AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORY AND HARDSHIPS EXPERIENCED BY GIRLS IN THE LAS VEGAS JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM:

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has identified several factors as predictors to juvenile delinquency. Characteristics among youth involved in criminal behavior include various home placements, running away, mental health problems, physical and sexual abuse, delinquency history, and family members with a delinquent background. These factors were analyzed in this study to observe whether the predictors were relevant to girls detained in the Las Vegas Juvenile Justice System. While observing the data in this study, it appeared that predictors described in previous research were not present among this population. However, further research should take in depth look at these factors in order to determine whether they could be deemed predictors among the Las Vegas youth.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to analyze the hardships girls in the Las Vegas Juvenile Justice system have experienced. Several hardships, such as family history, history of abuse, and mental health disorders which, in previous research, have been considered predictors of delinquency and running away (Alhuckler, K., W. Bullis, C., Yoanoff, P., 2006; Thompson, B., & Kim, K., 2011; Welch-Brewer, S., Stoddard-Dare, D., & Mallett, L., 2011). Mental health issues have also been shown to be predictors of suicide attempts among youth in the criminal justice system (Puttnam, L., 2005). The youth’s home placement has been said to be a “strong predictor” of involvement in criminality at a young age (Lev & Chamberlain, 2008, p. 149). Other research has examined that while males usually experience more violent abuse, females experience more sexual abuse (Ryan, C., Kilmers, C., Watanabe, H., & Hoyt, J., 2000; Thompson, B., & Kim, K., 2011). Based on previous research, it was expected that the majority of girls in the Las Vegas juvenile justice system would report experiencing hardships that the research has declared to be predictors of delinquency in youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- In Australia, Puttnam (2005) surveyed 900 youth in detention regarding suicide attempts and thoughts.
- Thompson, B., & Kim (2011) investigated whether male and female runaways differed in abuse experiences, depression, and reasons for leaving their homes.
- Welch-Brewer, S., Stoddard-Dare, D., & Mallett, L. (2011) investigated whether race, substance abuse, or mental health disorders influenced delinquency involvement.
- Lev and Chamberlain (2004) reviewed whether parental transitions, severe punishment, and sexual abuse were relevant and significant variables correlated to the age in which girls were involved in delinquency.
- Alhuckler, K. W. (2006) examined participants’ experience in foster care, their families’ felonious background, the youths’ special education and their socioeconomic status to learn if these factors differed among ‘early start’ and ‘late start juvenile delinquents’ (p. 487).

METHODOLOGY

- Dr. Alexis Kennedy and the students in her research lab collected data for the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services as a grant requirement for the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative.
- Participants were 161 female detainees from the County Juvenile Detention Center (CJCDC) between March 2007 and April 2008.
- They were 12 to 19 years of age (mean: 15.76, SD: 1.24). Ten girls were over eighteen-year-old but were originally arrested before 18.
- The majority of the girls were African American (32%), followed by non Hispanic Caucasian (30%), Hispanic (26%), American Indian (9%), Asian (2%) and other (2%).
- The girls who indicated their racial category as “other” considered themselves part of three categories or more, or of a single ethnic group (such as Indo-
- A survey was administered privately one on one with each girl to encourage the greatest level of honesty possible.

RESULTS

- Home Placement and Running Away: Girls indicated with whom they lived and by whom they were raised. More than half the girls (56.9%) were placed in a home before reaching age 14. The average number of group or foster homes girls reported being placed in 3.74 home with the most common answer being I foster/groom home placement (34%). Despite being happy with their home placement prior to their incarceration, 75% of girls reported that they had run away from home at some point. On average, girls ran away from home 7.87 times (median: 5, SD: 8.827), with most girls running away a total of three times.

- Mental Health: Only 9% of girls reported having had or very had mental health. 23.2% reported having had mental health. All the while, 27% reported having been hospitalized due to their mental health, nearly half (44%) reported that they had been diagnosed with a mental illness, and about half (51.3%) stated they had received counseling. The most common mental disorders reported were bipolar, depression, and ADHD or ADDHD. The girls were asked if they had ever thought about harming themselves or committing suicide. They were also asked about their family’s history with attempting or committing suicide.

- Physical and Sexual Abuse: Girls were asked to report the levels of abuse they had experienced. When girls were asked by whom they were physically abused; the most frequent answers given were by their father, mother, current or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, their mother’s current or ex-partner or spouse, and a sibling. Most of the sexual assaults that occurred were reported to have been by an uncle, their mother’s current or ex-partner or spouse, a stranger, a boyfriend or ex-boyfriend, or an acquaintance. The girls who reported sexual abuse stated it was by a stranger, their mother’s current or ex-partner or spouse, an uncle, a cousin, or a friend.

- Delinquent History: Although the girls who were surveyed were in detention at the time, 88.8% admitted having been arrested before. Of those girls, 72% were arrested in another state.

PERSONAL AND FAMILIAL SUICIDE HISTORY

- Lived with?
- Raised by

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- As predicted, the majority of the girls who were interviewed reported having experienced what previous research claimed to be delinquency predictors.
- These results simply reviewed the factors other studies have concluded are predictors of delinquency.
- Future research should conduct in an in-depth analysis is needed to see how factors such as mental health disorder correlate with suicide attempts (Puttnam, L., 2005), how being a victim of abuse (Ryan, C., Kilmers, C., Watanabe, H., & Hoyt, J., 2000). Having mental health disorders (Welsh-Brewer, S., Stoddard-Dare, D., & Mallett, L., 2011), having family members with a criminal history (Alhuckler, K. W., Bullis, C., & Yoanoff, P., 2006), and being removed from their homes (Lev & Chamberlain, 2004) affect the girls’ involvement in criminal behavior.

BIBLIOGRAPHY