

Preventing Juvenile Justice Involvement for Young Women

An Introduction to an Evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls

By Megan Millenky and Caroline Mage

Involvement in the juvenile justice system has tremendous costs for the individuals within it, as well as for society. Such involvement may damage a child's relationships with friends and family, negatively affect mental health, and interrupt the academic progress and work experience that should accumulate during adolescence.¹ On the societal level, the United States spends up to \$88,000 per year on each individual placed in a juvenile corrections facility.² Therefore, prevention or early intervention programs that help young people *avoid* involvement in the juvenile system in the first place offer a significant return on investment,³ and professionals in the field have focused on identifying and evaluating such promising approaches.

Increasingly, girls are making up a larger proportion of those involved with the juvenile justice system. Although the juvenile confinement rate is declining,⁴ and juvenile arrest rates are slowing overall, girls are seeing less of an improvement than boys. Specifically, from 2001 to 2010 boys' arrest rates decreased by 26.5 percent, while girls' arrest rates decreased by only 15.5 percent.⁵ Yet the current juvenile justice system is not well positioned to meet the particular needs of girls, as most services are rooted in research based on the needs of boys. Girls at risk of juvenile delinquency have a specific profile that differs from that of their male counterparts: They are more often detained for nonserious offenses, such as truancy or violating probation, and more often enter the juvenile justice system with a history of physical or sexual abuse.⁶ According to a recent report by

the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, "the juvenile justice system only exacerbates [the girls'] problems by failing to provide girls with services at the time when they need them most."⁷

One program that directly addresses this challenge is PACE Center for Girls. This "gender-responsive" program serving communities in Florida — perhaps the largest and most well-established of its kind — aims to prevent girls' involvement in the juvenile justice system. This brief describes an ongoing evaluation of PACE that will help policymakers and practitioners understand and strengthen the program's effects for at-risk girls on a range of outcomes, including education, delinquency, risky behavior, social support, and mental health. More broadly, the study will inform the national dialogue about how to better serve such girls. MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization, is leading this rigorous evaluation of PACE. The study is funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS); the Jessie Ball duPont Fund; and the Healy Foundation. The box on page 2 gives details about the SIF.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMS

With girls accounting for a growing share of the juvenile justice population, research has identified a number of ways in which female pathways to court involvement differ from those of males.⁸ Girls in the juvenile justice system are more likely than

THE EDNA MCCONNELL CLARK FOUNDATION SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) — an initiative enacted under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act — targets millions of dollars in public-private funds to expand effective solutions across three issue areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development and school support. This work seeks to create a catalog of proven approaches that can be replicated in communities across the country. The SIF generates a 3:1 private-public match, sets a high standard for evidence, empowers communities to identify and drive solutions to address social problems, and creates an incentive for grant-making organizations to target funding more effectively to promising programs. Administered by the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the SIF is part of the government’s broader agenda to redefine how evidence, innovation, service, and public-private cooperation can be used to tackle urgent social challenges.

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, in collaboration with MDRC and The Bridgespan Group, is leading a SIF project that aims to expand the pool of organizations with proven programs that can help low-income young people make the transition to productive adulthood. EMCF, with its partners MDRC and Bridgespan, chose PACE Center for Girls and 11 other programs to receive SIF grants. These organizations were selected through a competitive process based on prior evidence of impacts on economically disadvantaged young people, a track record of serving young people in communities of need, strong leadership and a potential for growth, and the financial and operational capabilities necessary to expand to a large scale.

boys to have experienced certain risk factors, including sexual violence, extreme family conflict, and child maltreatment.⁹ Overall, girls have a greater incidence of depression than boys.¹⁰ Research indicates that girls and boys respond differently to trauma, and there is more of an association between traumatic stress and mental health problems among girls.¹¹

Gender-responsive prevention programs offer a promising way to address girls’ unique needs.¹² In this context, “gender-responsive” describes treatment approaches for women and girls,¹³ based on the theory that the default approach is designed for boys and men.¹⁴ While “good gender-[responsive] services begin with good services”¹⁵ — meaning that they are part of a strong program, with a competent staff — they are distinctive in bringing an awareness of girls’ particular development and gender-specific issues into the program. The box on page 3 presents their most important components.

In recognition of gender-responsive programming as an approach to better serve girls, federal policymakers have lent their support through a 1992 amendment to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which provided funding for research and development of gender-responsive services.¹⁶ In 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created a Girls Study Group to further the research base around programming for girls. More recently, OJJDP partnered with another national organization to create the National Girls Initiative, which provides training, technical assistance, and other resources to programs serving this population.¹⁷ And in 2015, OJJDP released a statement about its commitment to provide funding for research about girls in the juvenile justice system.¹⁸ Thus, at the federal level, gender-responsive services are considered an important part of the service array. Similarly, the Florida State Legislature continues to value PACE Center for Girls’ gender-respon-

COMPONENTS OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING

Experts believe that the following components are central to creating a gender-responsive environment:*

Holistic approach to treatment. Understanding the context in which girls and women exist and the multiple dimensions of their lives.

Focus on high-quality relationships. Acknowledging that positive development and change are aided by supportive relationships.

Trauma-informed treatment. Understanding past traumas in order to address current high-risk behaviors. Both social-emotional and academic challenges often stem from traumatic experiences.

Strength-based approach. Emphasizing the assets of each individual, rather than focusing on her deficits or problems to be solved.

Emphasis on family. Building the family's ability to provide nurturing, support, and guidance, with an awareness of family structures and complexities.

Educational and vocational opportunities. Responding to the academic and skill-building needs of girls to promote a successful transition to adulthood.

*Bloom and Covington (2006).

sive prevention and early intervention programming. PACE's funding from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice increased by more than 60 percent from 2010 to 2015.¹⁹

Rigorous research on gender-responsive programming is thin, however. The current literature is more robust in its description of concepts and principles than in its evaluation of data on program performance.²⁰ It is largely unknown how gender-responsive services are implemented and how similar gender-responsive programs are to one another. Further, little assessment of the effectiveness of these services exists; researchers have characterized the empirical literature in this area as "limited and inadequate"²¹ and "in its infancy."²² The evaluation of PACE Center for Girls will answer foundational questions about the effectiveness and implementation of a gender-responsive program, helping practitioners and policymakers better understand, and possibly replicate, services to prevent girls' court involvement.

PACE CENTER FOR GIRLS

Founded in 1985 specifically to meet the needs of girls involved with the juvenile justice system, PACE Center for Girls operates 19 nonresidential program sites across the state of Florida. Applicants to this voluntary program are typically struggling academically and may have behavioral issues; PACE aims to get them back on track by providing services in a gender-responsive environment that develops their strengths and addresses their risk factors. (See the box on page 4 for details on the PACE program.) PACE centers run programs year-round, and girls attend classes daily during the usual school hours. Girls receive academic and extensive social services at the center for approximately one year and often return to schools in their communities to complete their education.²³

Girls eligible for PACE are between the ages of 11 and 17 and exhibit such risk factors as exposure to abuse or violence, poor academic performance, truancy, risky sexual behavior, substance abuse, and other stressors

PACE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Academic services. An average day at PACE is structured much as it is at a traditional middle school or high school. Girls circulate between classes, which usually include language arts, math, social studies, and science. Teachers play the additional role of academic adviser, meeting with girls every two weeks to develop and monitor progress on their individual plans, which identify short- and long-term academic goals for each girl. PACE centers also have the ability to serve girls with special needs — girls with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) — although their capacity to do so varies by the level of girls' needs and center staffing.

Life skills curriculum. Class sessions cover six domains believed to be essential for girls' healthy development: physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, sexual, and spiritual. Possible topics include healthy eating, pregnancy and pregnancy prevention, sexual health, body image, sexual identity, and stress management. In most centers, this curriculum is taught in a daily classroom setting.

Individual assessment and care planning. Early in a girl's time at PACE, a staff member uses a tool to assess her risk factors within multiple domains, including relationships, school, and mental health.* During meetings with her counselor, the girl sets and reviews her own goals to increase her protective factors and reduce her risk factors. The full staff holds regular meetings to discuss each girl's progress on these identified goals.

Individual and group counseling. Counselors meet individually with girls at least every other week to discuss progress on social service goals

and provide referrals for additional supportive or therapeutic services. Girls may also meet with their counselors as additional needs or crises arise. Group sessions, run either by center staff members or by outside partners, range in topic from teen parenting to building leadership skills.

Parental engagement. During the first 30 days of a girl's time at PACE, her counselor conducts a home visit in order to better understand her circumstances and get to know her parent(s) or guardian(s). Thereafter, the counselor attempts to involve parents monthly in a variety of ways: meetings at the center, follow-up home visits, and telephone calls to share information about the girl's progress.

Community service and work readiness. Work readiness training can take a variety of forms, such as a separate class for vocational skills or instruction incorporated into the life skills curriculum. Girls take an assessment to identify possible careers and work with the PACE staff to develop plans for reaching their career goals. Girls engage in community service activities such as visiting nursing homes and writing letters to those serving overseas in the military.

Transitional services. Once a girl has moved on from PACE, either to her home school or to another appropriate placement, staff members provide follow-up services for one year. During this period, girls may receive referrals to other services in the community or crisis counseling, among other assistance.

*Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (2012).

that may contribute to trauma and negative outcomes. Referrals come from a variety of sources, including school guidance counselors and juvenile probation officers, throughout the year. While academic problems result in many referrals, eligibility depends on the wide array of risk factors.²⁴ Upon a girl's application, staff members complete a thorough assessment in order to ensure that the

center has the capacity to meet her academic and social service needs and, if so, to develop a plan for her time at PACE.

Centers vary in size, serving 42 to 82 girls at any given time. Counselors meet with each girl at least every other week, and academic classes are small, with a maximum of 14 girls to one teacher. This small size allows staff

members — both academic and social service — to give individual attention to the girls and build relationships, contributing to the girls' sense of safety and belonging while they are in attendance. PACE centers strive to create inclusive environments in which a variety of support services “wrap around” each girl, and penalties for risky or negative behaviors are not the default response. Staff members hold regular reviews to discuss each girl's care plan and progress, and may intervene, for example, by holding mediation sessions among girls experiencing conflict with the goal of fostering stronger relationships between peers. The box on page 6 presents one girl's reflections on her experiences at PACE.

While each center is run by an executive director and other managers, a central office provides key supportive services to all the centers. These include fundraising, finance, human resources, legal, training, technical assistance, and information technology services, among other functions. The central management team also advocates for resources and public policy at the state level and coordinates regular meetings of the program staff to allow for information sharing statewide.

PACE receives more than two-thirds of its funding through two sources, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and the state's educational system.²⁵ The juvenile justice funding supports the social services provided to each girl and her family, as well as facility expenses. This contribution from DJJ, an agency that primarily supports programs for young people who already have committed offenses, underscores the state- and federal-level belief that gender-responsive preventive programs such as PACE may indeed help girls avoid juvenile justice involvement later on. For academic services, the centers contract directly with the local school districts to receive per pupil funding to provide a full academic

school day.²⁶ Additional contributions come from federal and state grants and local public, corporate, and private grants. The centers meet any remaining operating expenses through local fundraising efforts, including targeting individual donors and holding special events.

THE PACE EVALUATION

In response to the growing need to prevent court involvement among girls, this study aims to provide evidence on the effectiveness of the well-established PACE program. Additionally, the study will supply much-needed detail on how gender-responsive services function in practice. The evaluation employs a random assignment design. Girls first must be deemed eligible for PACE using the program's existing application and screening process. They are then assigned at random either to a program group, whose members are offered PACE services, or to a control group, whose members receive referrals to other services in the community.

A random assignment design, a rigorous method of evaluation, can provide valid information about what difference — or impact — a program makes. Because the randomization process ensures that the program and control groups are similar at the time they enter the study, differences that emerge between the two groups over time can be attributed to the PACE program model. Thus, by tracking the two groups over an 18-month follow-up period, using a survey and government records, the evaluation will be able to assess whether the PACE program leads to improved outcomes for the girls who are eligible for the program, relative to other services. Key outcomes include academic progress, academic engagement, juvenile justice system involvement, relationships, mental health, and risky behavior (such as high-risk sexual activity and substance abuse). These results will help indicate to what extent PACE prevented *negative* outcomes and created *positive* opportunities for girls in and

ONE GIRL'S EXPERIENCE AT PACE

There is no typical PACE girl, but here is one girl's story: J, a 16-year-old expelled from her public high school for fighting with other students, learned about PACE from the school's vice principal. It was the only program she considered once she was expelled. Every day, her brother drives her to PACE and she takes two buses home in the afternoon; the return commute takes about an hour and a half.

J has found that the teachers provide a lot of assistance, and the classes are smaller than those at her prior school. She explains,

These teachers, they help you out more than regular teachers at other schools . . . [they] are nicer. They ask you if you need help, instead of you asking them. . . . [The teachers] give me the work, and it's hard, but they literally will help me find the answers . . . they will lead me to the answers and help me out.

On the social services side, J estimates that she meets with her counselor five times every week.

Whenever I have problems with other students, that's when I go straight to [my counselor] and I talk to her about it. . . . She helps me with all my problems. If I need help with work she'll find me a tutor, if I'm having trouble at home she'll talk to me about it.

One day, J had a conflict with another girl at the center, leading to a mediation session. Both girls and two counselors participated in the mediation, and each girl had a chance to tell her side of the story. This approach allowed the girls to resolve their conflict.

Although initially J was worried about going to an all-girls program, she has found the other girls supportive. The absence of boys has prevented conflict and allows for more focus during classes. When she overdosed due to her struggle with depression, her friends at PACE let her know how much she was missed while absent from the center.

I didn't come for three weeks because of something that was going on, because I OD'd. I was really depressed, and that's when my friend was like "we're here to talk. We're mad at you because you didn't talk to us, we're here for you, we want you to be successful in life and come to school every day. We don't want you to miss out on anything."

J says things are better for her since she came to PACE. She doesn't get into fights as much, and she no longer feels like the "bad child." She is closer to her family and makes an effort to have real conversations with her family members. J plans to go to a different public high school when she leaves PACE and aspires to attend college.

out of school. This is vital information for policymakers and practitioners who are searching for ways to help young women and girls avoid any, or further, involvement in the juvenile justice system.

To more fully understand the impact analysis results and PACE's particular model of gender-responsive services, the evaluation includes an extensive implementation analysis, as well as a cost-effectiveness analysis. The implementation analysis will present detailed information

about the services that PACE provides, how those services are delivered, and potential variations in program implementation related to local community context across the state. Data will be collected and analyzed from a number of sources, including visits to each center over several days to observe classrooms, interview staff members, and speak to enrolled girls; a program staff survey, which will provide information about staff roles and backgrounds and PACE's organizational culture; and PACE's comprehensive management information

system, which tracks program participation and service receipt.²⁷ Additionally, the implementation study will provide key information on the services available to girls in the control group, as well as information about the larger Florida context in which PACE operates. Finally, a cost-effectiveness analysis will evaluate the costs of PACE in the context of its outcomes for girls.

WHO IS IN THE STUDY?

Fourteen centers throughout the state of Florida are participating in the evaluation.²⁸ Their locations represent the diversity of Florida in terms of level of population density, racial and ethnic makeup, and socioeconomic status. Among other local factors, each center must tailor its academic program to the specific requirements of its county-level school district or districts.

Following existing research that shows high rates of trauma, family problems, and academic challenges among girls involved with juvenile court, the study sample illustrates how PACE serves girls who are truly at risk for delinquency. Table 1 presents characteristics of the girls who enrolled in the study across the participating centers. The vast majority of girls are between 13 and 16 years of age, and about 11 percent are classified as special education students. About 45 percent of the sample are black, nearly 40 percent are white, and about 16 percent identify as Hispanic. More than three-quarters of the sample live in households with low or extremely low incomes.

Figure 1 shows some of the school-related experiences of the study sample members before they applied to PACE. More than three-quarters of the girls had reportedly failed one or more classes in the previous six months. Approximately half had been held back at least once in their school career, and around 39 percent had recently been expelled or suspended.

TABLE 1. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS AT BASELINE

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	STUDY PARTICIPANTS
AGE IN YEARS	
11-12	8.5
13-14	32.5
15-16	49.5
17 OR OLDER	9.5
RACE/ETHNICITY^a	
BLACK, NON-HISPANIC	44.8
HISPANIC	16.1
WHITE, NON-HISPANIC	38.3
OTHER, NON-HISPANIC	0.8
SPECIAL EDUCATION/EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION^b	11.1
HOUSEHOLD INCOME^c (%)	
EXTREMELY LOW OR VERY LOW	41.4
LOW	35.3
OTHER	23.3
SAMPLE SIZE	1,126

SOURCE: PACE's management information system (MIS).

NOTES: Sample sizes for individual characteristics may fall short of full sample size (N = 1,126) because of missing data.

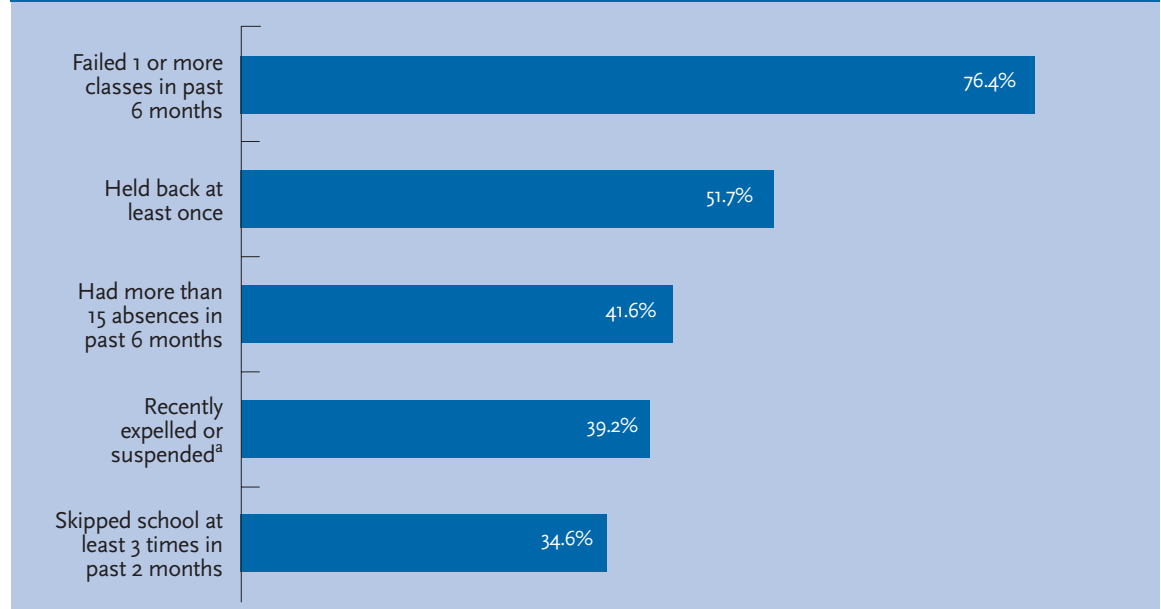
^aThe race/ethnicity categories shown here are mutually exclusive.

^bPACE uses the Florida Department of Education definition of Exceptional Student Education (ESE), referring to programs for students with disabilities and gifted programs.

^cThese categories refer to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development income limits. The Florida statewide income limits for a four-person household are as follows for FY 2014: extremely low, \$16,850; very low, \$28,050; low, \$44,900. Income limits vary by county and household size.

Figure 2 illustrates the nonacademic risk factors girls were facing at the time of enrollment in the study. Nearly 28 percent of the girls had been arrested at least once, and about the same percentage reported running away from home; 38 percent of the sample had a history of abuse or neglect; and 44 percent had been sexually active.²⁹ About 64 percent of girls in

FIGURE 1. SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AT BASELINE



SOURCE: PACE's management information system (MIS).

NOTES: Sample sizes for individual measures may fall short of full sample size (N = 1,126) because of missing data.

^aThis information was gathered in two different ways during the random assignment period. For approximately half of the sample, it was defined as being currently expelled or suspended. For the other half of the sample, it referred to an expulsion or suspension in the most recent school term.

the study sample had a family member with a criminal history.³⁰

LOOKING FORWARD

Although there is an overall decrease in girls' court involvement and incarceration, this decline is slower than it is for boys, and the juvenile justice system is not successfully serving girls. Girls enter the system for specific reasons, many of which are not addressed through traditional programming. There is a clear need for services that specifically target girls.

Both state and federal agencies have shown a commitment to gender-responsive approaches; however, research on their implementation and effectiveness is needed to help practitioners learn what works and use this knowledge to improve and expand such services. The evaluation of PACE Center for Girls will deliver reliable evidence about whether and how this gender-responsive program affects important outcomes such as school success, delinquency, relationships, and mental health.

Several upcoming publications will provide this evidence. An interim report to be released in 2017 will present the implementation research findings and preliminary impacts for early study enrollees. This report will offer an in-depth look at how PACE provides services and how those services vary across communities. A companion publication will focus on gender-responsive programming, contributing to the knowledge of what this looks like in practice. In 2018, a final report will present results for the full study sample for all measured outcomes and include the cost-effectiveness analysis. The impact findings will provide a rigorous assessment of PACE's effectiveness as a gender-responsive program for girls.

NOTES

1 Aizer and Doyle (2015).

2 Justice Policy Institute (2009).

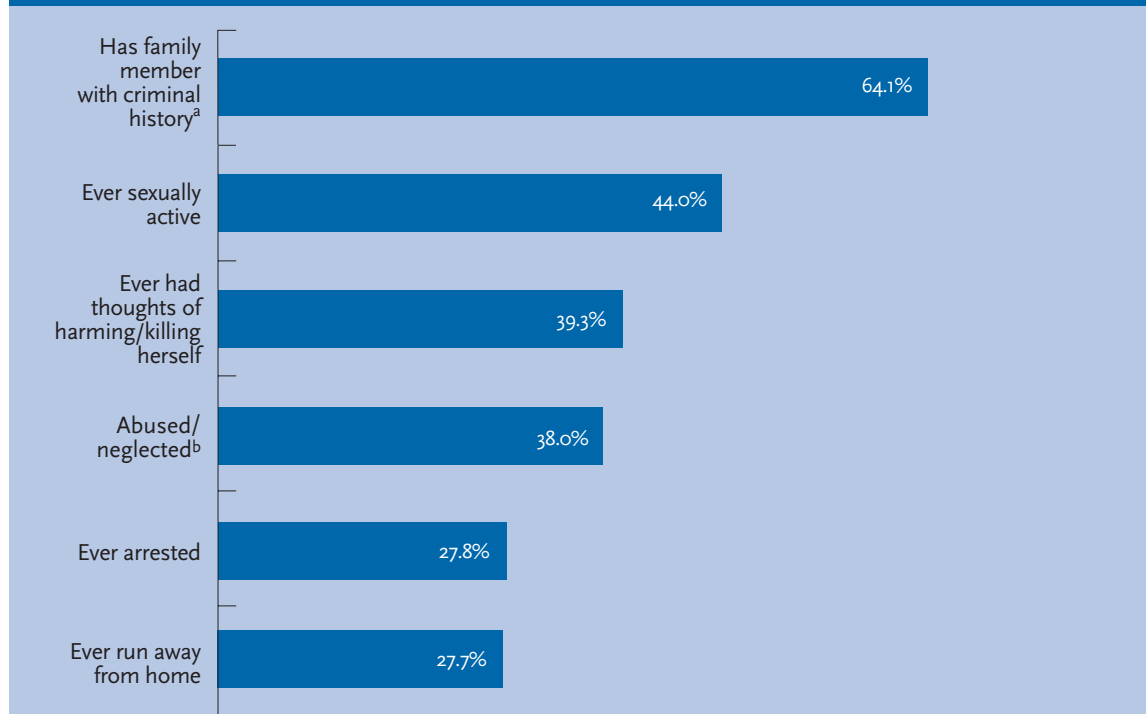
3 Aos et al. (2004).

4 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013).

5 Watson and Edelman (2012).

6 Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, and Whitworth (2008).

FIGURE 2. NONACADEMIC RISK FACTORS AT BASELINE



SOURCE: PACE's management information system (MIS).

NOTES: Sample sizes for individual risk factors may fall short of full sample size (N = 1,126) because of missing data.

^aThis information was gathered in two different ways during the random assignment period. For approximately half of the sample, this measure referred to a criminal record (including imprisonment, probation, parole, and house arrest) for a parent, guardian, or sibling of the sample member. For the other half of the sample, "family" included other members of the household as well.

^bThis information was gathered in two different ways during the random assignment period. For about half of the sample, this measure referred only to documented instances of abuse or neglect. For the other half of the sample, the measure also included suspected incidents of abuse.

7 Watson and Edelman (2012), p. ii.

8 Cauffman (2008).

9 Bright and Jonson-Reid (2010b).

10 Kleinfeld (2009).

11 Zahn et al. (2010).

12 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015a).

13 Bloom and Covington (2006).

14 Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, and Whitworth (2008).

15 Maniglia (1998); see "Female Psychology and the Study of Difference."

16 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015c, 2015b).

17 National Crittenton Foundation (2015).

18 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015b).

19 PACE (2010); Office of the Governor of Florida (2015).

20 Hubbard and Matthews (2008).

21 Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Stevens (2008), p. 169.

22 Bright and Jonson-Reid (2010a).

23 In some cases, girls seek options other than returning to the public school they attended previously; for example, earning a high school equivalency diploma and gaining employment. In rare cases, PACE centers provide a high school diploma through the local school district.

24 In order to be eligible for PACE, a girl must display three out of five risk factors, as required by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (one of PACE's primary funders).

25 PACE (2014).

26 Specifics of these contracts vary by center. Contracts may provide for academic materials, part-time staff, or transportation, among other items.

27 The classroom observations use a validated observational tool, the CLASS-Secondary, which will allow comparisons across centers and with national averages (Allen et al., n.d.). Similarly, the staff survey includes a validated measure, the Organizational Social Context (Glisson, Green, and Williams, 2012).

28 Currently, there are 19 PACE centers operating throughout Florida. One remote location was not included in the evaluation due to ethical concerns about other services available in the community. Two centers have opened since the evaluation began and are working toward the more steady state of PACE services that

the evaluation will measure. Two other centers were able to contribute to the evaluation only in a very limited way, due to low enrollment numbers throughout the random assignment period.

29 As a point of comparison, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System national survey asks young people about sexual activity. In 2013, nationally 46.8 percent of high school females reported they had “ever had sexual intercourse.” The 2013 rate is slightly lower in Florida, where 39.6 percent of high school females reported ever having had sexual intercourse. The 2013 rate for middle school females is not available nationally or for the state of Florida (Kann et al., 2014). However, in Duval County, Florida, 9.6 percent of middle school females reported ever having had sexual intercourse (Florida Department of Health in Duval County and Duval County Public Schools, 2013).

30 A growing body of research indicates that children with incarcerated parents often experience trauma, family disruption, and the loss of their primary caregiver, which can lead to financial hardship, residential instability, and an array of emotional and behavioral problems (Parke and Clarke-Stewart, 2001).

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Preventing Juvenile Justice Involvement for Young Women

An Introduction to an Evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls

By Megan Millenky and Caroline Mage



Girls constitute an increasing proportion of those involved in the juvenile justice system, but they differ from boys in important ways: They are more often detained for offenses such as truancy or violating probation, and they are more likely to enter the court system with a history of physical or sexual abuse. But girls at risk of court involvement lack services tailored to their specific needs. This brief introduces an evaluation of PACE Center for Girls, which uses a “gender-responsive” model of education and counseling services with the goal of preventing girls’ involvement in the juvenile justice system. MDRC’s evaluation uses a random assignment design at 14 PACE centers to provide information about the impacts of the program, and extensive implementation and cost analyses will provide an in-depth understanding of these impacts. Results from this study will contribute to the growing literature about the effect of gender-responsive programs for girls at risk of delinquency.