

CALIENTE GIRLS' NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research project was to provide a snapshot of the challenges currently facing delinquent girls confined as delinquents at the Caliente Youth Center (CYC). Started in 1962, this facility for youth needing correctional care can house up to 140 youth ranging in ages from 12 to 19. One of the main goals of interviewing girls at CYC was to identify their needs and how meeting those needs would improve their morale and reduce the possibility of being sent back to CYC.

Exposure to violence and victimization has led to an increase in adjudicated youth in our juvenile justice system, particularly girls (DeHart & Moran, 2015). The rates at which girls are being incarcerated has increased exponentially since 1992 (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). One of the reasons that girls have become a target population for arrest is because we are criminalizing abused adolescents (Simkins & Katz, 2002). Research has shown that girls who have experienced trauma and victimization are more likely to act out in a manner that would cause them to be arrested. Rather than finding out the reasons for girls acting out, we arrest them and start a cycle of trauma, aggression, and re-arrest (Simkins & Katz, 2002).

Research has found that girls respond better to staff and programs that are sensitive to different backgrounds of trauma, mental needs, and physical needs (Day, Zahn, & Tichavsky, 2014). A survey created from the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Owen and Bloom's survey for "Profiling the Needs of Young Female Offenders" (2000), and questions developed by the GIRLS Initiative Workgroup convened by Department of Juvenile Justice Services of Clark County was used to

interview the girls present at Caliente. The questions started with the background and childhood experiences of the interviewees and progressed into how they felt about school, their involvement with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and a variety of other topics pertinent to helping form policy and curriculum. It is the hope that these interviews could help staff and researchers develop programs that would be beneficial to girls at CYC.

All of the interviews were voluntary. Of the 35 girls at CYC, 2 declined to participate in the interview. It was made clear to the participants that their answers would be confidential and would not be shared with staff nor connected to their file in any way. The research team that conducted the interviews were all graduate students from the University of Nevada Las Vegas and all were trained interviewers under the supervision of Dr. Alexis Kennedy. The interviews took place in December of 2016. A summary of the girls' answers and the data collected can be found in the following report.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There were 33 girls interviewed during the study. Out of the 33 girls, nine were African American (27%), 12 were Caucasian (36%), one identified as Pacific Islander, one as Middle Eastern while 10 identified as mixed (30%). The majority, 57% or 19 of the girls, identified as Hispanic as well. The race and ethnicity of each girl was self-reported to the interviewer.

All of the girls interviewed were fluent in English. Among them 18% of the girls were also fluent in Spanish and three girls spoke another language other than English or Spanish. When asked about languages spoken in the home, 21% reported Spanish being spoken in the home. The girls interviewed ranged in age from 13 years old to 18. The average age was 16.

Living Arrangements

Most of the girls interviewed were Clark County residents (84.8 % or 28 girls). There were two girls from Reno, and three girls self-reported their hometowns to be in California¹. Most of the girls had siblings (93.4%). The living situations of the respondents prior to their arrest are presented in Figure 1 below. The responses generated were mostly positive with 60.1% reporting a very good or good relationship with the people they live with. Only 18.1% reported having a bad or very bad relationship. Also presented is who primarily raised the respondents (see Figure 2).

¹ Caliente Youth Center does not house California residents so these girls were adjudicated on offenses in Nevada and would have had a residential connection to Nevada.

Figure 1. Living situations prior to arrest (percentages).

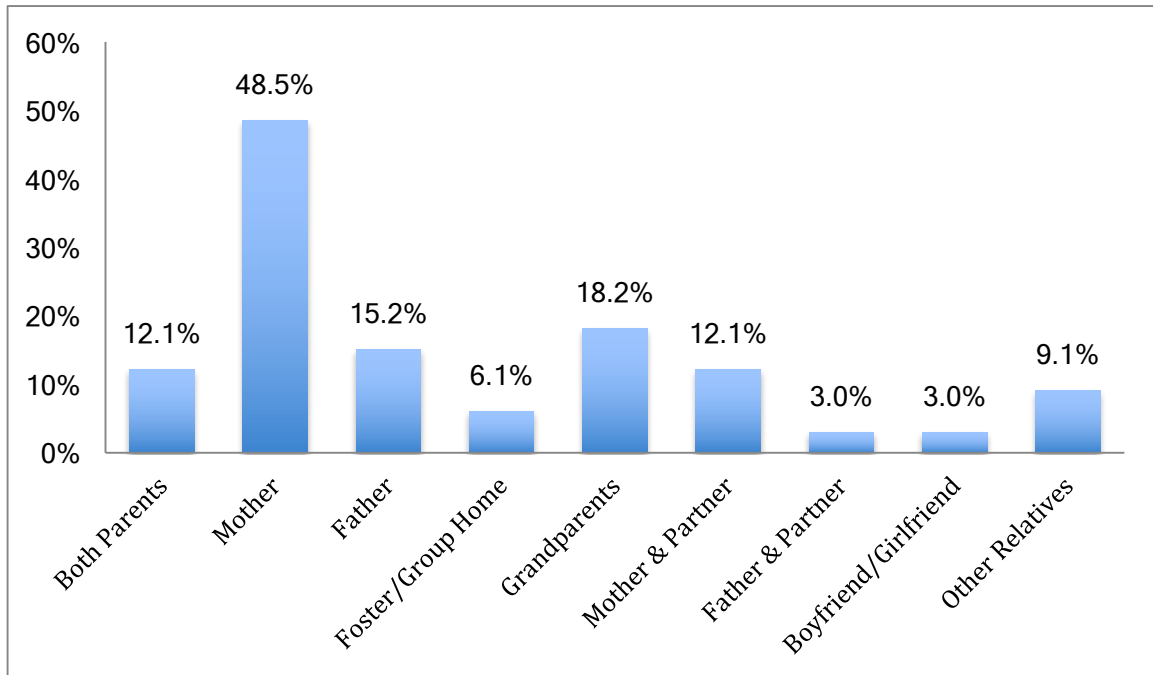
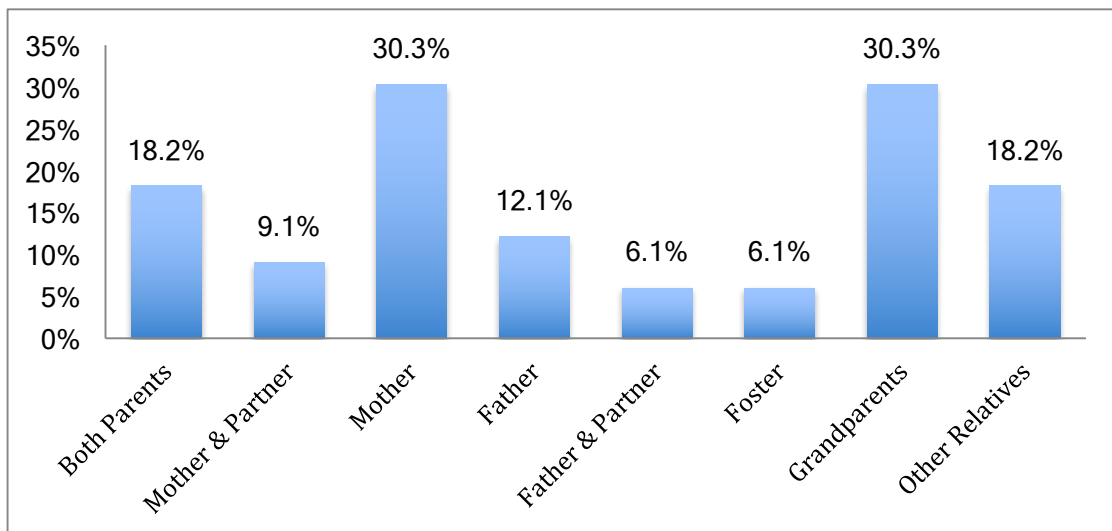


Figure 2. Who primarily raised respondents (percentages).

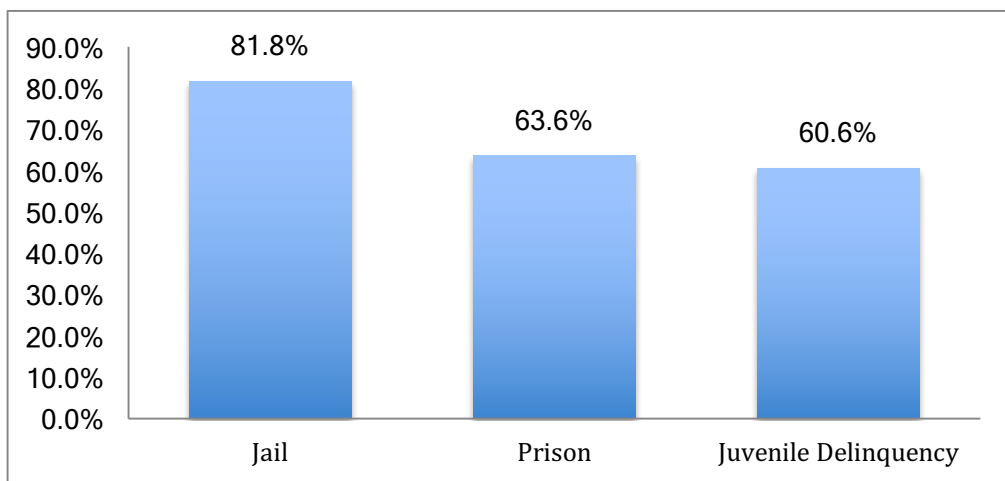


Girls were asked to self-report their family involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) and group home. About 42% of the girls reported that they had been taken away from their parents by child protective services with 17 of the 33 girls having reported being placed in foster care or a group home. The ages of first CPS intervention ranged from 5 to 16.

Family Criminality and Economics

Girls were asked questions about their family histories of criminality and economics. Those rates are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Family member ever incarcerated



When asking about current finances, one-third (30.3%) reported that they were supported by their parents. About 20% reported being self-sufficient, and 42.4% reported a combination of both self and parents contributed to household expenses. Only 27% of

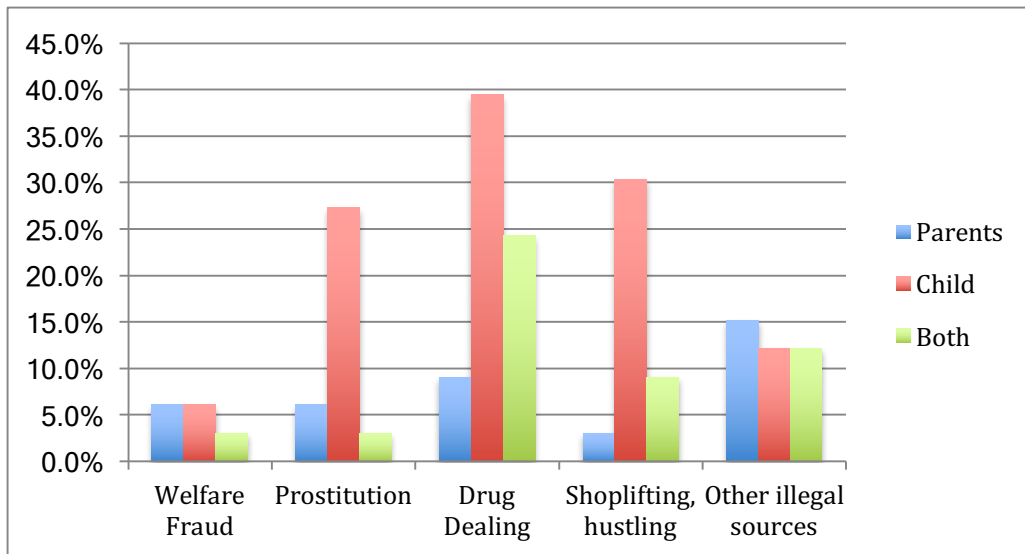
the girls reported ever having a legal job (e.g., restaurant industry, sales, babysitting, etc.). Only 2 girls had a job prior to their arrest.

Girls reported that 39.3% of their mothers were employed full-time, 6% were employed part-time, 30.3% were not working, and 18.1% were unsure of their mother's employment status. Respondents reported that 39.3% of their fathers were employed full-time, 6% part-time, 15% were unemployed while 21.2% did not know their father's employment status.

Detailed questions were asked about sources of legal and illegal income coming into the girls' households. The vast majority (84.8%) reported receiving income from business or job as well as public assistance programs (51.5%). Other sources of household income included unemployment compensation (36.3%), contributions from other family members (39.3%), and disability payments (27.2%).

Sources of illegal household income were also surveyed. Figure 4 presents the percentages of respondents reporting that type of income split by whether the illegal activity earning money was being done by parents or the respondents who then shared their money to cover expenses.

Figure 4. Household income from illegal sources (percentages)



Juvenile Criminality

Most of the girls (84.8%) reported that this was their first time at Caliente. All of the girls had been in detention before being taken to Caliente. All but three girls reported having multiple intakes into detention, the number of intakes per girl ranged from 2 to 12. Girls were not asked about age of first delinquency nor about their current charges.

Over 90% of the girls reported a history of running away from home (93.9%). Only three of the girls reported that they had only ran away once. Many of the girls reported that they had run away “multiple times,” “compulsively,” and “too many times to count.” The age that they first ran away ranged from 10 to 16.

Other delinquent behavior surveyed included gambling in casinos (33.3%) and using a weapon (72.7%). Over half (69.6%) reported being in a gang. A large majority (81.8%) said that they had friends in gangs and 48.4% said that their boyfriend or

girlfriend was in a gang. Figure 5 depicts how many contacts with the police girls had prior to arrest. While Figure 6 displays why the police were in contact with the girls.

Figure 5. Number of Contacts with police prior to arrest

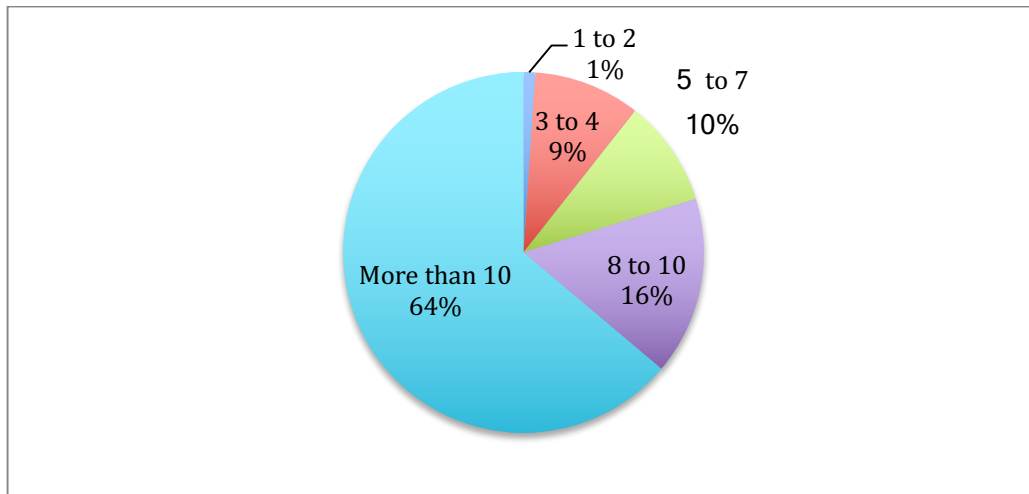
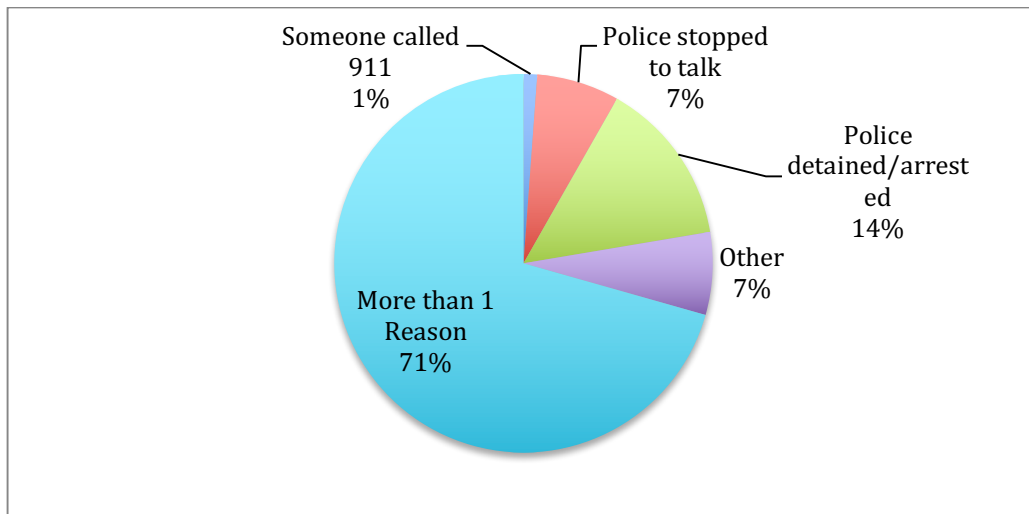


Figure 6. Reasons for contact with police



Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Exploitation through prostitution was measured in a few different ways. Across four different questions related to trading sex for money, 12 girls (36.3%) disclosed commercial sexual exploitation. Among the 12 disclosing involvement in prostitution, two were 13 years old, one was 14, four were 16 and five were 17. Eleven of the 12 came through Las Vegas and one from Reno.

Only 5 girls responded affirmatively to the question “Do you consider yourself a prostitute?” Ten of the girls reported having to work for a pimp. Among the 10 girls who disclosed how many people had paid to have sex with them, two reported that they were unsure, two girls said that there were too many to count, and three girls said that the number would be over 100. There were 10 girls that disclosed their age when they first traded sex, and their ages ranged from 12 to 16. Nine of the girls described witnessing serious violence while being trafficked, seeing family members and friends injured or killed. One 16 year old described how her “wifey” (e.g., main girl working for pimp) was killed and it made her want to kill herself since she felt the victim was the only one who understood her life. Nine of the girls described having weapons pulled on them (i.e., guns or knives) when asked to describe if they had been scared while being trafficked. All of the girls answered “yes” when asked if they have had to work for a pimp.

When these victims were asked about what services would help them get away from their exploitation, compassion and listening was the most common response. One girl expressed frustration that people trying to help do not have “street smarts”, but only “book smarts” and that they wanted to sit and talk about thing they did not really

understand. Girls felt that they needed programming that helped their self-esteem and made them feel worthy of help. Job training, safety, and even new identities were described as services that would help exploited girls.

Across the entire group of girls, a majority of the girls (90.9%, 30 girls) knew youth working in prostitution. Two-thirds (75.7%) of the girls said that the youth they knew working in prostitution had a pimp.

Education

School attendance and achievement was a common concern for the girls interviewed. Only 24.2% of the girls were attending school regularly before being arrested. Two-thirds (78.7%) of the girls reported that they skipped school sometimes. All of the girls (100%) said that they had been suspended from school. Talking back, dress code violations, fighting, and truancy were the most common reasons given for suspensions. Over half of the girls (69.6%) reported having been expelled from school.

Girls remained positive about school with 72.7% saying that they liked school. Three girls mentioned that they liked the school at Caliente. About 21% had ever been placed in special education classes and 27% said that they had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) written for them. Over half of the girls (57.5%) felt that they did not need any extra help with school. Their optimism was also reflected in their high level of desire to continue with education. Most of the girls (81.8%) wanted to continue with education beyond high school. Most girls (75.7%) wanted to go to college and 6% said that they wanted to go to vocational school.

Health and Wellbeing

For health coverage, 36.3% of the girls reported that they had health insurance or Medicaid (42.4%). The percentage that reported having no health insurance or health care plan was 12.1% with the remaining unsure about their coverage. When asked about where their caregivers would take them to get medical care, a third (30.3%) said hospital ERs, 42.4% to a doctor's office, and 33.3% to an urgent care clinic. Worrisome is the fact that 21% reported not seeking medical care. Almost two-thirds of the girls rated their health as very good or good (72.2%). Only 6% reported it as bad or very bad, the rest reported their health as fair (18.1%). Almost half (45.5%) reported having a chronic health condition. Asthma and high blood pressure were the most common chronic conditions reported.

Over half of the teens (60.6%) reported that they were happy with their body. Another 12.1% reported that they were sometimes happy with their weight. At the same time 60.6% reported that they are currently doing something to change their body weight. One-third (33.3%) reported that they would exercise heavily to lose weight. Another third (30.3%) said they reduced calories, 18.1% fasted for 24 hours, 6% took diet pills, and 9% would vomit or take laxatives.

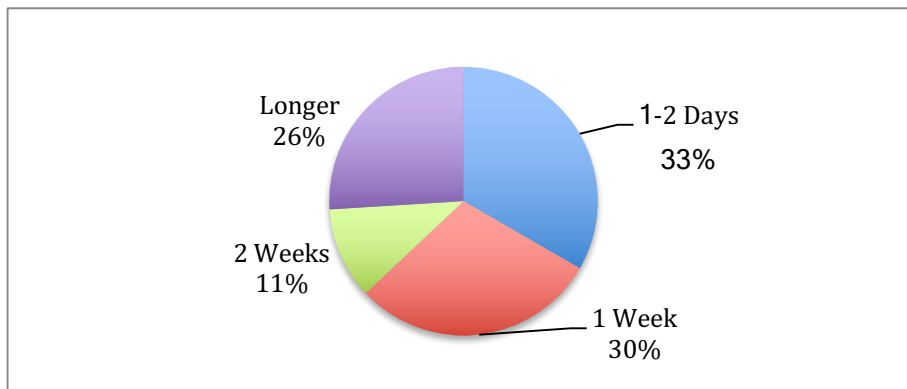
Mental Health

The girls were almost evenly split in terms of their mental health, 45.3% stated that their mental health was very good or good. The other 42.3% said that their mental health was fair or poor. Two-thirds (66.7%) said that they had been diagnosed with

mental health problems: 75.7% received counseling for mental health problems and 33.3% had been hospitalized for mental health problems. Some of the diagnoses included: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Major Depression, ADD, ADHD, Bipolar, Anxiety, and Schizophrenia. Among those reporting diagnoses, 42.4% reported that they had a regular doctor that they saw and 45.4% were on medication for their illnesses. Just under a third of the girls (30.3%) reported having a parent treated for mental illness and 9% reported having a parent hospitalized for mental health problems.

Self-reports of depression were fairly high which is expected when interviewing children in a detention setting. Over two-thirds (81.8%) reported feeling sad or depressed in the previous 30 days. A third (30.3%) reported talking to someone about feeling sad, but the rest reported that they had not.

Figure 7. Length of sad or depressive feelings



Histories of harm related thoughts and behaviors were surveyed as well. Over half (60.7%) of the girls reported that they had thought about harming themselves, and 54.5% said that they had cut themselves. When asked about suicidal thoughts, 60.6% said that

they had thought about suicide. Almost half (48.4%) of the girls reported having tried to kill themselves. Three girls reported feeling suicidal during the interview and two agreed to let the interviewers break confidentiality and tell staff and mental health services that they would like to talk further about their feelings.

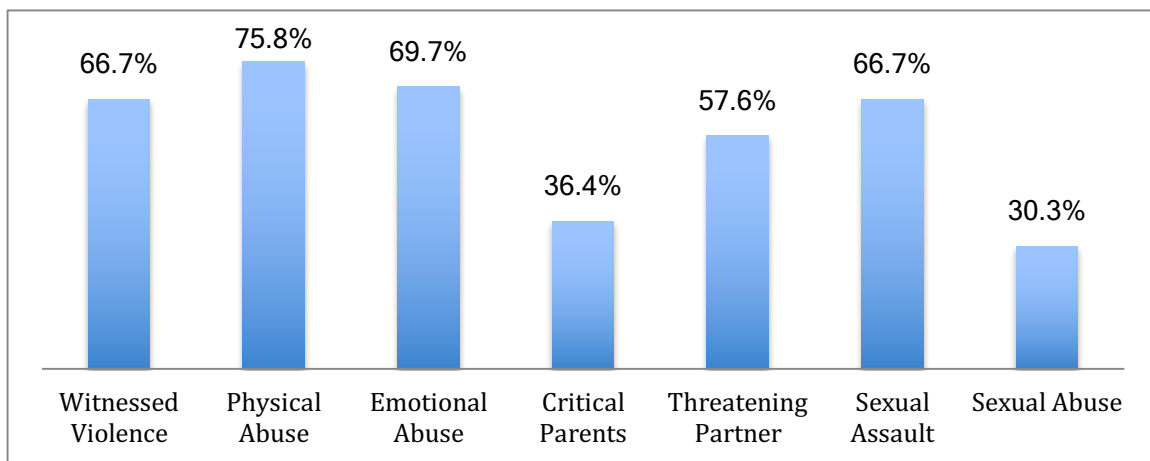
Abuse History

Girls were asked about witnessing and experiencing abuse and the rates of abuse are presented in Figure 8. Before these questions were asked, girls were reminded that they could skip answering any questions that made them uncomfortable or just did not want to answer. The most common response included the father as the aggressor, followed by mother, step-father, mother's boyfriend and brother. Some respondents reported seeing multiple perpetrators of violence in the same home (e.g., mom and dad). The physical and emotional abuse questions used those terms in the wording (e.g., "Have you ever experienced physical abuse"). To look deeper into emotional abuse, one question was asked about whether girls felt their parents were overly critical of them or made fun of them a lot. Also asked was whether they had ever been in a romantic relationship where a boyfriend or girlfriend ridiculed, insulted, threatened or controlled them.

The sexual assault question asked about having experienced sexual assault or rape whereas the sexual abuse question asked if they had been sexually abused or touched when they did not want to be. The relationship to the person who sexually assaulted them varied from family, family friends, teachers to strangers. The responses to the sexual

abuse question showed more family perpetrators. When asked if the abuse was tied to gang membership 24.2% said yes. Over half (51.5%) reported their assaults or abuse to authorities. Just over a third of the victims had received counseling for their abuse (36.3%).

Figure 8. Reported rates of abuse (percentages)



Sexual Health

Most of the girls were sexually active with 90% having engaged in vaginal sex. The range of first sexual experience was from 12 to 17. Fifteen percent of the girls said that their first sexual experience was not consensual. Over half (72.7%) of the girls reported engaging in oral sex. The range of first oral sex was 10 to 17 and one girl said that her first time was not consensual. A smaller percentage had engaged in anal sex (18.1%). The age range for first experience was 12 to 17 and one girl did not consent.

None of the girls had sex in the 30 days prior to the interviews due to their detention, however we questioned about their last sexual encounter. The age range for the

last person that they admitted to having sex with ranged from 13 to 41. Only 42.4% of the girls reported using a condom the last time that they had engaged in sexual activity.

Another troubling disclosure was that over half (60.6%) reported that they did not have a regular form of birth control. When asked about sexually transmitted infections 18.1% reported that they had contracted an Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) before.

Chlamydia was the most frequent STI reported.

Almost half of the girls reported currently being in a relationship (42.4%). Of those relationships, 27.2% were with male partners and 24.2% were with female partners. The longest relationship reported was six years however most ranged from one month to 2 years. The girls reported the ages of their partners that range from 15 to 25. Over a third (36.3%) of the girls reported that their relationship was very good or good. A small group (15.1%) reported that they experienced abuse in the relationship and one girl reported that she was the abuser. Of those in relationships, 36.3% of their partners had been to jail or prison.

Another consequence of the high-risk sexual behavior seen among respondents was the pregnancy rate. Over a quarter (39.3%) reported having been pregnant. Only (18.1%) of the population reported having children and most of those mothers lived with their children when they were not detained.

Drug Use

Most girls reported using alcohol (87.8%) with the youngest age of first use being 9 and the oldest 16. Half of the girls (51.5%) had been in trouble for alcohol and 51.5%

had been arrested for alcohol. The rate of trying cigarettes was 72.2% with only 15.1% having tried chewing tobacco. The age of first trying cigarettes ranged from 7 to 17.

Figure 9. Marijuana, Cocaine, and Crack (percentages)

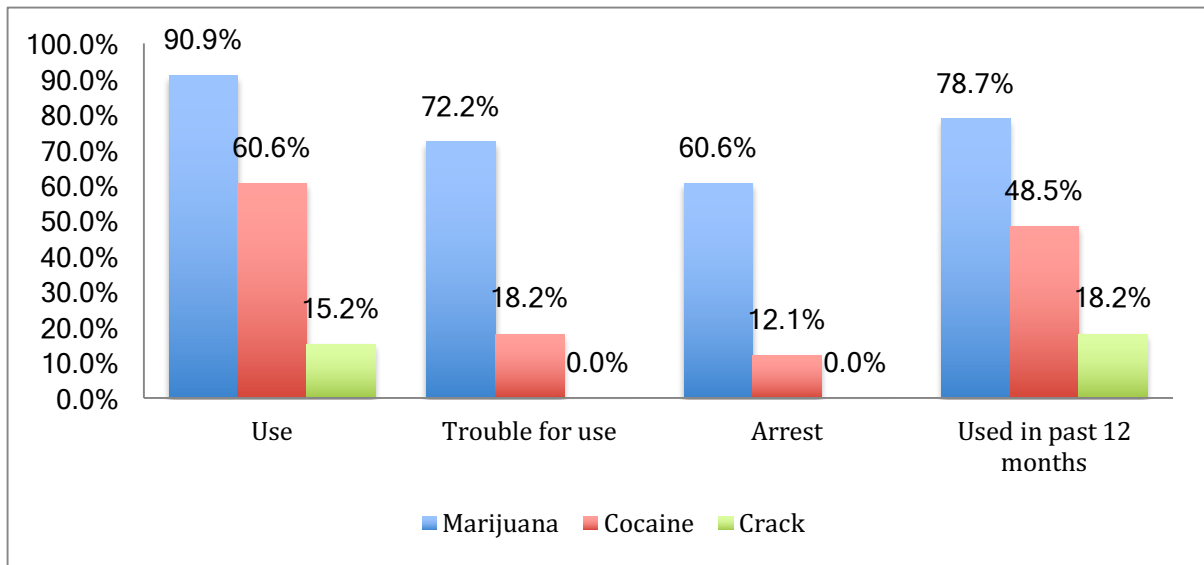
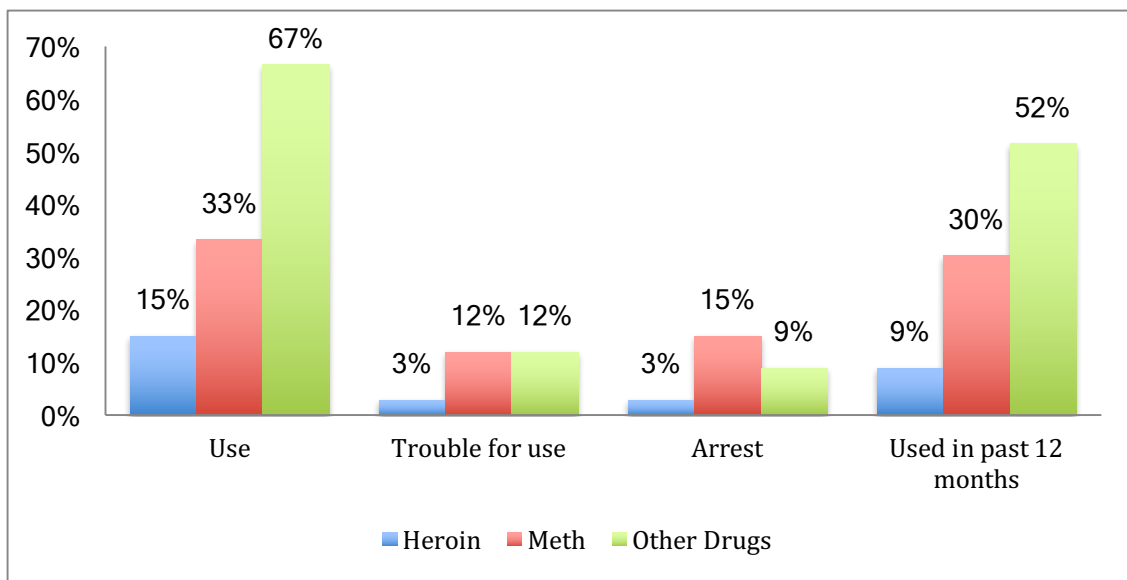


Figure 10. Meth, heroin, and other drug use



The final category of drugs abused was prescription drugs. The rate of prescription drug abuse was very high at 78.7% of the girls. Most girls abused multiple types of prescription drugs (e.g., Xanax, Lortab, Oxycotin, Vicodin, and cough syrup, etc.). Xanax appeared to be the drug most frequently abused. The age range for first use of prescription drugs was from 9 to 17. Almost a quarter (24.2%) of the girls had been in trouble for prescription drugs and 33.4% had been arrested for them. Over half of the respondents had used prescription drugs in the last year (66.7%).

One third of the population (33.4%) had been in an alcohol or drug treatment program. Another third of the population said that they would be interested in a drug treatment program (33.4%). A very high number of the girls reported that they had sold drugs (78.7%).

When looking at family use of drugs, 54.5% reported that their parents used drugs. Another 51.5% reported that their parents abused alcohol.

PROGRAMS AT CALIENTE YOUTH CENTER

Participants were also asked questions related to programs they had participated in while at Caliente Youth Center (CYC). Namely, they were asked to share 1) their thoughts about what is working well at CYC (i.e., any strengths and/or positives associated with programs), 2) their thoughts about what is not working well at CYC (i.e., any weaknesses and/or limitations associated with programs), as well as 3) their thoughts on how to improve programs (i.e., any recommendations based on their own experiences). Findings from these interviews are summarized below along with quotes and thoughts from respondents.

School, vocational classes - Thoughts about what is working

When asked what they believe is working well at CYC, the vast majority of girls acknowledged the range of educational and vocational training classes available to them. For instance, one girl noted the importance of schooling as it allowed her to get caught up with everything, and being part of vocational classes such as culinary classes, while another girl expressed that the school program allowed her to work towards getting a high school diploma. Many girls enjoyed programs that were out in the community, like volunteer opportunities, “*we go to the hospital and get to help old people, senior citizens*”. She continues:

“And another program I enjoy here too – we have this textile class, it’s a sewing class, we make robes, we make quilts, we make sweaters, jackets, we make everything. And I just finished making my daughter a bathrobe, and like on the

pockets I put her initials, NM, and I made it fully lined, its reversible, and even has the Velcro to close up [...] and the graphic arts program where we design our own logos, posters, business ads, anything.” (said by 17 year old girl, who has been at Caliente for 10 months; daughter is 2 years old).

Many girls also noted that the Forward-Thinking group was extremely helpful. Overall, the girls acknowledged that the schooling component and being able to attend a variety of vocational training classes (i.e., textile, culinary, graphic arts program) as well as participating in the Forward-Thinking group were paramount to their success. When discussing the strengths of programs, these three were often brought up.

Substance abuse program not helpful - Thoughts about what is not working or helpful

When asked what they believe is not working well at CYC, many girls mentioned that the substance abuse treatment program was not particularly useful. For instance, one girl mentioned that she dislikes the program because the staff does not allow her to participate in the goal-setting portion (due to having a negative attitude). Additionally, another girl expressed her frustration with the drug treatment program by stating:

“They keep trying to put me in all these drug classes, but I don’t do drugs [...] so its not helpful to me, they are wasting my time telling me about drugs. I think they can work on that.” (said by 17 year old girl)

Similarly, another girl added:

“I feel like the drug one is not helpful because it’s, like I don’t know how to accept that I am a drug user and stuff so it makes it hard for me to accept it.” (said by 16 year old girl)

Another girl stated that she dislikes the Aurora Pines China Springs, which is a youth camp. When asked why she dislikes about the program, she responded: *“The whole thing, it’s like a boot camp”* (said by 18 year old girl)

Groups, counseling programs - Thoughts about what girls would find most helpful

When asked what types of programs they would find most helpful, the vast majority of girls noted the need for additional counseling programs. Here, girls offered an array of suggestions from self-esteem, drug counseling, anti-gang strategies, prostitution related issues, family therapy, mental health, anger management, and meditation. Another girl expressed her thoughts on the importance of having more supportive programs and staff. In describing her need for counseling, one girl acknowledged the importance of having peers whom she can talk to and recommended creating meetup groups such as girls circle. Similarly, another girl recommended creating groups on cottage, where girls from different cottages can meet up and talk about their experiences rather than having an outsider effectuate the meeting. She explains this as:

“[...] we are trying to have a group on cottage with just us so I can be able to help - even though they are not on the same side as me [same cottage] – help other girls that are going through the same thing [...] basically us just having like groups on cottage instead of having the mental health and this person doing group stuff, like for us to have groups on cottage to kinda help” (said by 17 year old girl, at CYC for 5 months).

Additionally, another girl expressed the need for a self-esteem class:

“to help them, to help them get their self-esteem back up and know that doesn’t define who they are, because sometimes they’re talked down because of the stuff we’ve been through or the stuff that weren’t even our choice, a lot of us were very young too, and kinda it ruins our self esteem, and a lot of times we get talked down, and not necessarily talked down to our face but they don’t necessarily know they’re talking down to us – prostitution we would never do that [said by correctional staff to girls at CYC] – stuff like that.” (said by 17 year old girl)

Similarly, another girl acknowledged the need for self-esteem classes, girls group, and revealed that she enjoys the independent living program and notes the need for more of those types of programs:

“[I] like the independent living that I’m going to right now, actually I agree that helps a lot. They put you in a house but you also have staff like the staff here and it gives you motivation to help, and [it teaches you] how to get on your own and say no, and stuff like that. It’s not like lock me away from everything. You still have that structure.” (said by 18 year old girl)

One girl noted the need for “a class for prostitution and how to get out of the life” (said by 16 year old, at CYC for 12 months).

Food menu, not enough food available - Thoughts on how to improve CYC

It should be noted that, when asked what they would change about CYC, the vast majority of girls expressed concerns about their quality of life as it relates to nutrition. Particularly, many of the girls reported being dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of food served. For instance, one girl remarked that there is not enough breakfast offered

while another girl noted that there is a need for more food in general. Other common comments included a need for better food as well as more variety in meals. Here, girls expressed the importance of receiving different types of meals throughout the week and increasing portion sizes overall. Because of the limited amount of food served, one girl stated that herself and other girls were starving:

“I would change so much but the rules I would want to change are so little, like little things, better pillows and at least more food, because of miss Obama made this whole lunch thing and it’s terrible and we are freaking hungry – a lot of girls here starve, we want food, like we are hungry and their food here is not so good [...] What else would I change? More outside time” (said by 18 year old, at CYC for 11 months)

Many girls also noted that they would like to reduce the amount of time spent locked in their rooms. For example, one girl expressed that she would like to spend more time outside, so she can interact with others and engage in activities. Several other girls expressed similar thoughts. Common comments included the need to spend more time outside as well as being let out of the room more often.

Particularly, one girl wishes that:

“Kids would have more time outside, because we are always on cottage, like we want to go outside and do more things, be able to interact with more kids and not just the people in our cottages, like the other girls cottages – because the boys all interact with each other – the girls are not even allowed to [...] it can still be supervised and all that, just gives us a chance to play soccer or something. In the ten months I have been here –ten months I have been here- one time they let my cottage play a softball game, at the nighttime, in the rain against the boys, it was so much fun.”

Here, she proposes the idea of having cottage battles, where girls can play sports against the boys. She concludes with the following statement:

“They take us away from society and places us here, at least give us some type of normalcy. Yes, we eat three meals a day, shower, go to sleep at 9:00 o’clock but that’s not what we are going to do in the real world- we are not just going to do that.” (said by 17 year old girl)

Lastly, when discussing ideas about improvements, several girls noted that better bedding and clothing were needed. For instance, one girl stated that there is a need for better pillows, head and neck support but was appreciative of at least having a bed to sleep on. Another girl shared similar thoughts and highlighted the importance of having better clothing and access to personal items:

“Okay, if I ran the place, then we could wear our own clothes, any colored shoes we want, we could get our hair done, our family could send us hair and stuff, we could wear makeup, we could travel to cottages and stuff like that [...] we could talk in the dining halls because [right now] we can’t talk in the dining halls, and we could get visits every week.” (said by 16 year old girl)

In concluding her interview, and when asked if she had anything to say to the people that created the programming, one girl shared the following thoughts:

“You guys need to come down here for yourselves to see how it’s really being ran. I feel like the things they want and plan don’t always go through how they said they would go through.” (said by 17 year old girl)

DISCUSSION

The research report presented herein provides a comprehensive overview of the needs and issues of girls in the Caliente Youth Center (CYC). Data obtained from 33 face-to-face interviews reveals some of the strengths and limitations of the correctional care program. For instance, when discussing the strengths of the program, the girls acknowledged the schooling component, their ability to attend a variety of vocational classes (i.e., textile, culinary, graphic arts program), as well as participate in the Forward thinking group.

In terms of limitations, the vast majority of girls voiced concerns regarding 1) the effectiveness of the substance abuse programs concerns, 2) the amount and quality of the food served at the Caliente Youth Center, and 3) the amount of time spent locked in their rooms. In thinking about how to improve the correctional care program, the girls offered several recommendations including the importance of having counseling groups such as girls' circles, groups on cottage, as well as access to a variety of counseling programs such as self-esteem classes. Other recommendations included increasing the amount of time spent outside as well as improving their bedding, clothing, and access to personal items.

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