

The Needs and Experiences of Justice-Involved Young Women

By

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my Heavenly Father, my whole family, my community and to all the young women I have been privileged to work with before and will continue to work with in future. To my parents, sisters, and in-laws, who have long wished for this day, thank you for your blessings to pursue my dreams in the U.S, and I hope you are proud of the first-generation Ph.D in the family, thank you for all your prayers. To my husband, Anand, my partner for life who is always consistent and unwavering, thank you for all you have done for our family, showing us what excellence looks like, sacrificing your time, and sleep to not only help me get to this finish line but also to push through your own Ph.D. To my daughter, Anya, for standing by me through these past 5 years in school, for being so gracious and forgiving of my busyness. I hope you will always remember that you can achieve anything you put your mind to do, I promise. I'm so thankful to her Aunties (my sisters in Christ!) and my church family for always being willing to babysit and hang out with her, and at the same time, care for me with food, prayers, and encouragement, so that I could be here today.

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation includes three studies with a focused analysis on the needs and experiences of Justice-Involved Young Women (JIYW). The first two studies utilize a cross sectional data collected from the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) ($n=365$). The first study, “How are they different? An exploration of family and school factors among post-adjudicated young women” explores the associations between family and school factors, and their relationship to criminal risk among JIYW using multiple regression analyses. After controlling for age, the model (Family incarceration history, Running away from home, School suspension or expulsion, Abuse, Neglect and a Special learning need) emerged as significant predictors of criminal risk ($p < .001$). However, only family incarceration and special education needs (learning, behavioral or ADHD/ADD) were predictive of higher levels of criminal risk for Black JIYW, while running away from home was predictive for Hispanic JIYW. The second study, “Risk and protective factors among post-adjudicated young women with high criminal risk: An exploratory cross-sectional analysis” explores the risk and protective correlates of criminal risk among JIYW with high risk using an exploratory model building method with logistic regression analyses. The results revealed that young women with high criminal risk were more likely to have had a history of mental health problems, a history of running away from home, and were younger in age, based on the best model selected ($\chi^2 = 51.904$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$). The third study, “They see me as a bad kid”: Public School and Correctional Educational Experiences on the Self-perception of Justice-Involved Young Women” utilized a secondary dataset ($n=14$) to examine the self-perceptions of a sample of 10

JYW, two probation officers and two correctional teachers from a youth correctional facility. A qualitative thematic analysis using Symbolic Interactionism and Institutional Embeddedness revealed three themes, (1) " I would pay attention and I would still get them wrong and feel stupid ", (2) I'm making straight As for the first time", and (3) "They see us as bad kids". All three studies elucidate unique experiences, across risk level and race/ethnicity, which calls for gender-specific, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed intervention for JYW.

Key words: Juvenile justice, young women, risk and protective factors, gender-specific

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There has been an overall decline in the arrests of youth in the juvenile justice system over the past decade. However, this decline is less steep for girls than it is for boys, resulting in a net increase in the share of crime by Justice-Involved Young Women (JIYW) (Hyland, 2018; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 2019; Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018; Puzzanchera, 2019, Kerig, 2018). Historically, girls are involved in the juvenile justice system through non-violent, status offending, such as truancy or running away, conflictual family relationships, substance use, victimization and by technical violations such as a breach of curfew or school failure (Hockenberry, 2018; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Pasko, 2006; Simmons-Horton & Gibson, 2019; Zahn et al., 2010). However, in 2019, girls accounted for 31% of all juvenile crime (OJJDP, 2020). Violent offending such as simple assaults among JIYW has also consistently risen over the years, and in 2017 girls accounted for 20% of juvenile violent crime arrests and 26% of aggravated assault arrests (Puzzanchera, 2019). These rising trends in areas other than status offenses are disconcerting, and the long-term outcomes for JIYW could be dismal. There is a higher percentage of JIYW in contact with the courts, sentenced to probation, and out of home placements into correctional institutions than ever before (Sherman & Balck, 2015; Espinosa et al., 2019).

Increased involvement among JIYW has inadvertently altered their developmental trajectory concerning mental health, gang involvement, substance abuse, victimization, and mortality (Teplin et al., 2005). The changing landscape of justice involvement among girls warrants more considerable and holistic attention and focus on the etiology of their justice involvement. It is critical to focus our attention on JIYW by understanding their experiences,

their risk and protective factors, and other influences that support their desistance process. A more in-depth investigation promotes the endeavor to develop evidence-based, gender-specific programming that can augment desistance (i.e., cessation from crime) and positively alter their reentry trajectories. McNeill and Maruna (2007) referred to desistance as a fundamental change in how people view themselves and their world. Desistance can be achieved when one moves toward a new identity without criminality, a sense of personal agency and control, and a desire to be productive and contribute back to society (Maruna, 2001). It is vital to consider the desistance process as the end goal in juvenile justice outcomes, where policies and programs should target known pathways to desistance for JIYW.

Nature, scope, and significance of the problem

The consequences of justice involvement in crime and incarceration are dire. Recidivism (i.e., re-offending) among JIYW is high, with 53% of JIYW re-arrested primarily for warrants, probation, and program or parole violation as compared to only 41% of re-arrests for justice-involved boys (Sherman, 2005). The number of women in the adult criminal justice system has also risen over the years and currently accounts for 25 % of adult arrests (Puzzanchera, 2009; Snyder, 2011; Sickmund et al., 2011). In a recent nationwide study of 30 state prison data, the recidivism of men (85%) and women (77%) over a nine-year follow-up period were not significantly different, despite a significant gender disparity in crime statistics (Alper et al., 2018). The mortality rate of JIYW is dismal, most prevalent among JIYW who experienced major depression and generalized anxiety, is close to eight times greater than the general population, with most deaths due to homicide (Teplin et al., 2005). There is an urgency to shift our attention to JIYW and contribute to the discourse about recidivism and

reentry. The lack of planning for reentry and support for JIYW has dire consequences (Gagnon & Richards, 2008). Studying the experiences of JIYW allows for an evidence-based perspective of what the system needs to do to ensure that reentry for JIYW will be a smooth transition from the system to society.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) proposed a call for action to provide broader and more comprehensive reform to address the unique needs of JIYW (OJJDP, 2015). The amendment to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in 1992 emphasized the need for gender-specific intervention services by OJJDP, and to address the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) within the juvenile justice system. There is a significant need for action because we are still facing the same issues after two decades of minimal progress and increasing trends of justice involvement among girls. The findings of the proposed research can inform the development of evidence-based policies and programs that are gender-responsive and culturally appropriate for this subpopulation.

Innovation Statements

JIYW are still a relatively small proportion of the juvenile justice system. They are often forgotten and neglected in justice reform initiatives, policies, and interventions (OJJDP, 2019). Developmental differences between boys and girls, when coupled with justice involvement, can have differing iatrogenic consequences in their trajectory towards adulthood (Gilman, 2015). Altschuler and Brash (2004) propose three transitions faced by justice-involved youth at the same time; 1) they transition developmentally from adolescence to young adulthood, where critical milestones are achieved; 2) biopsychosocial and cognitive changes; and 3) transitioning from the correctional institution to society. JIYW also have other intersecting identities, structural and societal roles, as well as stereotypes and

expectations to fulfill, which involves a complex process of transitioning back into their community and establishing pro-social relationships (Hong et al., 2013; Crenshaw et al., 2015). Despite these complex intersections and transitions, there is a shortage of literature on JIYW and their developmental pathways of offending and desisting, which is surprising given the steady rise in crime for this population over the last two decades. This lack of progress is detrimental for our society, given the critical role that women play at the center of our families. Girls referred to the Texas state juvenile justice department were 3.5 times more likely to have a child while still, a teenager compared to their counterparts who were not involved in the justice system (Widom et al., 2018). If not addressed, this could lead to a social and family crisis, as the cycle of crime for the next generation within this subpopulation is particularly high, especially between female caregivers or mothers and their daughters (Murray et al., 2007). Targeted, gender-specific, evidence-based interventions can augment the post-adjudication reentry process through appropriate support, which can contribute to the successful desistance of JIYW, and positively alter their reentry trajectories. This dissertation is innovative in the multi-pronged approach to understand justice involvement among girls and has the potential to impact juvenile justice policy and practice in the U.S.

Gaps in the research

Several studies elucidate risk factors associated with recidivism. These risk factors include ethnicity, family history of criminality, family socioeconomic status, family strife, history of drug use, deviant peers, domestic violence, homelessness, unemployment, the severity of the offense, and age upon first arrest and referral to the juvenile justice system (Abrams & Terry, 2017; Barrett et al., 2010; Hubbard & Pratt, 2002; Zahn et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2011). However, more research is needed on a larger sample size that is representative

of all races. Additionally, many of these studies focused on girls are outdated from a decade ago and dismisses the changing trend of offending in this current decade. Additionally, the voices of the girls are hardly represented in the literature.

Black girls constitute 14% of the national population of American youth under the age of 18, yet disproportionately account for 35% of girls arrested and committed into the juvenile justice system. Yet, there is a limited discussion on DMC in the literature (OJJDP, 2019; Morris, 2016). A recent study by Dawson-Edwards et al. (2020) with institutions and stakeholders who encounter justice-involved youth revealed a general ignorance of the DMC in the juvenile justice system. The interviews conducted with these stakeholders revealed that they were unaware of DMC, have preconceptions about justice-involved youth of color, lack appreciation of the impact of DMC on justice-involved youth of color (Dawson-Edwards et al.).

Potential impact

This research is unique in that it uses both quantitative and qualitative data to provide an in-depth understanding of the needs and experiences of JYW. The last large-scale national study to include girls, the Girls Group study, conducted by Zahn and colleagues (2009) was over a decade ago, and it focused on the rising trends and factors that contribute to justice involvement. To date, there is little progress. In a more recent study of desistance among youth in Los Angeles, Abrams & Terry (2017) explored how social relationships played a huge part in the desistance of young women. The authors found common themes that included their living situation, wanting to break the cycle of crime, caregiving, social connections, gender-based violence, surviving through their adversities, and gaining strength through the process. Importantly, the women interviewed for this study expressed that they were tied to

criminal activity through their anti-social romantic relationships, sexualized violent victimization, and a lack of safety and social support. Girls have intersecting identities subject to gendered norms, expectations, and stereotypes. The institutional systems such as the juvenile justice system and the educational system have a part to play in influencing the perception of self among JIYW, which is an instrumental factor in how one transits into a crime-free lifestyle (Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The potential contribution of the proposed research to the literature and knowledge base for practice and policy is promising, given the consideration of intersectionality and complexities that surround a justice-involved girl in their journey towards desistance.

This Dissertation Research

This research is based on three articles using secondary data: 1) a quantitative study that examines family and school factors that are associated with criminal risk among diverse young women, 2) a quantitative study that examines the social correlates of criminal risk among JIYW classified as high risk and, 3) a qualitative study that examines the self-perception of JIYW within the educational context.

The first two articles used a recently obtained dataset provided by Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (HCJPD), that was cleaned and coded by the researchers. This dataset utilized the risk assessment scores obtained from the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) for JIYW adjudicated between 2017-2019 ($n= 365$) by the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department. The PACT contains 126 items from their criminal and social history domains. It includes items such as prior official criminal history, the seriousness of offenses, gender, education, use of recreation, employment, family history, alcohol and drug history, mental health, attitudes/ behaviors, aggression, and skills. Research has shown that

these risk categories play a significant role in sentencing outcomes and rehabilitation decisions (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013). The social history that contains dynamic factors such as family history, school history, mental health, substance use, etc., is more strongly correlated to the risk of re-offending than one's criminal history. Previous studies found a higher mean effect size for dynamic factors (.13) than static factors (.11) such as criminal history (Baglivio & Jackowski; Gendreau et al., 1996). This finding is significant in that it encourages a deeper look into intervention with a focus on the social history factors (Baglivio & Jackowski).

The first article focuses on a total of seven family and school factors based on a sample of 365 JYW from Harris County, the largest and most diverse urban city in Houston, Texas. The study examines how these factors are predictive of criminal risk of re-offending. There was a comparison of how these factors differed for Black and Hispanic JYW.

The second article focuses on young women classified as high risk by the PACT. This study examines how the social domains assessed in the PACT are predictive for girls with high criminal risk. These social domains were selected based on a model building process. Following the risk and resilience framework (Anthony et al., 2009; Masten, 2007), there were both risk and protective factors for the analyses which are correlated with criminal risk.

The third article utilizes a secondary qualitative dataset collected from post-adjudicated girls aged 14-16, teachers, and probation officers ($n=14$). This qualitative study aimed to hear from the educational experiences of ten girls in HCJPD and how their experiences shaped their self-perception. This study was guided by symbolic interactionism (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003) and Institutional Embeddedness (Snodgrass Rangel et al., 2020). A thematic analysis was conducted.

Aims of research:

The three studies aimed to answer the following research questions:

Article 1: Quantitative:

- a) What family and school factors predict criminal risk among justice-involved young women in a large, southern urban area?
- b) How do family and school factors associated with criminal risk differ among justice-involved Black and Hispanic young women?

Article 2: Quantitative:

- a) What are the risk and protective factors that are predictive of high criminal risk among justice-involved young women who are classified as high risk and not high risk?

Article 3: Qualitative:

- a) How do the public and correctional education experiences of young women involved in the juvenile justice system shape their perception of self?

All three articles are well aligned with the goals of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in reducing addressing disproportionate minority contact and racial and ethnic disparities that require action from states to reduce the overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system (P.L. 115-385). The first study focuses on the family and school factors for both Hispanic and Black ' young women using the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT), which highlighted the specific risks and characteristics based on a cross-ethnic examination. These studies considered both gender and culture, which

has the potential to identify intervention gaps and guide future interventions for young women of color. This cross-cultural examination and development of a culturally appropriate response could reduce the disproportionate minority contact among young women in the juvenile justice system in the long run. The PACT, a fourth-generation actuarial assessment tool used for this study, contains self-report questions involving the school and family. The PACT data collected from 365 young women adjudicated between 2017-2019, provides not only meaningful data but also more recent data that considers current youth trends. There are 166 Black and 161 Hispanic JYW represented in this dataset. The risk- needs- responsivity model emphasizes the “*what works*” model and reinforces the use of the PACT assessment tool as a means of effective case management (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). This framework emphasizes specialized intervention that responds to the risks present, including culture.

The second article focuses on JYW classified as high risk according to the PACT. This study elucidates the different social risk factors associated with high criminal risk and allowed for more in-depth consideration for those who have multiple and high risks through appropriate intervention. JYW are not a top priority for State and local juvenile justice systems, and these young women, especially those with multiple risks, face significant challenges in reentering society after leaving the juvenile justice system (Paraschiv, 2013). A clear within-group distinction in the correlates of social risk factors among diverse girls with high risk could change the direction of service provision through bundled services that will appropriately address the accumulation of risks in a culturally appropriate manner (Parrish, 2020). Additionally, this study also highlights the importance of considering protective factors in mitigating these high risks, potentially flipping the script that JYW have protective factors and resilience that should be considered in risk classification. According to Menon and

Cheung (2018), interventions should include protective factors that build resilience in youth. The lack of priority for JIYW has resulted in a one-size model in which all girls adjudicated the same way would receive the same intervention. The risk and resilience framework guided this scholarship.

The third article focuses on examining the influence of educational systems in mainstream and juvenile justice institutions on the perception of self among post-adjudicated girls aged 14-16. Although the school to prison pipeline is heavily documented in the literature, there is limited information on the impact of the public and correctional educational systems on the perception of self among JIYW (Gilliam et al., 2016; Noguera, 2003). The study of self- perception influences the desistance process; the transition from an anti-social to a pro-social lifestyle free of crime (Maruna, 2001). This study utilizes symbolic interactionism (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003) and Institutional Embeddedness (Snodgrass Rangel et al., 2020) as a framework.

The aims of all three articles are complementary to one another. They have the potential to form a cohesive body of work that will consider the unique experiences and intersecting identities of JIYW. These three proposed studies are critical because they focus on the same population of girls in HCJPD and offer both quantitative and qualitative understanding of their lived and self- reported experiences. This investigation informs service and resource allocation that is gender and culturally responsive to their unique and holistic needs (Hart et al., 2007). A clear and comprehensive inquiry into an under-studied population is critical to developing sanctions, policies and effective interventions (Parker, 2013). Much of the value of investigating desistance lies in the utilization of results to inform the court and juvenile justice system on the most effective allocation of resources (Mulvey et al., 2004).

The corrections and the education institutions play a critical role in the lives of young people by building competencies and increasing internal assets such as positive identity, social skills, commitment to learning, and positive values that can support positive youth development (Menon & Cheung, 2017; Scales & Leffert, 2004). These assets could empower and enhance the positive identity and self-worth of JIYW that could influence one's decision to lead a crime-free lifestyle (Faur & Oancea, 2012; Menon & Cheung; Maruna, 2001). Social workers can play a significant role in positively altering the educational and correctional experiences of young women in the Juvenile Justice System (Goldkind, 2011). Unfortunately, many schools do not have a school social worker or counselor who can provide additional psychosocial and learning support for JIYW (The U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Goldkind (2011) emphasized the role of social workers within educational settings who could provide a resource connection between the student and multiple agencies, through collaborations, interagency support, and advocacy for JIYW returning to school. The School to Prison Pipeline has disproportionately affected girls of color, and this pipeline is also reflected in the disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice settings. To reduce these disparities, both the correctional systems and the educational systems need to be addressed simultaneously with high importance. This research is an effort to better inform us about JIYW by providing an in-depth investigation of social functioning in multiple areas of their lives. This investigation aims to highlight the complex and interconnected risks and resilience of JIYW and offer suggestions for evidence-informed policies and programs.

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CHAPTER 2: HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT? AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILY AND SCHOOL FACTORS AMONG POST-ADJUDICATED YOUNG WOMEN

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Abstract

This study explores the associations between family and school factors, and their relationship to criminal risk among post-adjudicated diverse young women. Cross-sectional data were collected through the Positive Achievement Change Tool using seven measures of family and school factors (n=365). After controlling for age, this model (Family incarceration history, Running away from home, School suspension or expulsion, Abuse, Neglect and a Special learning need) emerged as significant predictors of criminal risk ($p = <.001$). However, only family incarceration and special education needs (learning, behavioral or ADHD/ADD) were predictive of higher levels of criminal risk for Black young women while running away from home was predictive for Hispanic young women. Interventions should be gender-specific and culturally responsive in addressing family and school factors that impact diverse young women.

Key words: Justice-involved young women, family and school predictors, delinquency, juvenile justice

Introduction

Over the last three decades, the proportion of young women in the juvenile justice system has risen, with increasing rates of arrest and adjudication, compared to young men (Hyland, 2018; Kerig, 2018; Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018; Puzzanchera, 2019; OJJDP, 2019). In 2019, young women accounted for 31% of all juvenile crime (OJJDP, 2020).

Although there has been increased attention on young women and crime, a specific focus on Black and Hispanic young women is lacking despite their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system nationally (Kerig, 2018). Young Black women constitute 14% of the national population of American youth under 18, yet disproportionately account for 35% of young women arrested and committed into the juvenile justice system (OJJDP, 2019). This need for additional research is further illustrated given increases in youth arrests and commitment to juvenile institutions among Black and Hispanic youth, as the overall trends among white youth decrease (Rovner, 2016; Stevens & Morash, 2015; OJJDP, 2019).

Lately, there is an increased interest in gender-responsive research, including identifying risk and protective factors among diverse groups of young women (Blinded for review, 2020; Blinded for review, 2020; Logan-Greene et al., 2018; Parrish, 2020; Walker et al., 2015). This new interest has sought to identify indicators of health and well-being that can positively interrupt pathways to offending (Ehrmann et al., 2019). This study seeks to explore and gain an empirical understanding of the family and school risk factors associated with re-offending among Justice-Involved Young Women (JIYW), with a comparison between Hispanic and Black young women.

Recidivism

Since 2000, the re-arrest rate for juvenile justice-involved youth has ranged from 50 to 80% (Seigle et al., 2014). Multiple risk factors, limited programming, and costs associated with re-offending continue to contribute to the U.S.'s high recidivism rates (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2009). Coleman and colleagues (2009) found that a majority of young women in New York were re-arrested (81%) as an adult at least once. This signals a considerable public health concern, and an increased need to address the underlying needs of JIYW.

Overall Risk factors

Young women involved in the juvenile justice system often have multiple complicated, intricate, and overlapping risk factors, which differ based on race or ethnicity (Loeber et al., 2008; Logan-Green et al., 2018). Their trajectories to the juvenile justice system are often unique and connected to prior victimization and trauma, which may trigger law-breaking behaviors such as family aggression, running away, and substance use, for example (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Olafson et al., 2018; Sherman & Balck, 2015). Additionally, JIYW can have co-morbidity and overlapping mental health issues with substance use, risky sexual behavior, sexually transmitted diseases, and poor physical health (Odgers et al., 2010; Teplin et al., 2005).

The ecological and individual needs of young men and young women differ due to structural factors, gendered socialization, and underlying biological and psychological traits (Moffit et al., 2001; Stockard, 2006). While there are shared risks between genders, the sequelae of justice involvement, level of exposure and intensity of risk differs (Wong et al., 2013). A review of the literature indicates certain risk factors are unique to the pathways of offending for young women: maltreatment, caregiver transitions, sexual abuse, running away from home, older male peers, and early pubertal timing (Baglivio et al., 2013; Espinosa et al.,

2013; Leve et al., 2015). Young women are four times more likely to be sexually abused than young men, and this often manifests in behaviors that result in low-level offending (Baglivio et al.). Young women are exposed to the juvenile justice system for non-violent and minor offenses, which may also cover up other deeper issues, such as sexual and physical victimization, that could lead to status offending such as running away from home, human trafficking, survival sex, and drug use (Abrams & Terry, 2017; Hockenberry, 2018; Javdani & Allen, 2016; Zahn et al., 2010). Inadvertently, these behaviors could spiral into mental health diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder, where JIYW are diagnosed at a rate eight times more than the general population (Espinosa et al., 2019; Teplin et al., 2005). JIYW also have high levels of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) with five or more, which is said to be double that of young men's traumatic experiences (Baglivio et al., 2014). This signals the presence of traumatic experiences in their lifetime that inadvertently results in justice involvement (Baglivio et al.).

Systemic Barriers

Young people of color are impacted by systemic barriers such as harsher and more intensive sentencing or sanctions by the juvenile court (Cochran & Mears, 2014). These systemic barriers are reflected not only within the juvenile justice settings but also within the educational settings where youth of color are disproportionately affected by the school to prison pipeline (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). For instance, Black girls are six times more likely to be suspended and four times more likely to be arrested compared to their white counterparts for the same offenses (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Normative gender and racial stereotypes within juvenile justice settings largely contribute to these systemic inequities for Black and Hispanic young women (Morris, 2016; Pasko & Lopez, 2018).

Hence, a focused analysis of the immediate ecological systems such as the family and school, are imperative to address the unique needs of diverse young women.

Family Risk Factors

Family Incarceration

Parent incarceration affects young people who silently suffer from the lack of their parents' availability and presence in the home (Mears & Siennick, 2016). Young people with family who have been incarcerated are more likely to be exposed to other structural risk factors, such as poverty, prior to parental incarceration (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011). Parental absence, especially from the maternal caregiver, could negatively impact the parent-child bonding and social controls in a young woman's life, opening the possibility of finding alternative sources to meet their essential needs for intimacy and protection (Miller, 2006; Morash & Chesney-Lind, 2009). Family attachments are highly emphasized among Black and Hispanic families, which relates to the importance of understanding the impact of family incarceration among JIYW (Bright & Jonson-Reid, 2010; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007).

Physical and Sexual Abuse

Childhood maltreatment, including sexual abuse and physical abuse and neglect, often preexists and strongly correlates with justice involvement (Ryan et al., 2013). Ariga and colleagues (2008) found that 84% of JIYW reported a history of trauma exposure, with sexual abuse being the most frequently reported adverse experience. In one study using latent class analysis, JIYW reported high victimization by their caregivers in the previous year (47.4%) (Charak et al., 2019).

Neglect

Neglect is commonly defined as the absence of parental care, supervision, or needs due to household instability and the lack of attention given to meeting the child's basic needs (Erickson & Egeland, 2002). In one study, 96% of JIYW had described being neglected in some way or another, bringing this experience into focus for young women (Anderson & Walerych, 2019). Neuroscience research suggests that early adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse and neglect, can negatively impact children's neurological development, impairing a child's emotional, social, and cognitive domains (Ford, 2009).

Running Away from Home

Running away from home, a status offense due to the minor status of the child, is criminalized by law enforcement due to nonconformity and unlawful conduct that is classified to be a threat to others (Ford et al.; Javdani & Allen, 2016). However, JIYW reported that running away was an "attempt to avoid or disengage with a dysfunctional home" (Anderson & Walerych, 2019 p. 151). Frequent victimization in the home from neglect or abuse could result in running away and adopting risky survival strategies to cope, such as drug use, human trafficking or survival sex (Abrams & Terry, 2017; Ford et al., 2006; Hockenberry, 2018; Javdani & Allen, 2016), which increases criminal risk. Latzman et al. (2018) reported that the risk of sex trafficking is higher for young women with a prior history of abuse and running away.

School Risk Factors

School Exclusion- Suspension or Expulsion

School exclusion -suspension or expulsion - is a documented contributor to justice involvement among young women (Simmons-Horton & Gibson, 2019). School exclusion is a consequence of zero-tolerance approaches to discipline in school for behaviors that include

but are not limited to aggressive responses, defiance, and classroom interruptions (Gregory et al., 2010). Also known as the School-To-Prison-Pipeline (STPP), young Black women are disproportionately disciplined for stereotypes and perceptions of poor attitude toward school personnel through their defiance toward school rules, which often results in a formal adjudication (Annamma et al., 2016; Redfield & Nance, 2016; Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Special Educational Needs

Academic challenges are widely documented as a risk factor specific to JIYW (Hockenberry, 2018; Feiring et al., 2013; Pasko, 2006). In one study of JIYW, it was documented that 75% of the young women reported failing one full school semester, and over four-fifths reported frequent truancy in the sample. Further, close to 50% of the JIYW were diagnosed with special education and learning needs (Pasko, 2006). Students who have special needs often require additional educational support to succeed in school, as a lack of academic support and academic failure is documented as a risk factor for recidivism (Hong et al., 2013).

Study Purpose

Few studies have explored family and school risk domains and their relationship to the level of criminal risk across a single sample of young women involved in the juvenile justice system. There is limited information on the heterogeneous needs of young women from diverse backgrounds (Logan-Greene et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2015). There are also cultural differences in criminal behavior; hence, this cross-ethnic comparison of two significant dynamic systems is imperative to fill the gaps in literature to understand within-group differences among JIYW (Berk, 2000; Walker et al., 2016). This cross-ethnic examination aims to provide empirical data that could provide the impetus for juvenile justice systems to

match and allocate necessary resources to address the unique risks for young women of color (Andrews et al., 2006). There is a lack of research on assessment tools that examine the specific domains of risks and protective factors. This study was designed to fill the gap in research on the social domains of the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT), an assessment tool developed to reduce gender and racial biases (Hoge, 2002). To date, this tool has only been examined by Baglivio et al. (2009, 2013, 2019), Martin (2012), and Barnoski (2004). Baglivio (2009) stated that a higher overall score warrants more residential treatment and intensive supervision and a lower score requires a less restrictive intervention that starts, for example, with a community-based intervention (Baglivio & Wolff, 2019). This aligns with the risk-needs-responsivity framework, which guides the development of these risk assessment tools (Bonta & Andrews, 2007).

Olver et al. (2014) propose that dynamic risk factors differ based on ethnicity. Hence, culturally sensitive assessment tools and explanations for criminal behavior are imperative and require more researchers to undertake cross-cultural investigations of criminal behavior to develop culturally appropriate theories in this field (Schmidt et al., 2019).

Research Questions/ Aims

The two research questions that will be investigated in this study are:

- a) What family and school factors predict criminal risk among justice-involved young women in a large, southern urban area?
- b) How do family and school factors associated with criminal risk differ among justice-involved Black and Hispanic young women?

Methodology

Sample

This sample of 365 young women post-adjudicated by the probation department was collected over two years from 2017 to 2019. This timeframe was chosen based on the department's decision to utilize the PACT as the risk assessment tool. This dataset's total sample is 365; Hispanics young women accounted for 161 individuals, and Black young women accounted for 166 individuals in this dataset. The power analysis and the minimum cases required for a multivariate analysis revealed that the sample size requirement for both analyses was met (Field, 2013).

Design

For this study, the secondary dataset, the PACT, was obtained from a Juvenile Probation Department located in a large, diverse southern urban area. The PACT dataset contained 126 items that required self-report data from twelve social and criminal domains, the criminal history score, social history score, and the overall risk score (Barnoski, 2009). The PACT predicts one's risk to re-offend by assessing static and dynamic domains and includes case planning to respond to the youth's criminogenic needs (Barnoski, 2004). The PACT has similar predictive validity (AUC statistic = .569 to .615) across gender and racial/ethnic groups (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013; Baglivio & Wolff, 2019). In addition to these scores, the probation department provided a matched database consisting of the participants' age at the time of adjudication, race/ethnicity, mental health screening dates, diagnosis, needs and treatment, severity and legal category of offenses, court referral history, and additional demographic and background data, collected from these 365 young women. The dataset was de-identified and converted to an extensive excel database. The data was then organized into categories from the PACT, coded based on the PACT's selection of responses, and cleaned for missing and non-applicable responses. The coded and cleaned data were

imported into SPSS v.27 for analysis. The PACT data utilization was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This study's measures were selected based on documented risks, empirical evidence for the items' psychometric properties, and the usefulness of these measures in other studies with JIYW (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013; Baglivio & Wolff, 2019; Logan-Greene et al., 2018). Family and school factors are included within the social history domains in the PACT. Descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted for this study.

Procedures

The full PACT assessment was administered following adjudication by the field officers trained to administer the PACT. The field officers are required to attend an initial two-day training and then follow-up fidelity training for the subsequent two days, to ensure rigor and consistency in scoring the PACT. Barnoski (2004) proposed that assessments conducted by well-trained personnel are generally reliable. Interviewers were also strongly encouraged to corroborate and validate the youth's responses with collateral information from the parents, psychiatric reports, and school records before coding the youth's responses into the computerized software.

Measures

Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)

The PACT full assessment forms an automated cumulative total score using a matrix that predicts youth's overall risk to re-offend (Baglivio, 2009). These scores are derived from the criminal and social history over 12 different domains, which include static and dynamic factors that categorize the JIYW into three groups, with low, medium, and high risk to reoffend (Barnoski, 2009). These static and dynamic risk categories form a total risk score,

which plays a significant role in sentencing outcomes and rehabilitation decisions. The measures are selected from the social history domains, as they are dynamic and function as targets for intervention to effect change (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). The social history domains include education, use of recreation time, employment, family history, alcohol, and drug history, mental health, attitudes/ behaviors, aggression, and skills, were calculated into a social history sub-score (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013).

Dependent Variable: Level of Criminal Risk

The level of criminal risk was measured using the criminal risk domain, which includes 12 items. The criminal history score includes mutually exclusive items such as the records of referrals resulting in adjudication, such as age at first offense (over 16, 16, 15, 13 to 14 and under 13), felony and misdemeanor referrals, against-person or weapon referrals, sex offense referrals, disposition orders for out-of-home placements, escapes and pick-up orders for failure-to-appear in court or absconding supervision. All the questions were answered based on the number of encounters (None, One, or Two or more). This domain includes any record of police or court referrals. The record of referrals were included in the item responses if there was: a) qualifying disposition that resulted in diversion, adjudication, deferred prosecution, or referral to adult court, or b) if they were less than 500 days old on the date of the referral (Barnoski, 2009). Baglivio and Jackowski (2013) indicated that higher scores were assigned for more occurrences, and the individual items' scores are calculated into a criminal history sub-score. The criminal history sub-score in this dataset ranged from 0-16, where 0-2 scores were classified as low criminal risk, 3-7 scores were classified as medium risk, and 8-16 scores were classified as high risk. This variable was used as a continuous variable for analysis.

Independent variables

The independent variables were selected from the social history domains. The family and school factors were selected based on prior literature, which documents the existing risk factors for JIYW. The only control variable selected was the age at time of probation, included as a continuous variable. The independent variables selected will focus on the school and family factors, as indicated below.

Age. The participant's age at the time of probation was measured as a continuous variable and ranged between 12 to 16 years old. This was a control variable in the analysis because prior literature on predictors of re-offending and theory, such as the age-graded theory of crime, indicates that age and maturity play a role in whether one re-offends. Two other demographic variables that could have impacted this study are gender, race and socioeconomic level. Since this dataset only contained young women, gender was not applicable. Socioeconomic level was not significantly correlated with the criterion. As race was used to compare the results, it was not used as a control variable.

Expulsions and Suspensions. Although this variable was initially measured in the PACT as an ordinal variable, the history of expulsions and suspensions will be treated as a continuous variable. To assess the extent of school exclusion, participants responded to a question on how many times they have been expelled or suspended since first grade with a range of 0 to 5: (*0= No expulsion or suspension, 1 = 1 time, 2= 2 or 3 times, 3= 4 or 5 times, 4= 6 or 7 times, and 5= more than 7 times*).

Special Educational Needs or Formal Diagnosis of Need. The participant's special needs were initially measured as a categorical variable assessed with five categories: *0= No special education need, 1= Learning need, 2= Behavioral need, 3= ADHD/ADD, and 4=*

Mental retardation. There were no responses for the fourth category, and hence, the responses were coded from 0 to 3. These categories were then collapsed into a dichotomous categorical variable reflecting if the participant did not have a special education need=0 or had a special education need= 1.

Running Away or Kicked Out of the Home. The history of running away or getting kicked out of home is measured as a continuous variable (range: 0 to 4). Participants were assessed for the number of times they did not voluntarily return home within 24 hours and included incidents not reported by or to law enforcement. Higher scores indicate higher frequency: 0 (*no History of running away/ being kicked out*, 1= 1 instance, 2= 2 to 3 instances, 3= 4 to 5 instances, and 4= over 5 instances of running away/ being kicked out).

Family Incarceration. The incarceration history of family members who were involved in the household for at least three months was originally a categorical variable with six categories: 0= *No History*, 1= *Mother/female caretaker*, 2= *Father/ male caretaker*, 3= *Older sibling*, 4= *Younger sibling*, and 5= *other member*. Participants could indicate more than one response. However, these categories were then collapsed into a dichotomous variable reflecting if *the participant did not have a current household member with an incarceration history* =0, or if they did = 1.

Neglect. The history of being a victim of neglect was measured as a dichotomous variable asking whether the participant was a victim of neglect, 0=*not a victim of neglect* and 1= *Victim of neglect*. This variable included suspected incidents of neglect, whether or not substantiated but excluded reports that were proven false.

Physical and Sexual Abuse. The history of abuse variable was computed as a composite measure of two items in the PACT, "History of violence/physical abuse" and

"History of sexual abuse/rape," which accounts for suspected incidents of abuse, including unreported or reported disclosures substantiated by the young woman. This measure was further dichotomized to 0 (*not a victim of abuse*) and 1 (*victim of abuse*).

Analytical Strategy

Univariate analyses were conducted to describe all study variables (see Tables 1 & 2). The analyses examined the frequencies and univariate details of each variable selected. Additionally, all other multivariate analysis assumptions, such as sample representativeness, level of measurement, data accuracy, normal distribution of the dependent variable, and independence of residuals, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and sample size were analyzed for the whole sample and then specifically for the sample of Black young girls and Hispanic young girls (Abu Bader, 2011). Next, bivariate correlation analyses such as Pearson's correlation (for continuous variables) and Point-biserial correlation (for categorical variables) were conducted to examine the associations between all study variables based on their level of measurement: level of criminal risk, history of expulsions and suspensions since first grade, special education needs, running away from home/ kicked out of the home, history of physical and sexual abuse, incarceration history of household members currently involved in the home, history of neglect, and age (Table 3). This method assessed the relationship between one dependent variable and several independent variables (Abu Bader, 2011). Next, a multiple regression analysis was conducted where all independent variables (history of expulsions and suspensions since first grade, special education needs, running away from home/ kicked out of the home, history of physical and sexual abuse, incarceration history of household members currently involved in the home, history of neglect) were entered simultaneously into the model to determine their relationship to the dependent variable

criminal risk, controlling for the effects of age at the time of probation (Table 3). The regression model was conducted with the criminal risk sub-score as the dependent variable associated with the independent variables. All analyses were completed using SPSS v.27. Additional diagnostics, bivariate and multivariate analyses were also run for the Hispanic population and the Black population by using crosstabs and by splitting the data file for separate analyses based on race/ethnicity. The results were compared to address the second research question on how these school and family factors differ based on race/ethnicity.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 includes the descriptive analysis of the continuous variables and Table 2 contains analyses for categorical variables along with racial/ethnic comparison. The analytic sample consisted of 365 diverse young women between the ages 12–17 ($M = 15.5$, $SD=1.2$). The participants' race/ethnicity was reported as 166 Black, 161 Hispanic, 36 Caucasian, and two Others. The criminal risk sub scores ranged from 1 to 16 ($M= 6.22$, $SD= 3.25$).

Descriptive analyses of independent variables found that 91% of young women had experienced at least one incidence of school exclusion, where 36% of young women experienced more than seven incidences of expulsions and suspensions since first grade ($M= 3$, $SD= 1.79$). Ninety-one percent of young Black women in the sample ($n=151$) and 92% of Hispanic young women ($n=148$) in the sample reported at least one suspension or expulsion. Out of all the young women sampled, 25% reported having a special education need comprising learning, behavioral, and ADD/ADHD needs, where 50% were young Black women ($n=45$). In terms of physical/sexual abuse, 34% of girls experienced abuse, where Black and Hispanic young women were equally impacted (Black $n= 55$, Hispanic $n= 56$).

Close to a quarter (20%) of the young women had experienced neglect; young Black women experienced the highest (47%) among all ethnicities ($n=34$). More than half of the young women (60%) reported episodes of running away or being kicked out of the home, where 25% reported over five such incidences ($M = 1.64$, $SD= 1.63$). Among those who reported running away, Hispanic young women represented close to 50% ($n= 81$). Close to one third (34%) of JIYW reported a family incarceration history. Among those who reported that they had family members with a history of incarceration, young Black women represented more than half (54%) of them ($n=67$), followed by Hispanic Young women ($n=47$).

<INSERT TABLES 1 &2 HERE>

Bivariate Analyses

Table 3 provides bivariate correlations between the independent study variables and the outcome variable of criminal risk. Prior to this analysis, multicollinearity statistics were analyzed to ensure that the independent variables were not highly correlated ($>.80$). There were three instances of multicollinearity observed between independent variables (between school expulsion and age, school expulsion and running away, and neglect and running away). The VIF output was analyzed to handle the issue of multicollinearity. After looking at the VIF values, all of them are less than 1.3 (Table 4). According to the range of VIF values, there is a moderate correlation, but it was not strong enough to justify any further action or measures (Frost, 2019). Additionally, some multicollinearity is expected given the collective and cumulative effect of risk for young women. All the selected variables were significantly correlated with the dependent variable (Table 3).

<INSERT TABLE 3 HERE>

Multiple Regression

Standard multiple linear regression was first employed to determine the relationship between multiple family and school variables and the level of criminal risk among justice-involved young women ($n=365$) for the first research question: What family and school factors predict criminal risk among justice-involved young women in a large, southern urban area? The age at the time of probation was controlled for in the analysis. The results of the standard multiple regression analysis revealed that after accounting for the effects of age, the model with these factors (expulsions and suspensions, special education needs, running away from home, physical and sexual abuse, family incarceration history, and neglect) significantly predicted criminal risk ($R^2 = .119$, $F(7, 357) = 6.86$, $p < .001$). Table 1 indicates that five independent variables emerged as significant predictors of criminal risk, including age at the probation time. Controlling for age, which was a strong predictor ($\beta = -.146$, $p = .004$), running away from home scores emerged as the strongest predictor of criminal risk, where every unit increase in running away from home will lead to a 0.153 unit increase in the criminal risk scores ($\beta = .153$, $p < .05$). Special education or a formal diagnosis of need was the next strongest predictor, positively associated with criminal risk ($\beta = .125$, $p < 0.05$), which reveals that having a special education need will contribute to a .125 unit increase in the criminal risk scores. Next, a history of expulsions and suspensions was statistically significant and positively associated with criminal risk ($\beta = .110$, $p < .05$), which reveals that every unit change in being expelled or suspended will lead to a .110 unit increase in the criminal risk scores. Finally, the results revealed an association between family incarceration history and criminal risk scores ($\beta = .103$, $p < .05$), where having a family member with a history of incarceration will lead to a .103 unit increase in the criminal risk scores. In summary, after controlling for age, four independent

variables running away from home, special education needs, expulsions and suspensions, and family incarceration explained 12% of the variance in criminal risk for the full model containing all girls ($n=365$).

< INSERT TABLE 4>

The second research question was answered by running separate models based on different ethnic samples of young Black women ($n=166$) and Hispanic young women ($n=161$). The second research question was: How do family and school factors associated with criminal risk differ among justice-involved Black and Hispanic young women? Accounting for the effects of age, these models emerged as a significant predictor of the criminal risk of re-offending for young Black women ($R^2 = .142$, $F(7, 158) = 3.74$, $p = .001$) and for young Hispanic women ($R^2 = .146$, $F(7, 153) = 3.74$, $p = .001$).

Table 5 reports the analyses for both races/ ethnicities per independent variable. The analyses revealed that for Black young women, after controlling for age ($\beta = -.168$, $p < .05$), two independent variables emerged as significant predictors of criminal risk of re-offending: special education or a formal diagnosis of need ($\beta = .163$, $p < .05$), and family history of incarceration ($\beta = .159$, $p < .05$). Similar to the full model, Age at the time of probation (a control variable) emerged as the strongest predictor of the criminal risk of re-offending ($\beta = -.168$, $p < .05$), which indicates that for every unit decrease in age, there will be .168 unit increase in the criminal risk of re-offending scores. The second strongest predictor of the criminal risk for young Black women is having a special education or a formal diagnosis of need. Having a special need will increase the criminal risk scores by .163 units when age is held constant. Finally, having a family member with an incarceration history increases the criminal risk scores by .159 units.

The standard multiple regression analyses conducted for Hispanic Young women ($n=161$) revealed that only one variable, running away from home, emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = .216, p < .05$) for Hispanic young women, where any one unit increase in running away from home scores will lead to a .216 unit increase in the criminal risk of re-offending scores, when age is held constant (Table 5).

<INSERT TABLE 5 HERE>

Discussion

The present study addressed a significant research gap by examining the association between family (e.g., family incarceration, running away from home, neglect, physical and sexual abuse), and school (e.g., suspension and expulsion, special education need etc.) risk factors and criminal risk among JIYW ($n=365$) in a large urban county. These factors were also compared between Black and Hispanic girls in the juvenile justice system—an overrepresented and understudied population. The mean criminal risk score of the PACT in this sample based on the cut off scores is 6.22, which suggests that young women showed moderate levels of criminal risk. Although there has been documentation of risk factors of JIYW, limited studies focused on the environmental factors such as the family and school influences on young people (Blinded for review, 2020; Logan-Greene et al., 2018; Quinn et al., 2020). This study extends this environmental focus by including these ecological influences on JIYW.

Age

The study results indicated that age was negatively correlated with levels of criminal risk scores, particularly for young Black women. While there is research to support the result that age is a significant predictor of delinquency, where early-onset justice involvement (< 13

years old) can lead to deeper and more pronounced anti-social behavior in the future, the age-graded theory of social control states that desistance depends on social capital, such as having stable employment and family, which is often achieved with age maturity (Leve & Chamberlain, 2004; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Based on the findings of this study, there is added emphasis for early intervention and support within the school settings and family environments to prevent early-onset and future justice involvement, especially among young women of color. Race-related historical trauma and mass incarceration of Blacks dismantles Black families, increases adversity from a young age, and increases health disparities faced by Black girls (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Special Education Needs

The study findings revealed that 25% of the sample had a special education or formal diagnosis of need, which increased their level of criminal risk, particularly among young Black women. Special education needs were also correlated with all other study variables except for age, emphasizing the impact it has on many facets of young women's lives. For young Black women, this increase is slightly higher compared to the rest of the sample. One study describes the disproportionality of African American students in special education and found that "educational resource allocation, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy, and inadequate teacher preparation" were reasons for this disproportionality (Blanchett, 2006, p.24). The gendered norms embedded in society call for a more in-depth look into the intersections of gender, race, age, and academic needs to better address the challenges faced by young Black women within the school context (Hong et al., 2013; Crenshaw et al., 2015). There is a need to investigate this phenomenon using racial and social justice oriented lenses and increase non-punitive additional support for students with these special needs as a

preventive approach to supporting students academically. Similarly, having a formal diagnosis of need could significantly and negatively impact education success (Somers et al., 2018). In a study with justice-involved young Black men, the curriculum which promotes culture was identified as a protective factor to achieving resilience and success in education, despite multiple risk factors (Lea et al., 2020). The research suggests that additional academic support from the family or trusted adults outside of the family, and supportive correctional staff in juvenile justice residential facilities can positively influence higher school success (Crosby et al., 2017; Somers et al., 2016).

Family Incarceration History

Based on our findings, having a family incarceration history will lead to an increase in criminal risk scores. Family criminality could lead to negative consequences and additional risks that may leave them on a similar criminal trajectory as their family (Leve & Chamberlain, 2004). Additionally, family incarceration possibly results in the absence of a parent, multiple parental transitions, insecure attachments within the family, and compounded life experiences such as poverty (Murray & Murray, 2010). Many of these outcomes (e.g., anti-social behaviors, poor educational outcomes, substance abuse) put justice-involved youth at a higher risk of re-offending, which creates a cycle of crime (Ortega-Campos et al., 2016). Although these outcomes are harmful to the psychological, physical, social, and emotional health of all girls, for young Black women, the effects are exacerbated by the individual- and community-level influence of race-related historical trauma and the intersectionality of identities such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability, etc. (Sherman & Balck, 2015; Morris, 2016). Supportive caregivers are essential for young women who have experienced adversity at a young age and is associated with

the reduction of externalizing behavior and PTSD symptoms, especially among Black young women (Blinded for review, 2020; Blinded for review, 2020; Wamser-Nanney et al., 2020). A strong support network can mitigate the cascading risks it presents for positive life outcomes among young Black women in the juvenile justice system.

Running Away

Our results suggested that an increase in incidences of running away from home or being kicked out of the home would also increase the criminal risk scores, particularly for Hispanic Young women. In this sample, more than half (60%) of JIYW had reported at least one running away incidence. This signals the need for focused intervention within the home settings, including culturally appropriate family therapy. For instance, the multidimensional ecosystemic comparative approach centers the cultural identity of the Hispanic family, which includes their sense of belonging, participation and identification with all other intersections in their life (Falicov, 1998). It is imperative for any effective intervention to consider the cultural and ethnic values held by Hispanic young women (Martinez, 2006). Hispanic or Latino families value the cultural concept of *Familismo*, which emphasizes the strong family bond, loyalty to one another, and mutually supporting the overall welfare of the whole family unit, including extended family members (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). Running away from home causes a strain in the family relationships and removes the attachments protective against criminal behavior (Hirschi, 1969; Huebner & Betts, 2002; Murray & Murray, 2010; Werner & Silbereisen, 2003). Black and Hispanic families mainly foster interdependence among family members, where family relationships are vital (Bright & Jonson-Reid, 2010; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Falicov, 1998). Parental attachment is especially important to young

women of color in preventing internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Ayón et al., 2010; Blinded for review, 2020).

Future studies could explore the unique pathways to offending where more evidence for the decriminalization of this status offence can be provided. Young women who run away from home may be targets of human sex traffickers where they are susceptible and manipulated into human trafficking for an extended period (Polaris, 2019). Youths who run away are at high risk for cumulative risk and various adverse outcomes, which calls for the considerations of programs to better support and protect these young women and plan for permanency housing to avoid further cascading issues (Kim et al., 2009).

Suspension and Expulsion

The study findings revealed that more incidences of expulsions and suspensions since first grade will lead to higher criminal risk scores. In this sample, the majority (82%) of JIYW had experienced suspension and expulsion since first grade, and 60% were aged 10-13 years old at their first experience ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.78$). This result is significant and consistent with prior research, which details the STPP among JIYW (Morris, 2016; Zahn et al., 2010). School suspension/expulsion are vehicles of zero-tolerance discipline for school infractions and unacceptable behaviors, such as defiance and disruption in the classroom, often through the adults' subjective appraisal (Gregory et al., 2010). Unfortunately, research suggests that these approaches have deleterious consequences, such as increased anti-social behavior and justice involvement (Simmons-Horton & Gibson, 2019). These zero-tolerance policies have disproportionately affected Black students and students with learning disabilities, as their cases are usually handled more strictly with a formal court disposition rather than a preventive program through diversion (Redfield & Nance, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

This study shows that having a history of school suspension or expulsion is correlated with special education needs, family incarceration, and running away from home. This calls for a more in-depth investigation into the broader needs of students, including environmental and familial factors. Additional academic support is necessary to support the transitory academic needs of JIYW and for them to complete high school or a GED successfully.

School social workers are well situated and nested within these environmental systems to facilitate change among JIYW transitioning back to mainstream education after being involved in the juvenile justice system (Goldkind, 2011). For example, Goldkind proposes that school social workers liaise between schools and the juvenile justice systems and their families by providing coordinated wraparound support to the JIYW. This presents an opportunity for social workers to engage in systemic collaboration, advocacy, and mediation between multiple systems, to support the desistance efforts of a young woman re-entering society (Goldkind). Education is documented as a protective factor such that more positive outcomes were observed among those who pursued education or employment upon re-entry (Abrams et al., 2011).

Abuse and Neglect

Contrary to other studies, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect was not significantly associated with the levels of criminal risk in this study. The presence of a weak positive correlation could be attributed to underreporting as national samples have indicated high levels of abuse and neglect among this population, and the link between abuse and neglect, and delinquency (Ariga et al., 2008, Baglivio et al., 2014; Charak et al., 2019; Simkins & Katz, 2002). Regardless, it is crucial to recognize that physical and sexual abuse had a moderate and positive correlation with the history of neglect and running away from home.

Neglect also had a moderate and positive correlation with running away. This points to potential underlying reasons for running away from home and should be carefully assessed before being criminalized (Ford et al., 2006; Javdani & Allen, 2016; Zahn et al., 2010). Abuse and neglect could be mediated by running away from a chaotic home situation, leading to justice involvement (Kim et al., 2009). Future research can focus on establishing and understanding this pathway better. Additionally, including trauma from abuse and neglect could play an essential role in how the correctional systems view and intervene with young women within their contexts, shedding light on their unique pathways into the juvenile justice system (Anderson & Walerych, 2019). Research has indicated the lack of trauma-informed services for young women due to limited funding and resources, opportunities, and evidence-based programs (Anderson & Walerych).

Implications

This study has broad implications in the long-term goal of reducing disproportionality among young women of color in the juvenile justice system (P.L. 115-385). A cross-ethnic understanding that identifies within-group differences highlights the ethnic-specific needs of young women in the juvenile justice system. This investigation addresses potential intervention gaps for a diverse population of young women. This study provides insight for social workers, correctional officers, policymakers, community organizations, and researchers, to direct attention to JYW's specific needs that can support their desistance. This study was conducted within an extensive, urban juvenile justice system located within a large urban city, which can be representative of other similar metropolitan areas. The PACT risk assessment data collected from 365 young women adjudicated between 2017-2019 offers meaningful and recent data that considers evolving trends among JYW. Furthermore, the

unique approach of comparing the family and school factors between two ethnic groups highlights significant differences that support the development and administration of culturally appropriate strategies to meet their academic and family needs. This approach has the potential to address ethnic and racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.

The findings suggest a variety of factors that present as targets for intervention and prevention. Results from this study can serve as a call to action for the juvenile justice system to (1) address the underlying needs for youth who have run away or experienced abuse, and to decriminalize trauma responses such as running away from home, (2) provide gender and racially responsive intervention by developing appropriate service delivery through community-based services, positive school interventions, re-entry and permanency planning, and (3) advocate for federal change in policy for gender-responsive assessment and intervention (Anderson & Walerych, 2019). An intersectional approach can also add knowledge about the marginalization of young women of color, and motivate the development of culturally sensitive prevention and intervention (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The disproportionate minority contact calls for a systems-level intervention, such as reviewing juvenile justice policies that are not favorable to the experiences of young women of color. Additionally, a healing-centered asset-based approach that addresses the marginalization of young women due to historical and racial trauma, can support better health and well-being, as well as a desistance-focused trajectory towards successful re-entry (Ginwright, 2018).

School re-entry and more positive engagement of students who have experienced family incarceration, have a special education need (learning, behavioral, ADD/ ADHD), and/or prior school exclusion, particularly for young women of color, are critical for

supporting the educational transitional needs of JIYW. Early intervention, especially for younger girls, is imperative to avoid deeper involvement in the juvenile justice system. There is also a need to engage families or caregivers in the rehabilitation process for the JIYW, which could enhance parent or caregiver-child relationships. Positive relationships with pro-social adults could be a protective factor for young women who come from families where there is a lack of supervision and strong relationships (Rhodes, 2005).

The Grand Challenge to Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice (AEOJ) is addressed toward the social work profession to create systemic change that will increase equity for all (AASWSW n.d.). Social workers are charged with the responsibility to address racial disparities and social injustice, and dismantle unfair and inequitable practice, to include the full participation of all in society (NASW, 2017). This includes the deconstruction of systemic barriers faced by young women of color so that they can thrive through their challenges.

Limitations

This study demonstrated a relationship between the level of criminal risk and all of the study variables; however, a few of these variables are considered static variables, which are not amenable to change. As this is a secondary data analysis, there are limited measures. Future studies should consider other measures of well-being such as internal strengths, identity or hope that could contribute to a deeper understanding of desistance (Maruna, 2001).

Nonetheless, these static factors provide reference points to direct prevention, early intervention and intentional service delivery. Since these factors' timing relative to the record of criminal risk is uncertain, temporal ordering cannot be established. This is also a cross-sectional design, with a subset of the overall juvenile justice population. Hence, it is critical to frame these findings within a gender-specific and geographical context. There is little

verification on the data gathering fidelity of the PACT by Probation Officers. Additional fidelity training and re-assessment of the PACT could play a crucial role in establishing a more accurate assessment. Additionally, youth involved with the juvenile justice system are not always forthcoming about sensitive information with probation officers, resulting in underreporting. For example, Simkins and Katz (2002) stated that the young women expressed discomfort in discussing their trauma and abuse in their study. Lastly, the overall variance of all factors was 12% for the full model, 14.2% for young Black women, and 14.6% for Hispanic young women. Although the variance increased when the analysis was specific to the race/ethnicity, there is still a lot of unexplained variance. This speaks to the complicated yet intricate pathways to offending among JIYW, where there may be several other factors to consider.

Conclusion

There needs to be a holistic and equitable response to enhance family and schooling factors for young women in the juvenile justice system. With desistance as a goal in mind, it is imperative to consider an asset-based mindset that will support the overall well-being of a young woman, and in turn, reduce the risks they face. The environmental factors explored in this study speak to the urgent need to bolster support and enhance protective factors that could buffer the impact of static circumstances such as family incarceration, school suspension, and special education needs. Through refined and focused efforts to address environmental, school, and family factors, the juvenile justice system will be better suited to provide appropriate intervention and reduce disproportionate minority contact in the long run.

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List of Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for continuous variables (n=365)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Level of criminal risk	6.22	3.25	1-16
Age at time of probation	15.42	1.2	12-17
History of running away	1.64	1.63	0-4
Expulsions and Suspensions	2.96	1.78	0-5

Table 2

Frequencies for Categorical Variables and racial/ethnic comparison (n=365)

Variable	Categories	<i>N</i>	Black	Hispanic	White	Other	%
Race/ Ethnicity		365	166	161	36	2	100.0
Family Incarceration	No Yes	241 124	99 67	114 47	26 10	2 -	66.0 34.0
Neglect	No Yes	293 72	132 34	134 27	25 11	2 -	80.3 19.7
Special Education Need	No Yes	274 91	121 45	129 32	22 14	2 -	75.1 24.9
Physical and Sexual abuse	No Yes	240 125	110 56	106 55	22 14	2 -	65.8 34.2

Table 3*Bivariate Correlations of the Study Variables (N = 365)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Level of Criminal risk	--							
2. Age at time of Probation	-.138**	--						
3. Special education Need	.193***	-.097	--					
4. Physical and Sexual abuse	.118*	.054	.118*	--				
5. Family Incarceration	.147**	-.002	.108*	.092*	--			
6. Neglect	.125*	.038	.112*	.310***	.095	--		
7. Running away from home	.193***	.143**	.130*	.349***	.058	.302**	--	
8. Expulsions and suspensions	.169***	-.047	.106*	-.027	.119*	.082	.147**	--

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .000$ **Table 4***Multiple Regression Analysis on the level of criminal risk among JIYW (N=365)*

Variables	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	VIF
Level of criminal risk					
Special Education Need	.942	.125	.384	.015*	1.058
Physical and sexual abuse	.230	.034	.379	.545	1.245
Family incarceration	.703	.103	.347	.043*	1.035
Neglect	.462	.057	.432	.285	1.134
Running away from home	.303	.153	.109	.006*	1.214
Expulsions and suspensions	.201	.110	.093	.032*	1.060
Age at time of probation	-.396	-.146	.137	.004**	1.039

 $R^2 = .120$ * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 5*Multiple Regression Analysis comparison between Hispanic (Model 1) and Black (Model 2) JYW*

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Level of criminal risk								
Special Education need	.376	.053	.556	.499	1.27	.163	.591	.032*
Physical and sexual abuse	.565	.095	.513	.273	-.561	-.076	.609	.358
Family incarceration	.537	.081	.477	.296	1.125	.159	.537	.038*
Neglect	.570	.075	.612	.353	1.018	.118	.675	.134
Running away from home	.369	.216	.144	.10*	.272	.127	.180	.134
Expulsions and suspensions	.184	.112	.128	.154	.232	.122	.149	.121
Age at time of probation	-.253	-.11	.173	.145	-.492	-.168	.224	.030*
Model 1: $R^2 =$								
.146								
Model 2: $R^2 =$								
.142								

* $p < .05$ Note: Model 1 refers to Hispanic JYW ($n=161$) and Model 2 refers to Black JYW ($n=166$)

CHAPTER 3: RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS AMONG POST-ADJUDICATED YOUNG WOMEN WITH HIGH CRIMINAL RISK: AN EXPLORATORY CROSS- SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study explores the risk and protective correlates of criminal risk among post-adjudicated diverse young women (n=365). This exploratory model building method utilized cross-sectional data that were collected through the Positive Achievement Change Tool. The analysis yielded the best model using eight social history factors ($\chi^2 = 51.904$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$). These variables include age at time of probation, running away from home, mental health problem history, school suspension or expulsion, self-control, dealing with difficult situations, involvement in structured pro-social activities, and attitudes and beliefs toward pro-social behavior. The results revealed that young women were more likely to be classified as high criminal risk of re-offending if they had a history of mental health problems, a history of running away from home, and were younger in age. Interventions should focus on addressing these factors at the family, individual, and community level in a holistic manner.

Key words: Justice-involved young women, risk and protective factors, delinquency, juvenile justice

Introduction

The disproportionate rise in justice-involvement among young women as compared to boys over the last few decades, combined with the lack of documented research and programs for this growing subpopulation, is a cause for concern (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018; OJJDP, 2019). In 2019, the most recent year of reporting, Justice-Involved Young Women (JIYW) contributed to 31% of all youth crime (OJJDP, 2020). JIYW who commit more serious offenses such as violent or person offenses are assigned to more intensive sanctions and considered to be high risk offenders (OJJDP, 2019). According to OJJDP (2019), nearly half (49%) of all JIYW received formal sanctions. Those receiving formal sanctions were most likely to receive a probation order (66%), followed by out-of-home placement (21%), or other intensive sanctions (13%) in 2015 (OJJDP, 2019). Additionally, young women of color are overrepresented in juvenile justice arrests and court/sentencing, with over half of young Black women (55%) and over a third (35%) of Hispanic young women representing 90% of the U.S. juvenile justice system. In these cases, more than half of young women of color were assigned to an out-of-home placement, a predictor of future justice involvement (OJJDP, 2019).

Youth with high criminal risk may be placed in high-security institutions for intensive treatment and monitoring (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; WSJCA, 2004). Although young women with high criminal risk comprise a small group of female offenders, these JIYW often continue to pursue a chronic course of offending as an adult (Welch- Brewer, 2018). There is extant literature on the risk and protective factors for JIYW, but few studies to date have investigated the differences in these factors among young women with different criminal risk levels (Walker et al., 2016; Welch-brewer, 2018). This group of young women with higher

criminal risk requires more intensive and costly services such as residential commitments, which calls for the need to identify risk and protective factors salient for this group. This study seeks to fill this gap in literature by exploring the dynamic social risk and protective factors that are associated with higher levels of criminal risk about justice-involved young women.

Risk factors for Justice Involved Young Women

Justice-involved young women have been described as experiencing multiple complicated, intricate, and overlapping risk factors (Parrish, 2020a; Welch-Brewer, 2018). JIYW with a high risk of re-offending typically exhibit multiple risk factors including mental health, suicidality, school suspension and expulsion, poor academic attendance and performance, conflictual family relationships, inadequate parental monitoring, anti-social attitudes and personality traits, mood disturbances, and substance abuse (Annamma et al., 2016; Roe-Sepowitz, 2009; Simmons-Horton & Gibson, 2019). Most young women are exposed to the juvenile justice system for nonviolent and minor status offenses (OJJDP, 2019). Gender-specific research over the last three decades suggests that minor and nonviolent offending can easily lead to deeper and more intensive involvement due to the difficulty in maneuvering through the juvenile justice system (Hennessy et al., 2004). These difficulties include but are not limited to the social relationships within institutional facilities, expectations, demands, gender stereotypes and restrictions placed on JIYW who are institutionalized, and a lack of appropriate response to their offending (Zahn et al., 2010).

JIYW experience six or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on a scale of 10, which is two times more than justice-involved young men (Baglivio et al., 2014). The ACEs encountered by these young women range from family incarceration or substance use, to

physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Baglivio et al.). Young women with an extensive traumatic history suffer from multiple mental health challenges, which often require extensive trauma-informed treatment services to be successful (Herringa et al., 2013). However, in conflict with this aim, findings from Espinosa and colleagues (2020) revealed that having a mental health need increased the probability of being placed in a secure residential facility for young women, and the rate of discharge from these placements took longer than with young men. This is concerning because out-of-home placements are typically not trauma-informed and may be lacking connection to necessary targeted rehabilitative mental health services (Mckenna & Anderson, 2021).

Running away from home, a common offense among JIYW, is often a way to deal with conflict at home and could indicate deeper issues such as sexual and physical victimization (Anderson & Walerych, 2019; Javdani & Allen, 2016; Zahn et al., 2010). However, running away from home often leaves them homeless and living on the streets, which increases vulnerability for further victimization (Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010). This is harmful for JIYW who are younger in age, as there is a lack of services for them (Saewyc & Edinburgh). JIYW often engage in criminal behaviors to cope with trauma and survive through survival sex, substance use, suicidal attempts, and human trafficking (Ford et al., 2006; Javdani & Allen, 2016; Zahn et al., 2010). Often, these behaviors contribute to mental health diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder, with JIYW diagnosed at a rate eight times higher than the general population (Teplin et al., 2005). While there is a need for trauma-responsive services and mental health supportive programs to support the needs of these young women, scarce resources and funding impede the development of these programs within the juvenile justice system (Espinosa et al., 2020).

Barrett and colleagues (2015) found that a lack of impulse control within JIYW in their sample had an 11 times higher probability of offending, compared to those who were undiagnosed. The lack of impulse control and tolerance for frustration among some of these young women could result in anti-social behaviors that lead to serious criminal charges and higher criminal risk (Smith & Saldana, 2013). A non-positive milieu or non-trauma informed social context reduces the capacity for young women to develop essential self-regulatory skills to manage their thoughts and emotions in difficult situations (Colvin, 2000). There is a well-established relationship between the exposure to chronic trauma and poor health and mental health outcomes, inadequate decision-making, and emotional dysregulation (Neumeister et al., 2007).

High criminal risk among young women has been shown to impact future adult outcomes. For example, adult women involved in the criminal justice system are more likely to have frequent and severe criminal behavior if they had been incarcerated as a minor, compared with peers without incarceration history as a minor (Lanctôt et al., 2007). If unaddressed at an earlier age, the cycle of crime could perpetuate for future generations.

Protective Factors for Justice-Involved Young Women

The multiple risks experienced by JIYW warrants an investigation into protective factors many of these youth also possess, such as pro-social attitudes and beliefs, attachments and social support, and psychosocial maturation and self-regulation (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004; Stice et al., 2004). Higher thinking capacity, emotional regulation capabilities, and setting goals for one's future can produce more effective self-regulation and decision making (Steinberg, 2008). Self- control or regulation skills such as impulse control and a tolerance for frustration have also been found to be protective factors for youth living in a distressed

environment (Dishion & Patterson, 2006). Closely related, social and life skills can also support the developmental trajectory for young people (Scales & Leffert, 2004). Especially for young women, life skills instruction can provide coping strategies for youth dealing with distressing and vulnerable situations (Lipsey, 2009). Using a youth developmental approach, the Positive Youth Justice (PYJ) model encourages an asset-building approach towards achieving desistance from crime (Butts et al., 2010). This includes the building of pro-social relationships and involvement in healthy activities (National Research Council, 2013). These structured pro-social and positive experiences have been shown to result in a different trajectory for youth as they build personal agency in their lives (Butts et al., 2010; Vincent et al., 2012).

The research dated since the 1900s revealed that the cognitive appraisals of anti-social behaviors differed between delinquent and non-delinquent samples. Particularly, anti-social attitudes and beliefs, often rooted within social contexts, are major predictors of justice involvement, especially due to the negative attitudes towards the law (Andrews and Bonta, 2010). There has been little investigation into the attitudes and beliefs towards anti-social behaviors among JIYW, which this scholarship seeks to address.

Within Group Differences

The heterogeneity among JIYW warrants an examination of within-group differences. The unique pathways to offending among JIYW call for integrated intervention that addresses the multiple risk factors of the young women rather than targeting individual risks alone (Parrish, 2020a). However, to understand the configuration of intervention and which risks should be addressed together for young women with high risk, it is essential to differentiate between the overlapping risks within subgroups of diverse young women who are classified

as low and moderate or high risk (Walker et al., 2016). Research that values within-group differences among a subpopulation can be used to effect "evidence-based, gender-responsive programming that examines how within-girl differences impact young women's responses to various types of interventions" (Matthews & Hubbard, 2008, p. 499).

Risk and Resilience Theoretical Framework

The risk and resilience framework identifies risk and protective factors, as well as the interaction of both factors that result in specific outcomes (Anthony et al., 2009; Masten, 2007). This framework employs an ecological approach where risk and protective factors exist in every system (micro, mezzo, macro) in each person's life. Yet, risks that are cumulative across the systems are detrimental to positive youth development (Finkelhor et al., 2007). Hence, this framework encourages interventions to consider strategies that concurrently reduce risk and increase protective factors across different domains/systems (Fraser et al., 1999). Risk factors are best understood as "events, conditions, or experiences that increase the probability, but do not ensure that a problem will be formed, maintained, or exacerbated" (Anthony et al., 2009, p.46). Protective factors refer to specific conditions that could buffer the effects of individual susceptibilities or threats within one's environment for a more positive trajectory to success (Masten et al., 1990). Resilience refers to one's ability to adapt and succeed despite adversity (Olsson et al., 2003). The positive interaction of risk and protective factors develops resilience, which is an internal asset that is useful in combating adversity (Masten et al., 1990).

While the risk assessment tools currently in use consider both risk and protective factors, protective scores are not included in the computation of scores that determine the risk levels of the young women (Barnoski, 2004). Hence, the central focus of correctional

intervention is focused on addressing the top criminogenic needs in case management (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Nevertheless, the protective factors embedded within the risk tool could be used in the overall assessment by considering how these factors correlate with re-offending, and if they can potentially act as a buffer to derive a more accurate risk score (Baglivio et al., 2017). The literature on young women involved in the J.J. system is mainly risk/deficit focused, leaving out an essential piece on protective/resilience factors that could buffer the criminogenic risks faced by JIYW. However, these studies overlooked the variances between subsections of JIYW (Walker et al., 2016; Welch-Brewer, 2018).

This framework is well-aligned with social work practice in the realm of evidence-based practice, where the best available evidence is used in making intervention plans (NASW, 2017). Evidence-based practice in correctional intervention can be understood from a strength-based perspective, which builds assets and protective factors among young women who are at an elevated risk of re-offending. Building protection around these young women may be a key component of rehabilitation, which can support the process of "bouncing back" from adverse experiences, also known as resiliency (Fraser et al., 1999).

Study Purpose

The primary objective of this study is to explore the dynamic social risk and protective factors that significantly predict and differentiate high level criminal risk among JIYW compared to low or moderate criminal risk. This study therefore contributes to the scant existing literature for JIYW by elucidating social dynamic risk factors associated with high criminal risk. Better informed knowledge of the correlates of the high level criminal risk group of JIYW may provide more informed and efficient decision making concerning the

allocation of correctional and community-based treatment or prevention for these JIYW (Andrews et al., 2006; Javdani & Allen, 2016).

Methodology

This study is a secondary data analysis of cross-sectional agency data collected by a Juvenile Probation Department in a large urban southern U.S. city. The data set included data collected (126 items) from all justice-involved young women ($n = 365$) adjudicated between April 2017- July 2019 by trained probation staff. The PACT items were used to calculate the PACT social history score, criminal history score, and the overall risk to re-offend scores. All scale items were also available for analysis. A matched probation database that included information on participants' age at the time of probation, race, mental health screening dates, diagnosis, needs and treatment, severity and legal category of offenses, and court referral history was also provided to supplement PACT data. The de-identified data were included in an extensive excel database consisting of all variables and raw data, which was then organized and coded into categories from the PACT and cleaned for missing and non-applicable responses. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Sample

This sample consisted of 365 young women adjudicated with a Juvenile Probation Department. The age of this sample ranged from 12 to 17 years old, with an average age of 15 ($SD = 1.20$). Nearly half (46%) of the sample identified as Black, 44% as Hispanic, 10% as Anglo, and .5% as Other. Based on the criminal risk score, which represents items describing the prior official criminal history, 11% of JIYW were at low risk, 58% were at moderate risk, and 31% were categorized at high risk of re-offending. Within the high risk group, 58 young

women identified as Black, 46 young women identified as Hispanic, and 10 young women identified as White. About a quarter of JYW (27%) were placed into the custody of the chief of HCJPD and assigned to a residential facility- such as Harris County Leadership Academy, Harris County Youth Village, or a private placement facility that is contracted with HCJPD - while the majority of young women (73%) were placed on probation.

Secondary Dataset

Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)

The Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT), directly adapted from the Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment (WSJCA), is a fourth-generation actuarial tool implemented in multiple states in the U.S. (Barnoski, 2004). The WSJCA has been validated as a reliable and valid tool to predict re-offending across gender and racial groups (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013; Baglivio & Wolff, 2019; Martin, 2012). The risk assessment tool is developed based on the risks-needs-responsivity framework which emphasizes the appropriate allocation of treatment services based on the risk levels of the youth (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The PACT, a validated risk assessment tool, provides more objectivity and accuracy, which reduces gender and racial bias in assessment (Hoge, 2002). The decision to utilize social history domains is derived from prior studies that identified a strong correlation of social history factors with recidivism. For example, one study in Texas found that for every one-point increase in social history score, there was a 3.4% increase in recidivism (Martin, 2012). These studies invite a more in-depth look into rehabilitation with a focus on social history factors that hold the potential to change over time through targeted intervention (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013). With added knowledge on the probability of re-offending, there can be a heightened response to resource allocation of treatment, although the

mechanics of treatment allocation lie in the response and expertise of the practitioner (Taxman & Caudy, 2015). The utilization of secondary data from the PACT assessment instrument forms the primary line of inquiry for this work, which will explore the predictors of high criminal risk of re-offending with social-environmental variables for a diverse group of young women.

This study uses the full PACT assessment with 126 items that produce classifications for the overall risk to re-offend (low, moderate, and high) (Barnoski, 2004). The PACT measures the total risk of re-offending using 12 risk and protective domains (criminal history, demographic/gender, school, use of free time, employment, relationships, family, alcohol and drugs, mental health, attitudes, aggression, and social skills) (Barnoski, 2004). The criminal risk history score is derived solely from the criminal history while the social history score contains all other domains. A matrix of the criminal history and social history scores produces a total score that assigns the young person into a risk level classification (low, medium, and high risk). The assessment will indicate which domain items are risk or protective factors, which could either be static (do not change) or dynamic (amenable to change). These items are rank-ordered and assigned with points that are considered when calculating the total computed score based on a matrix (Baglivio et al., 2014; WSJCA, 2004).

The overall score generates top criminogenic needs as they relate to re-offending and designates them into a case management plan, which consists of acute needs, criminogenic needs and stabilizing factors, and required services that match each need. This case management plan is reassessed over time to measure progress towards reentry (Baglivio et al., 2014). The risk level is commonly used for treatment decisions that consider the level of

institutional control required for each youth, which ranges from a residential commitment to community supervision.

Data Collection Process

Field officers conducted semi-structured interviews using the PACT to assess the risk of post-adjudicated young women to inform subsequent needs and referrals. Before the assessment process, all field officers attended a mandatory initial two-day training and subsequent two-day follow-up fidelity training on the administration of the PACT. All field officers had previously received motivational interviewing training and were asked to use these skills in their interviews, which were evaluated and reviewed during the fidelity training (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). According to Barnoski (2004), PACT assessments conducted by well-trained personnel are generally reliable. Interviewers were also strongly encouraged to corroborate and validate the youths' responses with collateral information before coding the answers into the system.

Measures

Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)

The PACT full assessment scoring process results in an automated cumulative total score using a matrix that predicts youths' overall risk to criminally re-offend using both criminal and social history risk items (Baglivio, 2009). The social history domains -- including education, use of recreation time, employment, family history, alcohol and drug history, mental health, attitudes/behaviors, aggression, and skills -- were calculated into a social history sub-score (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013). The criminal risk score, which was used as a dependent variable, is described below. Independent variables were calculated from social history items, which are described next.

Dependent Variable: Criminal Risk

The criminal risk score was calculated from the 12 criminal risk domain items. The criminal history score includes mutually exclusive items such as the records of referrals resulting in adjudication (including age at first offense: over 16, 16, 15, 13 to 14 and under 13), felony and misdemeanor referrals, against-person or weapon referrals, sex offense referrals, disposition orders for out-of-home placements, and escapes and pick-up orders for failure-to-appear in court or absconding supervision. All the items within the criminal risk domain in the PACT were answered based on the number of encounters (none, one, or two or more, and in some cases, three or more). This domain also includes any record of police or court referrals. The record of referrals was included in the item responses if there was: a) qualifying disposition that resulted in diversion, adjudication, deferred prosecution, or referral to adult court, or b) if they were less than 500 days old on the date of the referral (Barnoski, 2009). Higher scores are assigned for more occurrences, and the individual items are calculated into a criminal history sub-score within the larger PACT measure (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013). The criminal history sub-score in this dataset ranged from 0-16, where 0-2 scores were classified as low criminal risk, 3-7 scores were classified as medium risk, and 8-16 scores were classified as high risk. This variable was used as a dichotomous variable, where the low and medium categories were coded as 0 (low and medium criminal risk) and the high risk category was coded as 1 (high risk) for the analysis.

Independent variables

Age. The participant's age at the time of probation was measured as a continuous variable and ranged from 12 to 16 years old. Prior literature on predictors of re-offending and

theory, such as the age-graded theory of crime, indicates that age and maturity play a role in whether one re-offends (Leve & Chamberlain, 2004; Laub & Sampson, 1993).

Running Away or Kicked Out of Home. The history of running away or getting kicked out of home is measured within the PACT as an ordinal variable (range: 0 to 4) - 0 (*no history of running away/being kicked out*, 1= 1 instance, 2= 2 to 3 instances, 3= 4 to 5 instances, and 4= over 5 instances of running away/being kicked out). Participants were assessed for the number of times they did not voluntarily return home within 24 hours and included incidents not reported by or to law enforcement. For this study, this variable was dichotomized to include whether 0 = *no history of running away*, and 1 = *had a history of running away*.

History of Mental Health Problems. The history of mental health problems was originally measured in the PACT with five categories: 1) *no past history*, 2) *diagnosed with mental health problems*, 3) *only mental health medication prescribed*, 4) *only mental health treatment prescribed*, and 5) *both mental health medication and treatment prescribed*. This variable was then re-coded as a dichotomous variable indicating if 0= *the participant does not have a history of mental health problems*, or 1= *if they were previously diagnosed with a mental health problem*.

Suspension and Expulsion since 1st grade. The original variable measured in the PACT included the frequency of suspensions and expulsions experienced by the participants. Specifically, the ordinal variable included: 0 = *No suspension/expulsion*, 1= 1 time, 2=2 or 3 times, 3= 4 or 5 times, 4 = 6 or 7 times, and 5= *more than 7 times*. This variable was dichotomized into 0 (*no prior history of suspension and expulsion*), and 1 (*at least 1 experience of suspension and expulsion*).

Attitudes and Beliefs. The composite attitudes and beliefs towards anti-social behavior was calculated by combining four items within the Attitudes and Behaviors social domain. These items were coded from positive to negative (1-4) The four individual items include whether one accepts responsibility for anti-social behavior (*1= accepts responsibility for behavior, 2= minimizes, denies, justifies, excuses, or blames others for own behavior, 3= accepts own anti-social behavior as okay, and 4= proud of own anti-social behavior*), attitude toward pro-social rules/conventions in society (*1= believes pro-social rules apply, 2= believes pro-social rules sometimes apply, 3= does not believe pro-social rules apply, and 4= resents or is defiant towards rules*), respect for authority figures (*1= respects most authority figures, 2= does not respect authority figures, 3= resents most authority figures, and 4= defies/hostile toward most authority figures*), and respect for property of others (*1= respects property of others, 2= respects personally, not publicly accessible property, 3= conditional respect for personal property, and 4) no respect for personal/public property*). The composite scale for this variable was combined, with an acceptable Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency of the scale ($\alpha = .690$).

Self-control. The self-control variable was a composite measure from two items, frustration for tolerance and impulsivity. The tolerance for frustration item is measured within the PACT as three categories (*0 = rarely gets upset over small things or has temper tantrums, 1= sometimes gets upset over small things or has temper tantrums, and 2=often gets upset over small things or has temper tantrums*). This was re-coded as *0 =high tolerance*, and *1= low tolerance*. Impulsivity is measured within the PACT with three categories (*0 = uses self-control, thinks before acting, 1= impulsive, often acts before thinking, and 2=highly impulsive, usually acts before thinking*). This was re-coded as *0 = high self-control*, and *1=*

low self-control. Both variables were dichotomized as *0 = positive self-control*, and *1 = negative self-control*, where both variables were combined into a composite variable to form the self-control variable.

Structured pro-social recreational activities. The original variable in the PACT included four categories (*0 = currently not interested in structured activities*, *1 = currently interested but not involved in structured activities*, *2 = involved in 1 structured activity*, and *3 = involved in two or more structured activities*). This variable was dichotomized as *0 = not involved in any structured activity*, and *1 = involved in at least 1 pro-social structured activity*. Some examples of these activities include community/cultural groups, hobby group or club, athletics, religious group or church, and volunteer organization.

Dealing with difficult situations. This variable is measured on a scale of 0 to 3, where *0 = lacks skills in dealing with difficult activities*, *1 = rarely uses skills in dealing with difficult situations*, *2 = sometimes uses skills in dealing with difficult situations*, and *3 = often uses skills in dealing with difficult situations*.

Data Analysis

This exploratory analysis assesses the correlates of criminal risk (high vs. moderate/low risk) with social dynamic factors assessed by the PACT for post-adjudicated young women. This study utilized a model building procedure to identify the correlates of risk and protective factors for high criminal risk using logistic regression (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The procedure required an examination of logistic regression and model building assumptions such as sample size, multicollinearity, and linearity of the logit for three continuous variables in the model (Hosmer & Lemeshow). Univariate analysis was used to obtain descriptive statistics for this sample of JIYW using SPSS 27.0. Based on the sample size, the Hosmer and Lemeshow

contingency table was inspected and was found to have met the assumption. Additionally, the minimum required sample size per Independent Variable (IV) of 10 was met with a sample size of 365 and eight independent variables. There were also no more than 20% of cells with less than five expected cases (Hosmer & Lemeshow). Secondly, there was no multicollinearity found in the model (Table 3). Finally, the linearity of the logit for all continuous predictor variables assumption was assessed and was not found to be problematic.

Bivariate analyses were conducted to identify correlates of risk for the baseline multivariable model. The selection of variables was based on the risk and resilience theory along with an initial correlation cut off value of $p < .25$ for the baseline model. Mickey and Greenland (1989) proposed that the 0.25 significance level used for screening variables is a useful way to identify variables that are both statistically and clinically important. There were sixteen variables which met the criteria from all the social domains that were assessed univariately, and if significant at the initial correlation cut off level, these variables were then included into the multivariate model with the dichotomous criminal risk dependent variable. To obtain the most parsimonious model, independent variables that were not significantly correlated with criminal risk, using a value of $p < .25$ in the multivariable model, were removed for the next model. After removing eight variables which did not meet the cut-off value, the remaining eight variables were then entered into a second model for analysis. The second step was to eliminate variables that did not meet the second cut off value of $p < .10$. The third model consisted of five variables. The goodness of fit statistics were calculated for all three models and the final model was selected based on the best goodness of fit statistics. The second model, the most parsimonious model, was interpreted and reported (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1980).

Results

The sample of justice-involved young women were aged between 12 and 17 years old ($N= 365$, $M= 15.4219$, $SD= 1.20$). The criminal risk sub scores were dichotomized as low and moderate (0) ($n=251$) and high (1) ($n=114$). Nearly half of the sample experienced a history of mental health problems (46%), while 54% reported that they did not have a history. The mean for attitudes and beliefs towards anti-social behavior was 5.5 ($SD= 1.99$), with a range of 4-16, where the higher the score, the more negative one's attitudes and beliefs were towards law abiding behavior. Seventy-three percent of the young women reported that they had self-control (tolerance for frustration and impulse control), and 27% reported otherwise. More than half of the young women (60%) reported at least 1 prior incident of running away at the time of the PACT interview. The mean for the composite dealing with difficult situations was 1.66 ($SD = .85$), with a range of 0 to 3. More than half of the young women (57%) were rated as sometimes using skills in dealing with difficult situations, 11.5% often using skills in difficult situations, 17.5% rarely using skills in difficult situations, and 14% lacking skills in dealing with difficult situations. A majority of the young women experienced at least one suspension or expulsion since first grade (82.2%). More than half of the young women (65.2%) were not involved in structured pro-social activities, while 35% were involved in one or more structured pro-social activities (Table 1).

< INSERT TABLE 1 and 2 HERE >

The final multivariable model with the best model fit ($\chi^2 = 51.904$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) contained eight independent variables: age at time of probation, history of running away from home, history of mental health problems, self-control (frustration and impulse control), dealing with difficult situations, involvement in structured pro-social activities, history of

suspensions and expulsions, and attitudes and beliefs towards anti-social behavior. The results of the standard binary logistic regression revealed three significant predictors of the high criminal risk group among the participants. Having a history of : 1) mental health problems ($Wald_{(df=1)} = 12.37, p < .001, OR = 2.37; 95\% \text{ confidence interval } [CI] = 1.46\text{--}3.83$), 2) running away from home ($Wald_{(df=1)} = 11.49, p < .001, OR = 2.51; 95\% \text{ confidence interval } [CI] = 1.47\text{--}4.29$), and 3) age at time of probation ($Wald_{(df=1)} = 3.93, p < .05, OR = .814; 95\% \text{ confidence interval } [CI] = .663\text{--}.998$) were significant predictors of criminal risk among the sample of justice involved young women (Table 3). Young women were more likely to be classified as high criminal risk if they had a history of mental health problems, a history of running away from home, and were younger. Specifically, young women with a history of mental health problems have increased predicted odds of 2.4 to be classified as high criminal risk, while those with a history of running away had an increased predicted odds of 2.5 to be classified as high criminal risk. The final significant predictor of criminal risk is the age at the time of probation, where every unit increase in age decreases the predicted odds of being classified as high risk by .819 (Table 3).

The Omnibus test of model coefficients indicates a chi square value of 51.904, $df = 8, p < .001$. According to the iteration history, the -2LL score of (401.390) indicates that there is a difference between the starting model score and the ending model, which shows the goodness of fit in this full model at step 1 ($X^2 = 8.463, df = 8, p = .390$). This indicates that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who were classified as high risk and those who were not (low and medium risk), where there was a 100% classification rate of young women who were classified as high risk. The results of the Cox & Snell R square and the Nagelkerke R square show that the predictors explain between 13.3% to 18.6% of the variability in the

criterion variable (criminal risk). The overall model that is being tested shows that SPSS correctly classified 31.8% of all the cases, 0.6 higher than the classification at step 0.

< INSERT TABLE 3 HERE >

Discussion

This study, which relies on a sample of 365 post-adjudicated young women who completed the PACT between 2017-2019, identifies correlates of high criminal risk among young women involved in the juvenile justice system. These findings, which relied on a sample from a large, southern diverse urban setting, could help inform new gender-specific intervention for young women involved in the justice system who have high criminal risk of recidivism. Within this sample, significant predictors of high criminal risk included a history of mental health problems, running away from home, and age at time of probation, with younger age at probation predicting higher risk. In contrast, within the same model, intrinsic factors within the youths' control were not significant, including self-control, attitudes/beliefs, dealing with difficult situations, pro-social actions, and number of suspensions and expulsions. Overall, these results may suggest that these young women have a history of early court experiences associated with running away and mental health problems at an earlier age that results in a higher number of arrests (hence the higher criminal risk score). For young women with high risk, the diversionary or community-based interventions focused on the social context based on the social history score could be just as useful when they are identified at an earlier stage or when there is a suitable intervention infrastructure to support these needs, prior to advocating for an out-of-home placement (Greenwood, 2008).

This combination of significant predictors of high criminal risk recidivism suggests that it may be beneficial both for this population of young women and for the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of programming to urgently target family/home stability and mental health needs, particularly for female youth who are involved in the criminal justice system at earlier ages or who have high criminal risk scores of 8 or above. Ideally, these treatment and prevention services for JYW – which are currently lacking (Parrish et al., 2020b) -- would be feasible, easily accessible, community-based, and trauma-informed, and time spent detained in juvenile institutions would be shorter or diverted altogether (Parrish, 2020a). Other critical components of successful diversion programs include an emphasis on improving family interactions through holistic, family-centered interventions (Alexander et al., 2013). An international intervention conducted for Southeast Asian young women with a history of running away is known as the Runaway Intervention Program (RIP), which has shown strong research effects in restoring pro-social connections, increasing positive behaviors, and reducing the level of risky behaviors among young girls who had run away and had been sexually exploited (Saewyc & Edinburg, 2010). This RIP program is a home visitation program which focuses on strength, health education, and intensive case management.

Another alternative program follows the small therapeutic group home model proposed by Los Angeles County to “Establish safe and secure healing centers: small, community-based therapeutic housing, with a range of security, to serve as alternatives to juvenile halls and camps as comprehensive reentry services for youth removed from home for their safety or the safety of others” (Burns, 2021, p.12). One such example of a safe home is known as MWS girls’ residence in Singapore (<https://mws.sg/impact-areas/at-risk-youth/#>), which focuses on therapy, reconciliation, and reintegration, to provide a safe and positive living environment,

while offering trauma-informed care to support JIYW or young women in need of care as they complete their probation or protection orders.

Diversion programs can be utilized to effectively disrupt these trajectories for JIYW. Some of these programs target the complicated and multi-faceted needs of the young women (Farn, 2018). Following the risk-needs-responsivity framework, youth classified as low and moderate risks are already diverted to community-based services (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Some of these community-based services include trauma-informed therapeutic programs, family or parent education, mentoring services, or restorative justice practices which include circles and restitution to victims (Development Services Group, 2017).

While several variables were not significant in the exploratory multivariate model, some of the variables were significant at the bivariate level between the risk groups. For instance, the attitudes towards law abiding behavior differed between the high-risk group and the low/moderate risk group, where it is more likely that young women with high criminal risk have less pro-social attitudes and beliefs towards law abiding behavior. Similarly, young women with high criminal risk are more likely to have less skills in dealing with difficult situations. Teaching youth to conduct themselves in social situations, how to recognize risky feelings and thoughts, and the ability to process emotions and cognitions before acting on them is arguably one of the more critical responsibilities of the J.J. system (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Butts et al., 2010). Social skills are also critical to overcome mental health problems and running away from home, where these life skills can protect them against vulnerable situations and encourage the use of pro-social coping strategies (Vincent et al., 2012). Additionally, positive youth development suggests that pro-social community is critical for building a sense of belonging to a community and for pro-social interaction and relationships

with an adult in their support system (Seigle et al., 2014). Although these protective factors were not significant in the final model, these variables may be of interest for future studies.

A latent class analysis conducted by Walker et al. (2016) revealed four distinct groups within the JYW population where all distinct classes included mental health needs and sexual abuse. A distinct outcome in this study recognized that mental health was a primary need and a significant factor in many girls who would otherwise not be classified as higher risk. Walker et al. concurs with this current study in that mental health is one of three distinct variables that were predictive for young women with high criminal risk (Walker et al.). This presents an opportunity for earlier screening and identification for young women and making referrals to high quality mental health services to prevent an escalation of criminal risk (Dembo et al., 2012). There is a pressing need to enhance the infrastructure and capacity of the juvenile justice system to plan for high quality mental health treatment services within the community so that young women could be supported without being placed out of their home to receive services.

Another latent profile analysis of young women who have histories of multiple and severe offending revealed four subclasses as well among which there were no significant differences within these four classes for meeting a mental health disorder criterion (Welch-brewer, 2018). However, it is noteworthy that there was a difference in the types of mental health disorders detected within the classes. Specifically, in the class with young women who were classified as having *Aggression Only*, 90% of them met the diagnostic criteria for a conduct disorder. However, this was only true for 58% of the young women in the *Severe Alcohol and Drug use* class. The other two classes, *Socioemotional and Family Relationship Problems* and *Aggression and Drug Use* -- found that 50% of the young women met DSM

criteria for a mood disorder although this was only true for 29% of the sample in the *Aggression Only class*. Cannabis disorder and polysubstance use disorder was also found in all the classes but there was a significant difference between the classes (Welch-Brewer). The analysis from this study could be extended in future to include different types of mental health disorders across the risk groups to better identify the specific mental health treatment needs. Additionally, there are interrelated risks, such as substance use and mental health, which need to be identified early. Probation officers, correctional staff, and clinical staff including social workers play a key role in advocating for trauma-responsive mental health services for both the young woman and the family, to ensure that the underlying risks and needs are well addressed within the systems.

If we are to reduce recidivism indeed and positively impact the lives of these youth, it is also imperative to look beyond risk and protective factors and examine the broader social contexts in which these young women live. Prior literature suggests these environments are impacted by systemic racism and sexism, particularly affecting young women of color (Javdani et al., 2011; Morris, 2016). However, there is a lack of consideration of how systemic racism and sexism, as well as prior victimization from these systems, could influence justice involvement. There is also a glaring lack of services to address trauma or stressors in a gender-sensitive and antiracist manner, which have been shown to lead to increased chances of incarceration and longer periods of detention or placement for young justice-involved women of color (McKenna & Anderson, 2021). While it is crucial to note that the exposure to violence in the community and home may require an out-of-home placement for safety, it is important to consider alternatives placements such as safe group homes that can provide services and safety at the same time (Morash et al., 2014). An

important goal for juvenile justice is the identification and allocation of both systemic change (Burns et al., 2021) and systems level coordination for service utilization (individual, family, and the court) (Aalsma et al., 2014), as well as gender-specific strategy to the allocation of resources and strategies that will appropriately address the risks of justice-involved young women (McKenna & Anderson, 2021).

Limitations

This study utilizes secondary cross-sectional data collected by a large urban southern county juvenile justice system with young women adjudicated during a three-year period. Hence, the findings of this study are limited to young post-adjudicated women. Given the overrepresentation of young women of color in this sample, the expectation that criminal risk would not differ between racial/ethnic groups and a lack of proper sample size to examine disparate risks by race/ethnicity, these differences among young women with high criminal risk were not examined. This study does, however, provide additional documentation that young women of color are overrepresented in the post-adjudicated juvenile justice system (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Additionally, while gender is included as a binary category in this study, other identities, including a broader gender spectrum, are not taken into consideration due to the limitations of the original dataset. Future data collection within juvenile justice settings would enhance their data and responsiveness by ensuring this broader spectrum of gender is examined, given the risks associated for non-gender conforming youth (Beck et al., 2013). Also, while there was high quality training in the administration of the PACT and Motivational Interviewing for probation officers' collection of PACT data, it is always possible that there was a lack of fidelity to the assessment protocol. Also, the PACT offers room for subjectivity with scoring, and the perceptions that probation officers have of young

women may affect that process (Gaarder et al., 2004; Parrish et al., 2020b). If fidelity of the tool is not achieved, the data may not be accurate and under- or overreporting could be a possible limitation. Lastly, the overall variance of all factors was 18.6% for the full model, suggesting a great deal of unexplained variance in this exploratory model. This speaks to the intricate and complicated risks and trajectory towards offending, which could offer more insight with deeper investigation.

Conclusion

The risk and resilience framework used in this study reflects both risk and protective factors, which is a fresh perspective, given that risk assessment tools are primarily concerned with the calculation of risk factors for classification. While the protective factors within the study were not significant in the findings, a deeper discussion is warranted for a holistic rehabilitative approach. A rehabilitative approach is more humane and supportive of positive youth development that improves the lives of individuals and families, reduces health and social disparities, and enhances the ability of these youth to contribute to society in more positive ways as adults (Andrews et al., 2011). This study reinforced the need for trauma-responsive and quality mental health services that will support the interrelated risks faced by young women. Additional assessment of the social environment is necessary to find the most appropriate intervention points for young women with a history of running away; a “continued movement toward evidence based, gender-responsive programming that examines how within girl differences impact girls’ responses to various type of interventions” (Matthews & Hubbard, 2008, p. 499).

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List of Tables

Table 1

Bivariate Analyses of Categorical Predictor Variables and Criminal Risk Variable (n=365)

Variable	Categories	N	%	OR	95% CI	High Criminal Risk JIYW were more likely to
Criminal Risk	Low & Medium High	251 114	68.8 31.2			
Running Away	No History At least 1 incident	148 217	40.5 59.5	2.484	1.53- 4.03	Have a history of running away
Self-Control	No Yes	99 266	27.1 72.9	2.339	1.33-4.09	Have less self-control
Mental Health History	No Yes	199 166	54.5 45.5	2.863	1.81-4.52	Have a history of mental health problems
Structured Pro-Social Recreational Activities	Not involved Involved in at least 1 activity	238 127	65.2 34.8	1.344	.849-2.12	Involved in structured activity
Suspension and Expulsion History	No History At least 1 incident	65 300	17.8 82.2	1.642	.879-3.06	Have a history of at least 1 incident of suspension or expulsion

Table 2*Bivariate Analysis of Continuous Variables with Criminal Risk Variable (n=365)*

Variable	Categories of Criminal risk	N	M	T	P	SD	Range	OR	95% C.I	High Criminal Risk JIYW were more likely to
Age at Time of Probation	0 1	251 114	15.51 15.21	2.11	.035	1.16 1.26	12-17	.819	.68-.98	Be Younger
Attitudes and Beliefs	0 1	251 114	5.26 6.03	-3.46	.001	1.84 2.20	4-16	1.203	1.07-1.34	Have less pro-social attitudes and beliefs towards law abiding behavior
Dealing with Difficult Situations	0 1	251 114	1.76 1.49	2.55	.011	.84 .86	0 -3	.719	.557-.929	Uses fewer social/coping skills in dealing with difficult situations

Table 3

Summary of Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of being high criminal risk (n=365)

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	P	Odds Ratio	95% C.I. for Odds ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Age at time of probation	-.206	.104	3.934	1	.048*	.814	.663	.998
Running Away	.923	.272	11.485	1	.001*	2.517	1.476	4.293
Self-control	.398	.316	1.594	1	.207	1.490	.802	2.765
Mental Health History	.863	.245	12.369	1	.001**	2.371	1.465	3.836
Attitudes and Beliefs	.115	.068	2.826	1	.093	1.121	.981	1.282
Dealing with Difficult Situations	.133	.160	.687	1	.407	.876	.639	1.199
Pro-social Activities involvement	.463	.264	3.06	1	.080	1.589	.946	2.668
Suspension and Expulsion	.407	.354	1.319	1	.251	1.502	.750	3.006
Constant	.106	1.67	.004	1	.949	1.112		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Overall model: $\chi^2_{(df=8)} = 51.904$, $p < .001$.

Goodness -of-fit: -2LL= 401.390; $\chi^2_{(df=8)} = 8.463$, $p = .390$.

Pseudo $R^2 = .186$

CHAPTER 4: “THEY SEE ME AS A BAD KID”: PUBLIC SCHOOL AND CORRECTIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES ON THE SELF-PERCEPTION OF JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUNG WOMEN

Abstract

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Abstract

Little is known about the educational experiences of young women involved in the juvenile justice system, which can influence their self-perceptions and is a key component to achieve desistance from crime. This study utilized a secondary dataset ($n=14$) to examine the self-perceptions of a sample of 10 post-adjudicated young women, two probation officers and two correctional teachers from a large urban probation department. A qualitative thematic analysis was used, and findings produced three themes. Specifically, certain school structures and processes, such as teachers' beliefs and attitudes, labels, teacher-student interactions, curriculum and instruction, and class size played a role in influencing the self-perceptions of justice-involved young women. Implications for future practice and research call for examination and re-structuring of these processes to facilitate more successful and positive reentry of young women into public education that will disrupt the school to prison pipeline and instead, positively enhance their self-perceptions.

Keywords: Justice-involved young women, self-perception, public education, juvenile justice education, re-entry

Introduction

The School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) has been documented in the literature since the early 21st century (APA, 2008; Nance, 2015; Noguera, 2003). Zero-tolerance policies and the presence of on-campus police were implemented in school districts across the U.S. to parallel the war on drugs and curb the rise in crime among youth (Education on Lockdown report, 2005). Zero tolerance policies drive the STPP where students are punished harshly by school administration for noncompliance to school rules (APA, 2008). Educational systems utilize school exclusion—specifically, school suspension, and expulsion—as the most serious and commonly used method of discipline in response to school violations in the U.S., which funnels students into the Juvenile Justice System (JJS) through the STTP (Karp, 2011; Simmons-Horton & Gibson, 2019). There is a strong link between school-based arrests and justice involvement (Simmons-Horton & Gibson; Sprague et al., 2001)

This study seeks to understand the influence of public and correctional education systems on Justice-Involved Young Women (JIYW) and how these experiences shape their perceptions of self. Examining the educational experiences and self-perceptions of JIYW is essential because desistance theorists show that the self-identity of a young person in conflict with the law is a strong contributor toward achieving desistance, a crime-free lifestyle (Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Importantly, an investigation that includes the voices of JIYW can strengthen the educational institutions' capacity to better support the reentry of JIYW (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)

Young Women in Juvenile Justice

In 2019, young women represented 31% of all juvenile crimes (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 2020). Even though the level of youth crime has

decreased over the last decade, the rate of decrease is more pronounced in young men than in young women (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). Some of the risk factors reported in the literature specific to JIYW include poor school attendance, school failure, poverty, mental health issues, conflictual family relationships, substance use, victimization, and running away from home (Baglivio et al., 2014; Hockenberry, 2018; Feiring et al., 2013; Pasko, 2006). Specifically, in the school context, Pasko (2006) found that among JIYW who reported a prior history of school failure, 75% of the young women reported failing one full school semester, and over four-fifths reported frequent truancy in the sample. Approximately half of the young women were diagnosed with special education needs, which calls for more attention to multiple factors that could affect the educational experiences of young women (Pasko, 2006). Justice-involved youth require added support for better reentry transitions, achievement of education and reentry success, and attainment of superior life outcomes. The academic achievement of young women suffers when they encounter complex trauma and special education issues (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008). To disrupt the STPP, it is important for education institutions to understand the adverse experiences of young women that contribute to poor school performance and JJS involvement.

JIYW are often arrested for non-violent offenses such as school-related arrest, truancy, running away from home, sex trafficking, survival sex, and drug use. However, these offenses have been theorized as survival coping strategies to overcome the trauma caused by sexual and physical victimization (Ford et al., 2006; Javdani & Allen, 2016). These traumatic events also manifest through behaviors observed as noncompliance, truancy, or aggressive actions used as a means for self-defense or self-preservation (Ford et al., 2006). Unfortunately, these survival mechanisms are often misconstrued by school administration due to the lack of trauma-

informed policies and practices and, therefore, are viewed as noncompliance or precursors to unlawful conduct (Conrad et al., 2014; Morris, 2016). Furthermore, racial and normative gender stereotypes, culture, and stigma contribute to the additional misconception of behaviors associated with survival coping. Often, this misconception plays into school disciplinary actions and legal sentencing outcomes, particularly affecting students of color (Morris, 2016).

Educational Barriers

Although there has been some research on educational barriers for justice-involved youth as they transition to mainstream education, the literature overlooks the unique perspectives of JIYW. Some of the documented barriers faced by these youth include the stigma and label of being an offender, increased monitoring upon return from the JJS, attitudes, experiences of prejudice by school administrations, enrollment barriers (including difficulties transferring school records/ credits from juvenile education services), attendance protocols, mental health needs, academic problems, special education needs, and substance use (Kubek et al., 2020; Pasko, 2006; Snodgrass, Rangel et al., 2020). There has been scant investigation into the impact of structural and systemic barriers in education for JIYW. However, these barriers can significantly affect their perception of themselves and their educational success, which drives this qualitative inquiry.

Racial Disparities

Zero-tolerance policies affect students for violations such as skipping school or defiance, without any investigation into the underlying severity, circumstances, and real intention behind the violation of school rules (APA, 2008). These policies have disproportionately affected students of color and those with special education needs (US Department of Education OCR, 2018). Black girls only represent 17% of the student population

nationally but are overrepresented in court referrals by school officials (31%), and close to half (43%) were arrested in school (National Women's Law Center & NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2014). Similarly, Black young women represent 35% of those arrested and committed into the JJS (OJJDP, 2019). Racial stereotypes and prejudices are said to contribute to these educational experiences among young women (Ward et al., 2011). Young Black women are six times more likely to be suspended and four times more likely to be arrested compared to their white counterparts for the same offenses (US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2018). Black students' cases are usually handled more strictly with a formal court disposition rather than a preventive program through diversion, an example of a systemic barrier (Redfield & Nance, 2016).

The Annamma et al. (2016) study found that compared to White young women, Black, Hispanic, and multiracial young women were more often referred for discipline on grounds of disobedience and defiance, with all other identity markers controlled for. These referrals are subject to the educator's perception of threat to the school, rather than by objective behaviors such as possession of a weapon (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Students were issued violation tickets and arrested in school for small offenses such as rebuttals toward the teacher, which could be viewed as normal youth behavior (Mallet, 2016). Young women experience additional layers of disproportionality by social systems such as sexism, racism, and classism (Morris, 2016). The combination of these factors may impact the overrepresentation of young Black women in the JJS system (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2017; OJJDP, 2019). There is a pressing need for more discussion on the gendered educational experiences of young women who have transitional educational experiences in mainstream schools from the JJS (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Beliefs and Attitudes toward JIYW

Mainstream schools have expressed skepticism toward returning students from the JJS due to their transfer credits containing shortened hours of instruction, that average four hours per day in the JJ system. This has resulted in a reluctance to re-enroll students back into mainstream schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Mainstream schools perceive the youth who re-enter school from the JJS as liabilities who have a high probability of failure, which negatively contributes to the learning environment for these students (Kubek, 2020). Burson et al. (2019) suggest that structural attributions, such as larger social systems and gendered perceptions, significantly influence the attitudes and beliefs of juvenile justice staff about JIYW. For example, the gendered notion of young women “lacking ability and personal agency” results in the action of keeping them longer in the JJS to protect them (Burson et al., p. 160). One study found that probation officers expressed racial and gender stereotypes in their case notes, describing JIYW as “promiscuous, manipulative, liars, criers, harder to work with, having too many issues and being too needy” (Gaarder et al., 2004, p. 556). The lack of a supportive educational system undeniably creates a system that fails students on probation where discipline issues and poor school attendance could result in a violation of probation (Beneby, 2018).

Stereotypes and Implicit Bias

Young women of color who were involved in a focus group expressed that the stereotypes their teachers had of them—being loud, aggressive, defiant, rowdy, ignorant and lacking compliance to school expectations— translated into negative action toward them (Murphy et al., 2013). Furthermore, these stereotypes and implicit biases contribute to ostracism within the classroom and the use of exclusionary discipline methods toward students. Implicit

biases are discriminatory stereotypes, such as prejudice, based on personal beliefs and attitudes that are attributed to a particular group of people (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). These biases could unintentionally appear in one's actions toward others without awareness (Kirwan Institute, 2015). Implicit bias, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination can result in microaggressions that include "hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271).

As a response to gender and race normative stereotypes within the school environment, young Black women have reported the need to address their unequal treatment and defend themselves from teachers and other peers (Morris, 2016). Their behavioral responses to reclaim control over the inequitable situation builds on the stereotype that the young women are loud, aggressive, defiant, rowdy, ignorant, and lack compliance to school expectations (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris; Murphy et al., 2013). The subsequent disciplinary actions, taken by their teachers to feel less threatened by their behaviors, were intended to make these young women more gender-conforming and compliant (Morris, 2007). However, these disciplinary actions often marginalize students and direct them toward the STPP (Gilliam et al., 2016; Noguera, 2003). These measures are counterproductive to the goals of education because students lose motivation and incentives to adhere to school policies when they are denied learning opportunities within their environment (Noguera).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Young women interviewed in one study expressed that their school behaviors were influenced by their perception of whether their teacher was willing to explain school assignments to them (Murphy et al., 2013). Their connection to teachers bolsters their level of school belonging which, when of poor quality, is a factor negatively associated with

externalizing behaviors for Black and White young women (Kalu et al., 2020). Furthermore, young women prioritize connections and relationships with pro-social adults, such as teachers, and these relationships function as protective factors against future re-offending (Kalu).

Identity Development of Self

The systems that interact with young women play a significant role in influencing the perception of self (Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The negative stereotypes and labels placed on JYW by the educational systems could pose internal and external barriers to succeed academically. In contrast, supportive educational policies that support the learning pace of the students both academically and emotionally could bolster a more positive academic experience for these young women (Murphy et al., 2013). A qualitative study of young Black women found that they respond to perceived resentment or dislike from teachers in kind by talking back to their teachers or being rude (Murphy et al., 2013). The negative perception of the school environment may result in a lack of respect for school authority, a lack of motivation to be in school, and engagement in truancy, and could ultimately lead to justice involvement (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). An understanding of one's self-perception and identity is instrumental in the study of desistance and how one transits into a crime-free lifestyle (Maruna, 2001).

Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Institutional Embeddedness

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism (SI) examines the development of one's identity through their interaction with others (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). According to Blumer (1969), people act toward other people and objects based on the subjective meanings they ascribe to them. The original SI theory was expanded to include identity development (Olesen, 1994). In

this expansion, SI includes subjectivity and symbols that are weaved into one's social reality and communicated through human behavior (Blumer & Kuhn, 1991). Human behavior is constructed through "patterns" of interactions where students and teachers develop patterned behavior through their interactions with each other in the social environment, which influences students' perceptions of self (Jones and Somekh, 2006). Negative evaluations from others become incorporated into a person's self-perception and can lead to anti-social behavior as a self- expectation (Matsueda, 1992). One's perception of self is partly a response to how they are perceived by significant figures in their family and school environment (Felson, 1985).

Institutional Embeddedness

This theory is an extension of Gregory and colleagues' work in 2017 that explains how the education institutional context is nested and layered within multiple levels, such as the federal, state, and school district policies, and are subject to the education laws set by the district and the state (Snodgrass-Rangel et al., 2020). These system-level processes and structures further influence the re-entry process of a young person in mainstream education. The educator's beliefs and attitudes, the quality of interactions within the school context, the academic rigor and cultural relevance, and the student's access to resources all contribute to these systemic structures and processes (Gregory et al., 2017; Snodgrass-Rangel).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the public and correctional education experiences of JIYW. The main research question is, "How do the public and correctional experiences of young women involved in JJS shape their perception of self?" This study will contribute to the gap in the literature by investigating how the structures and systems of mainstream and JJS education influence one's self-perception using the lenses of Symbolic Interactionism and

Institutional Embeddedness. This scholarship is a response to the lack of literature on students' voices about their perceptions of educational experiences (Mitra, 2014).

Methodology

Sampling

This study focused on the experiences of ten JIYW aged 14-16, two probation officers, and two correctional teachers from a probation department located in a large urban city. This study utilized a secondary dataset collected by a team of five researchers, two faculty members, and three research assistants. These data were primarily collected between 2017 to 2018 to capture the students' educational experiences and goals while they were incarcerated and to identify the factors that facilitate their reentry into the community. Initial interviews were conducted with all participants ($n=14$). It was initially planned that once a participant was discharged from the juvenile institution, the research team would follow up with their family via a few telephone calls over a three-month period following the participant's release. However, only one family agreed to the follow-up interviews.

No additional demographic information was available because demographic data were not gathered in the interview guide by the original research team. Besides the names of the participants, contact information from all interview participants (email and phone number) was obtained for follow-up purposes, and were only privy to the Principal and Co-Principal Investigator. Participants' names were paired with a code number by the Principal Investigator from the original research team to maintain their confidentiality. The recruitment halted when the desired sample size was reached ($n=10$). Table 1 includes the descriptors used by all the participants in this study.

<Place Table 1 here>

Data Collection

For the initial interview, the research team collected data from one juvenile justice facility over six months. The research team continued to follow up with the probation officer to check if the young women were discharged from the facility. The research team (two to three at a time) met every Saturday for six months during family visitation time, based on a rotation between 12:00-4:00 pm at the facility. To obtain parental permission, the research team recruited the young women at the same venue where the parents/ guardians visited them. The research team invited the young women to participate and explained the study to the parents at the same time. The interviews were held in a secluded area within the facility and were conducted from November 2017 to May 2018. The young women were asked about their perceptions of the education they received before they were involved in the JJS and while in the JJS, their future goals, educational aspirations, and potential pathways toward desistance from crime.

The research team also recruited two teachers and two probation officers at the JJS Education facility via email contact information provided by the site director. The adult participants mutually agreed to a time and place for the interview. The interviews focused on the perceived role of the systems in supporting the transition of young women in their desistance process.

Research Procedures

The research team obtained IRB approval in mid-2017 and the authors of this manuscript were added on to the IRB protocol in early 2020. Prior to data collection, youth assent, parent consent, and an audio recording permission form, available in English and Spanish, were obtained. The one-to-one semi-structured interviews were completed

immediately after consent was given or in the following weeks during the same agreed upon time slot. All interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes and were audio-recorded using a handheld device. All audio recordings were destroyed after transcription and data checking by CiviCom. All qualitative data were stored on a password-protected computer in a private room at a university and were approved to be stored for three years. All youth participants were offered an incentive of one \$5 Target gift card per interview, and compensation was given to the participants after each interview. There were no incentives for adult participants. The adult interviews were conducted to better understand the perspectives of the systems that work with the young women in close proximity. This procedure also strengthened the rigor of the data through the triangulation of data. All transcripts were analyzed by the Primary Investigator for the current research and counter-checked for rigor by the research team, which consists of two other authors.

Positionality

As a social worker who has worked with JIYW for a substantial period, I have witnessed the weak re-entry of young women from the residential treatment center into society. I was curious about their trajectory toward desistance. Many of the young women I worked with had dropped out of school and were struggling to get a high school diploma and a decent wage for employment. Their struggles were hard to comprehend, and I sought opportunities to hear their stories. While I may not have lived their experiences, I have worked with many young people who have shared their stories with me. These are the stories and experiences I glean from and I am reminded to stay open to new voices to build knowledge of diverse groups of young women. This process of reflexivity allows me to separate myself from my thoughts and biases and, instead, be clear of my intentions and role in the research study (Parson, 2019).

Additionally, acknowledging my positionality enabled me to move beyond my purposes and adopt a social justice lens to understand the complexities and intersectionality of the issues expressed by the participants, which is a key component of my professional work as a social worker as well (Parson, 2019). This self-monitoring process allows me to acknowledge the power and privilege in my role and identity, and in turn, will prevent me from further marginalizing participants from vulnerable groups or settings such as the JJS.

Qualitative Analysis

The transcripts provided by a computer-based transcription service were accessible via a password-protected file on an online database. A qualitative computer-based data analysis tool, Dedoose, was used to organize and manage the transcribed data. Before analysis, the authors engaged in a process of "bracketing" which encouraged the separation of the researcher's subjective views from the experiences shared by the participants (Giorgi, 2009). A thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), was performed to identify, analyze, and report themes within the dataset. The thematic analysis included the following steps, (1) Familiarizing with your data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; (5) Defining and naming themes; and (6) Producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Memo-ing was done consistently during the analysis process to document initial thoughts and connections to the research question. This method, used to describe the dataset in full and rich detail, provides an interpretation of various areas regarding the educational experiences of the young women interviewed in this sample (Boyatzis, 1998). The contextual aspect of this study called for a latent thematic contextualist method (Willig, 1999), which recognizes the meaning-making of experiences and how the social context impacts these experiences. In a latent thematic analysis, there is a need to interpret multiple layers of content

from the data based on existing theories such as symbolic interactionism and institutional embeddedness, and a constant deductive and inductive process (Braun & Clarke).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

There were a variety of steps taken to enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study. First, there was a research team established for peer debriefing of the coding process to remove biases of the transcripts and codes. The research team provided constructive feedback and detected aspects of the data that were meaningful. The team discussed the latent meanings of the data to uncover the essence. Second, the research team supported the refining of the codebook through multiple rounds after reviewing the data twice. Third, to strengthen transferability, the primary researcher documented the analysis process in detail for all the steps taken in an excel sheet as part of an audit trail. This audit trail allowed for a critical examination of research decisions and ensured accountability and validity in the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fourth, there was a reflexive “bracketing” process to enhance the rigor by separating one's subjective views from the experiences shared by the participants, making the researcher a partner and interpreter of those experiencing the phenomenon where meaning is conveyed (Giorgi, 2009). Finally, the four additional interviews from two probation officers and two teachers in the JJS education institution were utilized to triangulate the data.

Results

The participants in this study attributed their educational experiences within the public and correctional education institutions to multiple structures and processes (e.g., class size, teaching and learning, discipline policies and practices.) that shaped participants’ educational experiences and self-perceptions. The qualitative analytic process produced three themes: (1) " I would pay attention and I would still get them wrong and feel stupid ", (2) I'm making

straight As for the first time", and (3) "They see us as bad kids". Specifically, certain school structures, such as large class size, negative adult and peer interactions, discriminatory and disciplinary practices influenced some participants to perceive themselves negatively using self-descriptors such as "dumb" "stupid" "outcast" "criminal" or "bad kid." On the contrary, the empathy and presence of a caring adult helped them feel safe and supported. Knowing that they "matter" and were "seen for who they were" gave them a more positive sense of self. Additionally, smaller class sizes and a curriculum paced to their academic level enhanced the self-confidence and academic competence of the young women in this study. Below we describe these three themes in greater detail.

"I Would Pay Attention and I Would Still Get Them Wrong and Feel Stupid"

This theme addressed several aspects of the two learning environments that included class size, curriculum, class structure, and student-teacher interactions.

Class Sizes in the Public Education System

The first theme, 'I would pay attention and I would still get them wrong and feel stupid,' illuminates the ways in which the structure and process of learning in a public-school setting created barriers and challenges for the participants leading them to perceive themselves as "stupid.". Specifically, participants expressed that the large class size, which consisted of 30 or more students, did not create a class environment that was conducive to their approach to learning. Classes with students who had varying learning competencies had a negative impact on the participants as they compared themselves to others who were able to comprehend the curriculum well. For instance, Annie, who was in eighth grade at the time of the study, expressed, "The classes were too crowded. I felt stupid, like I didn't know a lot. It

is too confusing. Now, it's like I'm reading these words, and I don't know what these mean, but other people know what they mean."

The participants also described the curriculum in public school as overwhelming and difficult to comprehend, which further led them to feel "stupid" as they engaged in the learning process. For instance, Mary, a 14-year-old ninth grader expressed, "I would pay attention, and then I would still get them wrong and feel stupid. I'll be like, well, dang, I actually put in effort, and I still got it wrong. I don't even wanna do school no more." Similarly, Disha, who was in eighth grade at the time of the interview, stated that English classes were hard to comprehend due to the vocabulary: "They're too big for me. Then, I had to look it up in the dictionary. But, in the dictionary, it makes me look up the other words for that one word. It's too hard." The participants also pointed to the class structure and process, including size and the pace of instruction, that created feelings of discomfort and embarrassment when they needed to ask questions out loud for support. Annie, one of the participants stated, "[I] wouldn't raise my hand because I'd be too embarrassed because we just learned that three weeks ago, 'Why don't you know what that is?' I sleep in class all the time. I wouldn't ask for help or anything." This is especially impactful for students who are challenged with special learning needs, as their needs are ignored and, instead, they are cast aside because they are unable to comprehend what is being taught (Sinclair, et al., 2017).

While the young women perceived the class structures in the public-school setting to influence discomfort and embarrassment when needing to ask questions aloud, the adults in this study attributed the discomfort to the young women's internal barriers. For instance, Ms. Walsh, the correctional teacher, perceived that the participants did not ask for help because they viewed asking for help as a weakness. She explained: "A lot of them have academic

issues. They will not ask for help because that is perceived as a weakness, so they won't do it".

Curriculum within Correctional Educational System

The participants perceived the structure and process of correctional education as lacking rigor, which many felt perpetuated the young women feeling "stupid" as they engaged in the learning process. For instance, Marlen, a correctional teacher, reported that the curriculum within the correctional institution is based on the county's expectations. She stated, "it's a county-given curriculum, and it follows the TEKS." The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are the state standards for what students should know and be able to master in each subject and grade level, and is approved by the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). However, although this is a statewide adopted education system, the participants perceived the correctional education curriculum to be too "easy". Sally, a participant, stated that the contents were too simple and easy, and she referred to the learning as "baby stuff". She stated,

I'm not thinking. I'm not trying to figure anything out. I'm just copy-and-pasting and the

work, the math work is like six plus six. It starts off at six plus six and all that baby shit, and then it works your way up to six times 10, six times 14, all that baby stuff.

Literally, all you do is copy and paste. She'll tell us the answer.

Bella, the probation officer, also corroborated what the participants had explained to us, adding that "the curriculum is very watered-down, but it's just so simple. I believe they're not being challenged enough." Marlen, the correctional teacher explained that this could be because "they don't have the tools to get done what they need to get done on their grade level.

So, we usually have to take it down a notch.” The comments from the adult participants suggest that their perception of the young women’s academic abilities influenced the curriculum instruction. The adult perception of the young women’s academic ability, the young women’s perception of the curriculum as “baby stuff”, and the class instructional method of “copy and paste” contributed to the perception of feeling “stupid” in the learning process.

The young women in this study also feared their transition from correctional to public schools. They explained that there was “one school teaching you one thing and then another school teaching another.” This difference in curriculum between institutions evoked fear and confusion among the participants. Wherein one participant, Sally, expressed:

We're not learning anything. I am not learning my grade level. That's why I'm so scared to go back out in the free when I do because what they're doing here, when I go back in the free and go to my school, they're going to be learning a whole different thing.

Class Structure within Correction Education System

The class configuration within the correctional setting includes all grade levels where all participants were learning in the same classroom within the correctional institution.

According to Bella, the probation officer,

You might have a senior learning what a freshman is learning. When you get home, you don't know what you're supposed to do because you haven't learned that senior level of learning, you've been on this freshman level of learning.

The class structure within the correctional settings supports the learning process for some participants whereas, for other participants who are on a different grade level, it creates

frustration about what they are or what they are not learning, inadvertently influencing their sense of self. This could be due to the lack of teaching staff within the correctional setting which resulted in a classroom of students from different grade levels. Marlen explained “it’s some constraints on availability of teachers. So all the grade levels are together which means that the teacher has to have [them] – depending on how many are in there. You can have the range all the way from sixth grade to twelfth grade.”

Teacher-Student Interactions within Public Education System

The participants’ perceived that teacher-student interactions within the public educational context plays a critical role in how they experienced school and viewed themselves. For example, Liz, a participant stated, "When I'm like, 'Stop!', the teacher gets annoyed. She's like, 'You're not listening.' And I'm like, 'I am.' I just don't understand it." The lack of positive regard or response toward students who cannot understand the school curriculum appeared to create a negative perception and interaction between the participants and their teachers. This led some of the participants to not want to be in school anymore because they constantly felt they were in survival mode, which was ultimately reflected in their grades. Some participants reported failing classes and getting "Fs, zeros, Ds," within the public education system.

“They See Us as The Bad Kids”

This theme addressed factors that include labels and stereotypes, teacher’s beliefs and attitudes, discrimination and Zero-tolerance discipline practices.

Labels and Stereotypes

The participants expressed that the labels and stereotypes which adults in the public-school setting placed on them, such as being seen as the “bad kid,” influenced their negative

responses toward education, their teachers, and themselves. These negative labels contributed to the ways the young women saw themselves as not being fit for schooling in its current state, which can lead to acts of disengagement. For instance, the negative appraisal from the teacher strongly influenced their perception of self as being "bad" and their decisions to drop out of school. Rachel, a participant in the ninth grade stated,

When I was younger, when I was in school, the times that I was in school, I was always bad. Was always disrupting class and just going about my business doing what I wanted to do. When it was time for me to get serious, the teachers are all, 'You're not going to do it'. Just saying, "Why do you even come to school? Why do you bother?" That's really the reason I dropped out of school too because I felt like there was no meaning for me to be in school.

Similarly, Marsha also stated, "They see us as the bad kids, when sometimes we're really not. If they treated me like they treated the rest of the kids, like the kids that are smart, As and Bs, and stuff like that." In the case of Marsha, she stated that she was treated differently from the other students who were smarter, which illustrates that she felt singled out and discriminated against based on how she was perceived.

Brenda, another participant in the ninth grade stated that her negative classroom interaction with her teacher resulted in her teacher "keeping grudges." Brenda explained:

I went into class when I got out of jail. I'm prepared to do my work and everything, and then I asked her for help. I said something and she was like, "What do you need help with?" She gave me attitude and I was like, "Dang. She's still mad about what happened?" Then after she said that to me, I stopped going to her class every day. I skipped her class every day.

Teacher's beliefs and attitudes in the public education system

The participants related to an experience that communicated the lack of value, respect and a second chance given to the participants. Annie, a participant, shared, "Because teachers, they just get aggravated, and they don't really teach you anything. They just move past you and they just, Oh my gosh. Okay, Annie. You're not getting it." Sally, another participant, also corroborated with this claim by citing an experience she had not being listened to and misunderstood by her teacher. She stated, "When I got held back twice, I didn't really learn like how other kids learned. The teachers didn't really pay much attention to me and I was set aside. It made me stupider, just didn't pay as much attention after that". Mary stopped going to school because her motivation to be in school was dependent on whether or not the teacher cared about her. She stated, "It's because I'm the type of person, if I feel like the teachers doesn't really care or if the work is too hard or something, I just give up. When I give up, I just skip class." This illustrates that teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward the participants played a large role in their motivation to complete their education.

Additionally, Mary received negative messages from her public school teachers. She stated that she felt "doubted all the time," where her teachers continually told her that "No, you can't do it, uhm, she was just really mean to me," which eventually led to her decision to stop attending school. The teacher's belief about the student's incapability led them to think they can't be successful and made them feel like a failure. The teacher's beliefs and attitudes toward the students can cast seeds of doubt which in turn can cause students to doubt themselves. Conversely, Rhea, one of the correctional teachers stated: "If they don't have a lot of self-esteem, then they don't see themselves as successful. And then they see their success, and once they start seeing themselves being successful, then they start trying harder."

Landry, a probation officer, further explained the impact of labeling on the participants' self-perceptions. He stated, "They don't want to learn, they're not driven because all their life they've had this labeling – excuse me – this stereotype, um, following them, and so they feel that, you know, 'Now I'm being forced to have to go to school', and they don't want to." These internalized stereotypes can result in a lack of engagement and poor self-perception.

Discrimination in the Public Education System

The participants also described situations where they were judged for their gender, race, or socioeconomic status. For example, Patricia, who identified as Mexican American, stated that she was in a school "full of bougie white kids" and she felt judged and could not fit in:

They just thought they were better than me, like I don't know. And then I would get into fights. I would like fight the whitest of like the richest, 'I'm so much better than you' kind of people. Yeah, so I get in trouble a lot there and I got kicked out of that school.

Patricia also stated that she was told she looked poor: "Somebody told me I look too poor. I had an iPhone. Somebody told me I look too poor for an iPhone." In her case, her schooling experiences were influenced by her environment, where she may have felt racially and culturally isolated. She felt that "people are so judgy. I just wanna go to a school where I can feel normal and I won't feel like I have to sit up straight, and like wear fancy clothes and not be ghetto." Another example of racial discrimination is the lack of information presented to the participants of color. Rachel explained, "A lot of us here, we're all minorities and we don't really know about things like that until somebody tells us."

The participants also experienced gender discrimination within the public school context. For example, Mary stated that she found it unfair for participants to be treated differently from young men. The participants expressed they were perceived as suspects and judged as "bad" through the screening process in the public school as described here:

It's really not fair because the boys, they get touched like this and then they're like, 'Okay, you go.' We have to get searched and we really like, uhm – and then if it's us, they make us take off our shoes, untuck our shirt, take off our belt, and they have to like go around and again, like they have to make sure like we have nothing. The boys stole a whole iPad because they didn't get searched right. It just makes me mad because it's not fair.

Zero-Tolerance Discipline Practices

The participants described discipline policies at their school as unfair and harsh. The actions by the school police officers reinforced the perception that the participants were “criminals,” and “aggressive.” For instance, Sally, a participant in the tenth grade stated, “I don't like the school police. I feel like they preyed on the kids like down. They loved it when they found the kid doing something bad. They would love to see a kid and have handcuffs.” The interaction between the police and the participants reflect the disciplinary practices that were intertwined with negative language and labels, negatively affecting their sense of self. Brenda, for instance, expressed that she received messages such as:

“Why are you so aggressive?” that kind of stuff. And they just treat me like I'm a criminal or something. They would've had the school sheriff come talk to be and be like, "Assault is a crime." They've done that so many times, to where it's here they'll just be like, "Calm down. What's going on? Why do you all have the issues?”

The participants also faced similar language in public education classrooms where the teachers would opt to discipline the student for minor things, such as the expression of anger or when they were unable to handle chaos in the class, without thoroughly investigating the issue. For instance, Marsha stated:

Teachers there, they were also like perfect - So, if I would get mad, they'd be like, 'Oh no, we're sending you to the office.' Like they couldn't just fix the problem like if somebody was like in my chair and I'd be like, Move. That's my seat, they would get all – the girls would be like, 'She's bullying me.' and then they would send me to the office for something that I didn't even do.

The participants felt misunderstood for outwardly expressing their feelings. There was little mention of a thorough investigation before classroom suspensions, although removing a student from the classroom should ideally be the last resort. Marsha stated an example where she would “do something bad and get suspended. And then like I would always get sent home. One time I got mad and I had went off on this girl and then they were like, ‘you're suspended for a day’.” Some of the young women expressed they were bullied, including “being teased and picked on a lot, but then I started fighting and people started respecting me more”. The young women seemed to take on a tough exterior to avoid bullying or risk looking weak in front of other students. The negative school environment was corroborated by Rhea, the correctional teacher who stated, “their schools can often be a very negative environment for them. And, a lot of them, that's why they quit.”

The participants expressed difficulty catching up with their work and staying on track due to frequent suspensions and the inability to fully focus because of the negative environment and the labels placed on them in the public-school context. For example, Rachel

stated, “I get suspended for like four weeks and then I have to come back and catch up on my work, and then when I'm feeling I don't wanna do my work. It's just so much.” For participants on probation, a suspension is considered a violation of probation where there is zero-tolerance for poor school behavior. However, Patricia stated that her public school did not understand the gravity of suspensions for her probation and she felt it unjustified that she should be suspended for wrong attire. She said:

They suspended me for having slides on. Because I had a zero tolerance at school—for my probation—I was supposed to have zero tolerance for school. I couldn't get in no type of trouble. She was just suspending me over that, and she suspended me for my jeans one time. She just kept on getting me in trouble and trouble. I told him something about it. He was like, "Just ignore her." How do I ignore her? My PO's going to know this. I can't ignore her because my PO's going to bring it up. He was just always trying to make things positive and I was like, ‘You're not the one on probation, dude. I am’.

This illuminates the students’ senses of helplessness. Their actions are subjectively controlled by the school administration, through their discretion in making disciplinary decisions, while the participants felt “they are set up to fail.” These educational experiences can potentially drive an internal sense of failure at the onset of reentry. The mere perpetuation of stereotypes, placed upon students for being justice-involved, and the expectations they need to meet in school, as part of their probation conditions, create hindrances to their success.

“I'm making straight As for the first time”

This theme reflected the curriculum that is paced to learning needs and the teacher’s support and empathy. This theme reflects the irony that despite the lack of challenge with the

correctional curriculum, participants thrived academically within the correctional education context.

This theme describes and explains how several structures, including a smaller class sizes, the type of curriculum and pace of learning, their teacher's support and empathy, and being humanized within the learning space contributed to thriving within the correctional education system. These structures supported the competency and mastery of the curriculum, which then positively impacted the participants' emotions and self-perceptions. For example, Else, who was in the ninth grade at the time of the interview, felt happy that she was earning good grades for the first time in many years. This achievement boosted her self-confidence. She stressed, "I'm making straight A's for the first time in sixth grade, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth...in four years. I'm happy because I'm making really good grades." The participant's academic success can be attributed to the smaller and focused class sizes, a curriculum and instruction that was paced to their academic level, and more attention and academic support provided by the correctional teacher.

Curriculum Paced to Learning Needs

Another young woman, Amy, stated she felt more confident about the curriculum when it was paced to her learning needs. She explained: "Education is kind of neat because they slow down for us. They try to help us with every step and try to at least help us with things that we don't understand about [the] 'why' process?" She also expressed that the pace was acceptable for her because they "stay on one thing at one time—one thing, one day." Rachel also stated that she is "less distracted and "more comfortable within the small class settings, because I focus more than being in a big, large class". Rhea, the correctional teacher, stated that smaller class sizes allow for more academic support. She said, "a teacher in a

public school doesn't really have the time. We do because we have such a small ratio of teacher to student." The small classroom size made a difference to the academic experiences of the participants. Within the correctional settings, learning took place in a small environment where everyone had similar experiences. Rachel stated:

It's easier here. I can ask the teacher for help if I don't understand something because there are four of us and we've all gone through something. In the other school, it was a class of 30, 20 students. I can't do that. Someone's bound to laugh at me if I ask a dumb question that I really don't know.

Teacher's Support and Empathy

The participants expressed that their teacher's support and empathy helped them thrive academically and socially, which influenced how they perceived themselves in the correctional education context. The young women felt supported through their learning difficulties because they had one-on-one academic help and external motivation from their teachers. Disha, one of the young women, reported, "The teacher here, on math, she's been...the whole week, she knows I'm lazy. [Laughter] She's been holding my hand—not literally. But she's been next to me in solving equations...everything with me and pushing me." This far-reaching impact, allowing the young women to feel understood and supported, translated into them achieving academic competencies and earning good grades within the correctional academic setting.

The participants also stated that their teacher's support and empathy from positive appraisals and concern had a positive impact on their self-perceptions. For example, Disha stated that her teacher encouraged and understood her. She stated that she was moved to tears when her teacher told her:

‘I was depending on you, we all need you.’ It just busted me into tears and it hurt so bad. It made me feel like somebody actually—somebody actually knew what I was going through and could see right through me.

Another participant, Liz, also stated that she was happy to be known for who she really is and humanized in the school space: “She sees right through me. If I need something, she’s there. It just makes me so happy.” These examples help to illuminate how teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward students have a direct impact on how the participants see themselves. Specifically, Disha expressed an increased sense of self when she felt like she mattered and was ‘somebody’. Mary, a student, compared the public education system to the correctional school context and stated that, within the latter context, “the teachers care more. If we have a problem, they try to get to it immediately. You’ll never go more than a day with the same problem in your hands. They’ll fix it.” Marlen, the correctional teacher, corroborated with reports from participants by stating that providing a caring environment within the correctional setting for participants is equally important to them and her:

You know, I wanna be there for you if you need me to be there for you. You know, I try to be somebody that they can talk to, sort of. And that’s one of the things I try to give them all to do, especially with the remedial packet. ‘You can do this. Do you feel smarter? Yeah, dude. You feel like you know more. You figured things out.’ And once they start seeing that? We have a reward in my room once every three weeks. We’re able to offer them a treat and watch a movie.

These three themes highlight that the public and correctional educational experiences of these participants shape their self-perceptions with very different conditions and structures in place.

Discussion and Implications

There are multiple factors involved in the public and correctional education systems that can have a profound impact on the self-perceptions of young women in the JJS. Our findings suggest that structural factors and both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, such as a teacher's beliefs and attitudes, labeling, teacher-student interactions, curriculum, academic support and pace of learning, and class size contribute to how young women see themselves within the correctional and public educational contexts. Institutional Embeddedness theory and Symbolic Interactionism highlight these structures and processes within the school context, which we discuss below.

Intrapersonal Level- Teacher's Beliefs, Attitudes, and Labeling

The intrapersonal level of the school reentry process for young women includes teacher's beliefs and attitudes toward students who are justice-involved. The analysis identifies that labels such as "aggressive," "bad kid," or "criminal," are not only offensive but self-fulfilling, where the person being labeled is reduced to the label assigned, even if it does not meaningfully describe the person's true characteristics (Willis, 2018). These labels are stereotypical, stigmatizing and disempowering to the point where young women can "become the thing he [or she] is described as being" (Tannenbaum, 1938, p. 20). These labels, which can be culturally driven, based on subjective views of young women of color, are counterproductive to the rehabilitation goals of juvenile justice and of education. Labels compromise the process of desistance by which one's pro-social self-perception and identity is paramount to the desistance process (Maruna, 2001). These negative appraisals label students as a threat or danger, which can inadvertently lead students to the JJS through the STPP (Matsueda, 1992; Sprague et al., 2001). Hence, a teacher's beliefs and attitudes toward

students play a critical role in the support of JIYW in their educational experiences and desistance process.

Maruna and LeBel (2010) proposed a de-labeling process whereby others recognize the changes made by someone and give them new, pro-social labels to facilitate positive identity changes. This is especially impactful for the community in the re-entry process. This de-labeling could start from the point of reentry from correctional education into the mainstream school context. Reentry officers or school social workers can role-model positive messages about returning JIYW and help to reframe these labels to facilitate a more positive attitude toward these young women. Additionally, it is important for school administrators to address the implicit bias within the school context toward girls of color. Research shows that subjective appraisals, such as the idea that Black girls acting loud or aggressively, influences teacher's perceptions toward them (Murphy et al., 2013). In addition to perceptions based upon their race, Black girls who are also justice-involved experience a double impact here there can be a reluctance to work with them due to perceptions of being justice involved. Oftentimes, the consequences of implicit bias and stereotypes may lead to ostracism and microaggressions during the reentry process (Burson et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2007). Some of the participants expressed they began fighting so that others would respect them more and not bully them. This is noteworthy as it represents the need for self-defense, as expressed through a tough exterior, that will protect them from bullies—a common coping response to trauma (Ford et al., 2006). Strong educational and disciplinary policies against bullying, stereotyping or labeling should be enforced to create a pro-social milieu.

The presence of police and zero tolerance policies on discipline processes has been harmful to the self-perceptions of the young women in this study. The subjective nature of

discipline within the public school can be detrimental to young women on probation as there are no allowances for disciplinary actions. Additional support to meet these zero-tolerance probation conditions are necessary for more positive outcomes. An educational system that stereotypes, stigmatizes, and labels youth involved in the justice system poses a barrier to successful reentry to school, and continue the STPP (Mathur & Clark, 2014).

Interpersonal Level: Teacher- Student Interactions

The analysis revealed that the quality of interactions within the school space, where young women felt supported academically and thrived in the school space, was optimized when they received warmth and empathy from their teachers through interactions. In contrast to labeling, consistent expressions of empathy, warmth and positive appraisals from teachers can act as a buffer to the negative impact of labels and, instead, serve to invigorate more positive self-perceptions. When students experience an internal belief in their capabilities, they become better able to reclaim their own dignity and worth for a better future (Willis, 2018). This phenomenon is also known as the “Pygmalion effect”, which refers to the direct influence of teacher’s expectations and interactions with students on their academic achievement (Friedrich et al., 2015). The quality of teacher–student interaction is a pivotal factor in facilitating behavioral changes among young women with externalizing behaviors (Kalu et al., 2020; Meehan et al., 2003). The analysis supports the claim that interpersonal structures, such as having relationships with caring pro-social adults who treat the young women fairly—without judgment and with support, can help students feel seen for who they are in the educational space. This further enhances their academic success and reentry process (Snodgrass-Rangel et al., 2020). Although most of the JIYW do not have these strong supportive relationships in place, there needs to be a structure instituted to help them form

these relationships through mentoring, or even through their teacher-student relationships. It is also critical to ensure that returning JIYW have a point person to go to, within their school context, who can provide this additional support for their needs. Larger community engagement, or wraparound services, can be engaged via social workers to help JIYW stay engaged and motivated to complete high school and desist from crime (Goldkind, 2011; Mathur & Griller Clark, 2014).

Systems Level: Curriculum and Instruction

The young women in this study made multiple references to the curriculum and instruction they received in the public and correctional educational institutions. In this study, they referred to the correctional curriculum as “baby stuff”, whereas the correctional teachers explained that the curriculum was “watered down” to meet the academic needs of the students. Oftentimes, the perception of students’ abilities also influences the quality of class instruction. Based on the teacher’s statement, this can be reflected as a deficit-based mindset where the action plan initiated has been designed to lessen the curriculum rigor rather than providing additional support to meet the appropriate standards required of the grade level. Although the students felt more supported in the correctional school, these low expectations can be detrimental to the academic success of young women and, in the long-term, and create self-doubt and distress for them in the academic space. In reference to the conflicting curriculum between public and correctional institutions, the young women felt fearful and confused about returning to public schools because they perceived themselves as unprepared to succeed at their grade level. Federal law requires that correctional facilities that receive Title I, Part D, funds must ensure that youth housed within their facilities have similar opportunities to meet academic standards, as if they were enrolled in a public school (U.S

Department of Education, n.d.). However, the results of this study seem to suggest otherwise. Additionally, in the correctional educational institutions, all grade levels are placed in the same classroom which compromises the grade-appropriate curriculum and instruction that should cater to all students.

Academic challenges and special education needs are widely documented as risk factors for justice involvement (Feiring et al., 2013; Pasko, 2006). In the Pasko (2006) study, nearly 75% of JIYW reported school failure for the duration of an entire semester, and half of the young women were diagnosed with special education needs (Pasko, 2006). Students who have special education needs often require accommodations and academic support to understand the curriculum (Hong et al., 2013). Many students may also be undiagnosed, which makes it harder to obtain accommodations. School socio-emotional behavioral supports, within the school context, could increase the early identification of learning challenges. The young women can benefit from additional academic support and quality services within the correctional education setting to help them catch up when they transition back to public school (Clarke et al., 2016).

The younger participants at lower grade levels expressed satisfaction and success with the curriculum as they found it “easy” to navigate and pass. Some participants expressed happiness with achieving A’s for the first time. The difference observed is that these participants received more one-to-one attention within a small classroom whereby the correctional teachers displayed warmth, patience and concern throughout their learning experiences. However, the easier curriculum may not be beneficial for students of higher grade levels due to the “watered down” curriculum and a combined class with multiple grade

levels. It is crucial that a high quality of education be reached and maintained with greater academic support, attention, warmth and positive regard for all students.

The instructional level within the Institutional Embeddedness theory, which is one of the theories used for this scholarship, suggest the adoption of culturally relevant and promotive instruction by teachers and school administration within classrooms (Snodgrass-Rangel et al., 2020). While there was no mention of culturally relevant practices in either academic space, this can enhance educational resilience and positively impact the self-perception of culturally diverse young women returning to public schools (Lea et al., 2020). Additionally, culturally relevant practices could effectively address the achievement gap and the disproportionate minority contact that is well documented within the STPP.

The learning pace within public schools was too fast-paced and advanced for the young women to catch up, which resulted in disengagement and, for some participants, led them to quit school. Young women with special education needs who lack accommodations may struggle to keep up with the school curriculum because they are often neglected within the school space. The results of this study describe young women as feeling “stupid” when they don’t understand the learning content, even following their multiple attempts to do so. It is noteworthy that being in classrooms with students of different academic competencies could be counterproductive because it becomes overwhelming for students to simultaneously keep up with others and with the teacher’s regular pace to comprehend the curriculum. The participants felt that teachers had difficulties catering to multiple academic levels. They were also aware that teachers expressed frustration when they were unable to understand the curriculum. These issues are connected to the negative teacher-student interaction that ensued from class instruction. However, it must be recognized that the curriculum expectations are

typically set by school districts and are often guided by state standards and policies, as well as federal mandates (Snodgrass Rangel et al., 2020). These systems play a large role in influencing the way policies are implemented at the local school level. Supportive educational policies that support the learning pace of students academically and emotionally could bolster a more positive academic experience and self-perception amongst JIYW (Murphy et al., 2013).

Structural level: Class sizes

The results of this study indicate that participants preferred a smaller class setting for their educational needs. A smaller class setting prevents distraction, increases comfort levels, and allows for more academic support to be provided to the young women in this study. As compared to a large classroom, where time has to be shared among multiple students, the small teacher-student ratio impacted the availability of teachers to actively support students academically and socially with more time allowed for each student. Students who have academic issues, or are falling behind their grade level, require additional support and more consistent attention given to their needs. The participants felt they were better able to understand learning content with greater explanation of the “why” process. This demonstrates that a smaller class setting could improve instruction to include detailed explanations. In the case of young women involved in the JJS, the smaller classes created a more intimate setting where they felt seen and cared for by the teacher. This enhanced their sense of self positively where they were constantly motivated and encouraged throughout the learning process. Most states set limits for maximum class sizes for elementary grades but do not require the same for upper grades. In low-income schools, class sizes may be quite large—as many as 32 students in middle schools and 29 in high schools (NCES, 2018) typically based on the lack of

resources to hire additional teachers. Research suggests that large class sizes are related to lower achievement and are particularly pernicious for marginalized students (Nye et al., 2000). There is a paucity of recent literature regarding the impact of class sizes on justice-involved youth, which could be an area of consideration for future research.

Conclusion

This study fills the gap in literature by exploring the voices of young women involved in the juvenile justice system concerning their educational experiences and its impact on their self-perceptions. The results of this study describe the processes and structures within the educational experiences of young women that influenced their self-perceptions. These structures can be best understood in the context of Institutional Embeddedness Theory which considers the intrapersonal, interpersonal, instructional systems, school district, and state and federal contexts. All of these levels play critical roles in the reentry of young women in public education. Prior literature suggests that justice-involved youth who don't return to public school have a high risk of dropping out, although youth who achieve academically within correctional institutions are more likely to re-enroll in public schools (Blomberg et al., 2011). There is vast documentation on how poor academic achievement and poor engagement in school are connected to justice involvement (Vacca, 2008). This puts larger pressure on the education systems to support the educational needs of JIYW. Educators who are competent and have the capacity, including the skills, knowledge, and resources to address the learning needs of justice involved girls, can create positive learning environments within the school context. This can disrupt the STPP and create more positive pathways for young women (Coggshall et al., 2013). The self-perception of JIYW is a key aspect to investigate, especially through their own voices, as one's identity is consequential to how they come to cease

offending. The results of this study can be used strengthen the policies, capacity, and capabilities of educational institutions to better support the reentry of JIYW (US Department of Education, 2016).

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List of Tables

Table 1

Descriptors of study participants (pseudo names included)

Name	Role	Age	Grade
Mary	Participant	14	9 th
Else	Participant	15	9 th
Annie	Participant	15	8 th
Rachel	Participant	15	9 th
Liz	Participant	16	9 th
Sally	Participant	15	10 th
Brenda	Participant	16	9 th
Marsha	Participant	16	10 th
Disha	Participant	14	8 th
Pat	Participant	15	9 th
Marlen	Correctional teacher		
Rhea	Correctional teacher		
Bella	Probation Officer		
Landry	Probation officer		

APPENDIX A

Student Interview Protocol

Introduction:

My name is____, and I work at the University of Houston. We're working on a research project that aims to understand your experiences both inside the Harris County Juvenile Justice (HCJJ) system and your School. We appreciate your willingness to meet with us. The interview should take 45 minutes to an hour, though you can stop interview at any time. Everything you say here will remain anonymous and we'll never identify you or your School in any reports. All personal information that we collect will only be used to describe who participated in the interviews (for example, how many young women, their age, etc). I would like to record the interview, is that OK? I can turn the recorder off at any point if you would like.

- I.* I am going to start by asking you about some personal information.
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. In which grade are you?
 - c. What was the last School you went to?
- II.* Now I am going to ask you some questions about your experiences in School before you entered the Program.
 - a. What was School like before you entered the Program?
 - b. What were some of the things that you liked about School, and what were some of the things that you didn't like?
 - c. What were some things that you were good at, and what were some of the things you found to be hard?
 - d. Were there any teachers or other staff members whom you trusted at School?
 - e. If you could have changed anything about your School, what would it have been?
- III.* Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences here in the program.
 - a. What is it like to be here in the Program?
 - b. Which goals do you have while being here at the Program?
 - c. What are your goals for the time after the Program?
 - d. What are you doing to make sure you can accomplish these goals?

- e. Have you experienced any difficulties reaching your goals in the past? If so, what did you do to move past these difficulties?
- f. How is the education in your home school different from the Program?
- g. What has it been like switching from one to the other?
- h. What are some things you like about being in School here compared to being in What are your experiences like with the other young women who are here? Did you make any friends here?
- i. What do you think would make your time and experience here better?

IV. [These questions to be asked once the student has re-integrated into her homeschool]

I'd like to ask you some questions about what it's like to be back at your home school.

- a. How are things going and how have you felt since you got back to your School?
- b. What, if anything, feels different than before you went to Program?
- c. Has coming back to School been what you thought it would be, or has it been different than what you expected?
- d. Did you accomplish any of the goals you had for your time in the Program?
- e. Have your relationships with your teachers or friends changed at all?
- f. What is it like to be back in regular classes?
- g. What has made it harder or easier to be back?
- h. If you could change anything about your experience at the Program or about Program itself, what would it be?
- i. What would you change about being back at School if you could change anything?
- j. Do you think you'll stay here at your School and graduate/go to high School?

APPENDIX B

Caseworkers, Juvenile Probation Officers (JPO), and School Teacher's Interview Protocol Introduction:

Good morning/afternoon. My name is _____ and I work for the University of Houston. My team and I are working on a research project that aims to understand juvenile justice-involved youths' experiences as they leave the Harris County Juvenile Justice (HCJJ) system and re-enter a public school. We appreciate your willingness to meet with us. The interview should take 30 minutes, though you can interrupt the interview at any time. Everything you say here will remain confidential and anonymous and we'll under no circumstances identify you or your School in any reports. All personal information that we collect will only be used in aggregate form to describe who participated in the interviews (for example, how many participants, their general demographics, etc.). We also would like to ask that you refrain from referring to any students by name so that we can protect the identities of any students who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. I would like to record the interview, if that is that fine with you? I can turn the recorder off at any point if/when you request it.

- I.* I am going to start by asking you basic information about you and your work context.
 - a.* What is your name?
 - b.* What is your educational and professional background?
 - c.* How many years of work experience do you have?
 - d.*
- II.* Now I am going to ask you about the role of education in juvenile justice-involved youths' lives, particularly with respect to their mental health and socialization. Please remember that we do not want you to name any specific students.
 - a.* What roles does education play in these youths' lives?
 - b.* How are education and mental health needs related in these adolescents?
 - c.* What does education mean for these youth and how does it influence their remediation?
 - d.* What role do these youths' families play in their educational decisions?
 - e.* What role does education play in the decision-making regarding the best course of action for any particular youth?
 - f.* What do you perceive as problematic to provide continued education to juveniles

at the transition from the public school system to involvement in the juvenile justice system (and the reverse)?

- g. To what extent can you expect support of this youth's parents/legal guardians as they try to successfully integrate in the educational system.

