Developing Correctional Facilities For Female Juvenile Offenders:
Design and Programmatic Considerations

By Shelley Zavlek and Rebecca Maniglia

Girls represent a challenge for the juvenile justice system. Their unique needs have to be considered in all aspects of facility design and operations. While much work has been done to explain what female-responsive programming looks like in a variety of settings, little has been done to explain how that programming might affect the design of juvenile residential facilities themselves. This article on female juvenile offenders is an effort to show how the programmatic needs of girls can translate into design concepts for more effective and responsive girls facilities and is based on a review of research as well as the authors' first-hand experience and interviews with staff and residents of juvenile correctional facilities.

Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

Juvenile arrest trends. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, there was a precipitous increase in the overall number of juvenile arrests. However, the 10-year trend in rising juvenile crime appeared to have reached a plateau by the mid-1990s, and the number of arrests began to decline by 1997. According to FBI data, there was a 25 percent decrease in the overall number of juvenile arrests each year from 1996 to 2000. During that period, while the total number of juveniles arrested each year decreased by 25 percent, the number of females arrested decreased by only 11 percent. Although overall juvenile arrests have remained fairly constant since 2000, the number of female juveniles arrested has steadily increased. Whereas females under the age of 18 made up 25 percent of all juveniles arrested in 1996, they made up 30 percent of juveniles arrested in 2004 — and that percentage has been increasing every year since 1996.[1]

Female and male juvenile offenses. Arrest numbers alone do not tell the whole story. They do not reflect the tremendous disparity between the nature of offenses for which female and male juveniles are arrested and institutionalized. In November 2005, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report by Francine Sherman titled

Detention Reform and Girls: Challenges and Solutions, which examined data on the detention of girls from 1990 through 2001. According to the report, the number of girls entering juvenile detention nationwide rose 50 percent between 1990 and 1999, compared with only a 4 percent increase for boys.

Girls are far more likely than boys to be detained for misdemeanors, technical violations of probation and parole, and status offenses such as underage drinking or curfew violations that would not be crimes if committed by an adult, the report notes. Nationwide, girls represented 19 percent of the young people detained in 2001 but account for 24 percent of those detained specifically for technical violations and 43 percent of those detained for status offenses. The report suggests that, contrary to the statutory purposes of detention, many jurisdictions are detaining girls not simply to maintain public safety, but to protect and arrange services for girls who have not committed serious crimes — including many who have run away from chaotic or abusive homes.[2]

While the current situation requires a number of solutions, the remainder of this article focuses on the secure facilities designed to house female juveniles — specifically on how the programmatic needs of girls can translate into design concepts for more effective and responsive girls facilities.

Commonalities of Female Juvenile Offenders

While there are many standard considerations (including safety, security and cost) that impact the design of secure juvenile facilities, programming and space purpose also should shape facility design. Therefore, in order to consider the design implications of the female juvenile population, one must first understand the issues facing this population and the key elements of a female-responsive program.

The past 10 years have seen research that has expanded and confirmed the early academic work of pioneers such as Meda Chesney-Lind, Joanne Belknap and others in articulating the needs of girls and young women. Whether using national, state or local populations, a reliable list of needs and key issues arise again and again for this population. The fact that these issues vary by location, age, socioeconomic class and race/ethnicity has resulted in the creation of standard recommendations for female-responsive services.

Sexual, physical and/or emotional victimization are among the most important commonalities found in populations of girls and young women involved in juvenile justice. For instance, in their 1998 study of girls in California, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) identified victimization, primarily sexual abuse, as the most critical pathway to female delinquency for young girls.[3] The report indicated that 92 percent of the girls interviewed reported a history of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Likewise, citing other studies that found girls were as much as three times more likely than boys to have been sexually abused, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming[4] identified victimization as a key issue for juvenile female offenders. State studies have

identified similar concerns.[5] Studies also show a connection between depression and involvement in criminal activity. In a report entitled *Adolescent Girls: The Role of Depression in the Development of Delinquency*, the National Institute of Justice asserts that "57 percent of mildly to moderately depressed girls engaged in higher levels of aggressive behavior, compared with only 13 percent of those who were not depressed."[6]

Research conducted by NCCD also identifies family fragmentation, academic failure, and health and mental health issues as some of the greatest concerns for girls and young at-risk women.[7] The American Bar Association's report *Justice by Gender*[8] affirmed the work of earlier research in identifying critical concerns that programmatic solutions must address: family problems, victimization both inside and outside the formal juvenile justice system, health and mental health issues, and school failure. OJJDP publications since the mid-1990s have made similar claims, citing substance abuse, teen pregnancy, academic failure, mental health needs, gang membership and societal pressure as issues of concern for this population,[9] and academic studies have confirmed this standard list.[10]

Female-Responsive Programming

Generally it can be said that in a female-responsive program all aspects of the specific service-delivery system (and the larger system in which it operates) are designed through a female-responsive lens. Practitioners, therefore, make an intentional effort to understand the shifting literature on female identity and development and use this information when designing specific program elements and general service-delivery systems. In essence, all policy and program development is examined to ensure that it meets the specific and varied gender and cultural needs of girls and young women.

The five female-responsive values, developed for the National Institute of Corrections as part of its training efforts for juvenile female offenders, define the theoretical framework in which female-responsive services exist.[11] Generally it is believed that if these conditions are not present, a program or service delivery system cannot, in good conscience, call itself female-responsive. The following five female-responsive values, therefore, set a high standard by which services delivered to girls and young women ought to be evaluated. Female-responsive services are:

1) Inclusive. Movements of gender equality have historically focused on gender as the primary social category to be addressed. This has resulted in criticisms that the conceptions of gender around which advocacy takes place are those of the majority population. Thus, women's movements have become defined around the needs and desires of white, middle class, heterosexual women and have ignored the unique circumstances of women of color, women living in poverty, and bisexual or lesbian women.

Likewise, the female-responsive services movement has been envisioned by some as focusing exclusively on the issues emerging from gender. However, in their intended form, female-responsive services allow girls and young women to understand gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, religion, and other social categories and individual life experiences as all interconnecting to

shape their self-identity. Therefore, female-responsive services seek to integrate treatment approaches in ways that allow for multiple perspectives and that encourage advocacy concerning all forms of oppression.

2) Relational. It has been said that "relationships are the glue that holds girls lives together."[12] It is often in the context of relationships that girls define their own self-identity — looking to others' perceptions when shaping their own ideas about the world.

The relational aspects of female delinquency and crime are well-known and documented. Girls often experience delinquency and crime collectively; for example, by shoplifting as a group or engaging in violent physical encounters with one another. Therefore, female-responsive programming acknowledges the role that relationships play in the development of healthy life skills. Typically girls are better able than boys to accept accountability for their harmful actions to others and to confront the emotional and physical difficulties they have experienced in their own interpersonal relationships when they are given the opportunity to connect relationally with service providers.

3) Restorative. Restorative justice practices have become popular in state juvenile justice systems in recent years, with many adopting new practices for handling crime and punishment.[13] The roots of restorative-justice theory can be found in the practices of indigenous peoples throughout the world, as well as in the early forms of criminal justice practiced in Europe. In contemporary justice understandings, however, restorative justice focuses on a philosophical belief that crime should be redefined as harm done to specific victims (including a community) rather than as a violation of arbitrary state laws that identify particular behavior as criminal. Therefore, the proper response to crime is restoration of the damage done. Victims receive compensation, and offenders may be restored through the process of making amends — often both emotionally, through the expression of remorse, and materially, through restitution or community service.[14]

For girls and young women, adopting a female-responsive philosophy means both allowing them the opportunity to experience meaningful accountability to their victims and restore their own broken relationships. Therefore, programmatically responding to the high rates of victimization among girls is as critical as helping them develop empathy skills and opportunities for restitution. While a program may choose not to use all of the formal mechanisms of restorative justice, it should be operating under the basic philosophy that crime and treatment are, in essence, about broken relationships that need restoration.

4) Aware of the social context. All girls and young women receive social pressure based on the societal expectations related to their gender. This social pressure can be further complicated by a young woman's membership in an additional social category of individuals who experience oppression, such as those based on race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or socioeconomic class. While female-responsive services do not believe that society is the sole cause of the individual behaviors of girls, there is an assumption that the social pressure girls experience does influence their own self-perception. Therefore, female-responsive services attempt to assist girls in becoming

critical consumers of media and other forms of social influence, while at the same time creating environments that offer alternatives.

5) Multileveled. The systems of which girls and young women are a part exist within a specific historical context that shapes the choices and quality of the services delivered. For instance, the juvenile justice system has historically created programs designed to serve the needs of its majority (and most violent) population, boys and young men. This has resulted in girls having access only to programming that has been designed for this separate and distinct population. Thus, those involved in the development and delivery of female-responsive services must confront systemic environments and system policies that hinder the ability to assist girls and young women in the work that they need to accomplish.

Female-Responsive Facility Design

An important aspect of designing a facility for girls is acknowledging the specific requirements of female-responsive programming. The past experiences and current needs of girls — and how these are addressed by residential programming — have critical facility design implications.

While it may be true that there are certain design features that are appropriate and useful for all juvenile facilities, there are hidden issues specific to the gender of the population housed. For instance, both male and female juvenile offenders need "structure, education, training and support to succeed,"[15] yet how each of these is manifested in the structural design and atmosphere of a facility can vary with the population served. The information provided below aims to address the ways in which aspects of facility design might be affected by gender. The remainder of this section, discusses how secure juvenile residential facilities can be designed to be more responsive to and effective for girls.

Safety, security and safe places. Security and safety are of paramount importance in a correctional system. Efforts should be directed toward preventing any breach of security that might endanger staff, juveniles, visitors or members of the surrounding community. Safety is maintained in accordance with modern standards and guidelines established by state and local agencies responsible for such planning. Further, architectural elements, including grilles, registers, fittings and all fixtures in areas accessible to residents, particularly bedrooms and bathrooms, should be suicide-resistant. Most suicides and suicide attempts take place in bedrooms and bathrooms where youths may be alone without direct supervision for intervals of time.

For girls, these efforts to create physical safety are paramount. However, efforts must also extend to ensuring emotional and cultural safety. In a female-responsive program, one of the most important safety and security tools any facility has is the quality of relationships — relationships among staff, between girls and staff, and among the girls. Therefore, meeting girls' relational needs through policies and physical space that allow for healthy and safe connections is a first step in making a facility safe for girls.

Physical and emotional safety also are affected by the high rates of victimization found in the juvenile female

population. Many, if not most, girls in a correctional facility will have suffered sexual and/or physical abuse prior to entering the facility, creating an environment where feeling safe is an important prerequisite to being able to work on treatment issues. Facility staff, therefore, should understand that "the prison system often contributes to the revictimization of these women by perpetuating feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability."[16] Procedures such as restraints, strip searches and intrusive explorations of body parts further exacerbate feelings of victimization by presenting a threat of further sexual assaults.[17] Policies and procedures that reflect this knowledge should be adopted. For example the manner in which security procedures are conducted should be modified so that they are not disempowering.

Other related implications are important for facility design. Whenever possible, private interview rooms should be available for intake questioning, which typically includes questions about sexual behavior and abuse. Moreover, close attention should be paid to the placement of windows and vision panels in the area where body searches are performed.

Privacy. Opaque shower curtains in front of multiple single shower units and saloon doors on bathrooms satisfy privacy needs without compromising institutional security. Girls can be made to feel that there is something giving them privacy from the watchful eyes of staff, while giving staff the ability to observe what they must for security reasons.[18]

Although providing natural lighting is critical, it must be achieved while being sensitive to privacy needs when designing for girls. Providing appropriate covering for bedroom windows allows for privacy and yet does not eliminate natural light or prohibit staff monitoring of girls while in their rooms. For example, bedroom windows that face courtyards or other areas that are accessible to youth or to the public may have diffused or obscured glazing that allows light into the room but blocks visual access from the outside. This is especially important if the facility is one of a number of buildings located on a coed campus.

Sightlines and visibility. The internal layout of a juvenile facility should provide for maximum visibility and supervision, with minimal reliance on electronic surveillance or security escort. Blind spots must be avoided as much as possible throughout the facility. Although closed circuit TV could be used to monitor certain areas, it is important that staff have a direct line of sight to as much of the facility as possible to allow ease of movement and visual supervision. Further, the design of any office and/or program spaces in, or adjacent to, the housing pods should have vision panels that allow for indirect visual supervision of youths by office staff.

Issues of visibility are of particular importance to girls and young women because they are often at risk of self-harming behaviors such as self-mutilation. Girls may also be at risk of exploitation by staff members. Enhanced visibility assists both in reducing staff opportunities for inappropriate contact and in reducing staff's risk of having false charges filed against them. For these reasons, it may also be undesirable to rely on the use of isolation rooms or small segregation units, which are often supervised by a single staff member.

Electronic technology. Electronic technology may be used in a facility to enhance security and surveillance but must not be substituted for direct staff supervision. Dependence on electronic systems, monitors and closed circuit TV within the facility should be minimized. Some areas, such as sleeping and recreation areas, cannot be adequately supervised without the presence of a staff member.

Given the relational nature of girls and their particular issues of safety and security, technology can never replace the importance of staff on the floor interacting and participating in the program model. For instance, if a staff-duty office is created, it should not be used as a break room for staff or a place to watch girls from a distance, nor should it be positioned so as to encourage such activity. Whenever possible, there should be no staff-duty office on the housing unit for direct-care staff. In order to know what is going on in any population of girls, and to ensure effective supervision in high-risk situations, it is important that staff are with the girls in the day room during activities. The use of isolation for security or safety issues is not necessarily effective, given girls' need for connection. It is far better in situations of suicide risk, self-harm risk and aggressive acting-out risk to have a staff member stay close by a girl, whether or not she chooses to interact with that staff person.

Relationships. Honoring the relationships a juvenile brings into a facility and allowing her to create healthy and meaningful relationships with facility staff is a key element of any program. Whether it is family, friends or the community, young women thrive in an environment where they are able to tend to the relationships in their lives and even form new ones. For this reason, whenever possible, states should build smaller, locally based facilities that allow juveniles to be kept close to their families and community support systems.[19]

Community-based programming allows for the facility to bring in outside resources for staff training, program development and direct-service delivery. Agencies such as sexual assault centers and domestic-violence shelters can be vital resources to a female-responsive residential program, and this kind of networking is enhanced when facilities are not geographically isolated.

Placing female juveniles in a facility that is in close proximity to their homes, families and community support networks also helps to ease subsequent reintegration to the outside community. Removing girls from their communities for placement in a remote facility not only breaks the ties these girls need with their families and support networks, it disrupts the chain of services and relationships that they have with counselors, therapists and other staff with whom they are involved in the local community. Although this is important for all juveniles, many of the risk factors for girls and young women originate in the home; therefore, involving the family and a girl's community as part of the recovery is an important element of treatment and rehabilitation.

This respect for relationships in a gendered context has many important implications for facility design. The design of the housing pods should encourage interaction between staff and juveniles, ensuring that the day room is an integral part of the housing pod. Movable furniture can help encourage relationship building by providing a setting conducive to small groups and intimate interactions between staff and girls and by creating a dayroom where people feel comfortable having personal conversations.

Many juvenile female offenders are also teen mothers. They are, in essence, raising the next generation, even while they are being held in the facility. Therefore, designing family visiting rooms with child-sized chairs and toys and supplying spaces where mothers and their children can interact in a positive and healthy environment will strengthen this vital relationship. The room should be large enough to accommodate visitors and ensure privacy for families who wish to talk about difficult issues with facility staff. Such spaces need to have access to restroom facilities with baby changing tables for families. However, it should be noted that many families are suspicious of juvenile justice efforts to include them because these efforts often have ulterior motives associated with blame, issue identification or abuse disclosure. This needs to be taken into consideration when using spaces intended to encourage familial interaction.

The need to honor relationships also has implications for the design of facility living spaces for girls. Anecdotal information suggests that double occupancy rooms can be beneficial to girls by allowing them to cultivate a new and important relationship and by giving the occupants a better sense of community. However, double rooms also can create unsafe environments for girls, so any decisions about room occupancy must take place within the context of other efforts to ensure safety and security.

Normative environments. All juveniles should be provided the opportunity to be in the least restrictive, appropriate environment. Since the majority of juveniles in the system are nonviolent, creating an environment that is as close as possible to a real-world setting makes sense. Furthermore, housing youths in a facility they must care for and respect keeps them from lapsing into the bad habits anticipated by a more institutional, security-grade environment. Using ordinary carpets and furnishings as well as a residential color palette — resembling a college dorm — allows the building to be used as a tool for teaching responsibility and provides a positive environment for treatment.

The furnishings and fixtures must be durable, easy to maintain, and appropriate for a secure residential facility. Dayrooms should contain movable tables and chairs with sufficient mass/weight to avoid their use as a weapon — or light enough to be harmless if used in such a manner. Natural light is also important in maintaining a rehabilitative environment and should be provided in each bedroom and program space, while still maintaining safety and security.

Some jurisdictions have determined that, for the majority of the population in their care, security hardware (which is very expensive) is unnecessary. In many facilities, recreation yards are located in central courtyards surrounded by buildings; there are no barbed wire or razor wire fences, no traditional security locks and no traditional cells. Housing units may contain a combination of single-occupancy, double-occupancy and/or dormitory-style sleeping areas. These areas may have features such as free-standing beds and desks (which, depending on the population, may be fixed in place), security-grade marker boards for personal notes or pictures, a mirror, and space for personal effects. Private or shared bathrooms should, where possible, be placed in the common area of the housing unit.

Creating a female-friendly environment means, when possible, achieving all of the recommended elements, while adding little touches that make the living environment feel more like a home. This can be accomplished by adding design features such as curtains to windows. The design of girls housing units might also include attention to details such as additional sinks, toilets, mirrors, and outlets for equipment such as blow dryers or curling irons, and adjusting the height of equipment or door handles. Creating larger grooming areas with amenities such as bathtubs can also be important.

Another way to make the environment more comforting is by providing dayrooms with bookcases and appropriate reading materials that include a wide array of books on female issues and women's fiction (particularly including those written by African-American and Latino women). Also, including security-grade bulletin boards in bedrooms can be an outlet for self expression.

Further, since many of the girls have suffered feelings of powerlessness due to their victimization, granting them some control of their environment — such as being able to turn the light switches on and off (with appropriate overrides) — can provide a good tool for empowerment and rehabilitation.

Programming spaces and learning environments. Residential facility design usually requires that space serve multiple purposes. Classrooms, multipurpose rooms and program spaces should be flexible to accommodate a variety of activities and teaching methods. Classroom design should accommodate individualized programming to meet the needs of students at varying academic levels.

Educational programming spaces should offer a stimulating learning environment for academic learning and vocational training. They should include adequate security-grade display cabinets and bulletin boards to display students' work. Noise reduction and natural light are also very important, with calming colors being used whenever possible.

In a coed facility, it is not unusual for facility classrooms to contain only one or two girls per class. Therefore, providing teachers with direct visual access to all areas of the classroom, as well as space for girls to sit separately or near adult staff, will ensure that girls are safe in the school environment.

It also is important to include space where females can talk and learn about female development and health issues with a level of confidentiality and where they can gather written information on issues such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception and overall female health. The design of medical exam rooms is also critical because gynecological exams can cause many girls to relive issues of victimization. These rooms should be private and should not contain cameras. They should have appropriate medical exam tables and equipment used exclusively by a female nurse practitioner whenever possible.

A specific facility feature that needs to be adjusted for female offenders is the type of food served. "Female offenders are fed the same meals as their male counterparts — equal in calorie count, carbohydrates and sugars."[20] Such a diet often contributes to weight gain and may have negative health impacts, including development or exacerbation of eating disorders. Something as simple as adding a salad bar

to the eating facility can have a significant positive impact on females. It also is important to work with a nutritionist to develop a menu specifically for girls.

Conclusion

The issues surrounding female offenders in the justice system are complex, and the research is clear on certain matters. Most young females entering the juvenile justice system are victims of abuse and require a healing and safe environment. Most enter the system for nonviolent offenses, and up to one-third for status-type offenses. Relationships are critical to these young females. Therefore, whenever possible, it is essential to include family and other significant relationships in the development of treatment plans and as part of the treatment process. Program elements such as mentors who can relate to the girls' experiences and opportunities for girls to develop relationships of trust and interdependence with other women already present in their lives (such as friends, relatives, neighbors, church members) are essential for effective gender-specific programming for adolescent females. Each of these programmatic needs of girls can translate into design concepts for more effective and responsive girls facilities. It is evident that jurisdictions should make careful choices when designing or converting facilities for female juveniles.

ENDNOTES

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systems for female juvenile offenders who are pregnant or who have young children. Here, international law has a strong preference for alternatives to institutional confinement that observe these standards.35. Designing interventions that support rehabilitation and reintegration. At the outset, officials involved in the design and oversight of a JVEO's treatment plan should carefully consider the programmatic logic and theory of change to set objectives and benchmarks for progress, anticipate challenges, and define success.38 A JVEO that is not ideologically radicalized to use violence may benefit less from a program focused on deradicalization as opposed to disengagement approaches. of correctional facilities with the concept of humane treatment and contemporary priorities of inmate rehabilitation and successful reintegration. As a penologist and criminologist by education, I have been always committed to the mission of offender's treatment and rehabilitation. In order for a correctional building to function as a tool for rehabilitation, the design of a correctional facility should However, for those spatial and environmental considerations and their positive attributes to be of value, they need to go hand-in-hand with positive and constructive inmate management policies, practices and procedures as well as committed, well-trained staff. Notes. A correctional facility is the building that many criminal justice systems use to detain offenders. These facilities may hold accused people prior to trial, convicted criminals, juvenile offenders, and other types of individuals. Some correctional facilities are intended to reform or otherwise prepare offenders for a successful reintegration into society, while others simply detain criminals until they can be released. Types of correctional facilities include jails, prisons, and juvenile detention centers. Each country has its own approach to the criminal justice system and uses correctional f...