

**Society for Community Research and Action  
Policy Grant Application**

**GENDER-RESPONSIVITY IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

**Policy Issue of Interest**

In recent years female juvenile offenders comprise a growing proportion of juvenile court caseloads (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004; Stevens, Morash, & Chesney-Lind, 2011). Thus, there is a growing interest and investment in gender-responsive services among juvenile justice practitioners (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004). Given the increased visibility of girls in the juvenile justice system it is important to examine how juvenile court personnel understand and respond to girls. The reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in 1992 mandated states to include gender-responsive services to youth (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). The literature on gender-responsive services broadly focuses on overarching themes and guidelines related to best practices with female youth (e.g., Ravoira, Graziano, & Patino-Lydia, 2012; Walker, Munro, & Sullivan-Colglazier, 2012). While a conceptual and theoretical basis exists in ways to work effectively with female adolescents, there is limited existing research on the efficacy of the implied approach (including both the evaluation of gender-responsive programming and the evaluation of programming disaggregated by gender) and practitioners' understanding and utility of the construct (Matthews & Hubbard, 2008; Walker et al., 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine the meaning of gender-responsivity from a practitioner perspective and connect practitioners' experiences of working with girls to the gender-responsive policy mandate. The study will focus on: (1) ideas that practitioners have about gender-responsivity and subsequently what they do with these ideas, (2) the types of services girls receive, (3) how these do (or do not) differ from services for boys, and (4) the degree to which services match gender-responsive policy goals.

*Gender-Responsive Policy Reform*

Under Michigan law, the juvenile code states that “each juvenile coming within the court's jurisdiction receives the care, guidance, and control, preferably in his or her own home, conducive to the juvenile's welfare and the best interest of the state. If a juvenile is removed from the control of his or her parents, the juvenile shall be placed in care as nearly as possible equivalent to the care that should have been given to the juvenile by his or her parents” (Michigan Juvenile Code 712A.1-712A.32). The behaviors of juvenile court personnel and their goals for intervention juvenile treatment are guided by this treatment and rehabilitative framework rather than punishment or holding the juvenile accountable. Thus, the purpose of the juvenile court is twofold: (1) to provide intervention-based treatment (rather than punishment), and (2) to separate youth from adult court. The system was originally designed to handle criminal misconduct among youth, but widened with the inclusion of status offenses—youth-specific noncriminal behavior (e.g., incorrigibility, running away, drinking alcohol) (Matthews & Hubbard, 2008; Walker et al., 2012).

Research on arrest and incarceration in the juvenile justice system has consistently shown that that courts respond to girls primarily for these noncriminal status offenses and respond to

boys mainly for criminal misconduct (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004). The federal Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974 prohibited states from detaining status offenders. The 1980 amendment to the JJDPA allowed states to detain status offenders for violating court orders, which ended up disproportionately impacting females (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004). Over the last three decades there has been an increasing number of girls coming into contact with the juvenile justice system (Puzzanchera, Adams, & Sickmund, 2010), largely seen by scholars as a reflection in policies and practices rather than increase in actual delinquency among girls (Javdani, Sadeh, & Verona, 2011; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2012; Stevens et al., 2011). Finally, historically, the juvenile court has been designed to handle and respond to the behavior of males and there is considerable evidence that the default treatment approach is built around the needs and experiences of boys (see Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004; Kerig & Schindler, 2013), which along with harsh treatment of girls for minor offenses is why scholars have called for a closer examination of girls' involvement with the juvenile justice system.

The focus of gender-responsive policy and practice reforms in juvenile justice is due to the growing interest in, and literature on, female delinquency, and the implementation of evidence-based practice in juvenile justice settings (Walker et al., 2012). Girls' historical involvement with the juvenile justice system can be seen as a residual impact of the child-saving movement on girls: the creation of a separate system for youth ended up incarcerating more girls for "immoral behavior" (e.g., promiscuity, incorrigibility) (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004). The reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) in 1992 specifically outlined the need for gender-specific services and an examination of gender bias across levels of the system (Walker et al., 2012). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) reissued these recommendations in 1998 in order to provide federal funding for separate, gender-responsive interventions (Kerig & Schindler, 2013). The amendment to the JJDPA explicitly stated the need for physical and mental health services, education, and treatment for previous trauma/abuse in. In addition, the American Bar Association and National Bar Association's review of gender bias and called for equity in the juvenile justice system (2001).

Numerous task forces and committees have been developed across states to implement gender-responsive services based on the principles put forth by the academic and governmental bodies of literature (Kerig & Schindler, 2013; Walker et al., 2012). Of particular note in gender-responsive reform was the development of the Girls' Study Group (GSG), a collaborative team of leading researchers on gender and crime, through the OJJDP in 2004. The GSG reviewed literature on girls' involvement with the juvenile justice system and concluded that there was a systematic lack of attention to gender across all areas of juvenile justice research (Kerig & Schindler, 2013; Zahn et al., 2008).

### **Potential Policy Contribution from Community Psychology**

The current literature examining court perspectives on girls' involvement with the system identified a scarcity of services for girls and lack of knowledge on gender-responsive services, a perceived increase in girls' violence and aggression, relationship issues (e.g., fighting with other female youth, family problems), a history of trauma, and perceptions that girls are more difficult

to work with than boys. In its current state, the literature on gender-responsivity provides an expansive ideological argument for its purpose in the juvenile justice system, but little empirical work to support its use. This inconsistency regarding gender-responsivity as a construct leads to the conclusion that there is a need to understand what exactly court personnel think would be the best way to (1) detect and (2) respond to the needs of girls, and if this is any different from how they would go about doing this for boys. Overall, gender-responsivity attempts to acknowledge gender differences and disparities in the system and develop a response (e.g., programming) to address these gaps and unique needs of girls (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008; Zahn et al., 2009). However, there are a number of issues related to the construct of gender-responsivity given the current state of the literature. Perhaps of greatest concern is the vagueness in defining and operationalizing gender-responsivity, the current formal evaluation literature's equivocal support for the use of gender-responsive intervention, and a stark absence of rigorous program evaluation for juvenile justice involved samples of youth that disaggregate program effectiveness by gender. Theorists have attempted to unpack the gender-responsivity construct by developing specific criteria, but the literature is still very broad. An alternative approach to understanding the problem is to go into the field and learn from juvenile justice practitioners. Since juvenile delinquency is a very local phenomenon, we can better understand the construct by learning directly from juvenile justice practitioners and the system's response. A community-centered approach (see Flaspohler et al., 2008; Miller & Shinn, 2005; Wandersman, 2003) is particularly useful given the ambiguity of gender-responsivity as a construct as well as the lack of convincing empirical evidence for gender-responsive services *and* the limited number of evaluative studies of juvenile court populations disaggregated by gender.

The dominant paradigm is a research to practice (RTP) model based upon the National Institutes of Health biomedical model for prevention and intervention inclusive of efficacy and effectiveness trials prior to widespread practitioner utilization (Wandersman, 2003). Thus, this type of model supports the production of innovation and focus on this translation of science (Flaspohler et al., 2008; Miller & Shinn, 2005). Much of the gender-responsivity literature has pushed for the use of gender-responsive services, however the current state of the literature is far from broad implementation and dissemination, in part because the broadness of the gender-responsive construct and the failure to operationalize it in a cogent way for academic and practitioner evaluation purposes.

An alternative approach, outlined by Wandersman (2003), Flaspohler and colleagues (2008), as well as Miller and Shinn (2005) is a community-centered approach in which research may fare better by learning from communities about the phenomenon of interest. Community-centered models focus on practice, and evaluation of practice, within local contexts and the improvement of existing practice rather than the development of a new innovation (Flaspohler et al., 2008). The perspectives of practitioners are critical to the improvement of practice in the local context (Flaspohler et al., 2008). Within a community-centered framework, the juvenile court is an active contributor in producing effective intervention addressing the needs in context (Flaspohler et al., 2008). Wandersman (2003) argued that the dominant prevention/intervention research paradigm is necessary but not sufficient and community-centered models provide a complementary approach. Finally, Green (2001) highlighted various characteristics that define a community centered approach: first, "best practices" should be seen as process instead of a package; second, community control should be the emphasis, in which practitioners have expert

knowledge; third, local evaluations and self-monitoring should be utilized; and finally, research should be tailored for the local context.

For example, a juvenile court may be implementing services that fit “gender-responsive” criteria, but the only way to understand this is by going to courts and asking practitioners what they are doing for girls. As well, indigenous programs that may be supportive of girls’ unique needs and producing positive outcomes in light of shifting demands and resources (e.g., funding) within the court system should be examined. Utilizing a community-centered approach is one way to begin to understand gender-responsivity by addressing: (1) issues of operationalization, (2) how court systems are detecting and responding to gender-sensitive issues, (3) the existence of (if any) implemented interventions, and (4) additional political, organizational, and community-based contextual factors that may shed light on this construct and how it may be used.

## **Methods**

This study will use multiple sources of data and an exploratory qualitative design to study one juvenile court system. The court system is located in a mid-sized county in Michigan and sees approximately 300-350 new youth annually across their three main divisions (e.g., intake division, truancy court, and standard delinquency). The standard delinquency division is for youth on formal probation in which a juvenile court officer supervises them. In the standard delinquency division girls comprise approximately 25 percent of youth, and in truancy court, they comprise approximately 50 percent of youth (Onifade et al., 2008; Onifade et al., 2010). Over the course of the last decade this court has adopted and implemented the best practices/“what works” framework for juvenile justice interventions (Andrews et al., 1990, Andrews et al., 2011, Lipsey & Cullen, 2007). Given the history of this particular court in implementing best practice and a stated concern with the needs of female delinquents, it represents a unique opportunity to observe how gender-responsive principles play out in the field.

There will be two phases of data collection. Phase I of data collection involves interviewing juvenile court personnel (n = 39) including court officers, programs/services managers, judges, and administration. The second part of Phase I includes case discussions with juvenile court officers (n = 27). The purpose of the case discussion is to provide an in-depth illustration of current cases of girls involved in the system. The case discussions will provide rich data for understanding the context of why girls are involved in the system and the services they received. Phase II of data collection involves unstructured observations of juvenile court staffings over a nine-month period of time. Staffings are meetings among court practitioners held to determine placements and/or additional probation services for youth on delinquency caseloads. The purpose of observing the staffings are to understand decision-making processes as they related to gender-responsive policy.

These data will be analyzed using directed and conventional content analytic approaches. In particular, the data will be examined in order to see which elements of gender-responsivity are (and are not) integrated into services across different levels of the system, how those elements are understood and utilized by the court system, and how well practitioners’ perspectives on

detecting and responding to girls' needs fare vis-à-vis the empirical literature on gender-responsivity.

### **Connection to Community Psychology**

This study is rooted in a number of core community psychology principles and values. First, this study focuses on increasing girls' well being across individual, family, and community levels through the assessment of gender-responsive policy reform. This study takes an explicit ecological orientation by examining female delinquency across multiple levels of analysis, with a particular focus on macrosystems (e.g., policies and practices) that differentially impact their trajectories in the system. Second, this study utilizes a community-centered approach by learning *from* the community using rigorous scientific methods and building upon previous collaborative relationships in the setting to develop actionable knowledge. Finally, this study has a strong emphasis on diversity and addressing structural oppression in the justice system by examining gender disparities (as well as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) by using policy-focused work to reduce social inequity in the juvenile justice system.

### **Demonstration of Relationship Building with the Organization**

The PI has had a working relationship with the court setting over the last 4.5 years. The majority of the PI's research to date has been with this local juvenile court related to the assessment of youth who enter the juvenile justice system and the provision of services to juveniles and their families. In particular, training juvenile court officers in conducting criminogenic risk assessment and consulting on a variety of projects as needed (e.g., statistical data analysis, report writing, program evaluation). The Co-PI has had a professional relationship with the court setting for nearly four decades and has collaborated with them on multiple research projects and community-based interventions. Currently, the PIs collaborate with all divisions of the local juvenile and family court: standard probation, intensive probation services, the sex offender program, residential placement and aftercare programs, in-home detention, family support services, the court-run alternative school, intensive neglect services, truancy court, and the intake division.

The gender-responsivity project will continue to build upon these relationships by addressing a needed area for policy research and a demonstrated area of need by practitioners in this particular juvenile court. This work will not only address local strengths in terms of services for at-risk girls, but also barriers, gaps, areas for improvement of services to achieve the goals of gender-responsive policy and practice. This organization can serve as an exemplar in addressing gender-responsive needs of through court intervention. This work will be used to build future collaborative relationships with other juvenile courts and community-based settings interested in implementing gender-responsive treatment.

### **Demonstration of Potential for Successful Impact**

- The PIs have had previously successful research and evaluation collaborations with the court;

- This study will have three sources of data, which will be optimal for triangulation of findings;
- Currently there is a strong response rate (>90%) for participation in the study by the practitioners in the court setting, indicative of their interest in the project and addressing gender-responsive policy reform locally.

**Demonstration of Increasing Community Capacity for Policy Influence**

- This is the first study to date that is gathering knowledge about practitioners’ understandings of girls’ experience in the juvenile justice system and how that is (or is not) related to the federal mandates for states to include gender-specific services to girls;
- This study will increase community capacity for policy influence through the development of trainings and educational materials about gender-responsivity that will be disseminated locally, through several ways within SCRA, and other policy-relevant venues (see below ‘Dissemination Plan’);
- Finally, the study has the potential to change current policy and practice to foster the use of gender-responsive treatment and address any gaps or barriers in the system’s response to girls.

**Demonstration of Increasing SCRA’s Capacity for Policy Influence**

While working on the project the PIs will connect with the SCRA policy committee around how this particular project can continue SCRA’s capacity for policy influence. In particular, dissemination materials will be shared via the policy connection link through the SCRA website, through the SCRA biennial meeting (e.g., presentations, participation in the pre-conference policy workshop and/or policy committee meetings at the conference), and through publication in SCRA-related outlets such as *The Community Psychologist* and the *American Journal of Community Psychology* for wider reach of SCRA members and other academics interested in community psychology and policy-related research and action. Finally, this work will be linked from SCRA to larger organizations addressing juvenile justice policy (e.g., the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) to promote broader policy influence.

**Budget**

<b>Budget Item</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>
<b>Transcription Costs</b>	\$2,000.00 (covering approx. 20 hours of audio)
<b>Training Materials</b>	\$250.00
<b>Space for Trainings including Food/Beverage</b>	\$1,500.00 (approx. \$500 for three trainings accommodating 30-40 juvenile court staff)
<b>Software – NVivo for Mac Full License</b>	\$495.00
<b>SCRA Biennial Conference Travel</b>	\$750.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,995</b>

Funding for this project will allow for quicker completion of interview and case discussion transcription, software to help with analyzing the data, materials for and space to hold

the juvenile justice practitioner trainings, and funding for SCRA conference travel for further dissemination.

## **Dissemination Plan**

There will be several mechanisms by which the results of the project will be disseminated. First, the PI of the project will develop and provide in-depth trainings to all of the juvenile court staff in the county. There will be three trainings total (approximately 12 staff per training). These trainings will include two parts. First a presentation giving project background and findings, including: (1) the history of juvenile justice policy reform around implementing gender-specific services for girls in the juvenile justice system, (2) the goals of the project, particularly as it relates to implementing the policy locally, (3) key findings from Phase I of the project, and (4) lessons learned and recommendations. Second, an interactive workshop component will be included in the training. The workshop component will include a case discussion review by creating a mock case based on the data and identifying the gender-responsive components of that girl's risk factors, needs, services received, and gaps/barriers identified by practitioners. The workshop will also include group discussion and strategic planning around the policy reform, facilitators and barriers to creating gender-responsive policy change locally as well as at the state and federal levels.

Second, the gender-responsivity project will be disseminated through multiple SCRA outlets as well as outlets specific to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working in the juvenile justice system. In terms of SCRA outlets, findings will be presented the SCRA biennial conference in Lowell, MA in June 2015. There will also be a column written for *The Community Psychologist (TCP)* and scholarly articles developed for publication in the *American Journal of Community Psychology (AJCP)*. In terms of juvenile justice outlets, the PI will connect with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to disseminate findings. For example, the PI connect with the research director of NCCD around writing a policy brief or developing an article for dissemination to juvenile justice practitioners related to the findings and/or work with the OJJDP on developing a webinar around gender-responsive policy reform.

In particular, the PIs already have a relationship with the Associate Director of Research at the NCCD, Dr. Angela Wolf, and will discuss with her potential options for dissemination through NCCD channels. The NCCD publishes numerous reports, information sheets, webinars and newsletters every year (<http://nccdglobal.org/publications>). The primary goal will be to develop an article for their newsletter and/or an information sheet based on the research findings and policy recommendations by the end of 2015. The project timeline specifies that the PI will connect with Dr. Wolf in early 2015 to strategize and develop a collaborative plan to disseminate findings. In addition to NCCD, the PIs will work on developing relationships with OJJDP in order to disseminate findings and policy recommendations via one or more of their publication outlets. The OJJDP frequently publishes newsletters (e.g., JUVJUST, News @ a Glance bimonthly, JUSTINFO biweekly, etc.). In particular, OJJDP offers a number of training webinars throughout the year and the PI will connect with OJJDP about options to develop a webinar in collaboration with OJJDP or to be disseminated through OJJDP. The plan will be finalized with

NCCD and/or OJJDP by the end of Phase II data analysis (September 2015) and disseminated at the end of 2015 or in early 2016.

### Project Timeline

<b>Month/Year</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>
<b>January 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Phase I of data collection (interviews)</li> <li>• Connect with Dr. Angela Wolf at the NCCD and develop an action plan for project dissemination through the NCCD</li> <li>• Connect with the OJJDP publications department about collaborating on project dissemination</li> </ul>	
<b>February – March 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Phase I Data Analysis</li> </ul>	
<b>April – May 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Phase II of data collection (observations)</li> <li>• Prepare training materials</li> <li>• Follow-up with Dr. Wolf at NCCD about newsletter/information sheet/report and contact(s) at OJJDP regarding dissemination plan</li> </ul>	
<b>May – June 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainings with juvenile court staff</li> <li>• Present Phase I findings at SCRA biennial conference in Lowell, MA</li> </ul>	<u>Progress Report to SCRA:</u> Phase I Findings, Training Plans/Agenda, Update on dissemination plan with NCCD and OJJDP
<b>July – August 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Phase II Data Analysis</li> </ul>	
<b>September 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write article for <i>TCP</i></li> <li>• Finalize dissemination product(s) for NCCD and OJJDP</li> </ul>	<u>Progress Report to SCRA:</u> Phase II Findings, Biennial conference update, Update on finalized dissemination formats with the NCCD and/or OJJDP
<b>October 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up meetings with court staff to address (1) policy impact, (2) policy changes, and (3) any barriers.</li> </ul>	
<b>November - December 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft article(s) for publication in <i>AJCP</i></li> <li>• Complete webinar and/or report</li> </ul>	Column published in <i>TCP</i> ; Complete webinar/report for NCCD and/or OJJDP

	based on project findings, recommendations, and policy change for dissemination via NCCD and OJJDP
<b>January 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional follow-up meetings with court staff to monitor use and policy impact</li> <li>• Complete final progress report for SCRA</li> </ul> <u>Progress Report to SCRA:</u> Submit Final Report

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