



# Gender and Ethnic Differences Among Youth Enrolled in Juvenile Drug Courts Implementing Reclaiming Futures



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## Introduction

Girls in the juvenile justice system are an understudied population.<sup>1,2</sup> In the last two decades, there has been a dramatic increase in girls served by the system<sup>3-5</sup>; currently girls account for nearly 30% of juvenile arrests in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> This increased presence is attributed to elevated physical and mental health problems, lower school achievement, substance abuse, family dynamics, and recurrent delinquency.<sup>1,6</sup> Girls formally involved in the juvenile justice system are more likely than their male counterparts to report direct trauma and victimization, including sexual and physical abuse, mental health issues, and fragmented families.<sup>6-11</sup> These factors may lead to substance abuse as a coping mechanism in girls.<sup>11-13</sup> Delinquent girls are also being diagnosed more often with co-occurring mental health<sup>8,10-11,14-15</sup> and substance abuse disorders compared to delinquent boys.<sup>1,6-8</sup>

Racial and ethnic minority girls are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system.<sup>16-18</sup> Despite having comparable rates of substance abuse to the racial majority,<sup>19-20</sup> they are disproportionately more likely to experience arrest due to substance issues.<sup>16,21</sup> Racial and ethnic minority girls have an increased likelihood of experiencing previous trauma, sexual abuse, problems in school, undiagnosed mental health issues, fragmented families, and past history of being a runaway relative to the majority,<sup>21-22</sup> and are less likely to be referred for mental health services.<sup>23-24</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to further examine gender and ethnic based differences among youth enrolled in Juvenile Drug Courts (JDCs) implementing Reclaiming Futures (RF).

## Methods

Findings are from the National Cross-Site Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts & Reclaiming Futures (JDC/RF), an evaluation of 8 JDCs across the U.S. implementing JDC/RF. Adolescent clients of the JDC/RF programs completed the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN-I) Initial Assessment<sup>25</sup> survey at intake. The GAIN-I is a standardized clinical assessment tool. Independent sample t-tests were used to examine differences between girls and boys and between racial and ethnic minority and majority girls involved in the 8 JDC/RF programs.

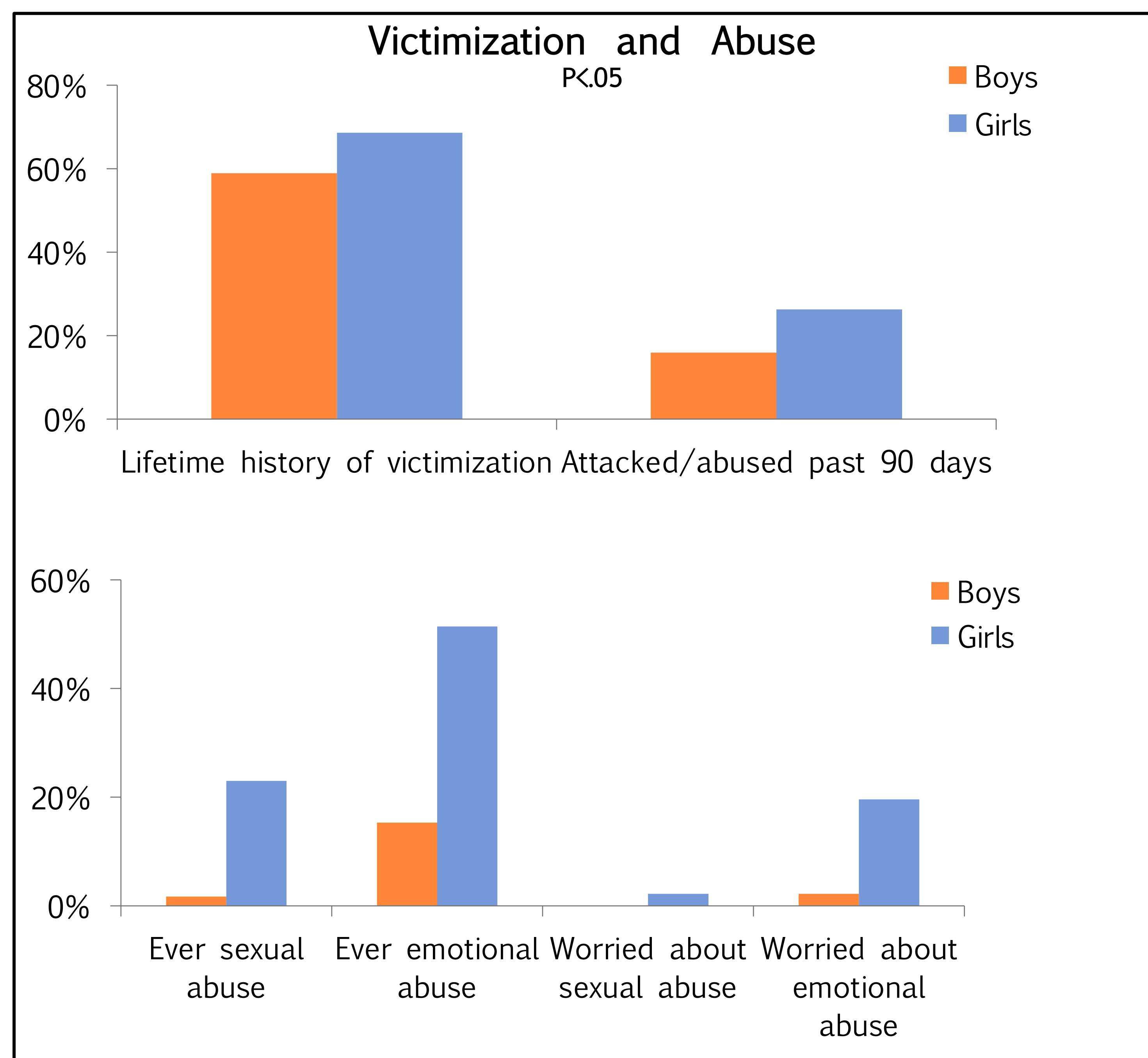
## Results

784 adolescents (76.3% boys) enrolled in the selected JDC/RF programs. A larger percentage of the girls were 11-14 years of age (14.5%) compared to boys (9.5%).

### Gender Differences

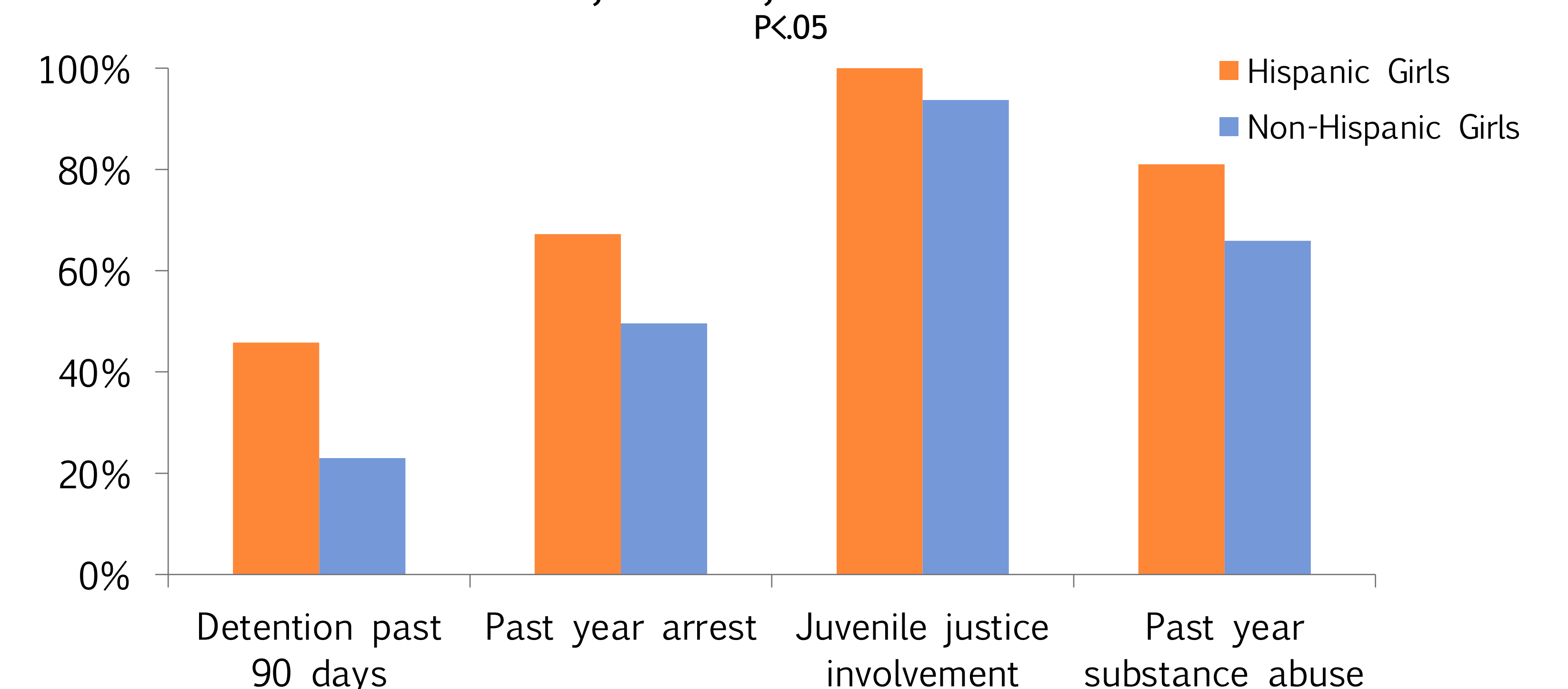
	Boys	Girls	p
<b>Race</b>			
Caucasian/White	36.1%	53.2%	<.001
Multiracial	6.9%	9.1%	2.99
African American/Black	17.7%	8.1%	.001
Other	3.0%	4.8%	.233
None of the Above (usually Latin@)	36.3%	24.7%	.004
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Hispanic/Latin@	43.1%	31.9%	.007

	Boys	Girls	p
Ever homeless	45.3%	64.5%	<.001
Past year drug dependence	60.3%	71.6%	.005
Opioid use (past 90 days)	7.9%	16.7%	<.001
Meth use (past 90 days)	6.9%	26.5%	<.001
Non-meth stimulant use (past 90 days)	6.1%	14.6%	.001
Mood disorder NOS	22.6%	49.5%	<.001



### Racial/Ethnic Differences Among Girls

#### Detention, Arrest, Substance Abuse



	Majority	Minority	p
Weekly drug use in community	47.1%	78.0%	.005
Opioid use past 90 days	22.2%	10.3%	.030
Attacked or abused past 90 days	35.4%	16.1%	.003
Ever sexually abused	28.9%	16.3%	.044
Ever emotionally abused	62.6%	38.4%	.001
Both external and internal mental health problems past year	59.6%	43.7%	.030
In detention past 90 days	24.2%	37.9%	.044

## Conclusion

Consistent with past research<sup>1,6-7</sup>, our findings indicate that girls experience higher rates of drug dependence, opioid use, homelessness, victimization, mood disorders, and victimization and abuse compared to boys. Our findings also show that racial majority girls have higher opioid use and additional comorbidities. However, racial and ethnic minority girls are disproportionately more likely to experience arrest and detention. It is obvious that girls entering the JDC system are highly vulnerable individuals requiring an array of gender-appropriate services to deal with co-occurring disorders and integrated traumas. When gender-specific<sup>26</sup> and culturally-specific<sup>27</sup> treatment programs & services are available, recidivism decreases. Research is needed on the systemic factors that might result in the overuse of the juvenile justice system for racial and ethnic minority girls, and failure to address the treatment needs of racial and ethnic majority girls.

## References

Please see handout for full list of references

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