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 defined several factors as predictors of 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 are all significant 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 appears 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 (Alhucke, Bulk, Close, & Yovanoff, 2006; Thompson, Bender, & Kim, 2011; Welch-Brewer, Stoddard-Dare, & Mallett, 2011). Mental health issues have also been shown to be predictors of suicide attempts among youth in the criminal justice system (Puttnam, 2005). The youth’s home placement has been said to be a “strong predictor” of involvement in criminality at an early age (Leve & Chamberlin, 2008, p.449). Other research has expressed that while males usually experience more violent abuse, females experience more sexual abuse (Ryan, Kilmer, Cauce, Watanabe, & Hoyt, 2000; Thompson, Bender, & Kim, 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, Bender, and Kim (2011) investigated whether male and female runaways differed in abuse experienced, depression, and reasons for leaving home.
- Ryan, Kilmer, Cauce, Watanabe, and Hoyt (2000) analyzed the effects of certain types of abuse in homeless youth.
- Welch-Brewer, Stoddard-Dare, and Mallett (2011) investigated whether race, substance abuse, or mental health disorders influenced delinquency involvement.
- Leve and Chamberlin (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.
- Alhucke et al. (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 (CCJDC) between March 2007 and April 2008.
- They were 12 to 19 years of age (mean: 15.76; SD: 2.12). 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 (25%), 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 on one by 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 (56.6%) were placed in a home before reaching age 14. The average number of group homes reported being placed in 2.3 home with the most common answer being foster/ group home placement (34%). Despite being happy with their home placement prior to their incarceration, 75% of girls reported that they had ran away from home at some point. On average, girls ran away from home 7.87 times (median: 5.96; SD: 8.627), with most girls running away a total of three times.

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 FAMILIAR SUICIDE HISTORY

- Mental Health: Only 9% of girls reported having had or very had mental health, 23.2% reported having fair 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 ADD.HD. The girls were asked if they ever thought about harming themselves or committing suicide. They were also asked about their family 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.

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. However, future research should conduct an in-depth analysis is needed to see how factors such as mental health disorder correlate with suicide attempts (Puttnam, 2005), how being a victim of abuse (Ryan, Kilmer, Cauce, Watanabe, & Hoyt, 2000); Thompson, Bender, & Kim, 2011), having mental health disorders (Welch-Brewer, Stoddard-Dare, & Mallett, 2011), having family members with a criminal history (Alhucke, Bulk, Close, & Yovanoff, 2006), and being removed from their homes (Leve & Chamberlin, 2004) affect the girls’ involvement in criminal behavior.

BIBLIOGRAPHY