

## Encouraging Assessments of Risks and Strengths among Offending Girls

### Project Summary

Offending youth are at great risk for negative outcomes in young adulthood, including continued offending, low academic attainment, poverty, employment instability, unhealthy interpersonal relationships, and poor physical and mental health (Giordano, Cernkovich, Lowery, 2004; Cauffman, 2008; Odgers et al., 2008). Although a growing body of research exists examining offending youths' transition to adulthood, this research is limited in that (a) much of the literature focuses on male offending samples (b) much of past research has been conceptualized within a deficit model, often focusing on *risks* for reoffending, and (c) even when research does examine risk and protective factors, the focus tends to be on predicting desistance from crime (Born, Chevalier, & Humblet, 1997; Carr & Vandiver, 2001). Desistance is an appropriate and critical focus of intervention and rehabilitation programs for offending juveniles, but developmental competencies in other domains (e.g., interpersonal relationships) are also important to successful transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

In this study we use a strength-based, holistic, and multi-method approach to study resilience among a group of women who were incarcerated in a juvenile correctional facility in adolescence. Specifically, we aim to:

- (1) Identify a group of girls who, despite great risk, experienced positive outcomes in important adulthood domains including behavior, education, work, romantic relationships, other interpersonal relationships, and/or health.
- (2) Investigate the promotive factors associated with general resilience (i.e., resilience across multiple domains) and domain specific resilience (e.g., resilience in education) among girls who were incarcerated in adolescence.

Participants were enrolled in the ***Gender and Aggression Project (GAP)***, a longitudinal, prospective study of development and functioning among 141 incarcerated girls. We have extensive data, including both self report and official record data, available for each participant. To address Aim 1, this data is currently being used to identify women who are experiencing positive outcomes at the time of their early adulthood interview. Aim 2 will be addressed using both existing quantitative and additional qualitative data collected from a subsample of 15-20 women who appear to be succeeding in early adulthood. The SCRA Public Policy grant allows us to conduct these qualitative interviews, which will focus on identifying key promotive factors related to positive outcomes among this high-risk sample.

Juvenile justice systems are responsible for the care and rehabilitation of thousands of girls each year. Identifying the reasons why some offending girls grow up to be productive citizens whereas others continue to use community resources in adulthood can inform service providers where to focus scarce time and resources. Juvenile justice systems are also tasked with assessing girls' risk for reoffending. Knowing more about what factors promote positive outcomes might improve current risk assessment tools and encourage service providers to consider both promotive factors related to desistance and risks related to recidivism.