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FACT SHEET

October 2018

Evaluation of California's Girls' and CSEC Courts

In California, there are currently eleven girls' courts or CSEC courts. Girls' courts are juvenile courts that have a dedicated calendar and judge for girls in the juvenile justice system who have a history of trauma or exploitation, or may be at risk for these things. The goal of a girls' court is to have a different track from traditional delinquency court that recognizes these girls' unique and gender-specific risks and needs. The court focuses on providing services rather than on convictions or detentions. Similar to girls' courts are CSEC courts, which are specifically for survivors of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC), or sex trafficking. Survivors of CSEC may be any gender.

The Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) is conducting two evaluations of California's girls' courts. The first evaluation is an in-depth study of the Los Angeles's STAR Court (Succeed Through Achievement and Resilience), which is a unique program that started in early 2012 and has been nationally recognized. This evaluation will examine the court's processes, outcomes, and effectiveness. The second evaluation will focus on the additional girls' and CSEC courts in California to examine their processes and team approaches. This process evaluation of the remaining courts will assist in gaining a better understanding of these court types, successful practices, and how they may be replicated. There is only one published study on these types of courts, while there is an increasing interest in research in this area.

Objectives

The main objectives of the STAR court outcomes evaluation include the following:

- Explore the progress of the STAR court toward meeting its goals and having a positive impact on court participants as determined by specific outcomes;
- Describe the process of the STAR court; and
- Identify specific aspects of the girls' court that are particularly beneficial.

The main objectives of the girls' court process evaluation include the following:

- Describe the process of girls' courts;
- Identify specific aspects of the court models that are particularly beneficial; and
- Identify what stakeholders see as model practices for jurisdictions that are interested in program replication.

Girls' Courts Defined

Girls' courts are juvenile courts that have a dedicated calendar and judge for young offenders who may be exploited or suffered from trauma. Some girls' courts are for any at-risk girl who enters the juvenile delinquency system while others are specifically for girls or boys at risk of being involved with CSEC (Commercial Sexually Exploited Children). Girls' courts apply collaborative justice principles to combine judicial supervision with intensive social and treatment services to at-risk girls in lieu of detention. These collaborative justice principles include a multidisciplinary, nonadversarial team approach with involvement from justice system representatives, mental health providers, specialized trauma services, and other support systems in the community. The goal of a girls' court is to have an alternative track for female offenders that recognizes their unique and gender-specific risks and needs. This track, like other collaborative courts, is meant to hold girls accountable for their actions while building on their strengths and reconnecting them with healthy relationships and behaviors. Each girls' court may operate slightly differently from one another, but all follow collaborative justice principles of combining judicial supervision, often on a weekly or biweekly basis, with intensive social and treatment services to at-risk girls or girls who have been victimized or exploited.

Evaluation Implementation

The evaluation of the STAR court will focus on processes, outcomes, and effectiveness. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected. Process data will be collected through interviews, focus groups, and court observation. Outcomes will be measured using a pre-post design by comparing participants' recidivism rates, trauma symptoms, and overall well-being, as defined by the researchers, before entering the girls' court to those variables at two points after leaving the girls' court. Researchers will also obtain a matched comparison group from the juvenile delinquency system in Los Angeles County.

The process evaluation of the remaining girls' courts in California will utilize qualitative data consisting of interviews, focus groups, and court observation. The interviews and focus groups will discuss court teams' experiences and thoughts about specific aspects of the girls' court establishment and process.

For both evaluations, the researchers will examine themes such as the model used by the court, who the court primarily serves, eligibility requirements, referral processes, how the court serves its participants, and differences in case processing between the girls' court and traditional delinquency court.

Data Distribution

Upon completion of these studies, CFCC staff will compile a report of the findings. This report will be available to all of California's juvenile court stakeholders and will be posted on the Judicial Council's website.

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Additional resources:

For additional information about girls' courts, please visit

<http://www.courts.ca.gov/37353.htm>

For additional information about the Los Angeles STAR Court, please visit

<http://www.courts.ca.gov/27693.htm>