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AN EXAMINATION OF THE UTILIZATION OF PROGRAMMING FOR FEMALE  
DELINQUENCY PREVENTION IN JAMAICA

A Dissertation

By

REGAN R. REID

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Prairie View A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2023

Major Subject: Juvenile Justice

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Approved as to style and consent by:

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December 2023

Major Subject: Juvenile Justice

## **ABSTRACT**

An Examination of the Utilization of Programming for Female Delinquency Prevention  
in Jamaica

(December 2023)

Regan R. Reid, B.Sc., University of the West Indies, Mona;

M.Sc., University of the West Indies, Mona

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Camille Gibson

Little to no academic inquiry has examined interventions targeting girls involved in the justice system in Jamaica. This qualitative study asked: (1) How do girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization? (2) How does the justice system respond to girl offenders who have also been victims? (3) What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica? (4) What programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law? (5) How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)? (6) What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome? The findings are from in-depth interviews with juvenile justice practitioners and former girls of the justice system recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. Data were manually coded, organized, and analyzed to discover concepts, themes, and patterns. The results indicated that the existing programming needs to be revised because they are not

an ideal match to the needs of the girls. Despite the girls' expressed interest in change, their limited responsiveness to current programming underscores the urgency of adapting interventions to better align with their unique circumstances and requirements.

Furthermore, mental health services must be more available, relevant, and readily offered, along with effective reintegration assistance. The results present a case for gender-focused delinquency prevention efforts and policies that guide the administration of juvenile justice in Jamaica.

***Keywords:*** Jamaican girls, programming, female delinquency prevention, reintegration, feminism, victim-offender overlap, Jamaica, qualitative methods, thematic analysis

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to the little girls in Jamaica who are unseen, unloved, interrupted, and silenced and all the people doing a thankless job of loving, protecting, and caring for them.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was possible because I have been “carried high and raised up by giants” (Bernard of Chartres, d. c.1130). To them, I owe a debt of gratitude for supporting my dreams and aiding my personal and professional growth over the years. Thank you all for being a part of my story, and may you be proud of the difference you have made in me.

First, I would like to thank Professor Christopher Charles for his early support during my undergraduate experience, as he taught me the importance of interdisciplinary work and scholarship. Your valuable insights and thoughtful critiques shaped my academic and professional values. I carry them with me throughout my career. To the entire Department of Government at the University of the West Indies, Mona, but especially to Professor Eris Schoburgh, I acknowledge the impact of your mentorship, which kept me grounded amid adversity. Most importantly, I thank you for nurturing within me the values of devotion and service to others. Indeed, it takes a big heart to shape young minds. I am blessed to have experienced your big heart.

I am eternally grateful to those who influenced my post-graduate experience at Prairie View A&M University. First, I extend gratitude to Dr. Camille Gibson, my fellow alumna and dissertation chair, who worked diligently with me, extending patience and showing confidence in my capabilities. I thank you for caring enough to be consistent. In times of uncertainty, your guidance provided clarity, and your support has been a source of strength in moments of self-doubt. I feel truly fortunate to have someone as knowledgeable, generous, and supportive as you in my corner. Without a doubt, your expertise and guidance were indispensable in making this dissertation possible.

Moreover, thank you to the members who served on my dissertation committee. To Dr. Jackson, your class on *Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Juvenile Justice* helped me see new possibilities for research not yet explored. The quality of my work reflects the lessons I have learned from you. Dr. Ouassini, your willingness to share your expertise, answer my questions, and offer valuable insights profoundly impacted my journey. Thank you for being a source of inspiration for me. Dr. Salami, I appreciate your dedication and enthusiasm for our conversations. Your expertise and passion for psychology contributed to me expanding my perspectives regarding multidisciplinary interventions.

Overall, to the Department of Justice Studies and the professors who allowed me to express myself authentically: Dr. Ash-Houchen, Dr. Cihan, Dr. Chism, and Dr. Rembert, you empowered me to push the boundaries of knowledge. I thank each of you for being generous with your time and insights. To Dr. Sesha Kethineni, your impact on my research practice is immeasurable. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from someone as experienced and dedicated as you. Mrs. Siegmund, I appreciate you for always staying on top of things. You helped me with all my educational resources and teaching supplies. I know I could always count on you to keep me informed. Indeed, you are a gem. To my Head of Department, Dr. Myrna Cintron, thank you for your willingness to step in and ensure that my classes continued when I traveled to further my research. It did not go unnoticed. Thank you for being supportive and instrumental in my professional development. To Dr. Kouassi and the Texas Juvenile Crime Prevention Center, thank you for allowing me to contribute to research projects and collaborate with great minds like Dr. Broadus and Dr. Ashton. These opportunities enhanced my research



skills and provided valuable insights into my field. To Dr. Lorna Grant, thank you for consistently providing support. I could reach out anytime, and you were always available to converse and willing to share your knowledge.

Most of all, I express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents for instilling a resilient foundation that has fueled the pursuit of my goals with unwavering boldness. Also, I express my most profound appreciation to my partner, Antonio, and my confidants, Vondane and Micah. Words cannot explain my gratitude to you and your families for welcoming me into your homes and hearts and adopting me as your daughter. My love for you is eternal. To Howard, Mercedes, Monique, the Martins, and Jameel, your confidence in me fueled me to persevere. Thank you for providing the support I can always depend on. I am grateful to my Prairie View extended family, Dayanand, Neha, Trudy, Kitty, DJ, and Ash, for their unwavering support and friendship. I will always carry your love with me. To Dahlia, you offered me immense support and friendship throughout my research pursuits and helped me navigate my new “home.” I dedicate my work to you in honor of your memory. Also, thank you for blessing my life with Kobe. Playing and walking with him between writing to clear my head kept me calm and composed through the ups and downs.

To the practitioners and girls who trusted me as their voice, I express my gratitude for your lasting contribution to my work. But, above all, I express my gratitude to God Almighty. I credit this achievement to His grace and favor, as without them, it would not have been possible.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Within the Caribbean, there is some concern that the juvenile justice system is indisputably male-centered, rendering girls and female offending neglected and often invisible (Block et al., 2010; Leslie, 2022; Morris, 1987; Weekes et al., 2019)<sup>1</sup>. This concern includes Jamaica, given a significant increase in court caseloads featuring an upsurge in girls' violent offenses since 2008 (Department of Correctional Services, Jamaica, 2008; Hunter, 2014). In Jamaica, this increase in aggression and violence signals a departure from traditional and cultural expectations of femininity (Hunter, 2014; Lewis et al., 2019). Thus, girls engaging in delinquency attract labels such as "purposefully violent" and "acting with criminal intent" (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 95). Behind these potentially incriminating labels are the officers making the arrest and the media shaping what the public thinks about "bad girls" and how they should be regulated and punished.

With the increasing violence taking its toll on the public, more Jamaicans are contending with the fact that females are just as capable of aggression and maintaining a life of crime that rivals that of males (Lewis et al., 2019; Wallace, 2013a). However, there is no clear understanding of why this is happening or how well the justice system has responded to the present issue. In recognizing this gap, this study examined the extent to which those involved in Jamaica's justice system perceived that the island's response to female delinquency was effective.

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This dissertation follows the style of the *American Psychological Association, 7th Ed.*

## **Background of the Study**

With an estimated population of almost 3 million, Jamaica, the largest English-speaking (anglophone) island in the Caribbean, is grappling with rising delinquency among girls (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2022). Stakeholders believe this trend could precariously shape the fate of successive generations (Hunter, 2014; Robinson, 2018) as more of Jamaica's adolescents are being drawn into or enticed by a life of crime (Hibbert, 2021). According to Ranga and Kavita (2021), “juvenile delinquency is an indicator of a country’s overall morality and law and order” (p. 17). Therefore, this study assumed two positions. First, the rising and falling rates of female delinquency correspond with broader sociocultural factors in Jamaica that reinforce girls’ antisocial behaviors. Second, programming, that is, care, protection and rehabilitation, where they may exist, is inadequate in preventing and controlling female offending.

Researchers have theorized female offending from various perspectives that might provide insight into different possibilities for the Jamaican justice system. However, given the differences in cultures, norms, and values, selectively exporting these perspectives to the Jamaican context might be helpful when attempting to explain crime and security issues. For example, the United States literature assessing female delinquency has consistently found that alongside experiences with trauma, emotional, physical, and sexual childhood abuse, neglect, substance abuse, mental health challenges, family dysfunction, and delinquent peers, differential social controls have also impacted girls in conflict with the law (Cauffman et al., 2015; Chesney-Lind et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2012; Odem & Schlossman, 1991; OJJDP, 2010). The latter implies that the social



control of girls perceived as deviant arises from stereotypical conceptions of femininity and the behaviors that are perceived to threaten it.

The assumption that the authorities control girls differentially in the United States, based on gender, seems similar in the Jamaican context, where many stakeholders refuse to acknowledge that females, also, commit to criminal or delinquent roles. Within some institutions, responses to female offending are conditioned in part by deeply gendered conceptions portraying females only as victims who require protection from violent or predatory men (Grant et al., 2011; Malcolm, 2021). These gendered perceptions emerge as a significant obstacle in enrolling delinquent and at-risk girls into appropriate preventative programs before confinement, during confinement, and even after release from correctional facilities.

Underestimating female criminality not only precipitates gender bias within the criminal and juvenile justice systems but also signals a reactive focus that overlooks proactive and preventive possibilities that acknowledge female agency in law-breaking despite victimization. As new challenges arise, responding to females only peripherally manifests as less-than-wholesome and inhibits the nation's fight against crime. Overall, the long-held commitment to addressing the behaviors of boys more so than girls is not ideal for treatment nor successful community reentry when female offenders are released into society, particularly when they require consistent support beyond their direct involvement with the juvenile justice system (Cauffman et al., 2015).

### **Children in Conflict with the Law in Jamaica**

In Jamaica, children, those under 18 years old, who become system-involved fall under two categories: (1) in need of care and protection or (2) in conflict with the law

(Grant et al., 2011). According to the Child Care and Protection Act (2004), Section 8 subsections 1 and 2, the state considers that a child requires care and protection when they do not have a parent or guardian, has an unfit parent or guardian, is without proper care and guardianship, is exposed to moral danger, for example when there are no discernable means of subsistence, wandering, or begging, is vulnerable to negative associations, is beyond the control of their parent or guardian, or is living in circumstances which put their physical or mental health at risk of severe impairment. In contrast, a child identified as being in conflict with the law must confront accusations or suspicions of having committed an offense (UNICEF, 2006).

### **The Victim-Offender Overlap**

It is common for children needing care and protection to become children in conflict with the law, given that youth offending and victimization derive from similar substantive reasons (Baglivio, 2018; 2020; Baglivio & Epps, 2016; Baglivio et al., 2014; Berg & Schreck, 2022; Piquero et al., 2005). Thus, acquiring a deeper understanding of girls' propensity for delinquency in Jamaica requires empirical knowledge about the link between their offending and victimization (Godsoe, 2022; Lauritsen & Laub, 2007). Based on criminological research emerging out of the United States and Europe, criminal/delinquency involvement increases the risk of victimization and victimization - experienced frequently and violently - increases the risk of offending (Daigle & Muftic, 2016; Piquero et al., 2005; Reingle, 2014).

From a practical standpoint, the victim-offender overlap acknowledges that some children could be concurrently involved in the child protection and juvenile justice systems or that they cross over (Randall et al., 2015) to one jurisdiction after having prior

contact with the other. Typically, crossover children shift from the child protection system into the juvenile justice system after they have committed an offense while in the care and custody of the state (Herz et al., 2010). Global perspectives indicate that crossover children represent an especially vulnerable but often overlooked subpopulation within both systems (Kolivoski et al., 2017). Thus, while examining delinquency prevention programming for girls, this study also made an original attempt at exploring the intersection between victimization and offending among females in Jamaica. Acknowledging that some girls' offending behaviors could be unaffected by their victimization (Berg & Schreck, 2022) and victimization experiences sometimes initiate desistance (Lauritsen & Laub, 2007), a discussion of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) makes a practical starting point, particularly given that the overlap is evident even in controlled settings, such as in juvenile facilities (Daquin & Daigle, 2021).

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**

Felitti et al. (1998) first introduced the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to account for the various negative and potentially traumatic events occurring in a person's childhood that contribute to poor health outcomes in adulthood (Yohros, 2022; van der Kolk, 2014). Since its introduction, researchers have actively explored the relationship between ACEs and their various effects on juvenile offending, including more recently, the recurrence of juvenile offenses (Baglivio et al., 2014; Flaherty et al., 2013; Logan-Greene et al., 2016; Kowalski, 2019; Wolff & Baglivio, 2017; Wolff et al., 2017) with some speculation that cumulative exposure to ACEs constitutes poorer outcomes for adolescents. Although research exploring the association between ACEs and juvenile offending in Jamaica is limited, research on child development has generally

shown that children's exposure to abuse, violence, household substance abuse, and neglect can compound their risk for violent victimization, conduct disorders, and prolonged justice involvement (Baglivio et al., 2015; 2018; CDC, 2023; Sherfinski et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the role of ACEs in female offending is a necessary step for early intervention and prevention efforts in Jamaica. However, addressing the problem of girls' delinquency more holistically necessitates a deeper understanding of the cumulative exposure to adverse events in the wards' early life.

Proceeding from extensive research in the United States, Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998) contended that one of the earliest warning signs of female delinquency was status offending. Usually, girls often begin truanting, running away from home, or acting uncontrollably before committing more serious offenses. Based on their study's findings, they argued that the genesis for both status offending and delinquency in girls was abuse from inside the home (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998), which draws attention to the family and living situations that present some form of risk for the girls. This finding seems applicable to Jamaica, given the overrepresentation of girls with similar demographic profiles, including age, education, and living status, appearing before the courts (ESSJ, 2017 - 2022).

### ***ACEs Among Jamaican Girls***

As a result of the growing proportion of chronically disruptive girls (Hunter, 2014) and girls in need of care and protection on the island (DCS, 2020; PIOJ, 2020), various campaigns have increased pressure on the government to invest in psychosocial treatment. This thrust toward child-focused interventions is rooted in stakeholders' concerns that girls' "bad" behaviors predicate upon their victimization experiences and

unresolved traumas. Particularly for girls residing in volatile and vulnerable communities, one obvious precursor to their delinquency is running away from their homes to limit their exposure to violence and susceptibility to, among other things, sexual and physical abuse, gang recruitment, and gang activities (Grant et al., 2011; Jonas, 2021). The issue of running away, however, has been raised in many studies as an antecedent of female delinquency in the United States and Canada (Belknap et al., 1997; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). In a study of children in conflict with the law samples, Grant and colleagues suggested that running away from home was a first step in dropping out of school, getting pregnant early, and getting involved with older men on whom they depended for subsistence (Grant et al., 2011). Research findings from Grant et al.'s (2011) assessment support earlier research, such as that conducted by Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998), focused on the female status offender and the circumstances that convert her into a delinquent.

In hindsight, many of the nation's children could be at risk of early system involvement because of their exposure to abuse or violent victimization (ESSJ, 2017 - 2021; Grant et al., 2011; Small, 2023). This observation is based on the recent spike in child abuse reports across the island despite suspected underreporting of abuse incidents (ESSJ, 2020; Hutchinson, 2022). In 2022, the National Children's Registry documented an 85% increase in the reports of child abuse between January and March, from 2276 to 4211 cases, compared to the corresponding months in the previous year (Hutchinson, 2022; National Children's Registry, 2022). While research from other locations indicate that providing educational and support services early to child abuse victims and parents, even during pregnancy, could improve the caregiving environment and prevent juvenile

offending altogether (Seitz & Apfel, 1994), local discussions pivot around strengthening prosecution for those who victimize children (Small, 2023). Nevertheless, additional research is needed to determine if similarly focused programs would be equally effective for Jamaican families.

Awareness of ACEs reinforces the researcher's concern that Jamaica's justice system criminalizes girls whose behaviors might be symptomatic of their victimization (Sherman & Balck, 2015; Saar et al., 2015). In other words, a child needing services might become system-involved due to unmet needs and unresolved traumas. Therefore, early system involvement can lead to worse behaviors in this situation, as children are likely to grow more morose and withdrawn when removed from their families, schools, and communities (Chesney-Lind, 1989). From a social justice standpoint, these insights emphasize that criminalizing disadvantage for some girls can hinder their rehabilitation experience (Pillsbury, 2019).

Even more worrying are the caveats within the law that endorse the incarceration of children who seem to be beyond the control of their parents or guardians (Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2018; Child Care and Protection Act, 2004). Notably, Section 24 of the Child Care and Protection Act (2004) has come under strict scrutiny in the past for permitting the confinement of "uncontrollable" children who, for example, run away from home or hit their parents (Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2018; Grant et al., 2011, p. 31). Over the years, the number of girls appearing before the courts for uncontrollable behavior and disorderly conduct remained high despite criticism that the offense of being "uncontrollable" is ambiguous and imprecise (Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2018). This finding of legal ambiguity suggests that the courts may

have been interpreting and applying the law arbitrarily despite international stipulations for clear rules, for example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; 1991) regarding juvenile detention (Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2018; UN, 2014). Such violations raise suspicion of the court's prerogative as it relates to delinquent girls and give attention to sentencing disparities that might have gone unchecked in the past.

### **Girls' Offenses Between 2017 - 2021**

In terms of prevalence, the court labeled 799 girls uncontrollable between 2017 and 2021 (see Appendix B). However, the South Camp Juvenile Remand and Correctional Center (SCJRCC) admitted only a few girls who had received correctional orders. Other girls committed to the South camp facility during that period had been adjudicated delinquent for other offenses, including but not limited to wounding/assault/assault occasioning bodily harm, robbery, arson, breaching the firearm law, and minor and other delinquencies (ESSJ, 2021; 2022). Separate from custodial sentencing, judges might also impose community-based sanctions, including community service, probation, or supervision orders, to shield girls from the trauma of being institutionalized and deter them from forming hostile peer relations with more serious delinquents (Austin et al., 2005).

### ***Population of Girls Admitted to the South Camp Facility in Jamaica***

Approximately 51 girls are in the system annually, although there is a capacity for 164 (DCS, 2019; MNS, 2019). Regarding admissions to juvenile facilities in Jamaica, the Economic and Social Survey (2017 – 2021) distinguished between girls remanded by the courts and those served with correctional orders, that is, those who were sentenced, to remain at the South Camp Juvenile Detention and Remand Center for a period not

exceeding three years. Reporting on the juvenile population over four years, the DCS found that in 2017, 34% of the total adolescent population appearing before the courts were girls (n = 835). Of this total, the court served 17 girls with correctional orders and remanded 20.

In 2018, girls (n = 866) accounted for the same percentage (34%) of juveniles appearing before the courts, 37 of whom the court remanded to the juvenile facility. However, in 2019, the DCS reported a four percent increase from 866 girls to 902 girls appearing before the courts, resulting in the court serving 29 with correctional orders and putting 25 on remand. In 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the data revealed a 47% decrease from 902 to 477 in the number of girls appearing before the courts. Of this total, the court served 27 girls with correctional orders and placed 31 on remand. Records indicated a six percent increase from 477 to 504 girls in 2021, with 16 girls sentenced and 22 girls put on remand (see Appendix C).

A comparison of girls appearing before the courts and those admitted to juvenile facilities reveals a rigid dichotomy, which suggests that many involved with the justice system have benefitted from services that divert them from it (DCS, 2020). Practitioners would likely engage girls diverted from the justice system through alternative dispositions with programming, a range of supports, and added supervision. For example, programming under the Victim Services Division (VSD) in 2020 provided therapeutic interventions to address trauma for 603 girls out of 681 juveniles who interfaced with the justice system (DCS, 2020; Ministry of Justice, 2022). There is no evidence indicating that the courts are resolving cases through pre-arrest diversion, which could provide girls with an opportunity to connect with behavioral health programs or services instead of



confinement. This gap is worth exploring to clarify what happens to girls not confined to juvenile facilities following their court appearances. This study sought to address this knowledge gap.

### **COVID- 19**

The fluctuating population of girls entering the system in recent years followed disruptions in the national security and justice sectors created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disturbances in the delivery of support services and lockdown measures furthered the disadvantage of children at risk (ESSJ, 2020; 2021). Despite the new and lingering effects of the pandemic, the reasons girls appeared before the courts in 2020 and beyond remained unchanged from previous years (ESSJ, 2020). While the total number of girls making court appearances seemed to have decreased in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the demonstrated increase the following year suggests that girls within the custodial population, that is, held on remand or sentenced, were still in need of services and potentially more so since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unavailability of any disaggregated data for 2022 prevents further examination of how the numbers might have changed in the last year. Further, data on girls' offenses in the current year were unattainable, given that the 2023 reporting period ends on December 31st. Thus, the present study was limited to reporting girls' offenses until 2021. A comprehensive evaluation of program efficacy, therefore, demands research examining girl offending and recidivism patterns in Jamaica. It is instructive to understand what proportion of girls who exited the juvenile facility were subsequently sentenced to the Fort Augusta Adult Correctional Center - the island's only prison for

females until a recent relocation. Examining recidivism rates among girls may be worthwhile to measure the nature and scope of program success or failure.

### **Juvenile Facilities in Jamaica**

An overarching concern about juvenile facilities in Jamaica is their capacity to sufficiently address the needs of girls and respond to their problematic behaviors. Historically, practitioners and academics alike have been dubious that these facilities are conducive to or create opportunities for rehabilitative care (Caribbean Policy and Research Institute, 2018; McLean et al., 2009). Focusing on the nature of state care facilities in Jamaica, including children's homes and places of safety, the Keating report (2003) confirmed that several wards were fearful and insecure about their unpreparedness to exit care or capacity for productivity upon release from the facilities they stayed in. Other findings highlighted a series of sexual and other forms of abuse against wards and institutional neglect of those wards who experienced suicidal ideations.

Regarding aftercare, the report documented the challenges wards faced when transitioning from state care into independent living situations, particularly those with a disability. Undoubtedly, the review provided prescriptive advice for practice, policy, and research, including, among other things, inconsistencies with communication and record keeping and tracer studies to follow ex-wards' progress post-release. The Keating report (2003) indicated an urgency for overhauling the system and improving the overall conditions of state care. Based on the recognition that the government of Jamaica had failed to uphold its duty of care for the nation's children, the report represented an overture for mobilizing systemic changes through public pressure.

Separate from the Keating review, few reports have generated public pressure for systemic changes regarding the treatment of girls involved with the judicial system (Grant et al., 2011; Hunter, 2014). According to the IACHR (2012), “disturbing accounts” (p. 87) that juvenile facilities in Jamaica were repressive, dehumanizing, and non-rehabilitative signaled an urgent need to reform the justice system. Interviews with children, government agencies, staff, and law enforcement also yielded qualitative insights into the little regard that juvenile facilities paid to the psychosocial needs and long-term development of youth wards.

In a 1999 report prepared for the Government of Jamaica by the Human Rights Watch titled *Nobody’s Children*, systematic investigations exposed that many of the nation’s children experienced detention in egregious settings, revealing human rights and other abuses. For example, children underwent confinement in overcrowded cells with urine-covered floors and virtually no ventilation alongside adults. In addition, detainees were denied access to medical care despite serious public health risks (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Although legislative changes greatly improved conditions in lockups for children in conflict with the law over the past decade, there is evidence suggesting that girls in conflict with the law are still confined to ill-equipped and understaffed facilities with limited programming to encourage their rehabilitation (Hunter, 2014).

In the past, several girls were comingled with women in the women’s prison, Fort Augusta, before being relocated to the renovated South Camp juvenile facility in 2013 (Jamaica Information Service, 2013). Inappropriately detaining girls in adult lockups, such as this, significantly increased their risk of institutional, physical, and sexual abuse (Humans Right Watch, 1994; Hunter, 2014). Nevertheless, for girls on remand, that is,

those awaiting trial, it was not uncommon for them to spend longer than the intended initial placement term, where they risked undermining their mental well-being given the uncertainty of the outcome of their case (Hunter, 2014). Today, improvements in the overall conditions of detention and the quality of rehabilitation programming make offenders less averse to prevention and rehabilitation efforts (Freemon et al., 2020; Leslie, 2022).

Notwithstanding these advancements in the correctional system, Jamaican society shows scant progress in preventing juvenile delinquency overall. This argument suggests that the increase in girls' delinquency results from the country's limited productive capacity for crime prevention. Instead of targeting the "root causes" of delinquency, law enforcement practices have involved an overreliance on arresting and prosecuting at-risk girls and those caught in "an irregular situation" (UNICEF, 2006, p. 1) for the sake of *protecting* them. In this regard, the differential experience of social controls imposed upon girls will likely motivate their delinquency (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994), undermining the system's high resolve. To that end, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) wrestles with (1) decoupling the idea of protection from punishment for girls and (2) analyzing what specific factors within Jamaican society are particularly criminogenic for females. It is only when fully committed to these responsibilities that the correctional system can effectively respond to the unique needs of girls who offend.

In Jamaica, the state established juvenile facilities to provide troubled youth between the ages of 12 and 18 with a structured environment and educational and behavioral services to facilitate their development and reintegration (DCS, 2019). This focus was contingent upon the fact that the volatility of many Jamaican communities

contributed to a public perception of a decline in both social support and social control. For example, Grant et al. (2011) documented that juvenile justice practitioners described volatility as innate to garrison communities and inner-city environments in which children and their families experienced high-stress conditions but limited exposure to life's possibilities. Stress in these communities resulted from inadequate funds and marijuana use, which precipitated violence and the exploitation of children by adult criminals. Thus, juvenile facilities and programming for youth became pivotal in addressing these growing and multifaceted challenges through rehabilitation and support.

### **A Postmodernist View of Programming in Female Facilities**

In a postmodern era, programming remains largely antagonistic, given the competing demands for security in a correctional facility and therapeutic practice (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). According to Carlen and Worrall (2004), progressive feminist urgings for women to exercise personal agency translated into programming that responsabilized females by making them accountable for their behavioral choices and the circumstances that led to them. Ultimately, prison staff expected women to be responsible for helping themselves (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). Hence, British politician Jack Straw's argument that "prison doesn't work, but we will make it work" (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, p. 20) was a catalyst for developing several programs inside female facilities that neglected the inmates' needs despite their experiences of multiple marginalities outside prison (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). Examining the literature revealed a similar concern for girls in Jamaican custodial care settings.

## **Problem Statement**

Tackling juvenile delinquency requires implementing programs that manage youth accused or found guilty of committing an offense, as well as initiatives focused on preventing the development of delinquent behavior (Institute of Medicine, 2001). Thus, the problem for this study was to describe the specific needs of girls, what programs or services exist for delinquent girls, and to assess how well (or not) these programs are working. Historically, boys have received more attention as both perpetrators and victims of violence in Jamaica. Hence, the current system's response, including the design of policy and programming, privileges their treatment needs, with minimal consideration for and understanding of the unique circumstances of girls (ESSJ, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Given that system response is directly related to girls' offending patterns, girls' reactions to androcentric treatment require separate research to inform planning and programming that meet girls' treatment needs. In Jamaica, research evaluating the effectiveness of treatment modalities for at-risk and delinquent girls is sparse. Nevertheless, to understand the ever-increasing number of girls in the care of the state's correctional system, including girls in children's homes, detention or remand centers, and places of safety across the island, it is essential to delve into the Jamaican conceptions and correlates of girls' delinquency and the approaches that appear [un]successful in reducing it.

## **Research Purpose and Questions**

In a high-crime society such as Jamaica, the correctional system must contribute to improving public safety. This contribution demands greater attention to girls because

they are an increasing share of youth in conflict with the law. The lack of understanding of the causes of female delinquency further complicates the rehabilitation of girls in conflict with the law. Beyond such observations, juvenile correctional facilities in Jamaica are egregiously ill-equipped to meet the needs of girls who become entangled with the legal system because of limited financial, human, and material resources (UNICEF - Situation Analysis of Jamaican Children, 2018). Indeed, there is a need for both proactive and reactive efforts to stop girls at risk of coming into conflict with the law from taking that trajectory. This study, however, was limited to exploring programs and services for girls who encountered legal issues and have stayed in custodial care settings.

This qualitative study asked: (1) How do girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization? (2) How does the justice system respond to girl offenders who have also been victims? (3) What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica? (4) What programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law? (5) How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)? (6) What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome?

Without a context-specific focus, researchers are more likely to make erroneous conclusions in defining and describing the nature of female delinquency and the treatment modalities that work and are promising. These faulty conclusions could, in turn, lead to precarious policies. Gaining idiosyncratic knowledge about the principles and practices in Jamaican culture requires an understanding of cultural stereotypes, social

attitudes, and motivations. Therefore, obtaining this knowledge concerning the response and treatment of girls in the justice system requires data from service providers and girls formerly recognized as “in conflict with the law.” This knowledge can clarify treatments and services provided to female delinquents, along with the treatment’s capacity for rehabilitating and promoting their effective reintegration.

### **Significance of the Study**

Two turning points in the attention on female delinquency in Jamaica have been the growing proportion of girls and women involved in the spate of violence on the island and public claims labeling girls as “so vicious [that] even the boys fear them” (Lewis et al., 2019, p.1). Nevertheless, academic research concerning female criminality and girls’ delinquency still lacks context. Specifically, information on the specific needs of girls aged 12 to 17, the programs that target them, and appraisals of the programs that serve them are scarce. Therefore, in reflecting on the limited knowledge in Jamaica, the researcher recognizes that system actors are limited in their understanding of female delinquency, which, in turn, undermines their efforts at preventing it. The current study explicitly addressed these gaps, among others.

Examining the utilization of programming for female delinquency prevention in Jamaica is crucial. Through programming, Jamaican girls can learn to regulate attitudes and behaviors deemed “unacceptable” by society. Developing and practicing self-regulation can, in turn, enhance their prospects of success within and outside the correctional system, as their commitment to positive attitudes can steer them away from deviant behavior. This study offers prescriptive advice for practitioners on improving



program effectiveness and informing decisions about future program development to achieve more positive outcomes for girls.

Finally, from a policy perspective, this study provides insights into how stakeholders can conceptualize issues regarding at-risk girls. For instance, focusing on delinquency prevention programming for girls in Jamaica may help identify their unique needs and the behavioral patterns that initially fostered their delinquency. There is also potential for creating universal policies regarding incarcerated females and those who return to the system after their release. The knowledge obtained here may put Jamaica on a path to becoming a model for reforming juvenile justice policy in other Caribbean nations.

The insights gained from both girls' experiences and practitioners' perceptions of the needs of girls in Jamaica's juvenile facilities should inform social justice efforts. Given the influence of females on the success of their families, their offspring, and their communities, insights toward rehabilitating girls in conflict with the law should have far-reaching and even intergenerational impacts. Thus, giving voices to girls and system employees is an initial step in documenting what appears useful and areas needing improvement.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Categories of Delinquency Prevention

**Primary prevention** – Prevention aimed at improving individuals' general well-being and addressing risk factors for delinquency (Carson, 2020).

**Secondary prevention** – Measures focused on children and youth at risk of becoming offenders or victims (Brantingham & Faust, 1976).

**Tertiary prevention** – Targeting offenders at risk of recidivism (Carson, 2020).

2. Children  
Anyone below the age of 18 years (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 1).
3. Children at risk of delinquency  
Children who are likely to be in danger because of their behavior (UNICEF, 2006)
4. Children in an irregular situation  
Children who are likely to be in danger from the environment in which they live (UNICEF, 2006).
5. Children in Conflict with the Law  
Anyone below the age of 18 years who comes into contact with the justice system because they have been suspected or accused of committing an offense (UNICEF, 2006).

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 6. Criminogenic needs   | These are circumstances that likely predispose children toward preliminary deviance and recidivism (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2001b).   |
| 7. Garrison communities | “Geographically discrete, fortified urban areas marked by poverty, gang violence, political manipulation and confrontational relationships with law enforcement institutions” (Mullings, 2019, p. 141). |
| 8. Juvenile delinquency | This behavior would be illegal when committed by a minor (a person under 18 years old) and criminal if committed by an adult (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2015).                                      |
| 9. Status offenses      | These behaviors are not punishable by law if committed by an adult (Grant et al., 2011) but are punishable for minors.  |

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter I outlined the nature of the problem, purpose, scope, and significance of the study. Chapter II formulates a theoretical framework and includes a review of the literature as it pertains to programs targeting delinquency prevention and recidivism reduction among young girls in Jamaica. Chapter III offers the research design, including sample, data collection, and data analysis methods. Chapter IV describes how the data

were analyzed and summarizes the study's findings in written (narrative) and tabular representations. Chapter V discusses the implications of the study's findings relative to the research questions.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Feminist Criminology Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework applied in this study was feminist criminology (Adler, 1975; Heidensohn, 2010), which provides propositions about (a) females' unique pathways into criminality, (b) program availability for female offenders, (c) the unique needs of females involved in the justice system, and (d) the means of responding to justice-involved females using exhaustible resources (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Most importantly, these propositions demonstrate that female offending results from multiple overlapping factors, including inadequate rehabilitative programming and attitudes regarding the [in]formality and imposition of social controls upon girls when their behaviors violate gender norms both inside and outside the facilities. Specifically, this discussion proceeds from second-wave feminist thought – given its concentration on the origins of female oppression and advancing women's rights – as a springboard for Caribbean perspectives on female offending.

#### **Second Wave Feminism (1960s and 1970s)**

In the postwar era, second-wave feminism gained traction by emphasizing women's equal rights, particularly addressing gender-based injustices arising from cultural and political disparities (Holmes, 2000; Pomrening, 2009). Consequently, feminists at the time, centered their advocacy and activism on reproductive rights and sexuality and advancing the *Equal Rights Amendment* (1972).

## **Consequences of Women's Liberation**

Twentieth-century sentiments about a decline in chivalry also seemed to causally associate women's liberation with girls' involvement in delinquency (Pollak, 1950). These sentiments fundamentally set the tone for narrowing the gender gap in crime and delinquency by focusing on women's roles in crime and the criminal justice system. On the one hand, Pollak's (1950) chivalry hypothesis portrayed the criminal justice system as male-dominated and axiomatically more "chivalrous" toward female offenders who were more likely than males to enjoy "lenient" sentencing. On the other hand, women's liberation theory in the 1960s – 1980s focused on radicalizing criminology to eliminate frameworks that reinforced gender biases. In this way, feminist intellectuals aimed to deconstruct traditional frameworks to reconstruct frameworks that engaged more critical methodologies (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Gelsthorpe, 2003). As a corollary effect of this radicalization, females are less likely to benefit from the benevolently sexist and paternalistic attitudes (Herzog & Oreg, 2008) that spared them from judgment in previous times. Today, females benefit from broadening rights that increase access to justice when those rights face neglect. For example, women's liberation triggered the criminalization of intimate partner violence – usually male-perpetrated – which can reduce the female's blame for crimes committed in that situation.

Knowing how girls enter the system is vital in designing programming to keep them away from it. According to Chesney-Lind and Sheldon (1992), penal policies and practices appear to be rooted in an antifeminist perspective that has mobilized risk discourses around girls through moral panic and by endorsing law enforcement's use of extreme measures while interacting with them. Criminologists and sociologists alike have

argued that girls who come in conflict with the law are disadvantaged because they get caught up in a male-dominated system that lacks the know-how to respond to them appropriately (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013; Richie et al., 2000). It is because of this unawareness that Richie et al. (2000) proposed that understanding girls as victims must precede understanding them as offenders as distinct circumstances expose them to beyond "normal" events that may derail their development (Widom, 1998).

Therefore, to ensure theoretical applicability, the researcher considered two pertinent questions measuring victimization that traditional methods fail to explore: (1) How do girls in conflict with the law experience victimization in Jamaica? (2) How does the justice system respond to girl offenders who have also been victims? Responses to these questions offer insights into how programming is done in Jamaica, thus allowing a more comprehensive examination of the study's remaining four research questions: (3) What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica? (4) What programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law? (5) How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)? (6) What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome?

Simmons (2002) addressed the concept of an "inherent duplicity of females" (p. 18) where blaming girls for their problems instead of providing them with anything but traditional gender scripts on how to behave during girlhood is normalized. Defying the gender script attracts punishment. As Denno (1994) proposed, girls are punished not just

for law-breaking but for defying gender expectations, in other words, being "doubly deviant." Policing girlhood (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008) in this way takes the focus away from providing girls with real opportunities to succeed and excludes the impact of trauma and victimization on the girls being "at-risk" for system involvement.

A feminist theoretical framework gives girls a voice in domains that once silenced them. Unlike traditional perspectives focusing primarily on males, a feminist researcher may argue that girls who direct aggression toward other girls could be frustrated with their powerlessness and the constant disapproval of being aggressive toward others. This type of relational aggression (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008) might clarify why so many girls who eventually come into conflict with the law in Jamaica are deemed "uncontrollable" and "disorderly" by the courts. The feminist pathways perspective offers a critical paradigm that attributes girls' involvement in delinquency to a history of childhood victimization and trauma (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). These adverse childhood experiences (ACES) push girls into committing "survival crimes" after they have run away from dysfunctional family settings (Chesney-Lind, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Okamoto, 2001). In Jamaica, approximately 64% of girls who came in conflict with the law in 2020 were girls deemed by the court to require care and protection (ESSJ, 2020).

According to feminist criminologists, most criminological theories are only marginally applicable to female offenders. By locating the problem of female delinquency within a feminist pathways perspective, the researcher was better able to address the causes and correlates of female offending, identify resource and programming needs, and examine girls' responsiveness to programming interventions (Andrews & Bonta, 1994) in Jamaica. A feminist theoretical framework enabled the researcher to explore



girls' experiences and issues in detail to offer insights into appropriate program designs for delinquency prevention.

### **Caribbean Feminism**

For Cain (2000), second-wave feminism neglected the concerns of Caribbean feminism. In rectifying this bias, Caribbean feminist scholarship explains the dynamics of criminalization, victimization, and offending for women and their experiences of the criminal justice system by giving attention to regional specificity (Binda, 1980; Cain, 1996; 2000; Evans & Kerrigan, 2019; Mohammed, 1994; Reddock, 1990).

Acknowledging the limited applicability of Western criminological theories to the Caribbean experience, feminist theorizing in the Caribbean involved critically and selectively absorbing lessons from Western criminology, aimed at challenging and ultimately replacing them with context-specific explanations (Cain, 2000). Appreciating and interrogating the cultural, economic, historical, and social context of the anglophone Caribbean makes for more socially progressive considerations of female offending, enabling Caribbean people, both girls and women, and systems to organize themselves more meaningfully (Myrie, 2023).

Although still developing, Caribbean feminist thought on crime and security centers on the relics of slavery and colonialism and their impact on gender and sexuality through global economic, political, and structural influences (Cain, 1990; 2000; Myrie, 2023). These feminisms explore the intersectionality between women's (gendered) experiences and proneness toward crime as they form within a broader cultural and socio-economic context. As a consequence of their activism against sexual offenses and gender-based violence, Caribbean feminist scholarship addresses child abuse and incest,

intimate partner violence, and sexual violence in the region (Binda, 1980; Cain, 1990; Dadds & Parsad, 1989; Gopaul & Cain, 1996; Mohammed, 1994; Reddock, 1990). Today, through an intersectional lens, Caribbean feminists contribute to legislative changes that support criminal and juvenile justice reform in islands such as Jamaica by challenging Colonial-era legislation (Evans & Kerrigan, 2019).

### **Overview of Female Delinquency in Jamaica**

Girls who eventually come in conflict with the law are committed to one of four juvenile correctional centers, South Camp Juvenile Detention and Remand Center and two places of safety, Homestead Place of Safety in St. Andrew and Granville Place of Safety in Trelawny. In the absence of female medium-security facilities (Leslie, 2022), girls who offend are required to serve their correctional orders at a maximum-security facility, that is, South Camp Juvenile Detention and Remand Center (SCJRC) which is the only detention center under the mandate of the Department of Correctional Services that accommodates girls. Other girls requiring care are likelier to spend time in girls' homes and places of safety, which fall under the regulatory responsibility of the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA).

### **Etiology of Female Delinquency in Jamaica**

One fundamental task of criminologists is to understand the specific etiologies, stability of, and changes in delinquent behavior over time to explain and prevent chronic delinquency, juvenile recidivism, and adult career offending. Beyond Jamaica, a series of qualitative and quantitative studies produced compelling evidence attributing girls' pathways to delinquency to several key psychosocial risks and needs which are substantively different from the risks and needs identified for male offenders (see

Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004; Richie, 1996; Van Wormer, 2010). Correlates of female delinquency commonly include a history of child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, family dysfunction, violence in the home, poverty, peer pressure, exposure to drugs including drug use and misuse, poor academic performance or school failure, unmet emotional and physical needs, or moral decay (Barlow, 2014; Dierkhising et al., 2013; Hunter, 2014; Moore et al., 2013; Patino et al., 2006).

In a case-control study of Jamaica, Patrickson (1996) explored predictors of female delinquency among Jamaican girls and contended that within the social context of Jamaica, drug use and abuse associated with gangs, father's absence, separation from mother, and violence in the home were the most common risks. Therefore, it would benefit the correctional system to understand the impact of extralegal factors, cognitive development, and contextual risks in selecting programs to address behaviors. Although these factors are relevant to interpreting statistical evidence of girls' arrests for various delinquent acts, emphasizing them in criminological research often precludes any attempt at a macro-level analysis of female delinquency as explanations for law-breaking are commonly relegated to deficiencies within the individual (McMahon, 1999).

Ward et al. (2017) conducted a Jamaica case study on youth, peace, and security and found that although most Jamaican children were non-violent, too many were disproportionately involved in violence perpetration (UNDP, 2012; Ward et al., 2017). After conducting a series of youth focus group discussions, Ward et al. (2017) contended that youth involvement in violence was attributable to various factors, including "attraction to the fast life," meaning that youth were particularly attracted to making easy money, becoming a "don" or area leader and enjoying the influence and prestige that

came with the title (p. 41). Other attributable factors included exposure to violence, a hostile community environment, unemployment, and unstable families (Ward et al., 2017). The discussants provided compelling narratives of a shortage of youth engagement opportunities directly linked to high unemployment levels and poor high school retention. Particularly in the 2015/2016 academic year, whereas 99.1% of girls enrolled in primary schools, only 85.6% attended school. Similarly, in secondary schools, also called high schools, although 98.7% registered in the 2015/2016 academic year, attendance figures dictated that approximately 17% only attained an educational level up to the ninth grade before dropping out, thus resulting in only 81.8 % of girls school attendance (Ward et al., 2017).

These figures are concerning because they emphasize a fundamental problem with school attendance and retention. Further, there is the presumption that many girls who drop out of the education system, lacking any qualifications, are at an increasing risk of becoming part of the “unattached” youth population - at risk of committing delinquent acts. According to the Planning and Project Development Division of HEART Trust-NTA (2009), the classification of “unattached youth” captures those between the ages of 14 – 24 years who are not engaged in any productive activity, that is, are “unemployed or outside the labor force, and not in school or training” (p. 1). Officially, the Jamaica Education Transformation Commission (2022) reported that poor academic outcomes, truancy, and inadequate skills training increased the likelihood of becoming unattached - not just from employment and school but also, perhaps most tellingly, hope and security.

From a series of interviews with practitioners in the justice and security systems, Grant et al. (2011) reported that the profile of girls in conflict with the law matched the

profile of boys in the system. However, notable gender differences included that girls in conflict with the law were more likely than boys to have grown up without their parents or in childcare facilities. Thus, girls' behaviors were often related to running away, sexual involvement, and truancy (Grant et al., 2011). Many of these girls had been alone for so long that they were unaccustomed to rules. The practitioners' narratives clarified that girls who became responsible for themselves from an early age, for reasons including poor parental relationship or inadequate parental supervision, were significantly more vulnerable to sexual and other types of criminal exploitation by men – usually in their families – which was likely to later manifest in prostitution, drug, and human trafficking, and early pregnancy (Grant et al., 2011). In addition, many of them had mental illnesses, were over-medicated, and were in urgent need of long-term counseling.

Counselors who participated in the study reported that counseling services were limited, although these girls required long-term counseling. The recommendation for more lasting counseling services reinforced some explanations practitioners offered for children's initial contact with the justice system. These explanations included envy, a desire to get rich quickly and to be trendy, low self-esteem, substance abuse, relationships with criminal men, inadequate guidance and parental supervision, poverty, illiteracy or semi-illiteracy, ignorance, negative peer pressure, the influence of "dons" in communities, weak family ties and girls in pursuit of love (Grant et al., 2011, p. 31).

Overall, research on Jamaican youth has empirically tested several criminogenic risk factors that influence their perpetration of violence. These social risks involve community, individual, cognitive-behavioral, relational, school, and economic factors (Gardner, 2017; Grant, 2017; Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2010; Walker et al., 1998;

Whitfield et al., 2003). For example, research conducted by Grant (2017) in an ethnography on violence in Jamaica's high schools identified four prototypical conduits of delinquent offending. She concluded that criminogenic environments or communities were those generally higher in access and availability of drugs and weapons, exposure to violence, broken homes and dysfunctional families, residential instability characterized by transiency and poverty, and lower levels of community integration and participation. However, criminogenic risk factors at the individual level include delinquent peer association, substance use and abuse, anger, poor impulse control and aggressiveness, developmental challenges resulting from inadequate pre/post-natal care or birth complications, and lower intelligence. Relational factors, on the other hand, typically involve dysfunctional family relationships evidenced by child abuse and neglect, a history of family crime or violence, substance abuse, weak emotional attachment to parents, low parental education, poverty, dysfunctional family functioning like little parental monitoring or supervision, inconsistent disciplinary practices, low parental involvement in the affairs of children, lack of parental support or parental expectations of children, and poor or hostile communication.

Given the universal literature on girls and delinquency and the work done on the circumstances of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica, this qualitative study began with a series of literature-informed etic codes related to predicting girls' delinquency. These were poor school performance, drug use and abuse, gang involvement, unstable families, childhood abuse, emotion dysregulation and prefrontal lobe deficits, and drive to survive and desensitization.

### ***Poor School Performance and Delinquency***

Universally, the association between poor academic performance and delinquency is robust. Although research produces inconsistent results regarding the direction of causality, there is substantive evidence suggesting that poor school performance is a criminogenic risk factor for adolescents (Bachman et al., 1971; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Hawkins et al., 1998; Kelly & Balch, 1971; Maguin & Loeber, 1996; Polk, 1975; Rhodes & Reiss, 1969; Thornberry et al., 1984). Academic failures as a result of learning deficits have also been implicated in delinquency to the extent that students become victimized and marginalized because of poor performance (Kingery et al., 1996). Earlier research, such as research conducted by Gottfredson (1997), found that poor school performance decreased students' commitment to school and learning, creating a pathway for delinquent peer associations and further isolation from prosocial values. Accordingly, students who struggled to excel academically and perceived a lack of emotional support from caring adults may become aggressive (Gottfredson, 1997).

Farrington's (2005a) Cambridge Study on Delinquent Development and Browning and Loeber's (1999) Pittsburgh Youth Study both established a link between poor school performance and juvenile delinquency. In alignment with this research, Maguin and Loeber (1996) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis, exploring the intricate relationship among academic achievement, delinquency, and targeted interventions aimed at improving school performance to prevent law-breaking among students. The researchers maintained that poor performance was consistently related to the frequency, seriousness, and persistence of juvenile delinquency. Considering that not all young

offenders fail to achieve academically, and not every student who performs poorly in school engages in delinquent offending, the literature suggests that the relationship between school performance and delinquent behavior may be contingent upon other variables. For example, after controlling for mediating variables, such as hunger and socioeconomic status, Walker et al. (1998) observed that fighting among 13–14-year-old girls in Kingston, Jamaica, was directly connected to poor educational achievement. These findings dictate that examining the bidirectional relationship between school failure and delinquency over time is meaningful, accounting for multiple time points along the child’s developmental progression, like transitioning from childhood into adolescence. Further, researchers must replicate these studies across different settings to underscore the nuances in this relationship and explain why they exist.

### ***Drug Use and Abuse and Delinquency***

Adolescent drug use, abuse, and gang involvement remain critical problems in Jamaica. However, there is a shortage of research exploring the associations with violent female offending in that context. Examination of data from a 2016 Jamaica National Drug Use Prevalence Survey by Felker-Kantor et al. (2019) revealed that substance use was strongest amongst individuals 12 – 65 years who experienced persistent exposure to threatening environments. Acknowledging the impact of neighborhood crime and disorder, Felker-Kantor and colleagues (2019) proposed that substance use and abuse patterns among Jamaicans reflected a stress response to cope with living in such noxious environments.



### ***Gang Involvement and Delinquency***

Gang proliferation across Jamaica has been particularly evident from the early 1960s and 1970s with localized, politically affiliated gangs – such as the Shower Posse, Phoenix, Spangler Posse, and Vikings (Edmonds, 2016) – that quickly established themselves as transnational criminal organizations. Gang presence in Jamaican communities creates unique challenges for implementing correctional interventions. However, it creates an impetus for developing gang prevention and gang interruption efforts to stop escalating criminality and violence threatening the rule of law and public order (Weekes et al., 2019).

There is limited data on gangs and gang member demographic characteristics. However, some empirical work on gangs in Jamaica noted law enforcement efforts at dismantling criminal organizations, given that gang activity accounted for 45% of total homicides between 2005 and 2015 (Weekes et al., 2019). Additionally, not enough research has explored girls' involvement in gangs. There is even less research on programming for gang-involved girls.

With the lack of empirical work acknowledging the role of females within the youth gang population in Jamaica (Harriott & Jones, 2016; Lewis et al., 2019; Weekes et al., 2019), researchers raised concerns about the accuracy of documented gang activity data. They argued that the data disproportionately implicated males because females performed invisible roles or engaged in co-offending, which was often unmeasurable because of specific conceptual and operational definitions in the research. The dearth of research in this regard is particularly troubling given the extended upswing of violence in

the country that is attributable in large part to gang-related activities (Edmonds, 2016; ESSJ, 2020; Ward et al., 2017).

Research efforts in the Caribbean that have generally focused on female gang involvement have disproportionately featured Trinidad and Tobago (Wallace, 2013a; 2018), which is 496 km from the coast of Jamaica. In recognition of this research gap, Lewis et al. (2019) was the first attempt to analyze how girls operated in Jamaica's gang environment, which is not altogether like that in Trinidad and Tobago, even though both islands are in the same geographic region. A chapter, *Some Girls Are So Vicious that Even the Boys Fear Them: Girls and gangs in Jamaica* explored the portrayal of “gangster girls” in media and news reports (Lewis et al., 2019). Lewis et al. (2019) proposed that more than being girlfriends of gang members, some girls in gangs played the role of “movers” - transporting illicit items, including weapons and drugs. In many ways, girls operating as movers insulate the gang from police interference because they are less likely to be detected by law enforcement and more likely to receive lenient sentencing than boy gangsters when caught. Primarily, they benefit from the spoils of gang activities, including financial rewards and material and physical resources for their subsistence. Further, for girls, gang involvement provides security that some families may be unable to give.

Ward et al. (2017) documented that Jamaican youth violence overlapped with gang activities and organized crime as volatile community environments and the stigma surrounding such communities can expose children to violence. This situation inadvertently compelled them to engage in adaptive strategies for survival, which often perpetuated a troubling cycle of violence. Similarly, community leaders or “dons” have

been known to promote organized criminal activities explicitly endorsed as a rite of passage for youth when they reach a certain age. Coercing children to participate in such activities constructed as “defending” (Ward et al., 2017, p. 13) the community has emerged as a primary policy concern for the Jamaican government, as a significant portion of youth, including “gangster girls” (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 96) have been implicated in contract killings, fraud, identity theft, incidences of extortion, lottery scamming, and money laundering both nationally and internationally.

*Communities, Crime Control and Policy Change for Safer Spaces in Jamaica* outlined that Jamaica has engaged a public health approach in responding to the violence in the country (Weekes et al., 2019). This approach follows the North American Cure Violence model, which emphasizes detecting, interrupting, and mediating potentially violent conflict to prevent violence (Maguire et al., 2018). The Cure Violence model explicitly targets at-risk youth and gang members to interrupt the cycle of violence through conflict mediation strategies that create non-retaliatory community norms. Engaging the target group in these individual and community norm-changing activities aims to prevent shootings and reprisal killings (Weekes et al., 2019). Based on the prior evaluation, the Cure Violence model has proven effective in the communities that implemented it (Maguire et al., 2018; Skogan et al., 2008). (Maguire et al., 2018; Skogan et al., 2008).

### ***Unstable Families and Delinquency***

The link between unstable families and female offending in Jamaica is robust, although the research remains limited. Fathers’ absence, separation from mother, and violence in the homes all reflect dynamic experiences of family instability. Ward et al.

(2017) subsumed these within the construct of unstable families. Their youth focus group participants in Jamaica equated family instability with fathers' absenteeism. Fathers' absenteeism contributes to various outcomes for girls, including but not limited to the erasure of their childhood, given that the removal of a co-parent forces them to adopt adult roles earlier in life. Further, as mothers struggle to support the family, challenges with childcare often compound into child neglect or an increasing risk for abuse.

Although previous research has established a connection between family structure and youth offending, there is comparatively less research examining the lasting effects of changes in family structure on delinquent involvement, specifically for females living in the Caribbean (Burt et al., 2008; Mok et al., 2018). In the context of Jamaica, situations such as divorce, parental separation, and migration account for the child's separation from her mother. It is not uncommon for mothers in the Caribbean to leave their children behind to pursue better economics overseas and improved financial standing for their families. According to Jokhan (2017), one cannot overstate the resilience of the Caribbean family when confronted with serial migration. Families with strong kinship ties are likely to adjust to the roles and responsibilities of childcare in the absence of the parent, which provides a social buffer for those children who might otherwise encounter adversities due to parental separation (Jokhan, 2017).

Parents are also migrating to urban areas of the island away from their children for improved employment opportunities. Beyond these shifts in family roles and responsibilities, family transitions also constitute changes in family routines and parenting, including disciplinary practices (Hanson et al., 1998). The literature on the impact of family transitions on the child invariably suggests the possibility of declining

child well-being and risk of delinquency (Amato, 2000; Schroeder et al., 2010; Wu, 1996). Of course, parental absence within this context can itself increase the risk of abuse for children (Jokhan, 2017).

Also contributing to family instability is intimate partner violence. A Reproductive Health Survey conducted by the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (2010) confirmed that Jamaican children were exposed to high levels of family violence by either witnessing or experiencing parental violence firsthand. Whitfield et al. (2003) postulated that children and youth who experienced parental abuse were significantly more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems during childhood that often progressed into abusive and violent adult relationships. At least 18% of Jamaican women witnessed domestic violence, while 61% had been physically abused by parents before age 15 (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2010).

### ***Childhood Abuse and Delinquency***

Females often experience developmental challenges with adverse childhood experiences (ACES). Too often, some girls face emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, childhood neglect, dysfunctional family dynamics with domestic violence, substance abuse, parental incarceration, mental illness, or parental separation. Delinquency research investigating specific delinquency etiologies and outcomes among justice-involved girls has consistently found that female minors with a history of sexual abuse tend to have more extreme delinquency than boys (Goodkind et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2006; Wareham & Dembo, 2007). Notwithstanding the paucity of research involving Jamaican girls, there is enough evidence to suggest that the high incidence of victimization among girls, as indicated by the sexual abuse reports from the Center for

the Investigation of Sexual Offenses and Child Abuse (CISOCA), may pose a significantly higher risk of delinquency for them.

The Center for the Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA) (2016) reported that out of 1,094 child abuse reports made in 2016, girls were disproportionately represented in child abuse statistics, accounting for 97.3% of the victims. Additionally, Ward et al. (2017) contended that girls were the primary victims of sexual abuse in Jamaica. Reports of sexual intercourse dominated with specifically 469 cases involving a person under the legal age of consent of 16 years; 277 cases involved victims of rape; 63 cases involved grievous sexual assault; 35 cases involved sexual touching; and 21 cases involved cruelty to the child.

Whether because of childhood abuse, extreme marginalization, or relational pathways to delinquent behaviors (Brennan et al., 2012; Covington, 1998; Daly, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Richie, 1996; Richie et al., 2000), the emerging picture reveals that some Jamaican girls encounter a combination of criminogenic risks that, over time, seem to corrupt moral standards and diminish self-efficacy. Regardless of the environments that contribute to and exacerbate such risks, scholars have acknowledged the overwhelming experience of childhood sexual abuse for many Jamaican girls prior to incarceration. Among those who endured such abuse, a prevalent outcome is the struggle with emotional dysregulation, as evidenced by existing research (Brennan et al., 2012; Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Harris et al., 2021).

From a psychological perspective, Coore (2006) observed that certain Jamaican children were encountering difficulties in successfully managing and maneuvering ordinary developmental tasks because of traumatic experiences. She identified these

experiences as contributing factors to adverse mental health outcomes, including post-traumatic stress disorder, which, in turn, can lead to psychiatric issues such as depression and the adoption of maladaptive coping strategies. Coore's conclusions are particularly interesting given that Jamaican children have consistently shown increased patterns of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors in response to their exposure to an excess of various stressors (Gardner & Webb, 2017).

Collectively, these studies have provided insights into the distinct needs and developmental processes of Jamaican children, particularly emphasizing the vulnerabilities of girls who may encounter legal issues. Despite the findings having a limited scope, they are pivotal for guiding the development of tailored programs and support systems to deter girls from engaging in delinquent behavior. An understanding of these complex dynamics is paramount for shaping the ongoing landscape of public safety in Jamaica.

### **Emotion Dysregulation and Prefrontal Lobe Deficits**

American researchers Gratz and Roemer (2004) offer a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationship between childhood trauma, including the severity of child maltreatment, and juvenile delinquency. The researchers proposed a direct link from childhood trauma to emotion dysregulation, likely to create a predisposition for juvenile delinquency. They explained that the nature and severity of trauma might prevent the victim from acquiring adaptive coping skills that could help them reduce the impact of the trauma and recover from it.

Emotion dysregulation, according to Hilt et al. (2011), is "a maladaptive pattern of regulating emotions that may involve a failure of regulation or interference in adaptive

functioning” (p. 160). Gratz and Roemer (2004) argued that individuals who struggled with emotion dysregulation possessed a limited capacity to adapt to and regulate negative, intense, and shifting emotions. Logically, it may apply to girls’ delinquency as particularly disruptive experiences for girls preventing them from developing normative regulatory processes (Kerig & Becker, 2012).

Krause-Utz et al. (2019) also support Gratz and Roemer’s (2004) framework as Krause-Utz et al. (2019) pointed out that concerning women with borderline personality disorder because of stressful or traumatic childhood events, some girls experienced difficulties with the absence of emotional awareness and clarity, goal orientation, impulsivity control, and an overall limited capacity for emotion regulation. Applying these psychological explanations to the Jamaican context might help characterize delinquent girls as emotionally dysregulated. However, to some extent, proposing that girls lack the skill of adaptive functioning after trauma diminishes ideas of female delinquents’ agency when exercising behavioral decisions in oppressive social conditions that might constrain or provoke them (Batchelor, 2005).

Related to this is the idea in adolescent development that if the prefrontal cortex develops inadequately until age 25 or is dense or damaged, the adolescent will lack the ability to regulate thought and control behavior (Hochberg & Konner, 2020; Moffitt, 1993). This developmental challenge increases proneness for aggression and irritability (Thompson-Schill, 2009). Increases in girls charged for uncontrollable behaviors and disorderly conduct in Jamaica (ESSJ, 2020) present an exciting starting point for deductions regarding behavioral responses under the most adverse conditions. The documentary *Seeing Red: The Science of Violence* (University of the West Indies, 2007)



framed physical conflict within Jamaican society as related to experiences of stress, malnutrition, and structural trauma to the brain (Grant et al., 2011; University of the West Indies, 2007). These are destructive to the prefrontal lobe. From this perspective, many girls, between 13 – 17 years who engage in violent physical conflict may do so because they have a damaged prefrontal lobe that activates violent responses to perceived crises.

Lacking the ability to regulate thought and control behavior can lead to fatal consequences, especially when firearms and other weapons, such as knives, are easily accessible. In 2022, one schoolgirl, 16 years old from Kingston Technical High School was stabbed to death by another schoolgirl following a dispute on the school grounds. The perpetrator, who was 17 years old, was charged with murder and sentenced to remain in the custody of Correctional Services. Since the start of 2022, multiple separate incidents of physical conflict involving girls, occurring both inside and outside of school settings, have garnered media attention and led to changes in school safety policies. However, politicized “knee-jerk reactions” to school violence persist amidst a legacy of stereotypes about some segments of society that further marginalize and criminalize vulnerable people, their communities, families, and schools.

### **Dealing with Violence: Survival and Desensitization**

Regarding the code of the street, American Sociologist Elijah Anderson posited that respect is a form of social capital campaigning to survive the “streets” environment (Anderson, 1999, p. 100). Thus, to remain alive and gain respect among their peers, children learn that disputes are resolved through violence and endeavor to make a name for themselves, typically by showing toughness and a willingness to fight (Anderson, 1999). According to Anderson, “the social meaning of fighting becomes clarified as these

children come to appreciate the real consequences of winning and losing” (p. 70).

Children’s toughness on display, including their willingness and ability to hit and curse each other, therefore, underscores the meanings and interpretations they ascribe to situations that reinforce violent behavior.

This code of the street, as identified by Anderson (1999), applies to the Jamaican context as children often receive lessons from parents, friends, or family on how to appear capable of defending themselves and standing their ground when people act aggressively toward them. For example Journalist Romardo Lyons, writing in one newspaper, addressed a very controversial issue of parents admitting support for their children taking weapons to school (Jamaica Observer, 2022). Although some parents suggested that weapon carrying satisfies a heightened need for protection on and off school campuses, their support evokes a tacit acceptance of violence as a “conflict resolution” method. According to Mrug et al. (2016), allowing children to navigate and survive dangerous environments using weapons likely induce emotional numbing and desensitization to violence, hence, more youth with maladaptive developmental outcomes and showing a propensity for violence.

Sheppard (2022) contended that individuals desensitized to violence or death were more likely to become less empathetic, less sensitive to another person’s suffering, and more prone to acting aggressively. Nevertheless, one way to understand the nature and rampancy of weapon carrying among high school girls in Jamaica is through framing and priming strategies utilized by the media to activate, create, or perpetuate stereotypical representations about place and people. Sherman et al. (1990) argued that viewers who internalized media primes would more likely stereotype members of the target group

regardless of their interaction with them and approve restrictions on their fundamental freedoms. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the role of the media in achieving and increasing support for both girls' desensitization to violence and their drive to survive dangerous environments. It is also helpful to systematically re-examine the consequences of endorsing cultural violence as a survival strategy, generally, and more specifically, in deprived communities.

### **The Jamaican Justice System's Response to Children in Conflict with the Law**

The Jamaican penal system hinges on separate legislation governing the procedures involved for children in conflict with the law. However, the legislation needs to be revised to guide a gender-responsive application of rehabilitative programming when responding to girls in conflict with the law. Examining what legislation exists and their gaps is necessary to lay the groundwork for change.

#### ***Legislative Framework***

An international legislative framework influences Jamaica's domestic policies regarding children in conflict with the law. As a member of the English Commonwealth heritage, Jamaica has adopted a dualist approach (Vasciannie, n.d.) to legislation, which generally requires the country to enact domestic laws to activate and accomplish provisions and rules accepted in treaties and customary international law. Within the correctional system, this dualist approach broadly applies to international human rights treaties, constituting a particular standard of "appropriateness" for determining the punishment and prosecution of children who break the law. Accordingly, various governmental and non-governmental agencies that have attempted to claim jurisdiction over juvenile delinquency have similarly advanced diverse preventative and rehabilitative

strategies that align with global commitments to protecting the rights and welfare of children in conflict with the law and those in detention.

Following a sequence of legislative differences internationally about the age at which children fully develop an understanding of the seriousness of their wrongdoing, Jamaica instituted a legal minimum age of criminal responsibility of 12 years (UNICEF, 2013). The island has since imposed upon itself a mandate to infuse delinquency dispositions with developmentally appropriate practices. Advocating for a more developmentally appropriate system for children in conflict with the law is predicated upon the idea that courts should remove criminal responsibility from juvenile jurisprudence (Lindsey & O'Higgins, 1970; Mack, 1909). From this angle, progressive legislation endorsed Jamaican facilities accepting full responsibility for the juvenile's welfare, social adjustment, and future behavior, as their vision and mission statements stipulated.

Historically, Jamaica's child protection system was uncoordinated, disproportionately resulting in fragmented programs, policies, and marginal impact in addressing the welfare and developmental needs of children (UNICEF - Situation Analysis of Jamaican Children, 2018). However, through the prescriptive advice of other countries, evidence-based research, and legislative support, juvenile programming and policy in Jamaica increased in popularity based on continued efforts to modernize its justice system into one that emphasizes trauma-informed care, supportive health, and social services for children who inevitably come into conflict with the law. The modern legislative landscape governing the enactment of child protection legislation and policy

involves international agreements and treaties that establish standards for local correctional procedures.

### *International Agreements or Treaties*

**Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991).** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a United Nations Human Rights treaty body with the principal mandate of instituting safeguards that protect children from exploitation and violence. The CRC encourages legislative changes that are in the best interests of children. These include proscribing the arbitrary and excessive use of detention and requiring the “sight and sound” separation of children away from adults who are awaiting trial or convicted (Grant et al., 2011; UNICEF – Situation Analysis of Jamaican Children, 2018).

As a signatory to the CRC, Jamaica committed to protecting the fundamental human rights of all children under 18 years. Since adopting and ratifying the CRC in 1989 and 1991, the country revolutionized pertinent institutions, legislation, and policies to create a more developmentally appropriate humanitarian justice system for minors. Conveniently, under the auspices of the CRC, children have the right to non-discrimination, life, survival, and development. These include seeing that the legal system serves their best interests and respects their views. Although the CRC is paramount in guiding legislation regarding the treatment of children, its provisions are absorbed in other international guidelines, including the Beijing Rules, the Riyadh Guidelines, the Havana Rules, and the main rules of the United Nations. Altogether, there is the consensus that youth incarceration is rarely appropriate, and systems must reserve its practice as a measure of last resort.

### ***Domestic Law***

The laws that govern the Department of Correctional Services in Jamaica include but are not limited to the Child Care and Protection Act (2004), the Criminal Justice Reform Act (2002), the Corrections Act (1985), the Parole (1978) and Probation of Offenders (1948) Acts. However, only one of these laws guides the DCS' mandate to protect minors in correctional facilities and remand centers. In juvenile corrections, the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA, 2004) is the primary legislative instrument that increased due process protections for minors in custody and constituted correctional reforms that implemented alternatives to juvenile detention. However, it excludes any provision or guidance for developing, implementing, and evaluating rehabilitation and reentry programs for young offenders. Altogether, these policy instruments focus on protecting children but ignore rehabilitation or reentry considerations. While they fall short of giving effect to programming for girls in contact with the law, this legislative gap signals a significant impetus for law reform that generally supports delinquency prevention in Jamaican society and achieves gender responsiveness.

**The Child Care and Protection Act (2004).** The Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA), a collaborative effort between the Office of the Children's Registry and the Office of the Children's Advocate, replaced Jamaica's Juveniles Act (1951). The Government of Jamaica instituted the Act to augment the child protection system, specifically for youth who are:

1. In conflict with the law
2. In the custody of the childcare and protection system

3. With dual status (i.e., system involvement in juvenile justice and child care and protection systems)

By promoting children's rights and ensuring their development, the CCPA functions as a more comprehensive and rights-based instrument, providing for a range of juvenile dispositions, including but not restricted to community service and mediation. A more significant concern is the extent of judicial discretion allowable when determining sentences for children deemed "uncontrollable." Notably, under the auspices of section 24 of the CCPA, the judge is permitted to impose a corrective order upon children who are seemingly beyond the control of their parent or guardian. Reformers intending to challenge and replace colonial-era laws like this regarding the care of children raised concerns regarding this legal practice in 2015 based on the assumption that children's behavioral challenges can be addressed more appropriately and effectively in alternative care settings. These discussions resulted in more directed efforts to repeal the clause to relocate "uncontrollable children" to non-residential childcare facilities (Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2018).

Among their most notable achievements is the amendment of this clause as recently as October of this year, allowing Jamaica to comply with standards outlined in the CRC (Jamaica Information Service, 2023). Regardless, girls deemed to be uncontrollable or disorderly continue to fulfill their sentence at the South Camp facility along with other girls who received Correctional Orders for various offenses. As it is, this situation points to the need to refine the classification system for girls within the facility (Leslie, 2022).

The CCPA also facilitates the establishment of relevant institutions and mandates that education should be compulsory for children in detention to provide them with academic, vocational, and development training. These efforts align with the empirical literature that intellectual engagement and achievement while detained are directly related to resuming school post-release, which can, in turn, lower recidivism (Blomberg et al., 2011).

**Juvenile Diversion Policy.** The Child Diversion Act (2018), which targets juvenile delinquency, has emerged as a significant pillar of the Ministry of Justice. This diversion policy aims to replace arrest, prosecution, and institutionalization with alternatives that hold offenders accountable without interrupting their ability to be productive citizens. Thus, under the auspices of the Diversion Act, the police and courts implemented community-based services to rehabilitate and engage youth. Central to diversion is the focus on restorative justice programs, which seek to repair the harm caused by the offense. As an alternative non-custodial measure, system diversion through restorative justice programs effectively achieves a "sense of healing for both the victim and the community" (MOJ, 2020, para. 2).

Currently, 13 child diversion centers exist to steer children away from formal judicial proceedings in Jamaica. However, none appear to include components specifically designed for girls. Nevertheless, since their enactment, social actors have lauded the juvenile diversion policy for effectively reducing the number of juveniles in correctional facilities nationwide. For example, in St. Elizabeth, one of the parishes of Jamaica, one child diversion officer confirmed that 32 out of 44 referrals to the program



were successfully reformed and discharged at the end of June 2022. Granted, the operationalization of “success” remains unclear.

Although the Act provides for preventing delinquency, rehabilitating, and treating children in conflict with the law, it ignores a gender-responsive focus on program development, which is likely to cause harm to some of the children, especially girls. Gender-neutral or gender-blind policies often assume that different issues affect both genders equally. This assumption is particularly concerning and likely harmful for girls, given that program impact and outcomes depend on accounting for gender-specific risk and protective factors in designing and implementing delinquency programming (Granski et al., 2020).

Under Article 18(1a), “A child diversion committee shall not implement any or shall immediately discontinue any child diversion program, in whole or in part, that is harmful, exploitative or dangerous, or likely to harm, exploit or endanger a child's physical or mental health” (The Child Diversion Act, 2018, p. 20). Thus, a person might foresee challenges with diversion programs overestimating their capacity to rehabilitate girls who come in contact with the justice system. By identifying this gap in its lack of provisions for gender-specific programming and services to female delinquents in Jamaica, this study may encourage the justice system to examine and reimagine how it deals with girls and provoke changes in its overall programming for girls.

### **Overview of Jamaica’s Juvenile Justice Needs**

A USAID (2011) report outlined priority needs for Jamaica’s juvenile justice reform. The USAID report called for:

1. Technical assistance to amend the CCPA and ensure policy implementation mechanisms are consistent with the policy's rights-based ideology.
2. An assessment of both the Court and probation systems to identify sentencing practices, the efficacy of the probationary system, and how they impact juvenile defendants.
3. An integrated case management system that captures individualized information regarding the criminogenic factors that predispose the child to the delinquent act and to inform and tailor treatment programming to each child based on the data collated.
4. Improvement of the social inquiry reporting system to guide judicial sentencing of juvenile defendants.
5. Increase the utilization efficiency of social investigations to influence sentencing outcomes for juveniles.
6. Increase financial support to facilitate the evaluation, expansion, and implementation of detention alternatives, i.e., introduce diversionary programs that are community-based and rehabilitative.
7. A holistic approach towards reducing juvenile delinquency and offending, which encompasses the strategic integration of family support services and psychosocial treatment into programming.
8. Increased funding to augment family support services.

Since the 2011 report, additional gaps in juvenile facilities and the delivery of essential services documented by others such as the Ministry of Education (2015) and an NGO Report (n.d.) included:

9. Increase the adequacy of the Victim Support Unit (VSU) to facilitate the recovery and reintegration of child victims of crime and violence.
10. Support victims of all types of crime and provide help and protection to children in all settings, including schools.
11. Strengthen investigative work and processes to prosecute [alleged] perpetrators of violence against children.
12. Provide adequate financial help for juveniles in detention and their families.
13. Establishment of more sufficient welfare programs that target youth with disabilities who come in conflict with the law.
14. Distribute specialized schools at the primary and secondary levels more evenly and provide more adequate services to children with disabilities, especially in the rural and often underserved areas of the island.
15. Improve mechanisms and structures for juveniles needing mental health services within the justice system. For example, increase and formalize screening and psychological assessments upon entry into correctional facilities and remand centers.
16. Tailor teaching modalities to meet the needs of the children in custody and provide specific training to teachers to manage the psychological effects of custodial care on learning more effectively.

These gaps help develop a basis of understanding of the juvenile justice environment in Jamaica, including how to deliver current and planned programming and which actions to prioritize when dealing with girls in conflict with the law.

In 2010, the OCA prepared a special report for the Jamaican Parliament detailing recommendations for preventing juvenile delinquency and offending. The report had the narratives of eight girls who attested to several human rights violations during their detention inside police lockups. Although many children in conflict with the law fell under the status offender jurisdiction and had been victims of some form of adult exploitation, a few of them committed petty crimes, including begging, misuse of alcohol, truancy, and vagrancy. In describing their experiences of detention, the children confirmed that law enforcement held them in conditions that violated their fundamental human rights and deprived them of opportunities to advance their education or participate in physical activity. The children's need for confidentiality and protection of their rights to privacy concerning how they were processed and treated in the court were also among the listed contraventions (Clarke et al., 2009). Other violations included the court's refusal to consider the unique needs and failure of officials to listen to the views of the children who were in the care of the State – particularly those with behavioral problems (Clarke et al., 2009).

In addition to the appalling sanitary conditions experienced by children in detention, juvenile centers in Jamaica face criticism for their gross deficiency in adhering to international standards and engaging in appropriate practices, particularly those stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Clarke et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2011). Under the auspices of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, fundamental rights to survival, to develop to the fullest, to be protected from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation, and to participate fully in family, cultural, and social life have been conferred upon every child under the age of 18 years (UNICEF,

2016). By adopting and ratifying the Convention in November 1989 and May 1991, respectively, Jamaica is legally bound to protect children's rights and ensure they reach their fullest potential. However desirable, efforts to protect the nation's children and promote their behavioral development through legislative and institutional changes have had a negligible effect on the outcome for those children in urgent need of care and protection and those alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having uncontrollable behavior and disorderly conduct.

Acknowledging that female delinquency can be both situational and temporary thus raises pertinent questions about appropriateness and proportionality in terms of how the court is punishing them. The desire to prevent female delinquency has attracted an increase in punitive responses to girls whose behaviors pose some risk to public safety. Proclaiming itself as a "parent" over wayward and neglected children, the state of Jamaica operates in *loco parentis*, based on the principle of legal paternalism. This principle justifies the state's coercive authority to officially intervene in the minor's life and protect and guide them toward becoming capable and responsible adults, regardless of how they perceive such interference.

The bitter irony, in this regard, is that society's goal of protecting young girls by taking them into custody – for their good, through access to programming that fosters moral persuasion, or the general good – (moral persuasion would decrease the likelihood of recidivism) (Carlen & Worrall, 2004), often miscarries. In sum, to date, the literature on girls officially in conflict with the law comprehensively dictates that attempting to balance child welfare with public safety is both complicated to achieve and difficult to sustain over the long term. Tackling this issue in their article on Considerations for

Justice-Involved Youth Programming, Cramer et al. (2019), writing in the United States, argued for new approaches to serving justice-involved youth as patterns of correctional praxis in society signal an overuse of punitiveness that undermines the well-being of the minor. As an illustration of the complexity of the issue, it is reasonable to perceive the justice system itself as a criminogenic risk for girls.

### **The Department of Correctional Services in Jamaica**

In Jamaica, juvenile delinquency is handled nationally by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), an arm of the Ministry of National Security (MNS), reflecting a merger among the Prison, Probation, and Juvenile Services in 1975. The DCS is committed to contributing to the nation's safety by operating the nation's prisons and jails in three core functional areas: custodial services, rehabilitation, and Human Resource Management and Community Service. Its overarching philosophy is to establish a safe and secure Jamaica by keeping offenders secure and facilitating their rehabilitation and successful reintegration as law-abiding citizens (Department of Correctional Services Jamaica, 2019) or replace correctional control with self-control (Stinchomb & Fox, 1999).

Consistent with the rehabilitative thrust infused into correctional processes in Jamaica, the Department established a Rehabilitation Unit in 2000. The Rehabilitation Unit is responsible for augmenting and strengthening the delivery of rehabilitative services to juvenile offenders in custodial care, primarily targeting those commingled with adults during that period (Hunter, 2014). To date, one of the greatest accomplishments of the Department was the establishment of Juvenile Correctional Centers. Previously approved schools, juvenile facilities are residential care settings that

provide juvenile defendants with education, security, and rehabilitation after the court orders their relocation from their usual settings to a more controlled environment (Department of Correctional Services Jamaica, 2019).

Since its inception, juvenile correctional centers have been committed to juvenile rehabilitation through life skills training, encouraging young offenders to make positive life decisions. These institutions are characteristically high security, like South Camp Juvenile Correctional and Remand Center which is reserved for children who commit serious offenses and need maximum control and intensive care, and medium security for children deemed low-security risks. They house children as young as 12 and up to 18 (Department of Correctional Services Jamaica, 2010). Medium security institutions embody the concepts of safety and supervision and allow more flexibility to children to enter or leave the facility under staff supervision, on license, or home leave, provided that their behaviors improve over time. It is not uncommon for juvenile facilities to provide special privileges such as the conditional release of wards “to spend the remaining portion of the Correctional Order in their community, under statutory supervision of a Probation Aftercare Officer” (Hunter, 2014, p. 125).

### **Jamaica’s Results-based Budgetary Framework (2020)**

Jamaica’s juvenile facilities boast several programs and services that are both available and accessible to youth in conflict with the law. In some way, these programs have advanced behavioral development and addressed the basic needs of institutionalized children. Nonetheless, results about whether program components are effective, ineffective, or produce iatrogenic effects for girls are inconclusive. This gap in knowledge draws the Jamaican Results-based Budgetary Framework (2020) into focus,

given its importance for Jamaica in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16, which address gender equality and peace, justice, and strong institutions, respectively (United Nations, 2016). The goal of the new budgetary framework, as described within the National Development Plan (2009 - 2030), is to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in public investments through evidence- and results-based approaches that inform budgetary planning (Vision2030Jamaica, n.d.). Thus, the framework emphasizes the evaluation of policy, program effect, and strategy to support decisions concerning equitable resource allocation (Spence, 2021). By incorporating evidence-based models into system responses and focusing on measurable results, all stakeholders can enhance the legitimacy and impact of their efforts to mobilize systematic changes.

### **Programming and Services**

To comply with international agreements governing the treatment of children, the Department of Correctional Services, Jamaica, instituted a few rehabilitative programs and services focusing on delinquency prevention. Programs initiated by the DCS include social preventative programs, for example, Children First, Child Resiliency Program (CRP), RISE, A New Path, and We Transform Youth Empowerment and Reintegration, behavioral modification, and Positive Behavioral Support Intervention programs (PBSI). Nevertheless, these programs are only partly consistent with international values of child protection and development (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Article 6, para. 2).

The concept of development, in its broadest sense, encompasses the child's mental, moral, physical, psychological, and spiritual development (Vaghri, 2022). With the lack of gender-responsive treatment for girls, protecting and developing those



involved with the justice system is not absolute. Additionally, information regarding these programs is difficult to locate, and the same is true for any documented evaluation success, specifically regarding societal reentry. It is also unclear whether there are measures to maintain program integrity for the quality of staff administering that programming. All of these have implications for possible program success.

### ***Social Preventative Programs***

Jamaica has implemented various youth-targeted social preventative programs in its crime prevention efforts. Among them, programming exists for at-risk boys, including but not limited to the Possibility program, which targets boys on the street (JIS, 2009) and young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 who are unattached and vulnerable. None of these programs focus specifically on girls. However, girls and their parents or guardians have benefitted from secondary prevention programs such as Children First, Child Resiliency Program, RISE, and tertiary prevention programs, including A New Path and We Transform Youth Empowerment and Reintegration program. The data primarily indicate an absence of female-focused and primary prevention efforts. Additionally, it shows a general need for more studies measuring the effectiveness of existing programs. This gap in research provides an impetus for further inquiry.

**Children First.** The Children First program demonstrates a preventative effort at the secondary level by emphasizing the need to protect children and adolescents ages 10 – 24 years, from violence. The program provides educational, health, and social programs for at-risk youth and their parents or guardians. It also communicates the importance of behavioral change to children through music and dance. Children First prioritizes skills

training and parental involvement in small business projects to empower the family to overcome poverty and enhance their overall quality of life.

**Child Resiliency Program.** The Child Resiliency program offers a holistic preventative approach toward delinquency prevention at the secondary level. The program emphasizes “cutting the pipeline to youth violence” (Ward, 2017, p. 54) by providing high-risk children, those 8 – 12 years old, in primary school academic and other forms of support. In this afterschool program, students with severe behavioral problems acquire life skills and receive mentoring and nutritional care. They also engage in creative expressions like arts and crafts, dance, drama, sports, and spiritual development. Along with these provisions, the program supports parents and families, which impacts communities.

**RISE Program.** RISE is a youth-targeted Social Prevention Program that strategically increases life satisfaction for at-risk youth in volatile and inner-city communities. RISE emphasizes the need to protect adolescents through community-based health and education interventions (Moncrieffe, 2013; Ward et al., 2017) that prioritize preventing and treating addictive disorders and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, for themselves, their parents, and their families. Thus, along with the benefits of parenting programs, RISE beneficiaries also acquire life skills through remedial educational programs and vocational training, some of which they obtain through the HEART/NTA training institute.

Implemented in 2003, RISE initially focused on three of the nation’s more volatile communities—Waterhouse, Towerhill, and Drewsland. The program expanded in 2005 to include Parade Gardens, Fletchers Land, and Allman Town. The RISE

intervention sought to offer social services to children and their parents, contributing to a broader nationwide crime reduction effort. Predominantly, the program targeted adolescent and youth programs and established community parenting support groups to observe the differential impacts on employment opportunities and overall life satisfaction.

Moncrieffe's (2013) assessment of RISE revealed through focus group discussions with children and parents that program continuity for children was critical to prevent regression, particularly in cases where program support mechanisms were reduced or removed without adequate treatment alternatives or supplements. Moncrieffe further recommended that participants receive programming for longer rather than shorter periods to achieve more successful outcomes.

**A New Path.** In a 2019 report, the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies documented the contribution of A New Path program to reintegrating youth formerly in conflict with the law into society. A New Path program targets boys and girls between 13 and 18 years through various educational, vocational, and training programs, employment opportunities, and psychosocial and emotional services that tend to provide meaningful assistance upon their release (Tindigarkayo et al., 2019). According to the report, 1,977 youth in Jamaica received the program. Still, only 893 children received certification upon completing the training programs, of which 70 boys and girls received job opportunities and apprenticeships.

A New Path program is one of several Organization of American States (OAS) activities in Jamaica targeting security and development. Their 70th-anniversary commemorative booklet detailed a list of alternative programming accomplishments for

juvenile offenders up to December 2017 (OAS, 2018). Among those celebrated were 91 releases and at-risk youth who received extensive training in entrepreneurship and 39 wards who earned micro-grants to become micro-business entrepreneurs through Pitch It! Learning and Investing in Your Future program. Youth who enroll in the Pitch It! program have an unparalleled opportunity to obtain entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and financial support so they may generate income for themselves either as a group or as individuals. They also receive capital as a reward from a panel of judges to offset startup costs based on the quality of business ideas they propose. As part of the larger framework, A New Path has also fostered the training of 160 officers and staff on ingraining reintegration strategies into the program curriculum for the success of each participating ward. In this respect, Freemon et al. (2020) noted that A New Path holds some promise as a best practice model for other countries, given its success in improving reentry services for juvenile offenders in Jamaica.

**We Transform Youth Empowerment and Reintegration Program.** The We Transform Program is a student-centered approach to rehabilitating and reintegrating troubled youth in juvenile facilities and those currently monitored by community service probation offices (Williams, 2018). This flagship program provides children between 12 and 17 years with character-building support and skills training to help them become productive citizens (DCS, 2022). Since its launch in 2016, the DCS implemented the program in all juvenile facilities on the island to engage youth through its six pillars: (1) innovative training for youth; (2) mentorship and internship; (3) friendly competition; (4) healthy lifestyle training; (5) parental engagement; and (6) staff capacity building and training.

With the paucity of research evaluating the success of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention efforts in the [juvenile] justice system, Jamaican policymakers have championed the need for and implemented behavior modification programs at the school level to circumvent using punishment as a first or only resort (USAID, 2005; World Bank Group, 2023). These programs focus on shifting cultural norms and social practices that promote violence and compromise children's welfare.

**Behavior Modification.** The first step toward behavior modification for girls in conflict with the law is understanding their differential needs, including their requirements for substance abuse and mental health interventions and trauma-informed care services. Recognizing these diverse needs compels program developers, service providers, and juvenile facility staff to understand and manage girls' complex behavioral issues. Research suggests that psychosocial intervention and behavioral management for residential wards are more effective when they involve more coordinated efforts between governmental and non-governmental agencies and by applying treatment programs that engage children holistically and with care (Covington & Bloom, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 1999; MNS, 2021; Reed & Leavitt, 1998; Salises, 2019). However, fulfilling the latter presents a critical challenge, particularly within group settings. The standards governing behavioral expectations and reinforcements are often inconsistently introduced and haphazardly applied, as outlined in Moeser's (2015) work.

Hunter's (2014) assessment of the profile and treatment of serious juvenile offenders in Jamaica yielded insight into what behavior modification entails. She proposed that support staff use various modalities, such as "disciplinary committees, case conferences, peer counseling, and special awards systems," (Hunter, 2014, p. 125) to

continuously observe and assess the growth and achievements of each child during their confinement. Children earn special privileges when their behaviors improve and may enjoy approved home leave at least twice yearly during the summer and Christmas holidays. They may also benefit from conditional releases (granted license) to a non-residential community-based program under the supervision of a Probation Aftercare Officer.

**Positive Behavioral Support Intervention Program (PBSI).** Behavioral programming is a theory-based approach to changing delinquent behaviors through social learning. Behavioral programming, done correctly, can critically contribute to higher levels of preferred behaviors among delinquents through reinforcement and increased access to special privileges (Doll et al., 2013). For this reason, the current literature encourages the implementation of behavioral interventions in juvenile justice settings (Fernandez et al., 2015; Pederson et al., 2020).

One type of behavioral intervention that prevents unwanted behavior is the Positive Behavioral Support Intervention Program (PBSI), which encourages social learning and promotes positive relationships between youth and facility staff (Carr et al., 2002; Scott et al., 2010). According to Dunlap et al. (2009), these support programs apply an evidence-based tiered approach to provide troubled youth with increasing support, including group and individual therapy, to prevent undesirable behaviors from escalating. Under these treatment conditions, the juvenile's response is likely to reveal essential variations in observable and treatable behavior, providing insight into their sensitivity to rewards and punishments and guiding facility staff's support of their behavioral development.

The initiative to implement a Positive Behavioral Support Intervention program in Jamaica, while still in its nascent stages, comes on the heels of an escalating number of violent disputes involving high school students, predominantly girls, armed with offensive weapons (McIntosh, 2023; Salmon, 2022). Media coverage of school violence propounds a very dark and sinister reality that rampant weapon carrying among Jamaican students may be unrelated to a need for protection. Instead, it signals a heightened response to broader social influences (Bailey et al., 1997).

Consistent with the tenets of child protection (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1991) and rehabilitation, the DCS also delivers services to juveniles with respect for their best interest when they come in contact with the justice system. These services include risk assessment, case management, medical and mental health screening, and social justice services that support delinquency prevention programming.

### **Risk/Needs Assessment and Analysis**

In a mixed methods study on Jamaica, the Office of the Children's Advocate (Grant et al., 2011) sought to address the needs of and responses to children in conflict with the law according to the national and international legislative framework. The children's narratives left the researchers "concerned about the wisdom" (Grant et al., 2011, p. 63) of many standard policies and procedures inherent to the nation's correctional setting. A prominent area of concern for the researchers was the line of consequences regarding the provision of *care and protection*, which appeared to be hindered by disciplinary approaches that targeted girls for behaviors that could be manifestations of unmet needs.

Assessing and addressing criminogenic needs and risk factors begins with accurately and appropriately identifying and classifying juveniles (Vincent, 2012). Identifying risk levels for girls and boys in conflict with the law facilitates their classification as low, medium, or high risk using the Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS). Given that the South Camp Juvenile Correctional and Remand Center is the only juvenile facility for girls, the classification of their risks seems futile because all girls on correctional order or remand remain there. With this arrangement, it is often difficult for the authorities to separate the girls according to their level of risk or protection needs (Freemon et al., 2020). For programming, the risks of intermingling, possible exposure to negative influences, and stress are high, and all have implications for possible program success.

Typically, practitioners analyze each girl for their criminogenic risks and needs within 30 days of their admittance into the custody of the DCS. This assessment utilizes the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), which captures criminogenic risks and needs factors across eight domains: attitudes/orientation, education/employment, family circumstances, offense history, peer relationships, substance use/abuse, recreation, and personality (Hoge & Andrews, 2002). The YLS/CMI is a Canadian risk/need responsiveness tool that helps juvenile facilities classify girls based on their level of risk for reoffending. Additionally, it aids in developing case planning and placement strategies and guides delinquency programming. Juvenile facilities in Jamaica also utilize the tool to determine girls' eligibility for special privileges, such as conditional release, and to identify who might require additional programming or services.



The main challenge with using the YLS/CMI in Jamaican facilities is the disconnect between the required information and the Social Enquiry Report (SER) that courts consult to adjudicate and sentence juveniles. These early assessments may only sometimes provide reliable information, which is a notable difference with evaluations performed later and with longer follow-up times (McGrath & Thompson, 2012). Probation Aftercare Officers prepare the SER after investigating the juvenile's environment and documenting information on their background, family circumstances, past behaviors, and goals (Grant et al., 2011; Hunter, 2014; MNS, 2021; National Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2011). Between the time it takes to complete the investigation and the juvenile's first assessment, assessors often need more information about the child. Therefore, assessing the child at least six months after admission can provide more reliable data, given that the assessor would have had more interactions with the child by then (Hunter, 2014; Onifade et al., 2008). According to Hunter (2014), this could be a more effective use of the SER instrument.

### **Case Management**

The protocol for receiving and admitting wards into the various juvenile and adult facilities also includes assigning a welfare case manager to conduct periodic assessments. The results from these assessments inform a range of treatment programming and behavior modification regimens. The case manager develops and manages an individualized treatment plan for each child with the support of medical doctors, mental health professionals, and other specialized service providers (Hunter, 2014). Each case management plan comprises continued care requirements that may inform their community release plan (Ministry of National Security, 2021). The DCS also assigns one

welfare officer to each correctional facility. The welfare officer is responsible for conducting risk assessments, scheduling medical, dental, and other appointments, and accommodating visits that preserve solid social bonds between the offender and society (Hunter, 2014).

In Jamaica, two primary instruments used for treatment planning are the Youth Services YSET: Eligibility Tool (Hennigan et al., 2014) and the JRA-YV: Jamaican Risk Assessment-Youth Version (Barnes-Ceeney, 2018). An interview with Dr. Kevin Barnes-Ceeney indicated that the Jamaican Risk Assessment: Youth Version (JRA: YV) was developed specifically to respond to juvenile offending and comprised 13 items, including static and dynamic risk factors that measure (1) violence history, (2) friends and family, (3) anger, impulsivity, and thinking skills and (4) protective factors. Through testing, practitioners discovered and documented the usefulness of marrying risk assessments with case management services. According to Koetzle et al. (2021), both approaches “have the potential to change life trajectories for many people” (p. 38). Hence, it facilitates treatment programming to reduce juvenile offending and promote positive youth (behavioral) development.

### **Medical and Mental Health Screening**

Since 2010, medical and mental health screening has been available to children in police lockups, although only sometimes. Practitioners use the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument – II (MAYSI-2) to perform preliminary medical and psychological screening of youth in conflict with the law based on seven measures: alcohol/drug use; angry-irritable; depressed-anxious; somatic complaints; suicide ideation; thought disturbance; and traumatic experiences (Grisso et al., 2012). The protocol for providing

medical care to wards involves consent from the superintendents. However, in the case of major or invasive procedures, the facility may obtain parental consent. Where parents are unavailable or unconcerned, the superintendent is authorized to proceed with consenting to the ward's medical treatment under the advice of a medical team.

Ideally, the instrument offers information to support staff that might facilitate visits to a health center if the child requires specific services or referrals to mental health counselors for further evaluations. Given that screening provides a basic description of the juvenile's health needs, medical and mental health screening instruments may aid in cautioning staff about what factors are related to offending patterns. The MAYSI-2 is supposed to be helpful in diversion programs, during intake, or in juvenile probation (Grisso et al., 2012). However, its suitability in the Jamaican context is unclear. Indeed, assessment tools supporting delinquency prevention for Jamaican youth must account for the country's inherent social conditions. It is unlikely that instruments designed for a specific geographical context will apply effectively to others (Atienzo et al., 2017). Nevertheless, authorities should not discount their promise as a starting point for augmenting tools that screen and detect mental health or substance-related challenges in girls. The justice system may use these tools to (1) appropriately separate and treat girls based on their risk levels and protection needs and (2) develop and deliver culturally sensitive and gender-responsive programming to ensure positive outcomes for girls.

### **Social Justice Services**

Jamaica's modern justice system also boasts the delivery of social justice services through the following categories of programs: restorative justice, victim services, and the child diversion program. According to the ESSJ (2020) report, there were 2,039 referrals

to the Restorative Justice (RJ) program between 2018 and 2020. Ninety-seven (97.4) percent of those cases were resolved. Regarding the national child diversion program, 234 referrals benefitted substantially from rehabilitation, resocialization, and reintegration into society by being redirected from the penal system.

Considering the high levels of trauma exposure to children across the island, the Victim Services Division (VSD) served the dominant proportion of youth during the reporting period, demonstrating a 19.9% increase from the year prior (2019). Of 6,144 victims who sought victim support services, 76.8% were females, 37.1% of whom were between the ages of 12 and 18. The Victim Services Unit actively identifies the needs of the victims and advocates for their rights. For girls who have also been victims of crime and violence, the unit assists with coping, managing, and eventually healing from their emotional trauma (Government of Jamaica, 2011; UNICEF – Situation Analysis of Jamaican Children, 2018). Clients predominantly demanded victim support services after they were assaulted (5.9 %) or victimized through domestic violence (9.3 %), murder (13.4 %), sex-related offenses (24.8 %), wounding (2.9 %), or where crimes were a direct result of behavioral (3.4 %) or ‘other’ (33.8 %) problems (ESSJ, 2020). Evidence also revealed that eight victims who received services from the VSU were victims of human trafficking.

The available data demonstrate that society often blames girls for their victimization experiences. This response to girls requiring services remains a leading cause of girls’ involvement in delinquency, as DCS records show that victim support services are the most sought-after social justice service for girls in conflict with the law (ESSJ, 2020). Girls victimized and then criminalized by the justice system present

complex behavioral and developmental challenges demanding gender-responsive services. However, in Jamaica, gender-sensitive services are largely not present. Additionally, while juvenile facilities comply with medical and mental health services and screening protocols for girls, there are concerns about the assessments – aided by tools developed in foreign contexts, and the demonstrated disconnect between the information they produce, and the information required to sanction juveniles in Jamaican facilities. Without context-specific data and instruments, more girls might be at risk of confinement, which could cause and exacerbate trauma and mental health issues, impacting their outcomes for rehabilitation and societal reentry.

Regarding programming, there needs to be more female-focused and primary prevention programs targeting girls under 18 years. Most programs are male-focused (e.g., academic and vocational training, behavior modification programs, Boys Scout programs, Possibility programs). Hence, girls' criminogenic risks and protection needs require significantly more attention. Other programs like the Learning for Life program, target unattached and vulnerable young adults ages 18 and 35 years, and aims to increase their capacity for employment and skills training. The available data exclude details of program administration, so it is unclear whether youth receive programming as an individual or a group intervention.

However, evidence points to the possibility of more group-level interventions, given the facilities' lack of space and resources. The data also point to a need for more general research and research measuring the effectiveness of existing programs. Only after program evaluation can authorities compare outcomes for girls, identify gaps in

previous efforts, evaluate adaptations of promising approaches, and develop and implement programming that reduces delinquency risk and promotes desistance.

### **Research Gaps and the Current Study**

The current study builds upon the academic literature in the Caribbean and internationally to fill the gaps in knowledge concerning the specific needs of girls in conflict with the law, victim-offender overlap and variations in between; juvenile female offending; programming and prevention efforts for female delinquency; and programming effect based on relevance, responsiveness, measurability, and resource. Broadly, this study explored these pertinent questions: (1) How do girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization? (2) How does the justice system respond to girl offenders who have also been victims? (3) What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica? (4) What programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law? (5) How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)? (6) What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome?

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

This chapter details the research design, participants, instruments, data collection processes, analysis, ethical considerations, researcher reflexivity, and study limitations, laying the groundwork for this study. Acknowledging that data is limited and sometimes outdated, it was necessary to examine the current patterns of female offending, given the intricate link between the future of society and the status and progress of its women. Learning more about the existing programs and their effectiveness increases knowledge about what works for female offenders. This knowledge can contribute to developing a more supportive environment within the judicial system that responds to the unique needs of girls and women. As such, this study was an effort to add to the literature regarding programming for girls as it exists in Jamaica currently. The details of treatment programs mirror what society thinks causes female offending, and anticipated variations in the performance of each intervention are likely influenced by how well they matched the females they intended to serve and demonstrated gender and cultural awareness within the local context.

By examining in-depth interviews with practitioners and formerly incarcerated girls, this study explored: (1) How do girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization? (2) How does the justice system respond to girl offenders who have also been victims? (3) What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica? (4) What programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law? (5) How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)? (6) What recommendations can

be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome?

### **Research Design**

The current study employed an exploratory design to describe the extent to which those involved in Jamaica's justice system perceived that the island's response to female delinquency was effective. An exploration of the research topic allowed subjectivity during data collection (Merriam, 2009), which helped to develop insights and direct future research (Swaraj, 2019) by more precisely identifying and defining existing problems (Kinnear & Taylor, 1996). The design was also advantageous because it was highly flexible (Swaraj, 2019). Reiter (2017) proposed that an exploratory design helps to provide new explanations of reality from different angles and is most successful when theoretical explanations offer a basis for understanding strong connections between variables.

The current study utilized a feminist criminology (Chesney-Lind, 1988) framework for interpreting female delinquency, including the sexual victimization of girls that often precedes their conflict with the law. A critical paradigm is inherently reformative and stirs the researcher to explore, expose, and oppose oppressive systems while advancing the case for meaningful social change. Therefore, feminist criminology, specifically Caribbean feminism, was relied upon to give regional specificity to the discourse on female offending as contextualized within cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts. Through this lens, practitioners and policymakers can dismantle culturally based structural barriers that produce and reinforce gender disparities in treatment programming. A description of girls' experiences and perspectives about their



system involvement alongside the views of juvenile justice practitioners gives girls a voice (Egbert & Sanden, 2019). Data needed to be collected and analyzed qualitatively to hear them and give meaning to the experiences of this under-researched group (Belknap, 2007).

### **Interview Sample**

This study relied on two target samples obtained through purposive and snowball sampling. Participants included five formerly incarcerated girls and 10 practitioners who were required to identify and critique the programming and prevention efforts for female offenders in Jamaica. Data saturation was achieved with 10 participants through interviewing practitioners, although 13 had previously volunteered for the study. The final analytic sample of juvenile justice practitioners included caseworkers, rehabilitation managers, social workers, child counselors, probation officers, and NGO representatives who had a history of working with girls sentenced to juvenile facilities like the Armadale Juvenile Correctional Center or South Camp Juvenile Correctional and Remand Center for girls or remanded at Places of Safety. These practitioners worked with their organizations such as the Department of Correctional Services, the Child Protection and Family Services Agency, and one NGO – Stand Up for Jamaica, for at least nine months and at most 33 years, and had extensive knowledge of the justice system's position on and responses to juvenile delinquency in Jamaica. Comparatively, the five women, who were former girls in the system, were between the ages of 20 and 31 years and had been released from a juvenile facility at least 4 – 14 years before the study.

**Gatekeeping (Access)**

The researcher contacted directors at the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA), given the institutions' mandate of protecting and rehabilitating children in conflict with the law through educational and other treatment services. Jamaica's Ministry of National Security granted permission for the study and access to the facilities and potential participants following approvals from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at Prairie View A&M University. The researcher approached individual practitioners and women formerly entangled with the law to solicit participation with the relevant consent forms.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

A critical step in the sampling process was conducting eligibility screening with all potential participants. Eligibility screening for formerly incarcerated women was based on two main criteria: (1) the participant's incarceration history and (2) involvement in at least one residential treatment program. Former justice-involved women would likely be best able to describe the programs in which they participated and the impact of these programs on their offending even after they left the system's custody. Women were excluded from the study if they had a history of mental illness based on research standards that participants must be able to engage in the study without undue harm or distress. Although the study focused primarily on girls, the criteria for selecting practitioners did not exclude anyone based on gender.

**Units of Analysis**

This study focused primarily on one unit of analysis: individuals, those who were formerly incarcerated women and practitioners. Regarding the women, socio-

demographic characteristics, such as education level and community setting, were included for analysis to facilitate comparisons of girls' needs across urban and rural communities in Jamaica. Additionally, the researcher focused on juvenile justice practitioners who worked at the selected agencies. Regarding the initial research plan to incorporate the review of official records, such as assessment and evaluation reports, prepared by the agencies as a unit of analysis, the researcher could not locate or access them. Consequently, she excluded these records from the final report.

### **Coding Schemes**

The researcher endeavored to collect comprehensive data during interviews with practitioners, meticulously documenting information in Excel. This included demographic details for practitioners, encompassing gender, education level, and length of service, along with their roles, responsibilities, and perspectives on programming and prevention efforts in Jamaica. Similarly, data for girls incorporated details such as age of offender(s), community setting, offense type, incarceration history, length of time residing at the juvenile facility, program name, program type, program length, program effects, and outcomes. The researcher manually coded these details given the sample size she achieved.

### **Instruments**

Interviews helped the researcher obtain new and detailed information through open-ended questions that sought clarity concerning the phenomena. Based on the operationalized definitions of concepts examined, the researcher was able to unearth specific data that offered deep insights into the research problem and the research questions. Interviewing participants proved to be the most appropriate data collection

method as the comments enhanced the researcher's ability to explore the effectiveness of the available programs based on participants' views and lived experiences.

The semi-structured interview protocol covered these topics:

1. demographic characteristics of all participants.
2. general questions aimed at ascertaining their awareness and perceptions of delinquency and programming.
3. staff's utilization of risk/needs assessment tools.
4. programming, including program name, type, length, fidelity, and availability (both inside and outside the facilities).
5. program effect (i.e., a measure of effectiveness).
6. program moderators, i.e., anything that might affect how well the program works.
7. recommendations for improvement of programs delivered and the overall experience of the correctional system.

The interviews were to qualitatively present the criminogenic pathways to female offending and girls' experiences with programming during confinement. For example, the research instrument included questions such as "Tell me what happened, and how did you come to be in conflict with the law most recently?" and "Are you currently participating in any programming offered at your facility or through corrections? If Yes, why?"

### **Data Collection**

The study relied on the knowledge and expertise of Jamaican practitioners regarding existing delinquency prevention programming by collecting pertinent information through semi-structured interviews with a sample of formerly incarcerated women, aged 18 and above, and a sample of juvenile justice practitioners. The researcher

liaised with Jamaica's Department of Correctional Services (DCS) to access these individuals. However, some DCS staff recommended the women who had passed through the system and had since resettled in their communities. Data collection occurred over two weeks, from October 25 to November 07, 2023.

Before data collection, the researcher secured approval from Prairie View A&M University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Ministry of National Security in Jamaica, adhering to predefined guidelines set by both institutions. Furthermore, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews in person and via telephone, ensuring the participation of individuals who willingly consented to be part of the study at their convenience. The researcher enlisted the help of the DCS staff to involve women over 18 who had previously experienced legal issues leading to their placement in either the Armadale or the South Camp facilities. Both women and practitioners could provide their consent for participating in the study by signing the consent forms in the researcher's presence or via email and returning them at the start of the interviews.

Interview times for each participant varied based on how much they had to say throughout the conversation. Nevertheless, most participants actively participated in discussions for about an hour or so. Data collection took place at the various workplaces of the practitioners in Jamaica and via telephone. The write-up of the data and analysis of the same occurred in the United States at the Prairie View A&M University. The researcher asked structured and semi-structured interview questions and transcribed data verbatim to obtain a complete image of the problem context. The interview protocol also entailed additional spaces that allowed the interviewer to capture non-verbal communication and body language, girls' and practitioners' reflections, additional

comments, and any other observations that could add utility to the study and enhance the study's trustworthiness and authenticity. The researcher manually reviewed and transcribed the field notes after each interview session to achieve data accuracy and ensure all participants' responses followed the original interview protocol guide. Audio recordings of the interviews did not aid the researcher.

### **Analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended starting the qualitative analysis process early, during the data collection stage. Moving between developing the concepts and collecting the data helped guide the overall analysis of the data and the research questions. Therefore, the researcher developed a provisional list of etic codes before fieldwork based on the literature review and theoretical framework (see Appendix A). Recognizing that trustworthiness must be established in qualitative inquiry, the researcher used data source triangulation and referential adequacy to address credibility (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999).

Researcher triangulation involved collecting data from different groups of people, the formerly incarcerated girls and juvenile justice practitioners from multiple institutions, and memoing critical observations about the content to gain various perspectives on the research problem. Alternatively, the researcher examined referential adequacy by constantly comparing emergent themes to the raw data to ensure that the interpretations and themes were rooted in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both these techniques helped validate the qualitative data, ensuring the data were confirmable, credible, dependable, and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, this approach allowed the researcher to change the model as new categories and concepts emerged inductively (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and deductively. The preliminary list of coding categories facilitated the development of a spreadsheet for organizing and systematically classifying codes as they emerged from the interview data. Accordingly, this list enabled a comparison of research findings across multiple studies and settings in the study's discussion. Data transcriptions, although time-consuming, were an excellent technique for the researcher to familiarize herself with the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Without audio recordings, the researcher asked participants to repeat in some areas or expound when discussing pertinent topics to achieve accuracy in the data collection and reporting phases. The researcher identified the occurrence of words by hand and computer. She also engaged reflexively and thoughtfully with the data and analytical process to provide code categories and robust themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

### **Thematic Analysis**

In qualitative research, thematic analysis provides an appropriate method for understanding individual experiences, perceptions, and behaviors across multiple groups (Joffe, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The analysis involves generating themes inductively and deductively from data sources, for example, interview transcripts. It engages a six-step process that requires the researcher to be aware of her paradigmatic orientations (i.e., constructivist and critical) while becoming familiar with the data, creating preliminary codes, searching for and identifying themes, revising themes, defining and redefining themes, and producing the report (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). Although thematic analysis, particularly reflexive thematic analysis, is subjective and may lead to differing conclusions about the patterns of meaning, this approach to inquiry is flexible. It

helps the researcher address trustworthiness in the study's interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For this study, reflexive thematic analysis was appropriate to address the research questions and provide a nuanced and engaging data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research involving human participants tends to raise ethical concerns. Therefore, ethical considerations extended to prioritizing the welfare and protection of study participants and their data, reflecting a commitment to upholding the highest standards of research integrity throughout the study. The risks of participating in this study for the practitioners and women were no more significant than those in everyday life. However, if the participants felt uncomfortable with the questions, they could refuse to respond or cut their responses short without repercussion.

The researcher also paid keen attention to non-verbal communication data during the interview, for example, eye contact and facial expressions, to detect potential discomfort. Participation in this study was voluntary, meaning participants chose to participate without coercion or deception. Additionally, participants could refuse to answer questions they found sensitive or decide to discontinue participation or withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalty.

The researcher secured a private room to interview the practitioners to circumvent distractions or disturbances. However, when that space was unavailable, the researcher interviewed the practitioners in their cubicles or inside an empty office. The researcher also aimed to protect data confidentiality by removing identifiers from the transcript data to mitigate the risks to study participants. Women and practitioners were assigned an identification code and number (e.g., practitioner – CJP2; women – G1) to exclude their



names from the interview instrument throughout the study. Furthermore, the consent forms were stored separately from the interview data.

While the participants in this study did not experience immediate benefits, their contributions could drive systemic changes that benefit society as a whole. The insights gained from the responses and findings in this research could serve as a catalyst, encouraging the government of Jamaica and other stakeholders to refine and optimize offending prevention programs, specifically focusing on addressing the unique needs of girls in society. Thus, in spite of not receiving compensation, the participants' efforts exemplified the transformative power of research in advancing societal well-being.

### **Reflexivity**

The researcher engaged in reflexivity to manage her potential biases and their influence over the study outcome. One technique that she used to assist with her process of reflection was journaling during the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers must acknowledge and disclose their backgrounds, experiences, and stakes in the research process. Recognizing this, the researcher discussed identifying potential gaps in her data and interpretations of the data with colleagues. From these dialogues, she incorporated feedback to refine and improve the clarity and quality of her work.

The researcher received practical training in managing development efforts, policy reform, and public services renewal initiatives and, therefore, applied a policy perspective to assess and address the research problem. The researcher utilized her skillset to explore the impact of programming on girls' experiences within the system, their development, social adjustment, and future behavior. By engaging the prospect of

system reform through a gendered lens, the researcher endeavored to provide a transformative framework that can benefit communities nationwide.

The focus of this study was to present cultural, legislative, policy, and institutional change recommendations related to females who offend if such is necessary. However, her interest in undertaking this research extended beyond academic reasons. As someone who has not experienced the justice system, she observes an urgent need for more evidence-based knowledge and evaluation reports to address female offending and recidivism and, secondly, to break violent cycles for generations of girls and women living in Jamaica.

Overall, research and commentary examining the link between gender and crime in Jamaica are largely missing. Of those that exist, the majority have framed girls only as victims of sexual violence. However, the recent escalation in incidences involving violent girls, usually in high schools, appears much more complex. The study presents the voices of the practitioners and the former girls of the justice system to address this knowledge gap. Their experiences and voices have been instrumental in this study's completion.

### ***Reflexivity of Girls***

This study gave various consideration to girls in conflict with the law, from their victimization experiences, that is, abuse and neglect, to their offending behaviors, their status and serious offending, the rules governing their treatment in state care, and the efforts toward prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration through programming. This study acknowledged that girls' experiences of the justice system might contribute to their resentment towards it and the juvenile justice practitioners who worked with them. At the

same time, those experiences might catalyze their advocacy and activism for juvenile justice reforms.

Observing and engaging with former justice-involved girls gave the researcher a unique opportunity to capture their raw experiences and lessons learned over their years of system involvement. Broadly, their backgrounds and lived experiences can help educate stakeholders like parents, families, school administrators, NGOs, and the staff at the DCS, regarding gaps that may exist in the correctional system. Such pointed discussions could make a difference in informing budgeting and procurement processes by helping to resolve the issue of misallocating funds and promoting direct investment in programming that is well-matched to the needs of the girls who offend.

### ***Reflexivity of Juvenile Justice Practitioners***

This study acknowledges that practitioners have a stake in protecting their institutions for fear of professional setbacks. In this regard, some practitioners might withhold pertinent information to preserve the image of the institutions for which they work. Moreover, depending on how practitioners feel about the degree of administrative and political support they receive for their work, some might be inclined towards misrepresenting the truth to generate systematic and other changes. Alternatively, their experiences might urge them to be truthful to achieve the same end.

### **Paradigmatic Perspectives**

This study engaged the constructivist and critical paradigms. Researchers within these frameworks acknowledge that the truth varies, and that social change is achievable. Specifically, the constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm endeavors to understand the subjective world of human experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) and permits the

researcher to understand and interpret the meanings that subjects ascribe to the context in which they live and function. In this study, the researcher endeavored to understand the perspectives of the young women who had experienced the justice system as girls and the practitioners who served them. Hence, the researcher was particularly keen on interpreting the socially constructed realities of all the subjects involved in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) to delineate female delinquency more accurately.

Comparatively, the critical (transformative) paradigm addresses economic and socio-political issues that may contribute to and escalate conflict and struggle to create real change. In this vein, the critical paradigm could be transformative because it compels researchers to confront and improve social injustices. The paradigm acknowledges cultural norms and guides the researcher's examination of individual conditions and situations and social positioning within the unique context of Jamaica. In this way, the researcher's efforts may facilitate the discovery of agency- for both girls and practitioners – previously hidden by social practices (Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Martens, 2015). Furthermore, research efforts should signify a means of taking action toward opportunities for delinquency prevention within the correctional system.

### **Summary**

This study examined the utilization of programming for female delinquency prevention in Jamaica and whether these programs seemed effective. This chapter presented the research design, including epistemological assumptions, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with juvenile justice practitioners and young women who were formerly children under the care of the

Department of Correctional Services, Jamaica. The results offer perceptions of programs and services and thoughts about improvement.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study aimed to garner the perspectives of former justice-involved girls and juvenile justice practitioners regarding the extent to which the Jamaican justice system has responded effectively to young females in conflict with the law. This chapter outlines the research setting and demographic characteristics of the participants, both former justice-involved girls and juvenile justice practitioners, a summary of the research themes, and a discussion of the research findings supplemented by participants' narratives, evidenced throughout the chapter.

#### **The Setting**

The researcher traveled to Jamaica to interview juvenile justice practitioners ( $n = 10$ ) and formerly incarcerated girls ( $n = 5$ ) over two weeks, between October 25 and November 8, 2023, for a combined total of 15 interviews. Collectively, the interviews accounted for approximately 15 hours without the aid of audio tape recordings. During this time, the researcher not only obtained the perspectives of the girls and practitioners but also developed a rapport with study participants, enabling the study's completion.

Remarkably, this rapport between the researcher and study participants permitted a deeper dive into each person's lived experiences, thus allowing the revelation of inimitable and rich data regarding their sensitivities and reflexivity. Thus, the following section provides an exclusive and detailed description of the programming and prevention efforts targeting female delinquency from the perspectives of juvenile justice practitioners and former justice-involved girls in Jamaica. Having de-identified the data, the researcher assigned an identification code and number to each participant.

## **Description of the Sample**

### ***Demographics of the Practitioners***

The researcher initially planned and prepared for interviews with, at most, 15 practitioners working with girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica. Thirteen practitioners agreed to participate. However, the researcher completed data collection with only 10, given that she achieved data saturation early. The final sample of juvenile justice practitioners included caseworkers, rehabilitation managers, social workers, child counselors, probation officers, and NGO representatives who had a history of working with girls sentenced to the South Camp Juvenile Remand and Correctional Center (SCJRCC) or remanded at Places of Safety that accommodated girls across the Island. These practitioners worked with the Department of Correctional Services, the Child Protection and Family Services Agency, and one NGO – Stand Up for Jamaica, with years of service ranging from 9 months to 396 months (33 years).

Of the 10 practitioners who completed the interview, seven were female, and three were male. Of the seven women, all had training in social work but specialized in various functions, including (1) child welfare (2), family court (3), human services, and (4), and investigation. Of the three men, two had social work training, and one had human services training. The men worked at various ranks as officers in the family court either investigation/internal affairs or child welfare. All practitioners earned bachelor's or master's degrees in social work, counseling, psychology, or national security. Only one earned a PhD in Gender & Development Studies.

### **Demographics of the Girls**

The researcher initially planned and prepared for interviews with at most 20 formerly incarcerated girls in Jamaica. She actively identified and interviewed five girls who made themselves available at the time through the snowballing method. The participants were between 20 and 31 and entered the facility when they were between 13 and 16. Thus, all the participants were released from the juvenile facilities 4 – 14 years before the study and had since been contending with their reintegration needs.

In terms of education, two had failed to complete high school. The highest education level attained by the other three girls was high school. Girls resided in both urban and rural settings. The court adjudicated them as delinquent and committed them to the Armadale Juvenile Correctional Center which no longer exists or the South Camp Juvenile Remand and Correctional Center (SCJRCC) on the island for either wounding or uncontrollable behavior. In their current households, two were single mothers with at least one child, one resided with her mother and grandmother, one lived with her partner and her partner's children, and one resided with her two children, her father, her aunt, her uncle, two cousins, and her grandmother. Regarding sexual orientation, one identified as gay, while the remaining four girls identified as straight.

### ***Assessment of Body Language***

The researcher observed non-verbal communication data during the interviews such as eye contact, facial expressions, and vocal inflection, to detect confidence, potential discomfort, and transparency in responses (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The researcher observed that non-verbal communication was less frequent among former justice-involved girls than among practitioners. Notably, practitioners, regardless of being



in a private and enclosed space, leaned more forward and whispered their responses to the researcher. Beyond keeping their responses confidential, this behavior exposed a cultural bias of distrust and suspiciousness among Jamaicans. Alternatively, during phone interviews, when the participant sounded lower over the phone, the researcher probed softer tones and intonations by asking questions such as “Why did you sigh?” or “What makes you say it like that?” or “Please, can you expound for me?” or “How did that make you feel?” Altogether, the body language indicated sincerity—pessimistic and optimistic tones related to results-oriented attitudes.

### **Summary of Results**

Data analysis began with a manual search for preliminary codes and memoing critical observations about the content. After analyzing data source of the narratives shared by juvenile justice practitioners and formerly incarcerated girls for common themes, the researcher addressed the six research questions that examined the issue of female delinquency, particularly concerning the programming and prevention efforts implemented in Jamaica. The six (6) most dominant themes were:

1. **Rejection:** the participants indicated that girls in conflict with the law experience feelings of rejection, which skews their perceptions of reality and interactions with others. The participants are also of the view that each victimization experience reinforces the negative affect, which, in turn, creates aggressive behavior.
2. **Just A Body to Store:** when recounting girls’ experiences in conflict with the law, the participants recognize that girls face unique challenges because of their

intersecting identities. They recommended tailoring interventions to address their needs instead of storing and hiding them in the system.

3. **Guidance, Love, and Positive Support:** the participants suggested that when girls feel heard, they feel valued and understood. Thus, catering to the girls' need for guidance, love, and positive support is fundamental to responding to girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica.
4. **One-Size Does Not Fit All:** the participants suggested that generic solutions do not serve girls' best interests when they get in trouble with the law because they struggle to adapt to changing circumstances and evolving needs.
5. **Inadequacy:** the participants shared a common perspective that while the ideas for programming exist, the structures and guidelines for programming are weak. Moreover, programming remains gravely limited by the lack of political will and buy-in among system actors and stakeholders.
6. **Relevance and Responsivity:** the participants perceive that programming and prevention efforts targeting girls' delinquency must consider the girls' experiences and needs to deliver programs relevant to the operational goals and responsive to girls' needs and interactions.

### **Research Theme 1: Rejection**

**Rejection** was the dominant theme developed from the data sources in their responses to the question of how girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization.

Table 1 is an illustration of the coding process.

**Table 1***Summary Table of Codes and Rejection Themes*

Codes	Code Categories	Emerging Themes	Dominant Theme
Cursing	Sexual abuse	Feeling dehumanized	Rejection
Shaming	Verbal abuse	Feeling unloved	
Molestation	Physical abuse	Poor self-concept	
Feeling unloved	Neglect	Lack of guidance for girls	
Neglect	Loneliness		
Poor parenting	Poor academic		
Parental absence	performance		
Peer relationships	Poor supervision		
Lack of trust	No guidance		
Adult exploitation (criminal, sexual)	Presence of negative role models		
Volatile communities	Community violence		
Bullying inside facilities	Bullying inside facilities		
Institutional abuse			
Microaggressions by staff	Microaggressions by staff		
Loneliness			
Literacy and numeracy challenges			
Negative role models			
No conflict resolution skills			

*Note.* This table demonstrates the codes emerging from the interview responses to the question of how girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization.

Girls in conflict with the law are those accused or suspected of committing an offense (UNICEF, 2006). Given the absence of literature addressing girls' victimization experiences in Jamaica, this study attempted to examine the role of victimization in girls' offending. Understanding the duality of victimization and offending is globally

recognized as a requisite for addressing girls' delinquency, given that girls' problematic behaviors are almost always symptomatic of prior victimization. Therefore, the researcher asked the practitioners "Q7. *In your opinion, why are girls in Jamaica in conflict with the law?*" Notably, practitioners separated girls' victimization experiences into two categories: *victimization before coming into conflict with the law* and *victimization resulting from breaking the law*. The codes emerging from practitioners' responses regarding prior victimization included *sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, neglect, loneliness, poor academic performance, poor supervision, no guidance, the presence of negative role models, and community violence*. Alternatively, regarding victimization resulting from breaking the law, the codes emerging included *abuse, bullying, and microaggressions by staff* inside the facilities. The practitioners' comments confirmed that violent victimization, in the forms of abuse and bullying, likely occurred in three ways: ward-on-ward abuse/bullying, staff-on-ward abuse/bullying, or ward-on-staff abuse/bullying.

### **Victimization Before Coming into Conflict with the Law**

The analysis revealed that girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica showed high perceptions of rejection, which could have influenced their delinquency. Feelings of rejection originating from victimization strongly relate to adolescents' behavioral and psychological problems, given that rejection might intensify the effects of their trauma. This finding suggests that rejection whether perceived or actual, regardless of whom it comes from, can cause severe emotional pain (Cleveland Clinic, 2022) or rejection-sensitive dysphoria (Dodson, 2023). This dysphoria could severely impact girls' resilience and even lead them to engage in self-sabotaging behavior like self-medication

and self-harm such as cutting, if and when they anticipate rejection (Shelby et al., 2014). Thus, it is possible that, for girls, self-sabotaging could lead to either peer-reinforced victimization or offending, either onset or repeat, when socially valued goals are unmet.

The practitioners suggested that most of the girls' adverse experiences originated within the family, as they described girls' offending as a consequence of poor [parental] supervision and limited guidance. Despite little research, the link between poor parenting, unstable families, and juvenile offending in Jamaica is robust (Grant et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2017). Therefore, findings from the analysis were consistent with previous research based on practitioners' comments that parents require resources to parent effectively. As one practitioner included, "...it is all from poor parenting... the lack of good resources for parents... parents don't know how to parent..." (CJP10).

Poor parental relationships or inadequate parental supervision have been found to predispose girls toward exploitation and victimization by men, but especially girls who become responsible for themselves at an early age (Grant et al., 2011). For instance, girls in single-parent households, where one parent is the family's sole breadwinner, are presumed to struggle with fewer resources and financial assistance that provide a safety net for them. As the single parent contends with multitasking amid financial instability, the child is likely left on their own to fend for themselves or left in accommodations, for instance with a neighbor, where they can be supervised. According to Gayle (2020), 81% of Jamaica's children grew up in situations where they lacked consistent supervision. Therefore, identifying and stabilizing the families of high-risk youth was vital in protecting them against delinquency or criminal involvement (Gayle, 2020).

Approximately 45% of children in Jamaica grow up in matrifocal households owing to the father's absence – through death, separation, or divorce, the mother not assigning father at child's birth, fathering children with several women, imprisonment, or emigration (Dreher & Hudgins, 2010; Patrickson, 1996; Walcott et al., 2015). For girls who grow up in these settings, the absence of a second parent might be directly related to their delinquency if they are not well-supported. For example, girls may receive less attention from their single parent, lack the resources to meet their needs, or have limited supervision and guidance.

Recognizing that single mothers sometimes struggle to get assistance (Ensminger et al., 1983; McCord et al., 2001), it is not uncommon for girls raised in single-parent homes to adopt adult roles and chores prematurely. In this process of adultification, girls likely assume responsibilities that they are not developmentally prepared for (Epstein et al., 2017). In balancing these roles, girls might put themselves at risk of exploitation because of their situational contexts and social needs (Epstein et al., 2017). As one practitioner said, "...it's a breakdown in structure... when there is a lack of structure, when parents are absent from their homes, girls tend to get in relationships early and deviate from the norm" (CJP3).

The literature indicates that with limited supervision and little access to emotional and economic resources (McCord et al., 2001), adolescents have the freedom and time to get involved in situations that do not serve them. While some might enjoy this freedom to explore their youth, others might feel neglected and act out when they want attention. Thus, feeling rejected by some girls might relate to attention-seeking behavior, which can

increase their risk of system involvement, as some girls will do what they can to get noticed like engage in impulsive behavior, risky sexual behaviors, and substance abuse.

From a different perspective, feelings of rejection might lead to them having low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression, which can manifest in risky behaviors, suicidal ideation, or violence. In the view of one practitioner:

... I am talking about the mood disorders... the depression, different levels of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, attachment issues... we are seeing the issues... I feel and worry about those at home, they're at schools and they are unwell but unable to access services just because of limitations in the system.

(CJP1)

These outcomes are especially severe if parental absence contributes to the girls' victimization. Given these conclusions, the researcher advances that some parents need assistance with parenting, while girls need positive support to avoid system involvement. The practitioners shared many of these concerns, having previously counseled some. More than anything, their views suggest a need to prioritize mental health care for girls inside state facilities.

As it is, mental health support for children in Jamaica is severely lacking. According to CAPRI (2021), children's exposure to high levels of violence over time has predisposed them toward aggressive behavior, high-risk sexual behavior, substance abuse, or suicidal ideation as coping mechanisms. Even so, only seven percent of Jamaican children received mental health support, and of the children in state care, 60% of children showed signs of psychosocial problems (CAPRI, 2021).

From these findings, the researcher interpreted that girls who grow up in matrifocal households who are not well-supported are equally vulnerable to challenges beyond sexual or criminal exploitation by men, as suggested in Grant et al.'s (2011) study. In this study, the analysis revealed that girls who feel rejected might engage in delinquent behaviors that help them cope with their rejection or loneliness. As one practitioner said, "... girls getting into gangs and cliques... and using drugs like marijuana and Molly..." (CJP3).

Given these conclusions, the researcher advances that some parents, more than others, need assistance and support with parenting. At the same time, mothers and fathers need to form secure bonds with their children to help them as they grow. CJP7 and CJP4 reinforced this standpoint by articulating that girls get involved with the wrong people without proper guidance and become susceptible to negative influences.

... I think that parenting is a big issue you have a lot of single mothers who just are not able to protect their girls because of the rush to go find a job... I have met various mothers who are barmaids so they would see the child off to school but when the child comes home, the child is left on their own and sometimes they get involved in things they shouldn't... so it probably boils down to children being left unattended, being impressionable... for the main reasons of wanting to be accepted and so without guidance ... some children learn or draw from the persons with negative influences... (CJP7)

According to another practitioner, "... girls coming before the courts may have social issues... there may be issues of poor parenting, peer pressure and a lot of them



make poor choices... they're from poor family backgrounds or unhealthy family backgrounds..." (CJP6).

Practitioners were also of the view that girls experienced victimization because of a breakdown in structure. Structural breakdown, in terms of dysfunction, gives rise to power imbalance, conflict, and chaos, which can perpetuate delinquent subcultures. Previous studies examining the structural correlates of delinquency in Jamaica confirmed that communities mired by crime and violence created an environment conducive to gang involvement and substance abuse among children (Lewis et al., 2019; Weekes et al., 2019). These social characteristics frequently pair with limited economic opportunity and help to explain why some girls get into relationships with older, criminal men on whom they depend for subsistence (Grant et al., 2011). Only a few studies portrayed an image of the girl gangster who was raised in the garrison or inner-city community and contracted to kill, scam, extort, or move drugs (Lewis et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2017).

From another perspective, Felker-Kantor et al. (2019) suggested that young girls who experienced persistent exposure to threatening environments were more likely to use and abuse substances. In the current study, the practitioners described the same structural deficits as pressuring girls into conforming to deviant norms and values, thus indicating support for the existing literature. From one perspective, girls experience feelings of rejection when circumstances force them to have limited access to resources and opportunities. Thus, girls who experience rejection, whether from peers, family, or societal factors, may resort to substance use to cope with emotional pain. Of importance here is that the intensity of rejection matters, specifically concerning girls' coping

strategies. As one practitioner said, "...it's a breakdown in the homes, in the schools... children do what they see..." (CJP 9).

Girls engaging in delinquency in Jamaica are considered "purposefully violent" and "acting with criminal intent" (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 95). These descriptors define societal reactions toward girls' delinquency, which give importance to their inherent duplicity (Denno, 1994; Simmons, 2002) and create a false narrative that Black girls are intentional and malicious when they do wrong. In this context, delinquent girls experience rejection from their peers, their families, and the communities they reside in for two reasons: (a) they have deviated from socially accepted norms, and (b) they have deviated from traditional gender norms. According to CJP2, girls' predispositions toward violence and delinquency "*come from the environments... they are raised in.*" This explanation supports Anderson's (1999) conceptualization of street codes, from which girls learn to resolve disputes through violence.

As indicated by some of the practitioners, most of the girls in conflict with the law come from rural communities in the westernmost parish of Hanover, St. James, and Trelawny and northeastern parish of Portland, which have developed their unique norms and values around the crimes most prevalent there. For example, according to CJP10, lottery scamming, a form of fraud in the West has given rise to a particularly unique set of girls in conflict with the law whose persistent exposure to criminogenic risks increased their susceptibility to getting involved in drugs and guns (Mortley, 2017). According to the literature, some girls in gangs play the role of "movers" – transporting illicit items, including weapons and drugs (Lewis et al., 2019; Weekes et al., 2019) and appearing to be less easily detected by law enforcement. Most of these girls are from communities

characterized by overall poverty, crime, and limited access to resources. Thus, they share similar values regarding decency, the use of violence, and morality (Anderson, 1999). For girls, this value system obeys the principles of cumulative disadvantage (Latham-Mintus, 2022), wherein they adapt to the absence of social safety nets and a profound lack of support services. These social characteristics create an environment where violence becomes more prevalent and entrenched, and people become desensitized to violence, are less empathetic, and are more prone to acting aggressively (Sheppard, 2022).

Given the conclusion that girls in conflict with the law are operating from a place of rejection – because of their overlapping victimization experiences – girls will attempt to campaign for respect through violence (Anderson, 1999). Thus, considering the duality of victimization and offending among Jamaican girls is critical to understanding the nature of those girls coming into conflict with the law. CJP1 identified the circumstances contributing to girls’ initiating and reciprocating violence in Jamaica. The revolving nature of the violence displayed by girls sheds light on the various sources of rejection, including peers, family, and the justice system itself.

So, a lot of the girls in conflict with the law are girls deemed to be uncontrollable under the old administration. Because of our culture, we expect girls to express themselves in a specific way... a lot of parents don’t have the capacity to manage them, so they bring them to the courts... When you look at sexual abuse of children, there are many girls in Jamaica who have been victims of sexual assault and so quite often we see where early sexual initiation causes many girls to start having suicide ideation etc.... girls will be very defiant and they present conduct disorders and other delinquent behaviors and end up in court as well... when you

look at the girls in South camp, a large proportion was deemed to have uncontrollable behavior... when there is an element of abuse, the girls will use violence to protect themselves but they are taken to court for “acting out” per se. So, there is the element of abuse that causes them to express themselves using violence and that is why you find a lot of their offenses to include wounding and assaults... there is also no conflict resolution skills for girls coming in conflict with the law. (CJP1)

CJP2 addressed the importance of exposing young girls to conflict resolution as a core element of violence prevention efforts across the island. While there is value in teaching conflict resolution to girls at risk, the personal stories from formerly incarcerated girls shed light on the role of culture, which could act as a barrier to effective conflict resolution processes. As one practitioner included “... it comes from the environments that most of them are raised in... they are not exposed to proper conflict resolution strategies and not trained to deescalate situations, then it gets violent, and they get into it...” (CJP2).

CJP4 argued that parents usually bring girls before the court, claiming or proving that the child is “uncontrollable” without understanding or appreciating the complex overlap among abuse, growing in loneliness, or lacking parental guidance and parental support when navigating their environments.

Well, we work in the prisons with the juveniles, so I know it quite well and I go there every Friday. Alright, if you look at the background, the background is volatile communities, violent communities, very poor parenting... usually there is only one parent, the mother. The fathers are not present normally and the mother

is not well educated, and she is hustling the full day trying to put some food on the table. So, children grow in loneliness... there is very little guidance and very poor education. Also, there is quite a number of abuses... most of the incarcerated girls are incarcerated as uncontrollable... the bad behavior is mainly generated by a trauma... most of them have been sexually abused, physically abused, verbally abused, etc. and have been trying to figure out what they are supposed to do to get help... most of the parents or family members have not been very responsive because usually abuses are into the family right so they do not want to report that. So, the child sometimes feels they don't have the support of the family or the parent. It is happening a little bit more... It's educating parents about the truth and the fact that the child who is the victim of abuse in a situation becomes the element of destruction in the family... so the children don't go to school, they smoke ganja, they come back home late, and the mother brings the child to the police station stating that she cannot manage the girl and therefore the girl ends up in front of a court where she is sentenced until she reaches 18. (CJP4)

### **Victimization Resulting from Being in Conflict with the Law**

Victimization occurring inside juvenile facilities also produces feelings of rejection for the girls sentenced or remanded there. Based on hostile exchanges between themselves and correctional officers, some girls might resort to disrespecting the officers, given their sensitivity to rejection. In these environments, being impudent may precede violence or be concurrent with violence, by for example hitting and cursing, to obtain recognition or respect. Such interactions constitute antagonistic behaviors that grow worse in the unproductive environments they create.

...I think these girls have underlying issues that have not been dealt with... so it's like they are acting out now. Say you interview a girl who has been charged with an indecent assault, destruction of property, etc..... when they get really upset, 70% of the time the parenting problem is not to the real issue... some lack family support, some live in sexually, physically, emotionally abusive situations where they are abused by parents or close relatives... and would not have the support... so, some will tell you they feel neglected ... other things they will tell you is how they are treated by some of the staff... they don't show them love... some remind them of why they are there and the girls end up being disrespectful sometimes because of that...(CJP5)

According to practitioners, victimization also results from literacy challenges. This explanation is supported by Grant et al.'s (2011) account that illiteracy or semi-illiteracy was the cause of many children's initial contact with the justice system in Jamaica. For CJP8, girls with learning problems may be more susceptible to exploitation because they cannot advocate appropriately for themselves. From another perspective, peers might exclude some girls from certain activities or events if they become aware of their learning challenges. Thus, to deflect from their literacy problems, some girls might misbehave while others might get frustrated easily or feel embarrassed (Thompson, 2022). Under these circumstances, it is common for victimization to be peer-reinforced.

CJP8's explanations indicated that the population of girls in conflict with the law is dominated by those who are functionally illiterate. This finding validates others' perspectives that the girls might have a limited capacity for conflict resolution or de-escalating situations before resorting to violence. As one practitioner said:

... At least 95% of the girls have a literacy challenge. They come to us but are not tested so it would be unfair for me to say they have a disability... But some have literacy and numeracy challenges and they... might get frustrated easily...(CJP8)

### **Narratives from Former Justice-Involved Girls (1 – 5)**

Some commonalities exist between practitioners' such as caseworkers, rehabilitation managers, social workers, child counselors, probation officers, and NGO representatives, and girls' perspectives on how girls in conflict with the law experience victimization. Based on the responses generated from the interviews, victimization experiences encompassed various forms of abuse including emotional abuse, institutional abuse, verbal abuse, community violence, and bullying inside facilities. The researcher included highlights from each of the girls' personal stories to draw attention to their core narratives quickly and briefly. These highlights urge recognition that along with feelings of rejection, other social and psychological factors such as street code, lack of parental support, negative parental attention, maternal inattention, and low self-control or impulsivity, contribute to girls' delinquency in Jamaica. Among their delinquent experiences, the researcher found that positive attention could potentially serve as a protective factor for these girls who experienced feelings of rejection because of their victimization experiences.

#### **Former Justice-Involved Girl 1 (G1)**

*“...I only fought to defend myself... [emphasis added]”*

G1 first came into conflict with the law at age 13. Now 30 years old and living with her partner and partner's two children, she revisited what she described as the most traumatic experience in her life: her placement in state care. After withstanding years of verbal and emotional abuse from her mother and having to fend for herself and her four siblings while her mother went to work, G1 was sentenced to the Armadale Correctional Center in Kingston for uncontrollable behavior. When asked, "Why were you in conflict with the law?" G1 explained that she got into a fight and ran from the police. In her narrative, G1 explained that:

I'm a garrison yute [youth]. Even though I was 13, I always knew how to fend for myself. It was my mother alone with five of us. So, probably that's why I'm so rough. I grew in the streets... I had to walk and beg on the streets... the only thing I needed at that point was love and support... I think uncontrollable kids shouldn't be sent to state care. I was sent to state care for being uncontrollable, but I only fought to defend myself because I'm not going to be a walk over...

#### **Former Justice-Involved Girl 2 (G2)**

*"...I felt like I needed more parent support... the least likkle ting, yuh jus' triggered... [emphasis added]"*

G2 first came into conflict with the law at age 15. Now 30 years old and a single mother of two residing in a rural community, she revisited the circumstances that led to her charge for the offense of wounding with intent. G2 described that the "victim" provoked her and cut her uniform blouse before injuring her in the fight that ensued. G2 admitted to reacting more violently than her attacker as she expressed, "Me did stab up di person" although she was merely "cut" by the knife in her possession. When asked,



“Why were you in conflict with the law?” G2 described how a lack of parental support coupled with abuse predisposed her toward violence. For G2, and quite similarly to the experiences of other children in Jamaica, some parents prioritize meeting the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing over providing their children with emotional support. As suggested by G2’s narrative, a lack of parental emotional support may contribute to feelings of rejection or neglect, which, in turn, can be associated with delinquency as individuals pursue validation and belonging elsewhere.

Me feel like when before mi get charged and everything I felt like I needed more parent support... they just beat me... in every little thing she didn’t take the time out to ask how I was doing or what happened why I acted the way I did... she only wanted to know that she gave me food to eat and neva care ‘bout nutn afta... so that was the situation... it kinda did mek you have nuff anger inna yuh, so you know, every little thing that people did or said mek yuh feel like yuh jus’ blurr... yu nuh like think and say yuh ago think about it or something like that... the least likkle ting, yuh jus’ triggered... (G2)

### **Former Justice-Involved Girl 3 (G3)**

*“I feel like I needed more attention... [emphasis added]”*

G3 first came into conflict with the law at age 14. Now 31 years old and a single mother living in a rural setting, she revisited the circumstances that led to her placement in a juvenile facility. G3 was deemed uncontrollable and was subject to multiple relocations in-between places of safety before ultimately being sentenced to two years in one of the juvenile facilities. G3 lamented that she needed more attention from her parents, who were mainly absent given the nature and demands of their jobs. While she

did not disclose the nature of her parents' jobs, G3 attested that more financial help could have mediated her pathways into delinquency.

I wasn't hearing because I was uncontrollable so... I feel like I needed more attention from both parents because mother was always busy, same as my father... by the time they got home everyone was tired and only wanted to go to sleep... probably I would also say more financial help... (G3)

#### **Former Justice-Involved Girl 4 (G4)**

*"I had to... defend myself... [emphasis added]"*

G4 first came into conflict with the law at age 16. She is now 27 and resides in a rural setting with her two children, their father, aunt, uncle, two cousins, and grandmother. When asked, "Why were you in conflict with the law?" G4 described that the situation forced her to defend herself against multiple attackers. She explained "...I was attacked by four girls and had to defend myself..." (G4).

#### **Former Justice-Involved Girl 5 (G5)**

*"...Mi sorry it happen, but it was just the moment... [emphasis added]"*

G5 first came into conflict with the law at age 15. She is now 20 and resides with her mother and grandmother in an urban setting. G5 shared her experience of system involvement resulting from a school fight with other students. The court labeled G5 as uncontrollable based on her frequent rule-breaking and disorderly conduct. G5's narrative draws attention to girls' self-control levels when dealing with conflict matters. Overall, it emphasizes the crucial role that parents, guardians, and educators play in aiding the development of self-control and conflict resolution skills in girls entangled with the law.

This collective effort is necessary to deter them from engaging in impulsive or aggressive behaviors.

Yu know fi tell yu di trut' miss, when I think about it, if the teachers at the school showed more care and concern... students will always have disagreements, I think they could have treated the situation differently and even the police on the school campus, I understand you will part the fights but to bring it to station and blow it out of proportion, dem likkle ting deh, honestly, if they sat us down and let us talk it out it probably wouldn't need to get to that stage. Mi sorry it happen, but it was just the moment... (G5)

On conflict resolution, as suggested by CJP2, these personal stories shedding light on girls “defending” themselves bring into focus a significant weakness in how people understand and handle conflict resolution in Jamaica. For the girls who were sentenced for uncontrollable behavior or wounding while acting in self-defense, questions arise regarding the rampancy of weapon carrying among girls in Jamaica. A discussion of weapon carrying among high school girls must proceed from understanding the dialectic between girls having weapons for protection (Sheppard, 2022) or because of a heightened response to broader social influences (Bailey et al., 1997). Contextual factors that can lead girls into conflict with the law include cultural reactions like stigmatizing attitudes regarding poor mental health can likely discourage girls from help-seeking behavior and increase the risk of victimization and offending as the psychiatric disorder worsens, poverty, and religion whether through beliefs about moral judgment, fatalism, and divine retribution that encourage victim-blaming of girls when they experience trauma. Thus,

understanding context and culture before strategizing how to respond and prevent girl delinquency is imperative.

The girls' narratives indicate that girls' protection needs and social influences are overlapping and interconnected factors in their disempowerment. From their responses, the researcher assumed two things. First, girls may not believe that they have the physical strength to defend themselves against an attacker without the use of a weapon. Second, girls may not believe they will stand a chance against multiple attackers without involving a weapon. Consequently, recognizing the absence of adequate protections for girls in Jamaica, some take responsibility for their security by carrying a concealed weapon – usually a knife – in contravention of the law (Lyons, 2022).

Conflict resolution assumes that social norms regarding civil interactions to solve interpersonal problems are universal. However, the dominant cultural norms within the Jamaican context dictate that violence is a “conflict resolution” method. For example, anecdotal evidence in Jamaica dictates that whoever is loudest, physically more assertive, or popular will sway public opinion in their favor. Hence, the social dynamic does not always allow for civil interactions in resolving conflict to be successful. Therefore, this study aligns with Anderson's (1999) assumption that children, in this case girls, learn that disputes are resolved through violence or by showing toughness and a willingness to fight. From this perspective, one might argue that neither practitioners nor formerly incarcerated girls understand that there is a conceptual difference between fighting and defending oneself. This ambiguity substantively points to the need for legislators to clarify laws regarding self-defense and reconcile sentencing practices that lead to net-widening in the Jamaican justice system. Thus, for girls to successfully navigate a high-

crime country such as Jamaica, it would be helpful for practitioners and program developers to incorporate an understanding of the social influences and cultural norms into more effective conflict-resolution processes (Avruch, 2006).

## **Research Theme 2: Just A Body to Store**

**Just A Body to Store** was the single overarching theme developed from the data sources in their responses to the question of how the justice system responds to girl offenders who have also been victims. Table 2 is an illustration of the coding process.

**Table 2**

*Summary Table of Codes and Just a Body to Store Themes*

Codes	Code Categories	Emerging Themes	Dominant Theme
Basic screening	Inconsistent and	Low-quality care	Just a Body to Store
Inconsistent counseling sessions	infrequent counselling for girls	Resource deficits	
Infrequent counselling sessions	Prevalence of girls who have literacy and	Power imbalances	
Limited staff, i.e., psychologists	numeracy challenges	Staff attitudes	
A body to store for a specified time	Limited human resources		
Long wait time (in between sessions)	The abusive relationship between ward and correctional staff		
Group therapy			
Education services for girls with literacy and numeracy challenges			
Insensitive staff			
Antagonistic staff			

*Note.* This table demonstrates the codes emerging from the interview responses to the question of how the justice system responds to girl offenders who have also been victims.

The practitioners' comments included various references to an inadequate response from the Jamaican justice system when managing girl victim-offenders. For them, these inadequacies exist and endure because, within the penal culture, offenders are just a body to store for a specified time. Challenges overcoming this deeply embedded attitude toward female offenders undermine rehabilitative efforts and likely worsen girls' behavioral outcomes inside the facilities and after they leave. The researcher, therefore, incorporates an understanding of intersectionality regarding the justice system to understand its treatment of girls in custodial care.

Feminist perspectives on intersectionality assert that identity markers, including [dis]ability, gender, sexual orientation, and social class, are layered and complex, often creating and compounding experiences of discrimination or oppression (Chesney-Lind, 2006; Gueta, 2020; Potter, 2013). As such, individuals with more intersecting identities are likelier to be disadvantaged and equally likely to be at risk of victimization (Carastathis, 2014; Hassler, 2020). For example, Jamaican girls involved with the justice system might be oppressed on the one hand because of their gender and on the other because of the offense they have committed. These overlapping sources of oppression for justice-involved girls, as determined by institutional and systemic structures, were particularly interesting for the researcher in understanding why practitioners felt that the legal system perceives girl victim-offenders as "just a body to store" despite the victim-offender overlap.

Within the female custodial population, most offenders have been victims (Jennings et al., 2012). Therefore, to discover the nature, merits, and shortcomings of system response for victim-offenders, the researcher asked the practitioners the following

question: “10a. After sentencing/arrival in this facility, are the girls evaluated to determine their needs (individual, family, peers, school, neighborhood, and community)?” Evaluating girls’ risks and treatment needs upon admission to the facility is a first step toward (a) exploring girls’ behavioral challenges, mental health concerns, trauma, and victimization experiences, which may have had a direct influence on their offending, and (b) developing the targeted interventions they may require. The researcher attempted to satisfy her curiosity about evaluations even further by enquiring about the frequency of assessment (“at least once per year”/ “at least twice per year”), critical times of the evaluations to be completed (upon admission/before discharge), and the specific risk/needs assessments tools (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire, Social Enquiry Report, Self-Assessment, and Other) used to facilitate these assessments with the girls.

The codes emerging from practitioners’ responses regarding the treatment of girl offenders with prior victimization include inconsistent and infrequent counseling for girls, the prevalence of girls who have literacy and numeracy challenges, limited human resources, and abusive relationships between ward and correctional staff. While the narratives from CJP1, CJP2, CJP3, CJP4, CJP6, and CJP8 confirm that staff may administer risks/needs assessments to the girls upon admission to the facilities, there are divergent views on the comprehensiveness and quality of these assessments based on screening questions and whether it was a standard protocol.

Some practitioners raised the concern that correctional staff complete rudimentary evaluations at intake on the offense with minimal consideration for girls’ mental health, trauma, or victimization experiences, even supposing these circumstances may be directly

related to their delinquent behaviors. Although these evaluations should encourage further investigations of girls' treatment needs, practitioners conveyed that in-depth behavioral and psychological assessments are not mandatory but must be court-ordered following displays of disorderly conduct inside the facilities. Some practitioners found assessment tools to be admittedly limited - based on the types of screening questions they ask - obsolete, and lacking structure.

Furthermore, when it comes to administering self-assessment tools to children, there is considerable doubt that all possess the developmental, cognitive, and emotional capabilities required to provide accurate responses to the questions posed.

Acknowledging that girls with literacy and numeracy needs dominate the female custodial population in Jamaica, the researcher assumed that some girls may struggle to understand and complete these assessments because they are likelier to have shorter attention spans and may struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary. Thus, from an interactional lens, [dis]ability, culture, educational level, gender, nationality, offense type, and social class, among others, along with the direct influence of traumatic and victimization experiences on social identities, co-formulate various systems of disempowerment for girls in conflict with the law (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000) and emphasize their marginalization (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2008). In response to the research question, the emerging themes of "low-quality care," "power imbalances," "resource deficits," and "staff attitudes" demonstrate an enfeebled response to girls who are victim-offenders, creating further an interlocking system of oppression that could impact girls' recidivism. From these shared perspectives, the researcher interpreted that tailoring assessment tools to girls' unique needs and capabilities, considering cultural



diversity, and maintaining an empathetic and supportive environment are focal points. They remain essential to the successful evaluation of treatment requirements of girls in custodial care and implementing developmentally appropriate and targeted interventions for them. The ongoing discussion is enriched by relevant excerpts drawn from practitioner responses.

### **Narratives from Juvenile Justice Practitioners in Jamaica**

Practitioners in the study brought attention to disconcerting practices, emphasizing that staff predominantly engaged in basic screening during girls' intake. Notably, this process neither considers girls' literacy challenges nor aligns with their ability to respond to survey questions. Some practitioners also included that staff frequently relied on self-assessments when compiling individual records for the girls in their care. However, the prevailing concern among the practitioners centered on the inadequacy of evaluation tools, particularly in failing to assess girls for mental health and other psychological issues. This gap, they argued, compounds the overwhelming difficulties girls face during confinement, further complicating their rehabilitation experience. As it is, these challenges undermine the quality of programs and services provided to girls in the custody of the state and impede the implementation of more targeted and effective programming.

According to one practitioner:

We have our strengths and difficulties questionnaire that we use to evaluate the children after they arrive into the facilities and this is a popular questionnaire... to conduct the evaluations too we outsource a lot because we only have two in-house psychologists... when our investigators are responding to a child protection report

and see that the allegations are true, there are some things that are looking for so they do a rapid assessment. You do a rapid assessment to identify the needs that the family would have and based on that assessment they will determine for example if the child is to be removed, placed with another family member, or stay at home with certain kinds of support. Now, when the child is in the place of safety there are a couple of things that can be done... we have a couple cases now where the child is in a place of safety and we're doing psychological assessments but those are ordered by the courts... however once the child is placed in our care ... we do some basic screening using the strengths and difficulties questionnaire... (CJP1)

Another explained:

Yes. Once they get probation and are here, we have the self-assessment forms they fill out by themselves. It has about 23 questions. They give us answers to identify the issues they might have, for example, gambling, substance abuse, family issues etc. Once the child appears before the court; a Social Enquiry Report must be done on the needs of the child, type of offense, family situation, education, health situation, family background, initial complaint and so on.... So, we go to the communities and schools the child is from to investigate, then we make recommendations to the court... We have something we call the of risk of harm screening which usually accompanies the ward's file... It captures everything... Not every file will have a risk of harm attached. We developed it but the risk assessment can be updated... it needs some improvement... (CJP2)

One practitioner included that “Yes, there are tools. But even at intake there is no real intake strategy for screening for mental issues...” (CJP3). Similarly, another practitioner explained, “...it is very poor very poor usually they just assess them to see what is done but there is nothing specific which is addressing maybe the roots of the problem, no!” (CJP4). Speaking on the girls’ literacy skills and their ability to respond to survey questions, one practitioner said, “...we use a self-assessment... I think some need to be updated because they are not always clear especially for some [girls] who have literacy and numeracy or other educational problems...” (CJP5).

From a different perspective, CJP6 said:

... I use a tool to evaluate them [girls] but that tool is not a structural tool... it depends on the individual social worker or caseworker to develop their own tools that they would use so it’s really based on the initiative of the caseworker.

Apart from the types and structure of the screening tools used, one practitioner included that “...most times as soon as the girls get there [the facility], they are evaluated at reception... the probation officers who attend court will follow up with the girls on the correctional orders to complete assessment...” (CJP7).

In addition to probation officers who follow up with some girls, CJP8 explained that,

The psychologist and case managers have done the risks and needs assessments, then the education coordinator would do the literacy and numeracy assessments to see where they [girls] would fit... they [girls] are at different reading levels, remedial, intermediate, and advanced. (CJP8)

It is noteworthy that the same screening instruments seem to be employed for both custodial and non-custodial populations of girls. This dual usage poses challenges,

including potential inaccuracies in assessing risk factors and needs, as well as the risk of implementing interventions that may not align with individual requirements. As one practitioner said, “yes, we do have a risk and needs assessment tool... it is created for juveniles and adults, custodial and non-custodial offenders...” (CJP9). A concerning aspect revealed in the study is that when practitioners encountered difficulties compiling a report on an individual, they turned to the juvenile for answers. As one practitioner said, “... within a month of arrival providing that a Social Enquiry Report is also provided by a probation officer or a CPFSA officer... a report is necessary, otherwise I would have to go off what the child says...” (CJP10). This practice raises significant questions about the truthfulness and accuracy of the information obtained, highlighting a potential flaw in the reporting process. Such a flaw has profound implications for programming and treatment, as inaccurate or incomplete data may lead to ineffective interventions and hinder the development of tailored and impactful rehabilitation strategies.

### **Narratives from Former Justice-Involved Girls**

The personal stories shared by former justice-involved girls reflected mixed responses of being asked to recall whether anyone asked what their needs were. Their answers, however, supplement the opinions of CJP4, who exclaimed that evaluation processes were admittedly “very, very poor” because “there is nothing specific addressing the roots of the problem.” Nevertheless, the girls’ narratives helped to clarify the practitioners’ meaning of “basic” or “poor” when describing evaluations. According to the girls, practitioners only inquired about their offense types at best, but at worst, no one had assessed their needs. One girl recalled being requested to complete a self-assessment but could not remember the specific name of the assessment used. Of the

girls, G1 was most descriptive in saying that, "...the only thing they offered me was the one phone call... they just checked me to make sure nothing was on me and put me in a dormitory." None of the narratives shared by the girls included that the staff enquired about their needs. Particularly, one girl said, "... no, it wasn't like that, no" (G3), while another exclaimed "...no, I've never had that... never encountered that before" (G2). According to G4, she was never asked to complete any assessment. She explained, "...the only ting dem ask yuh a weh yuh come een fah, that's all..." One girl recounted a distinct interaction with a staff member, during which she was provided with a form to fill out. She said, "...they gave me like a form to fill out myself... I had to tell them like things about myself and my home and so but ... no, I don't think they asked me about my needs..." (G5).

Actively involving girls in assessing their risk and treatment needs is a rights-based approach and a practical strategy for developing effective, empowering, and responsive programming that meets their unique needs. This approach will likely contribute to more positive outcomes for girls and promote the well-being of girls involved in the justice system. Thus, recognizing that only one in five girls could recall any question about their needs upon admission to a juvenile facility gives importance to a bigger problem. If all practitioners affirm that, upon entry to the facility, they evaluate the girls in contrast to girls' claims that they have not, the researcher considered four possibilities:

1. Interference may have occurred. For example, girls' new experiences lead to confusion or loss of details from the past.

2. Psychological or behavioral assessments are administered haphazardly or inconsistently inside facilities.
3. Psychological or behavioral assessments are not administered at all in the facilities.
4. Participants are prone to social desirability and extreme response biases.
5. Changes have occurred since the girls left the justice system.

However, empirical evidence supports the second assumption that psychological or behavioral assessments are administered haphazardly or inconsistently, based on previous reports endorsing their formalization for children in conflict with the law (USAID, 2011). Intuitively, the gap presented by these mixed responses reflects an opportunity to investigate evaluation/screening processes in state care to capture the whole picture. This exploration could contribute valuable insights for refining assessment practices and ensuring more consistent and comprehensive evaluations in the future.

From a different perspective, formalizing psychological and behavioral assessments in state care could expand practitioner responsibilities. Therefore, practitioners who work in juvenile facilities may become resistant if they are required to “do more with less.” Various reports have documented that juvenile facilities in Jamaica are egregiously ill-equipped to respond to girls in conflict with the law because of limited financial, human, and material resources (Human Rights Watch, 1999; Hunter, 2014; UNICEF – Situation Analysis of Jamaican Children, 2018). Thus, practitioners’ resistance to adopting new, evidence-based rehabilitation approaches – as guided by formal screening processes – could be instructive in that they lack the necessary resources and training to take on additional responsibilities. Grant et al.’s (2011) findings

validate the current study, proposing that practitioners bear an excessive burden with caseloads and inadequate staffing. Thus, “with much to do, needed counseling becomes less and less a part of daily job functions. In some areas, they are not available to all” (Grant et al., 2011, pp. 60–61).

In articulating some of the challenges that practitioners faced with programming, CJP3 explained:

When girls start to offend, they are brought before the courts, and they are put in a storehouse, and in that storehouse, they ramp up the security... the thinking is that I receive a body and I store that body for a specified time... as it pertains to rehabilitation, they don't rehabilitate because they don't know how to rehabilitate.

While his claim points to the training and education needs among practitioners, it also emphasizes that there is an insufficient focus on behavioral change for delinquent girls and an overemphasis on punitive measures. Given the role of intersectionality, the researcher acknowledges that successful rehabilitation should involve a nuanced understanding of the complexities of girls' behaviors, their circumstances, and the impact of targeted interventions. Thus, actively involving girls in the assessment process can empower them to contribute to decisions concerning their well-being and enhance their sense of control over their lives. However, until staff perceptions that girls are just a body to store change, these prescriptions will remain unrealized. Recognizing and challenging such perceptions is crucial for fostering a more equitable and empowering environment within juvenile facilities.

### Research Theme 3: Guidance, Love, and Positive Support

**Guidance, Love, and Positive Support** were the dominant themes developed from the data sources in their responses to the question, “What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica?” Table 3 is an illustration of the coding process.

**Table 3**

*Summary Table of Codes and Guidance, Love, and Positive Support Themes*

Codes	Code Categories	Emerging Themes	Dominant Themes
Attention	Parental affection	Acceptance	Guidance, Love, and Positive
Affection/love	Parental support	Love	Support
Guidance	Remedial education	Remedial education	
The need to fit in	Aftercare services	Parental support	
Mental health	Individualized	Aftercare services	
screening	treatment	Individualized	
Someone to talk to		treatment	
Remedial education			
Individualized			
treatment			
Parental support			
Financial help			
Trauma-informed			
care			
Substance use			
treatment			

*Note.* This table demonstrates the codes emerging from the interview responses to the question of what needs exist for girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica.

Throughout the conversations with practitioners, the themes of Guidance, Love, and Positive Support were most salient when they described the needs of girls in conflict with the law. The researcher asked this question to determine the predisposing need factors identified by screening/assessment tools. The researcher attempted to give



importance to context-specific needs from girls' experiences in Jamaica. The practitioners' responses revealed an interplay of psychosocial needs that, if meaningfully explored, could provide a basis for developmentally appropriate programming for both at-risk and delinquent girls. In the current study, the researcher dichotomized risks from needs to decipher whether they were mutually exclusive. While the risks present social and relational attributes, the needs of girls remain primarily emotional. For example, parental absence, when internalized, creates feelings of rejection for the girls. They want parental affection, but they need to feel loved, supported, and guided. When the parents do not meet this need, girls pursue it elsewhere, including from peers or older men and women. In other words, the emotional deficit predisposes girls toward offending but equally puts them at risk of victimization.

The cultural, economic, political, and social contexts of Jamaica can expose all girls to unprecedented criminogenic risks, but only a few come into conflict with the law. Therefore, the current study reasoned that beyond the environment, relationships accounted for the differences between delinquent girls and their non-delinquent peers. Hence, while parental affection, parental support, remedial education, aftercare services, and individualized treatment provide a buffer against delinquency for girls, it is ultimately their need for guidance, love, and positive support that may cause them to break the law. Maslow's (1943) Needs Hierarchy provides insights into girls' deficiencies of connectedness, which appears to trigger their delinquency. According to Maslow, people are perpetually wanting; thus, "any thwarting, actual or imminent, of these basic needs provides a psychological threat that leads to psychopathy" (p. 395). In responding to the question of what the most common and unique needs of girls were, some

practitioners raised the concern of sex and sexual identity. For them, these topics are not well discussed or understood and, thus, form the most significant challenge for modern system response. In discussing the negative experiences of children in conflict with the law in Jamaica, Grant et al. (2011) gave minimal attention to sexual behaviors between girls. The current study adds to that gap. For girls in conflict with the law, the need for love and positive support worsens with 23-hour lockdowns and irregular family visits. As one girl said: "... they [family] came by here and there..." (G5). Similarly, one practitioner expressed, "...remember they are locked down for 23 hours... what else will they do? Girls defend their relationships with other girls with their life..." (CJP7).

Well... girls tend to be responsible for meeting a lot of their needs especially their emotional needs because the officers work in isolation... they don't listen to the girls and so in trying to feel good in themselves and in trying to connect with someone they connect with each other very deeply, even sexually and they defend those relationships with their lives. This, I would say is one of the greatest challenges today... with the LGBT... and there is no system response to this challenge. (CJP3)

These findings validated Maslow's ideas regarding girls' negative responses to people and events, actually or imminently thwarting their love and belonging, that is, positive support, needs. Practitioners' comments on parents responding to this need in their daughters included providing positive parental attention and support for them. According to a 2009 OJJDP study in the United States, the presence of a caring adult is likely to discourage girls from engaging in delinquency. This explanation holds for the Jamaican context because when girls become responsible for themselves from early on,

they become more vulnerable to victimization, which later manifests in adverse behavioral outcomes (Grant et al., 2011). Thus, guiding the girls is equally important to help girls make better life decisions and advocate for themselves in threatening situations.

In the 2017 study, *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, researchers found that girls who functioned as mini adults in their childhood, due to the process of adultification, had higher standards of behavior and received harsher penalties because the societies they lived in did not perceive their wrongdoings as youthful exuberance. For example, in Jamaica, girls are arrested by the police or taken to the courts by their parents when they act outside of their parent's control. This practice is interesting precisely because it raises questions about prevention efforts in homes, schools, and communities. For girls, removing them from their homes and placing them in state care signals to them that they do not belong. Officers reinforce this rejection inside the facilities by isolating themselves from the girls. These situations provided insights that helped the researcher interrogate the associations between girls' victimization experiences, their psychosocial needs, and the romantic attachments they form inside the facilities. A better understanding of this context could serve as an important direction for research, given the implications for programming and training for program personnel.

Practitioners also commented on the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) response to these needs, which broadly points to a requirement for moral persuasion, education, and counseling on gender, sex, and sexuality. As one practitioner said: "They [girls] would have the need for ... counseling on sex and sexuality and anger management" (CJP9). Others echoed similar views, in which they largely agreed that an

effective system response to this challenge must begin from a place of awareness and education in schools. As one practitioner said:

There is no sexual education... there is no gender-based violence education which should educate not only the girls but also the boys... I am not talking about math and English; I'm talking about the fact that they [children] do not receive instruments which help them to get balanced and matured... (CJP4)

This study found that girls within the judicial system urgently require assurance, attention, affection, guidance, love, and protection. Despite ongoing debates among practitioners about girls' unique needs and risks contributing to delinquency, there is a prevailing consensus that family situations and parenting exert the most significant influence. The narrative from one practitioner included:

So girls with behavioral issues there are a lot of them and what I have come to realize is that girls really do need protection there are many of them that were abused and as children when I tell you that the impact of trauma is lasting... self-esteem issues as well because of their experience of being victimized so they feel like nobody's in their corner a lot of them resent their mothers and their families too so we find that the girls will cut themselves in places that you can't see... girls are definitely operating from a place of hurt girls sometimes feel isolated even in the facilities and remember too some of these girls are victims of trafficking so girls are definitely in need of protection... (CJP1)

For another practitioner, he explained that "...we haven't exactly captured all that data to understand those unique needs factors for girls..." (CJP2). His concern about needing a dependable record of the facts emphasized the importance of the current study while

advocating for additional contemporary research to address this critical gap in understanding. From another perspective, CJP3 explained “...everything is rooted in the attention seeking... they tell you mommy is never there and that drives them down a deadly path... they will tell you I want to feel cared for...” Similarly, one practitioner said:

Guidance and somebody to talk to because when we talk to them, they look at you and they tell you, you are the first person who is asking how am I doing how am I feeling.... The other thing which is very concerning to me is that they [girls] are absolutely emotional so they cry they scream, and they don't have any form of self-control... (CJP4)

Above all, these illustrations clarify that the fundamental cause of girls' delinquency lies in the neglect of their essential needs for belonging, esteem, and love. Consequently, it becomes evident that by addressing and fulfilling these core needs, parents may play a pivotal role in cultivating effective self-control mechanisms in young girls, thereby contributing to a reduction in their delinquent behaviors. One practitioner explained:

... I think it's more the need to feel a part of or belong, so attention seeking... they tend to tell you they are lonely, feeling stressed ... when you probe it's a problem that they have at home many cannot relate to their parents or siblings some say they cry a lot have suicide ideation some parents are not able to provide validation for their children ... (CJP5)

When parents fail to offer validation to their daughters, it often results in the development of a diminished self-concept and low self-confidence. This, in turn, significantly

influences their socialization patterns and choice of social circles. According to one practitioner:

Some of the girls suffer from poor self-concept which impacts how they interpret or view their environment and this poor self-concept results in negative behavioral outcomes for some it is a need that they have which leads them into negative groups such as cliques sometimes in order to fit in as well they are introduced to doing some things that cause them to commit an offense... (CJP6)

Categorically, these girls came into conflict with the law in Jamaica for reasons including gender-based victimization and trauma that caused them to feel rejected. When internalized, these feelings of rejection led the girls to develop a poor self-concept, inadvertently distorting how they thought and behaved. Notably, the practitioners' claims draw focus to the negative coping skills that some girls adopt while attempting to manage their feelings of rejection. In this study, it was imperative to analyze the role of coping mechanisms as an outcome and possible moderator when discussing the connections between victimization and delinquency, mainly because subjective victimization experiences (based on extent and frequency) can increase – or decrease – the risk of early system involvement for some girls more than others. These findings confirm theoretical knowledge about the impact of strain on girls' delinquency and the role of stress in defining coping responses (Agnew, 1992).

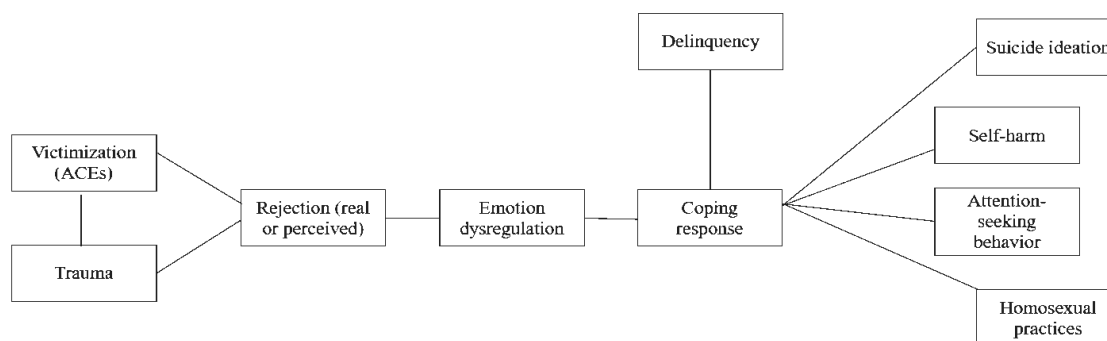
According to Agnew's (1992, 2001) General Strain Theory, individuals who fail to obtain positively valued goals experience strain and are more likely motivated toward maladaptive coping behaviors like delinquency, self-harm, or suicide ideation, given that strain creates and exacerbates negative affectivity, feelings of rejection. In addition, strain

emerges when positively valued stimuli are lost, actually or imminently, or when negatively valued stimuli become present (Agnew, 1992, 2001). By acknowledging that individuals experience strains subjectively, this study argues that girls in conflict with the law might initiate and follow through with self-harm that can manifest as overdosing, hitting oneself, cutting oneself, burning oneself, being promiscuous, starving oneself (Sansone et al., 1998) and suicidality, either having thoughts about committing suicide or attempting to commit suicide, as coping with very intense emotions.

Despite being limited, the available data suggest that non-suicidal self-injury and suicidality, both ideation and attempt, are prevalent among adolescent victims of physical and sexual abuse compared to their non-abused peers (Boduszek et al., 2021). Therefore, considering the profile of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica, this study proposes that guidance, love, and positive support constitute protective factors for girls in general, but especially for those girls whose experiences and exposures predispose them to self-harm. The observation that girls are “operating from a place of hurt” (CJP1) and are being “driven down a deadly path” (CJP4) manifests in the various coping styles their traumas mobilize them toward (see Figure 1).

### Figure 1

*Concept Map of Coping Strategies for Girls in Conflict with the Law*



Overall, girls' responses validate the views of the practitioners. Regarding responses to the question, "What could have helped you to avoid a facility such as this?" Four girls said love and parental support (see Table 4) versus one girl who explained that it would help more girls if school administrators and law enforcement officers showed more care and concern for them. Girls suggested needing more guidance after leaving custodial care, given their unique challenges for reintegration and resettlement, including but not limited to managing interpersonal relationships and job placement. This finding validates previous studies which have found that girls who were previously in the care of the State faced significantly increased risks of recidivism because of factors such as limited education, challenges with independent living, disability, education, low-paying jobs, unemployment, social exclusion and stigma (Anaokar et al., 2016; Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2014).

**Table 4**

*Major Risk and Need Factors for Girls in Conflict with the Law*

Major risk factors	Inadequate parental support
	Poor mental health
	Sexual abuse
	Family conflict
	Poor education
	Substance misuse
	Negative peer association
Major need factors	Attention from parents
	Affection from parents
	Guidance
	Remedial education
	Mental health care
	Counselling (long-term)



#### Research Theme 4: One Size Does Not Fit All

**One-size Does Not Fit All** was the single overarching theme in response to the question of what programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law. Table 5 is an illustration of the coding process.

**Table 5**

*Summary Table of Codes and One-Size Does Not Fit All Themes*

Codes	Code Categories	Emerging Themes	Dominant Theme
Educational programs	Behavioral development programs	Generic programming	One-size Does Not Fit All
Cosmetology	Community-based programs		
Sewing	(e.g., RISE Life, child diversion)		
Culinary	Social justice programs		
Art	Social preventative programs		
Drama	Vocational training		
Child diversion program			
Offender rehabilitation program			
Stand Up for Jamaica			
RISE Life			
Teen challenge			
Challengers camp			
Nation changers			
Transitional living program			
Substance abuse treatment program			
(START)			

*Note.* This table demonstrates the codes emerging from the interview responses to the question of what programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law.

Overall, where programming for girls is concerned, Jamaica's justice system shows slow and scant progress in addressing girl offending. None of the interventions for

children in conflict with the law (ESSJ, 2016 -2022) cater to girls specifically. Instead, current programs are one-size-fits-all, generic programs that appear relatively inefficient in encouraging “rehabilitation.” The conversations with the practitioners helped reconcile the knowledge gaps regarding current programming delivered to girls in facilities. Their responses helped the researcher to compare each program to the various sources of risk for girls in conflict with the law as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Criminogenic Risks for Girls in Conflict with the Law and Programming*

Major risk factors	Programming	Partners/providers
<b>Family</b>		
Family conflict	Counseling	Psychologist
Inadequate parental support	Group therapy	Probation/Aftercare officers
Sexual abuse		
<b>Community</b>		
Substance misuse	1. START 2. RISE Life 3. Challengers camp	National Council on Drug Abuse (NCDA)
Negative peer association		
<b>Individual</b>		
Poor mental health	none	Psychologist/Psychiatrist Stand Up for Jamaica
Poor education		HEART Trust NTA Stand Up for Jamaica

*Note.* This table demonstrates the current programs provided to girls under the care of the DCS, Jamaica.

Although some practitioners struggled to recount the programs’ names, their responses included types of services and their providers. Most practitioners referred to

counseling services provided generally by the staff at the DCS or the psychologist assigned to the facility. Other service providers included a chaplain for spiritual care, a case manager, and a psychiatrist. Overall, the practitioners used *programs* and *services* interchangeably, confusing their responses. Nevertheless, based on their comments, the researcher gleaned that girls had access to various services provided under external partners, namely Stand Up for Jamaica, HEART Trust NTA, and the National Drug Council Agency (NCDA), but only a few targeted programs – all of which were present in alternative residential care settings.

Generally, services tended to focus on the education, professional training, and substance use needs of the children. Notwithstanding their value to the children they serve, it is worth mentioning that there are currently no programs offered in residential facilities that target the criminogenic risks for girls. The study's findings revealed that girls were more likely to get involved with the legal system because of various factors interlocking to form systems of disadvantage for them. These parallel factors include family conflict, inadequate parental support, and sexual abuse; substance use and negative peer association; and mental health challenges. Considering the dichotomy between girls' criminogenic risks and programming objectives, it is evident that girls' treatment needs remain neglected, admittedly for various reasons. Therefore, providing adequate support for children in conflict with the law remains a formidable challenge in Jamaica's legal system. This finding highlights state actors' lack of political will, overshadowing vital improvements in programming and crime prevention efforts. As one practitioner said:

They [the state] go for where they can get the most success and quick results so, for example education where girls will acquire skills and knowledge... you will always see a lot of certification courses but in terms of meeting an objective of preventing female delinquency, that is severely lacking. (CJP3)

This study recognizes that girls in conflict with the law still require urgent mental health care and long-term counseling (Grant et al., 2011). Therefore, it recommends increasing mental healthcare services for girls and strengthening the health infrastructures to support continuous service delivery. In the absence of holistic mental health support for children in Jamaica, practitioners expressed concern that staff might be medicating girls inside the facilities to get them to conform to facility and program rules. According to one practitioner, "... Some of these girls are medicated, and I am not sure if this is what is happening, but the medications that they're receiving seem to affect their development... some almost seem zombie-like... " (CJP 5).

While medical interventions can be a necessary component of some individualized treatments, the tendency to medicalize children for manifestations of their trauma may overlook the broader cultural, psychological, and social aspects of their suffering. Moreover, without a formal intake strategy for mental health screening in facilities, these concerns point toward unintended consequences for the child's development post-release. Consequently, a comprehensive approach that integrates medical interventions with a holistic consideration of the child's well-being is crucial for ensuring effective and culturally sensitive support.

When identifying the programs and services for girls at their facility and girls in Jamaica, the practitioners tended to clarify which programs were available to girls in

residential facilities versus those in the communities. From their comments, the researcher gleaned that some programs had been delayed or discontinued due to budgetary, funding, and other setbacks before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, practitioners distinguished between the programs formed under the CPFSA and the DCS, illustrated in Tables 7 and 8.

**Table 7**

*Programming Offered to Girls at the South Camp Juvenile Facility*

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DCS + Stand Up for Jamaica (NGO)	1. Stand Up for Jamaica Education, achievement of professional skills, and psychological help for children in conflict with the law.
DCS	2. Challengers camp (temporarily discontinued since the COVID-19 pandemic) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-esteem and self-worth</li> <li>• Substance use and misuse</li> <li>• Anger management and conflict resolution</li> <li>• Healthy interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• Human sexuality</li> <li>• Career development and skills training</li> <li>• Money management and entrepreneurial training</li> <li>• Spiritual management and motivation</li> <li>• Social graces</li> <li>• Creative craft</li> <li>• Entertainment and recreation</li> </ul>

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**Table 8**

*Programming Offered to Girls in the Communities*

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DCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offender rehabilitation program/ offender rehabilitation guide <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Provide comprehensive guidelines for rehabilitation processes that improve community safety and improve life chances for youth.</p> </li> <li>• Substance Treatment and Referral Tool (START) <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Educate juvenile offenders and minors about substance abuse and offer treatment.</p> </li> <li>• Child diversion program – (negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic) <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Provide alternative sentencing arrangements for children and reduce the number of those exposed to the formal criminal justice system.</p> </li> <li>• RISE Life <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Prevent and treat addictive disorders and sexually transmitted diseases in minors, parents, and families.</p> </li> <li>• Teen Challenge Jamaica (for males) <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Provide a Christ-centered environment that fosters restoration, wholeness, and empowerment.</p> </li> </ul>
CPFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitional living program <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Provide reintegration services, e.g., housing and education to children leaving state care at the age of 18</p> </li> </ul>

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Girls provided mixed responses when asked to identify all the programs and services at their past facility. All the girls responded that they participated in vocational training and education programming, which exposed them to life skills training,

cosmetology, and culinary arts training, which appeared to be the most popular responses. Girls also participated in recreational activities, including art, drama, and tea parties. Reactions from the girls formerly placed at the Armadale facility included that the staff provided counseling services only after the fire. These responses differed from the girls formerly placed at SCRJC, which indicates some degree of change in terms of the treatment services girls have access to inside facilities. These girls, formerly at SCRJC, claimed to have received counseling at least once in the one or two years they stayed there. The girls noted that the sessions were very few and far apart. None of the girls participated in the transitional living program, given that they left the facility before turning 18.

The emphasis on educational and professional skills training inside the facilities overshadowed programs and services that provide psychological support and spiritual care. In their responses, none of the girls included religious or spiritual programming as a component of their “treatment.” Section 62(h) of the CCPA (2004) revealed that even though children have special rights while in places of safety, children's homes, or under the care of a suitable guardian, “to receive the religious instruction, and, as far as may be reasonably practicable, to participate in the religious activities of the child’s choice” (p. 45) there are no such provisions for children committed to juvenile facilities. Given the extent of empirical support for religiosity in deterring destructive behaviors and the value Jamaicans attach to spirituality, the researcher found this observation notable. Perhaps this finding draws attention to a changing culture from Christian and conservative to more secular and liberal. If this is true, the imperative of the state remains concerning, given the implications it has for [female] juvenile offenders.

In recognizing that girls seem to be less likely to engage in religious practice inside juvenile facilities, although the schools they attended, more or less, would have retained devotions (Gleaner, 2022) and promoted their spiritual guidance, this study asserts that religiosity is one “forgotten factor” (Larson & Johnson, 2003, p. 1) in the discourse regarding delinquency prevention (for at-risk girls) and interruption (for delinquent girls). Empirical evidence supports the view that religiosity directly affects delinquency by reducing deviance, independent of other parallel factors (Larson & Johnson, 2003). However, none of the participants referred to an established program or service encouraging religiosity among the girls within the facility. One practitioner mentioned that girls could speak with a chaplain for their spiritual care, indicating that this, like some other programs inside residential settings, was discretionary— available for use only when the ward chooses. That participant’s responses omitted any such references to religiosity, regardless of its impact, would suggest that it might not be a priority concern for the DCS.

Studies across the United States and other parts of the world have highlighted the strong positive associations between religious belief and involvement and delinquency prevention. Attributing this outcome of delinquency prevention to the role that religion plays in socialization and social control is appropriate, given that religion tends to foster socially conforming behaviors (Chitwood et al., 2008; Hill & McCullough, 2008). Examining whether religious involvement encourages prosocial behavior among juvenile girls by reifying positive social values in Jamaica would help guide program direction. It would suggest emphasizing religious participation for girls in the facilities if the same outcomes are observable in Jamaican facilities.



### Research Theme 5: Inadequacy

**Inadequacy** was the single overarching theme developed from the data sources in their responses: “How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)?” Table 9 is an illustration of the coding process.

**Table 9**

*Summary Table of Codes and Inadequacy Themes*

Codes	Code Categories	Emerging Themes	Dominant Theme
Limited funding	Under-resourced	Resource constraints	Inadequacy
Limited staff	programs	Lack of political will	
Bureaucratic red tapes	A lack of political will	and stakeholder	
Top-down decision-making	and buy-in from GOJ	engagement	
Fragmentation	and practitioners	Social desirability	
Social desirability among stakeholders	Social desirability among stakeholders	among stakeholders	
No buy-in from some practitioners	Limited evidence-based research	Reintegration challenges for girls	
Girls do not feel heard	Absence of program evaluation data	Need for culturally sensitive programs	
Recidivism rates of girls	Culture of resistance		
No way to track girls' progress	Reintegration needs		
A lack of political will from the government	Lack of continuity in programming		
Absence of evaluation data			
Limited evidence-based research			
Negative staff-ward relationship			
Some rural areas are neglected			
Some urban areas over-serviced			
Issues with job placement			

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Some girls' lives are impacted  
by pregnancy  
No guidance after system  
involvement  
Programs discontinued

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*Note.* This table demonstrates the codes emerging from the interview responses to how effective existing programs have been for girls in conflict with the law and whether outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban).

The researcher asked practitioners whether they could explain the effectiveness of programming in preventing females from being involved in delinquency and the types of resources needed to support existing programming. “Effectiveness” was operationalized *as relevant, resourced, responsive, and measurable* according to the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that guides Jamaica’s response to significant challenges. The practitioners’ comments focused mainly on the challenges affecting program delivery at the expense of the girls’ rehabilitation experiences. All the practitioners’ comments included human, monetary, and infrastructural resource deficits that limit the success of programming for girls. Regarding human resources, most practitioners said staffing and staff training were inadequate. Thus, in contending with large caseloads, practitioners admitted that focus on some job functions had lessened, ultimately leading to their neglect. As one practitioner put it: “We need human resources. We are short-staffed as it is. That is one of our greatest challenges... We need more case managers, psychologists, and teachers...” (CJP8).

What this means is that the support services for girls might be interrupted at critical stages of their care. Interrupting services before trust can develop between the staff and the girls lessens the prospect of rehabilitation. Although all the practitioners expressed caring for their clients, inadequate staffing creates a significant challenge for balancing programming requirements, ultimately defeating practitioners' good intentions.

Another challenge that practitioners expressed was the lack of political will in reference specifically to the Government of Jamaica, and stakeholder interest in delivering effective programs. These comments emphasized stakeholder and staff attitudes, including general disengagement and social desirability tendencies. As one practitioner said:

... The programs are not as effective... if the cameras aren't there, people hardly want to commit so there is a lack of political will... you also have selfishness [among stakeholders] preventing cooperation efforts, so even though we have all the tools, some practitioners lack the training... and don't care if the programs work for them. (CJP3)

From a different perspective, negative staff attitudes create a barrier for girls to engage fully with the programs. As one practitioner said:

They are involved but not fully engaged because if they were some of the bad behaviors would not be so much... they need to be more occupied... sometimes it's relationship problems with the staff so if they don't get along with the officers there they may be reluctant to engage and the officers cannot force them because that would be an issue... (CJP7)

Staff discrimination against girls, which may result from intersectionality, inhibits the process of rehabilitation. Thus, changing the attitudes of correctional staff towards these girls is an area of improvement for the facility. Instead of perceiving the girls as a body to be stored, correctional officers must be actively involved in the rehabilitative process, which necessitates building relationships with the girls. For one practitioner, forging these connections is essential to reconcile the gaps in programming and deter recidivism: “Rules without relationship equal rebellion, and relationship without rules cause frustration” (CJP3).

Thus, adding emphasis on sensitivity training for staff can better equip them to manage the girls in their care and, in turn, foster positive relationships that help resolve girls’ emotional deficits, especially those who might be emotionally dysregulated (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Kerig & Becker, 2012). Further complicating program effectiveness is how system actors manage monies intended for programming. Practitioners’ comments included concerns about the likelihood of the government misallocating and misappropriating funds intended for program development and continuity. These concerns emphasize two types of harm: disparity and inequity. Thus, practitioners expressed concern that even with limited funding, as it is, the behaviors of certain state actors are directly impacting the treatment outcomes for girls involved in the system. As one practitioner commented:

First of all, the Ministry of National Security does not believe too much in rehabilitation... there is the idea in punishment and throwing away the key which is very strong... secondly, we want to partner we don’t want to be donors and

they don't like it because what they would love to do is receive funds and then nobody knows what is happening with the funds... (CJP4)

The concern about state actors speaks to a broader corruption problem in Jamaica and public distrust of the government. Practitioners, therefore, believed that the government of Jamaica was directly responsible for not upholding their duty of care in ensuring that they met the fundamental needs of the children in their custody. One practitioner included that institutional and national policies must be more informed because they exclude the girls' input. This comment reinforces the merits of evidence-based research as a starting point for meaningful and effective policy and program development. The practitioner commented:

So, what is happening is that policies are being made without being really informed based on the experiences of the people or the girls and so they continue to make it seem like they are implementing a program and they will take the money from these donors and nothing much is done so sometimes the girls go in [the facilities] and they leave the same way that they came. (CJP6)

Another critical challenge many of the practitioners included is the availability of programs and services after girls leave the facility. For them, aftercare and reintegration support are significantly lacking. One practitioner said, "... the OAS took on the responsibility to provide the aftercare aspect once the child was close to leaving the facility, however, the contract ended..." (CJP10).

While aftercare and reintegration support are limited, the practitioner's comment implies that programming continuity and succession planning is a severe weakness of the current system. The practitioners explained that although the Ministry of National

Security assumed responsibility for aftercare and reintegration services once the OAS contract ended, there was little evidence of effect. Only one practitioner included that a child leaving state care might benefit from a transitional living program provided by the CPFSA. He explained that as of the end of September 2023, the transitional living program recorded 370 female beneficiaries out of 570 clients. Still, while efforts on the part of the CPFSA are commendable, there are gaps. For example, the program excludes youth transitioning from state care under 18 years, although some children do leave earlier and might be without the safety nets that shield them from poor outcomes upon exiting care. In this situation, it is practical to develop and regularly update programming continuity plans that outline steps to ensure the continued delivery of essential support services throughcare and aftercare (Fox et al., 2005).

Given this limitation, Jamaica might be experiencing high recidivism rates among girls. When probed about the recidivism rates for girls in Jamaica, practitioners contended that there is no database tracking juvenile recidivism. Once the sentencing period comes to an end, their juvenile records are expunged (Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1988), and they re-enter the correctional system as adults, away from the practitioners who served them while they were in the juvenile setting. According to Leslie (2022), “Success” suggests that ex-inmates have developed an ability to stay out of prison. But this does not necessarily mean that some or all the requisites to lead crime-free and productive lives following imprisonment have been met” (p. 60). The current study validates Leslie’s findings. As one practitioner Id: “... Sometimes we have clients that keep coming back... I know about two girls that keep coming back for financial

support and emotional support... obviously we don't have resources to continue once the period here ends" (CJP2).

As it is, the challenges that practitioners included in their response to program effectiveness signal a retreat of the state and system actors. Attributable factors include but are not limited to:

1. The authorities may doubt their capability or competence to rehabilitate offenders because of limited resources.
2. Shared perceptions that the problem is too grave to be suppressed.
3. Political ideology.

Indeed, attempting to balance child welfare with public safety is both complicated to achieve and difficult to sustain over the long term. Regardless, it is crucial to understand that retreating signals a lack of accountability for the problem. This interpretation raised the question of who is accountable for girls' rehabilitation. For most practitioners, it is the state. Nonetheless, some are of the opinion that girls bear the burden of their rehabilitation. As one said:

The programs are not tailored to fit everybody... I have some girls who are recidivists despite being exposed to the programs... the programs are effective for those who want it to be effective for them... Girls have to play a part in their rehab process. (CJP10)

Given that the programs are discretionary, staff cannot guarantee their participation in them. While some girls participate in programming and have benefited from it, for many, participation is conditional on its possible impact on their sentence or sentence reduction. More than anything, the practitioners' comments reflect that girls are

disengaged from the programs because they are not tailored to their needs. As one practitioner commented:

Some of the girls will tell you it is organized waste of time... they don't want to be a part of it because they are not heard... the staff does not include them in the program that is designed to meet their needs...(CJP3)

Nonetheless, as another practitioner included, “for the girls who are helped, it is a beautiful and meaningful process...” (CJP3).

Overall, for the girls, the programs were ineffective. Their responses included tailoring programs to the needs of the girls inside facilities but also providing more support to families through parent-focused programs. For them, programming that supports and reinforces prevention is vital. These responses give importance to the role other social institutions, such as the family and schools, play in preventing girls' delinquency. As one girl said: “...Fix the home before you break the child...” (G1).

Overall, for girls in conflict with the law, the programs and services are ineffective. Although programs are measurable based on their goals and objectives and appear relevant to delinquency prevention generically, they are unresponsive to the needs of girls in conflict with the law. On this basis, current programming, which follows a one-size-fits-all approach, is inappropriate for delinquency prevention among girls in Jamaica. This study recommends developing and implementing gender-responsive programming for girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica, programming that specifically addresses the gender-specific factors influencing girls' involvement in delinquency.



## Research Theme 6: Relevance and Responsivity

**Relevance and Responsivity** were the two dominant themes developed from the data sources in their responses to the question, “What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome?” Table 10 is an illustration of the coding process.

**Table 10**

*Summary Table of Codes and Relevance and Responsivity Themes*

Codes	Code Categories	Emerging Themes	Dominant Theme
Gender-responsive programming	Adequate staffing	Proactive and multi-disciplinary approach	Relevance and Responsivity
Reintegration planning and follow up	Competency training (LGBTQ)	toward program development	
Information sharing	Proactive and multidisciplinary approach towards	Gender-responsive programming	Culturally appropriate programming
National Tracking technology for girls who leave the system	program development	Culturally appropriate programming	
Culturally appropriate programming	Culturally appropriate programming	Improved	Collaboration among stakeholders
Sensitivity training for staff	collaboration among stakeholders	Fewer disruptions to programs delivered	
Parent and family-focused programming	Fewer disruptions to programs delivered	Evidence-based research and practices	Responsiveness
Updated screening and assessment tools	Evidence-based research and practices	Responsiveness	
More psychosocial programming	Responsiveness		
Softer approach with girls			
LGBTQ competency training			
Evidence-based research and practices			

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Proactive and  
 multidisciplinary approach  
 toward program  
 development  
 Adequate staffing

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*Note.* This table demonstrates the codes and themes emerging from the interview responses about the recommendations for program improvement.

The practitioner's comments led to discoveries that ranged from diversifying programming to addressing sexually aggressive girls inside the facility. The staff shared multiple stories that indicated the urgency for effectively managing the psychological effects of confinement on girls' sexual behaviors, noting that girls frequently became violent toward them when they tried to intervene. On this note, many practitioners admitted that although girls – primarily those who have more severe behavioral challenges – need individualized treatment, some staff expressed feeling safer in situations that allowed for the involvement of a few service providers and program personnel. Therefore, group therapy appears as the default treatment despite the various manifestations of trauma and behavioral problems that signal a need for a child-focused approach. In addition, practitioners' comments highlighted the need for more collaborative efforts between the medical unit, the psychologists and psychiatrists, and correctional officers because psychologists are uniquely positioned to be instrumental in advising program development and policies that translate into practice. Psychologists can apply their expertise in understanding human behavior, mental health, and effective interventions to contribute significantly to the rehabilitation and overall well-being of girls in custodial care settings. Accordingly, they can use empirical evidence to inform

the development and improvement of rehabilitation initiatives targeting female juvenile offenders, including treatment planning and skill-building emphasizing communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. Ultimately, this contribution can reduce the likelihood of recidivism and promote girls' successful reintegration into society. Thus, as a recommendation, one practitioner suggested that psychologists should decouple the idea of confidentiality from secrecy to develop and articulate a multidisciplinary approach to programming. Such a foundation can simultaneously equip practitioners with the know-how to effectively address the root causes of girls' destructive behaviors and, in turn, reduce workplace frustration for staff. The practitioner commented:

As it pertains to rehabilitation they don't rehabilitate because they don't know how to rehabilitate... the psychologists and psychiatrists work in isolation and tend to be very cagey with the information that we would need to help design programs or even provide services for the girls... they do this in the name of confidentiality but psychologists and psychiatrists need to know how to separate confidentiality from being secretive... so the case managers will plan the programs for the wards but they end up planning generic programs because they don't understand the basis or root cause of the girl's bad behaviors and so that is why you will have a lot of education programs because everybody has to go to school once they are inside the facility.... so even when a girl might need individual therapy there is always group therapy because of the staff's fears of dealing with some of the girls on their own... the [program] ideas are good, but they are disconnected so a lot of this staff operate in frustration inside of the facilities... (CJP3)

Overall, practitioners' recommendations for improving programming and prevention efforts in Jamaica included comments for children in Jamaica generally and, more particularly, girls in conflict with the law (see Table 11). Although some challenges remain, such as increasing mental health care, formalizing psychological screening/assessments in facilities, and integrating family support services and psychosocial treatment into programming, this study's recommendations compared well to those outlined in the USAID (2011) report on Jamaica's juvenile justice priority needs. However, given the current study's focus on delinquency programming and prevention efforts for girls in Jamaica, its findings advance new possibilities for delinquency and crime prevention strategies on the island.

These guidelines apply broadly to the competencies of all stakeholders involved in Jamaica's justice system, with influence in and responsibility for agenda setting, policy development, program development and implementation, program delivery, program evaluation, and program reporting in Jamaica. These stakeholders include the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Correctional Services, the Child Protection and Family Services Agency, the Office of the Children's Advocate, Civic Society, NGOs and the media. The stakeholders also include practitioners who work directly with girls in conflict with the law who conduct assessments and evaluations of girls and supervise their rehabilitation, such as correctional officers, welfare officers, child diversion officers, probation officers, case workers/managers, rehabilitation managers, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, chaplains, and teachers.

**Table 11***Recommendations for Delinquency Prevention and Interruption in Jamaica*


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<p>Recommendations for delinquency prevention: (Societal)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase mental health support for children by improving healthcare infrastructures and mechanisms.</li> <li>2. Increase awareness of and formalize psychological (mental health) screening and assessment for school children islandwide.</li> <li>3. Increase trauma-informed care and support for children who have been victimized by improving mechanisms and developing supporting structures.</li> <li>4. Increase public awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) in Jamaica. For example, to help Jamaicans recognize their various roles in GBV as victims, offenders, or victim-offenders.</li> <li>5. Promote gender-responsivity in all schools, including co-education and boys' schools, at the primary and secondary levels by</li> </ol>
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implementing sex education and advancing an inclusive curriculum.

6. Increase parent-focused programming, targeting specifically single-headed households in need of assistance. For example, to counter the early adultification experiences of girls and provide support that encourages positive child developmental outcomes.
  7. Increase and augment family support services. For example, family therapy.
  8. Increase stakeholder partnerships that support information and resource sharing to facilitate the development, implementation, and expansion of programming.
  9. Increase stakeholder engagement and political buy-in from the Government of Jamaica and government agencies. For example, to overcome their resistance to change.
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10. Increase and augment evidence-based research and reporting by improving processes and systems for researchers. For example, to overcome bureaucratic red tapes.
  11. Integrate evidence-based results into policy development and programming. For example, to inform budgetary and procurement planning and resource allocation.
- Recommendations for delinquency interruption: (Institutional)
1. Increase mental health support for children by improving healthcare infrastructures and mechanisms.
  2. Formalize psychological screening/assessments. For example, to identify behavioral challenges, trauma, and treatment needs.
  3. Increase trauma-informed care and support for victim-offenders.
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4. Create a conducive environment for therapy by designating a “safe space” for girls to do counseling.
  5. Tailor teaching modalities to meet the needs of the girls.
  6. Provide specific training to correctional officers and teachers to manage the psychological effects of confinement on girls’ sexual behaviors more effectively. For example, sensitivity training can help officers de-escalate situations related to girls’ sexually aggressive behaviors while in custody.
  7. Provide LGBTQ competency training for correctional staff and teachers.
  8. Increase staffing and financial support to facilitate hiring more staff to deliver programming.
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9. Provide more consistent and frequent counseling services for girls in custody and post-release.
  10. Provide specific training on interpersonal communication and conflict resolution and manage staff attitudes through recognition, appreciation, fair compensation and benefits.
  11. Develop and regularly update programming continuity plans that outline steps to ensure the continued delivery of essential support services during disruptions.
  12. Increase and augment individualized therapy for girls who have more serious behavioral challenges and improve reintegration efforts to meet all the requisites that allow girls to lead productive lives following incarceration.
  13. Develop a nationwide information system that tracks children from the first court
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appearance through confinement and reentry.

14. Keep girls engaged in programs by using shorter training sessions and seminars. For example, to overcome distractibility in girls with a shorter attention span.
15. Encourage involvement in programming by using incentives and incorporating more visual aids. For example, to engage girls with learning problems.
16. Implement new legislation and strengthen existing legislative framework to support gender-responsive programming.
17. Develop a multidisciplinary approach toward program development, encompassing innovative training for rehabilitation personnel and culturally appropriate curriculum and materials for girls.

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Many of these girls, for reasons such as poor parental relationships or inadequate parental supervision, came into conflict with the law. As such, their recommendations for

prevention emphasized improving parent-child, mother-daughter, relationships and increasing support for families through parent- and family-focused interventions.

Fundamentally, the girls believe parents should be more attentive to and supportive of their daughters, and girls should obey parental authority. As one girl said, "...instead of putting girls in state care, help the family... offer parenting workshops" (G1).

The girls' comments also flagged the classification of girls as uncontrollable and the mixing of these girls with other girls who received Correctional Orders for violent and other offenses, proposing that they are separated within the facility or housed elsewhere because of concerns for their safety and socialization. The girls' responses regarding staff attitudes validate those of practitioners. For the girls, specific training to help correctional staff and teachers manage different types of girls, whether those with a disability or those with different sexual orientations, within a custodial care setting is necessary. However, reform must center on hiring more specialists and professionals who love children and care about their success.

Other recommendations included providing throughcare (Fox et al., 2005) and aftercare arrangements that lead to safe and sustainable reentry even after leaving custodial care. For girls, inadequate aftercare may lead to poor outcomes like prostitution, early pregnancies, addiction relapse, and homelessness, as girls are re-exposed to criminogenic risks in their natural environments. Meanwhile, prioritizing aftercare could help them overcome the challenges associated with reintegration and resettlement. Under these circumstances, it is evident that the justice system has made only nominal progress in meeting girls' needs after their sentence expires.

To offer insight into reintegration efforts in Jamaica, the current study borrowed from the United Kingdom's Seven Pathways to Resettlement document, which portrays a tried and true situation of delivering aftercare support for youth. The UK proposed seven pathways to resettlement that address holistic reintegration according to youth's needs: accommodation, education, employment and training, mental and physical health, misuse of substances, managing personal finances and debt, and the welfare of children and families (Leslie, 2019; 2022; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2019). This Seven Pathways to Resettlement model could guide Jamaica's broader delinquency prevention and interruption efforts.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, six themes emerged from this qualitative analysis based on word searches. Specifically, through a reflexive analysis, the researcher described the extent to which practitioners and girls perceived that the island's response to female delinquency has been effective. The six overarching themes emerging from primary data included Rejection, Just A Body to Store, Guidance, Love and Positive Support, One-Size Does Not Fit All, Inadequacy, and Relevance and Responsivity. Beyond word counts, the researcher assessed the relationships and interconnectedness between the words identified, mainly because understanding those relationships facilitates meaningful interpretations of the context in which they appear (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the extent to which those involved in Jamaica's justice system perceived the island's response to female delinquency was effective. An analysis of transcribed interviews through conversations with formerly incarcerated girls and juvenile justice practitioners, provided contemporary insights into the shortfalls of programming and prevention efforts. Additionally, this study explored the nature of victimization and the victim-offender overlap, co-occurring factors that influence victimization and offending, for girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica while foregrounding the needs of girls and the quality of programming received throughout and after custodial care. The study gave special consideration to the factors accounting for variability in the girls' outcomes regarding their education levels and settings, that is, rural versus urban. This chapter includes: (a) Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis, (b) Limitations, (c) Conclusions, and (d) Future Work.

#### **Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis**

The analysis of 10 juvenile justice practitioners and five formerly incarcerated girls offered insights into the victim-offender overlap and the interlocking cultural, economic, historical, and social influences that impact female offending within a Caribbean context. Following data collection, the researcher systematically classified codes and identified pertaining themes as they emerged from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2014). Based on prevalence, in terms of the words identified by hand, the following themes emerged: Rejection, Just A Body to Store, Guidance, Love, and Positive Support, One-size-Does Not Fit All, Inadequacy, Relevance, and Responsivity. The ongoing

discussion describes these themes and concludes the study's findings relative to the extant literature.

RQ1. How Do Girls in Conflict with the Law Experience Victimization in Jamaica?

**Theme: Rejection**

Consistent with the findings of earlier research conducted by Baglivio et al. (2016), Berg and Schreck (2022), and Hesselink (2022), this study found that a higher number of female juvenile offenders in Jamaica had a history of victimization and trauma. These experiences originated from intersectionality between cultural and socio-economic factors that increased their risk of offending. The analysis contextualized girls' offending within their peculiar disadvantages based on the assumption that girls with the most interpersonal needs faced a significantly higher risk of engaging in delinquent behavior. This finding builds upon prior research, suggesting that women most susceptible to offending are those with the most pronounced social needs (Hudson 2002).

Schutz (1958) proposed that individuals possessed three fundamental interpersonal needs—affection, control, and inclusion—that shape their behavior in social situations as opposed to when they are alone. Within each interpersonal need, Schutz delineated two components—*expressed* and *wanted*. Expressed needs are those translated into actions, such as a girl actively seeking social interaction by initiating conversations or joining group activities to fulfill her desire for connection. Conversely, wanted needs guide how individuals wish to be treated and encompass desires for others to fulfill specific needs. For instance, a girl may have a wanted need for affirmation or acknowledgment from her parents, desiring their recognition and appreciation for her efforts or achievements.

In terms of prevalence, the analysis indicated that victimization experiences included neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and verbal abuse resulting from conditions such as poor parenting, societal influence, community influence, lack of conflict resolution skills, breakdown in homes, parental absence, peer pressure, and inconsistent penalties in schools. Consistent with the academic literature, the study found that Jamaican girls with a history of sexual abuse were more likely to become delinquent due in part, to the severity and impact of the trauma endured (Goodkind et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2006; Wareham & Dembo, 2007).

In Jamaica, of the girls who are adjudicated delinquent, it was evidenced that many of them had been victims of carnal (Neufville, 2011; Ward et al., 2017) or sexual abuse – a trauma that manifests as extreme forms of delinquency, including uncontrollable behavior and wounding/assault. Drawing attention to the broader cultural milieu, researchers investigating the sexual practices of some Jamaican men posited that gang leaders in some communities frequently demanded the company of underage girls to have sex with them (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007) while some other men might copulate with virgin girls given the belief that this sexual contact might cure him of his sexually-related diseases (Simms, 2012). These sexual attitudes toward young girls in Jamaica reflect a subculture that depicts sex as independent of love and sex with a minor as a [man's] right (Samms & Cholewa, 2014; UNICEF, 2006).

The analysis also revealed that victimization is more likely because of neglectful parenting. Poor or bad parenting can encompass various behaviors and situations, and its impact may vary in degree and consistency depending on the child's temperament and other supportive influences. The practitioners, who accounted for the larger proportion of

responses, described poor parenting as the parents' inability to provide structure for their daughters. For them, providing structure by setting clear rules and behavioral expectations with consistent feedback and predictable consequences might help protect more girls from victimization (Griffith & Grolnick, 2014).

The absence of this structure for girls in their natural environments exposes them to chaotic conditions in which they might feel less in control of their outcomes. The young women echoed these concerns and acknowledged that beyond their need for love or someone with whom to talk, parental guidance was fundamental in keeping children from breaking the law. Their stories validated practitioners' opinions on why girls become system-involved in Jamaica. Overall, the narratives explained that sexual abuse and neglect interlocked with factors such as poor parenting or lack of structure in the home precipitated girls' risk of engaging in delinquency. This finding lends additional support to claims that with fewer protections and multiple co-occurring risks, girls are significantly more likely to become enmeshed in a cycle of delinquency or violence (Posick, 2012).

Examples might include girls from single-headed households assisting their mothers by prematurely adopting adult roles (Ensminger et al., 1983; Epstein et al., 2017; McCord et al., 2001). Regardless of the reasons for its occurrence, this process of adultifying Jamaican girls increases their vulnerability to being exploited by others. At the same time, the child may become more autonomous by allowing her some freedom (Griffith & Grolnick, 2014). From a Caribbean perspective, this support contradicts society's prevailing social values of interdependence and power distances (Griffith & Grolnick, 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).



Contextualizing girls' victimization in this way reveals a persistent theme of rejection. In academic literature, predominantly from the United States, parental rejection occurs in homes with considerable conflict and inadequate supervision (Wright & Wright 1993). Parental rejection, more so than physical abuse, may also lead to delinquency, given that incarcerated girls show higher perceptions of parental rejection than their non-incarcerated peers (Kroupa, 1988; Wright & Wright, 1993). In these studies, girls were more likely to become delinquent because of actual or perceived parental rejection.

While these earlier findings support the current study, from a Jamaican perspective, finding an association between rejection and girl offending was inconsistent with Walker et al. (1998) who found poor educational achievement to be strongly associated with fighting among young girls in Kingston, Jamaica (Walker et al., 1998). However, this discrepancy in the findings should be interpreted as an expansion of knowledge and creates an argument for implementing research findings in program development and practice.

One subtle discrepancy between earlier research and the current study is the contextualization of rejection. In previous studies, there was a singular focus on parental rejection. However, in this study, the researcher found that feelings of rejection seemed to proceed from adverse experiences, in general, and not only when it was lacking from a caregiver. Describing rejection from this perspective offers a more fitting description of how girls perceived the moments they experienced victimization and the circumstances in which those victimizations occurred. From one practitioner's account, prior victimization invoked feelings of rejection that translated into resentment toward the caregiver – usually their mothers, who, in turn, took them to court, claiming they were

uncontrollable. Thus, girls' feelings of rejection were central to their offending behaviors, which were likely to increase with the severity and impact of the victimization experienced.

Appreciating that some Jamaican girls break the law when they feel rejected by caregivers, peers, community, and society demands psychological explanations. For example, Gratz and Roemer (2004) argued that individuals who struggled with emotion dysregulation, that is, a maladaptive pattern of emotion regulation (Hilt et al., 2011), possessed a limited capacity to adapt to and regulate negative, intense, and shifting emotions. Within the literature, childhood abuse, especially sexual abuse, and emotional neglect are two of the most common and serious causes of emotion dysregulation in children and adolescents, which can manifest as severe mood swings, emotional instability, or serious mental disorders (Paulus et al., 2021). Applying these explanations to Jamaica, some delinquent girls might be emotionally dysregulated (Hilt et al., 2011). Overall, this analysis highlighted the complexities of the victim-offender overlap for girls in conflict with the law and signals the need for a multifaceted and culturally sensitive approach to addressing delinquency prevention more effectively in Jamaica.

From a Caribbean feminist perspective, this study fills a gap by exploring the intersectionality between Jamaican girls' gendered experiences and proneness toward delinquency as they formed within the broader cultural and socio-economic context. Caribbean feminism, operating within the larger framework of feminist criminology, rejected the universalizing of Western theories and was therefore applied in this study to validate the finding that girls who eventually became entangled with Jamaica's legal system are, more or less, victim offenders whose victimization experiences induced

feelings of rejection, particularly in cases where parents were uninvolved or failed to provide structure and protection for their daughters.

RQ2. How Does the Justice System Respond to Girl Offenders Who Have Also Been Victims?

**Theme: Just A Body to Store**

The analysis revealed that girls in conflict with the law are perceived and treated as just a body to store. The evidence suggests that systematic inadequacies exist and endure because, within the penal culture, offenders are just a body to hold for a specified time. Challenges overcoming this deeply embedded attitude toward female offenders undermine rehabilitative efforts and likely worsen girls' behavioral outcomes inside the facilities and after they leave. According to Carlen and Worrall (2004), female facilities operate upon an imperative of control, which often results in the disadvantage and oppression of the girls and women placed there. The situation for Jamaican girls in conflict with the law is no different as they occupy a maximum-security correctional facility (Leslie, 2022) that lacks the resources and infrastructure to meet the needs of girls and enable their rehabilitation sufficiently – in other words, until their sentence expires, they reside in a storehouse.

A compelling point for the discussion began with practitioners' responses to whether girls were evaluated for their criminogenic risks and needs upon admission into the facilities. While there was a consensus that the officers at intake assessed the girls, practitioners confirmed that these were rudimentary assessments, insufficient to provide more in-depth psychological evaluations of girls. Practitioners indicated they relied upon assessment tools such as the Social Enquiry Report, ACES questionnaire, Strengths and

Difficulties questionnaire, and self-assessments. While they sometimes provide reliable information, practitioners confirmed that assessment tools demand some degree of revision to reflect the evolving social needs of children in Jamaica.

Moreover, too many girls in the system struggle with literacy and numeracy challenges, which limit their ability to comprehend what some of the questions are asking entirely. In these situations, girls were more likely to leave questions unanswered. The challenge represented here raises concerns about the degree to which facilities are taking seriously the needs of girls who enter their custody, given that evaluating girls' risks and treatment needs at reception is a first step toward (a) exploring girls' behavioral challenges, mental health concerns, trauma, and victimization experiences, which may have had a direct influence on their offending, and (b) developing the targeted interventions they may require. More importantly, they draw attention to the correctional staff holding the girls responsible for their behavioral choices and the circumstances that led to them (Hannah-Moffat, 2001).

The researcher observed discrepancies between practitioners' responses and the young women's responses regarding the nature of the assessments they received. Of the women, none could recall being screened or assessed for trauma or mental health challenges. Only one could remember that someone asked what her needs were. In contrast, the others recounted that the correctional staff asked why they were sentenced to the specific facility, in terms of the offense they committed, before being searched for contraband and turned away to the dormitories. According to Leslie (2022), Jamaica's penal culture is a remnant of the legacy of slavery, which manifests as control and oppression. Thus, for girls and women who come in conflict with the law, the

environment is fundamentally antagonistic, struggling to balance the demands of securing the prison with rehabilitating the offenders (Carlen & Worrall, 2004).

Foregrounding Jamaica's justice system response toward girl victim-offenders in Jamaica's historical context of colonialism and plantation slavery (Cain, 2000; Smith, 2011) helps to understand the structures that contribute to their oppression and domination both in and out of confinement. Culturally, the cycle of violence perpetuating from unmet social needs will persist if Jamaica's response to the crime problem continues to neglect the needs of girls in society. The position this researcher takes is that the system's response towards girls in conflict with the law is not ideally matched to their needs because it negates the value of utilizing culturally sensitive or current assessment tools that enable system actors to gain valuable insights and make informed decisions about how to respond to the girls in the state's care.

Therefore, the researcher advances that actively involving girls in the assessment process can empower them to contribute to decisions concerning their well-being and enhance their sense of control over their lives. However, until staff perceptions that girls are "just a body to store" change, these prescriptions will remain unrealized. From a Caribbean feminist perspective, this finding may contribute to policies that challenge and ultimately replace colonial-era legislation with new legislation that includes and empowers girls across the island (Evans & Kerrigan, 2019).

RQ3. What are the Needs of Girls in Conflict with the Law in Jamaica?

**Theme: Guidance, Love, And Positive Support**

The analysis showed that girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica have varying needs that interlock with their criminogenic risks. Notably, while recognizing that all

girls in Jamaica are exposed to similar criminogenic risks, regardless of educational level or living situation, the researcher was able to reconcile a significant knowledge gap. The analysis revealed that the few who came in conflict with the law received less guidance, less love, and lower levels of positive support from parents/caregivers than non-delinquent girls. Accordingly, these conditions that lead to emotional deficits such as poor self-concept leads to distorted thinking and extreme behaviors towards others within young girls are further compounded by community and broader societal influences, including rising crime and the power of social media, that motivate girls towards engaging with people and in groups where they fit in. This assumption draws attention to the issue of girl gangs in Jamaica and quite possibly deepens insights about the types of relationships that girls engage in for their subsistence.

Borrowing from the literature on gangs in the United States, Howell (2010) suggested that adolescence marks the period for forming peer groups and social networks, each of which might influence a youth's life either negatively or positively. Hence, some children may become predisposed to joining "starter gangs" (Howell, 2010, p. 3). Based on Howell's (2010) work, the researcher theorizes that starter gangs or delinquent groups in Jamaica socialize girls toward gang culture, which, in turn, leads to the formation of cliques, usually in schools.

If meaningfully explored, an understanding of girls' experiences might provide a premise for understanding victimology within the Caribbean and thus guide approaches toward prosecuting criminals who take advantage of otherwise wayward girls. Further, more work supporting Grant et al.'s (2010) inquiry on *Gang Activity in Jamaican High*

*Schools* is required to give current and new perspectives on girl gangs and the system's response toward prevention or interruption in Jamaica.

This finding supports the claims of intersectional disadvantage, as experienced by young girls in Jamaica. To rectify the bias against girls who offend, as demonstrated by public perceptions labelling them as “purposefully violent” and “acting with criminal intent” (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 95), the researcher assessed the relationship between all the emerging themes in this study. This assessment served to challenge stereotypes propagated by media coverage of cases involving girls displaying violent behavior and facilitated a more profound understanding of girls overall.

To that end, the researcher theorized that feelings of rejection, produced by victimization experiences, lead girls into emotionally dysregulated states for which they require guidance, love, and positive support to maintain a positive image of themselves and others. When these needs go unnoticed by their caregivers, girls become interrupted; and, along with co-occurring social and cultural influences, are more susceptible to delinquency. Furthermore, when girls come in conflict with the law, correctional staff might reinforce these feelings of rejection as they isolate themselves from the girls. Devoid of connectedness, girls might turn to each other to manage the psychological effects of confinement and satisfy their unmet needs, which, at times, can manifest as sexually aggressive behaviors toward each other and the staff when they try to intervene. Without a heterosexual outlet for their sexual urges, Ford (1929) suggested that it was natural for girls to engage in homosexual experiences. Therefore, in these circumstances, a one-size-fits-all approach to programming proves inadequate, and the expectation of successful rehabilitation is unlikely. Thus, to prevent them from reoffending, system

response should emphasize relevant and responsive programs and services throughout and even after girls leave custodial care.

Considering that the participants' responses revealed an interplay of psychosocial needs, the researcher proposes that more work is required across the Caribbean and multiple disciplines to provide a basis for developmentally appropriate programming for both at-risk and delinquent girls. A better understanding of the Caribbean context could serve as an important direction for research, given the implications for programming and training for program personnel. Academically, these findings may contribute to expanding or developing regionally-specific theories.

RQ4. What Programs Exist Specifically for Girls in Conflict with the Law?

**Theme: One-Size-Does Not Fit-All**

Despite the various failings and challenges with Jamaica's justice system, the Department of Correctional Services implemented several programs that serve Jamaica's juvenile custodial population. Nevertheless, as this research showed, according to the participants in this study, the programs that exist neglect the girls' needs, despite the victim-offender overlap and their experiences of multiple marginalities before they enter the facility (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). This study flagged the one-size-fits-all generic programs for impeding rehabilitation among girls in conflict with the law. As mandated by the Child Care and Protection Act (2004), programming inside residential care facilities for children must prioritize their education and professional skills development. Therefore, it is unsurprising that girls' needs beyond skills learning receive comparatively less attention.



The analysis revealed that girls in non-custodial settings received a more comprehensive range of programs compared to girls in custodial care as depicted by the sum of programs (i.e., Offender Rehabilitation Program/ Offender Rehabilitation Guide, Substance Treatment and Referral Tool (START), Child Diversion program and RISE Life) targeting girls serving community, supervision, or probation orders. For girls serving correctional orders at South camp, the study discovered only two programs Challenger's Camp and Stand Up for Jamaica that the DCS and a non-governmental organization provided, Stand Up for Jamaica. However, because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Challenger's camp was temporarily discontinued. Thus, as it is, Stand Up for Jamaica appears to be the chief participating provider of program activities and services working with children in conflict with the law, in tandem with correctional staff and practitioners, the psychologists and psychiatrists, who were outsourced to provide care.

Due to the unavailability of in-house specialists, outsourcing has become a staple for the DCS and CPFSA to deliver services continuously to the girls, although based on need. On its own, the DCS cannot provide programming and therapeutic practices to the girls. Redressing this challenge has demanded partnerships with the National Drug Council Agency (NCDA) and the HEART Trust NTA. The NCDA has the primary responsibility of detecting and treating girls' addiction needs through drug testing and counseling, while the HEART Trust NTA focuses on professional skills training in the areas of cooking, sewing, cosmetology, and art, among others. Notwithstanding their value to the children they serve, this study exposed that one of the most significant perils to girls in custodial care is the generic nature of programming. This study claims that

such programs might be irrelevant or even harmful for girls and even more so that the study foregrounds girls' offending in their gendered and multifaceted experiences.

Regarding reintegration programming, one practitioner highlighted the CPFSA's Transitional Living program tailored for children leaving state care at the age of 18. Nevertheless, there exists an additional opportunity to reconcile programming weaknesses throughout sentencing by focusing on the reintegration and resettlement efforts for girls departing state custody before reaching age 18. This approach not only tackles existing weaknesses but also ensures a more comprehensive and individualized support system for their successful transition into society.

Despite identified shortcomings, the Jamaican legal system has been considered a benchmark for reform in the juvenile justice policies of other nations, notably the United States, owing to the DCS' dedication to community-based programming for young offenders (OJJDP, 2002). Nevertheless, the neglect of girls inside the facility, characterized by inadequate and inappropriate programming, deviates from the overarching rehabilitative focus of the justice system. A critical reassessment and enhancement of gender-specific programming for girls are imperative to realign with the system's rehabilitative objectives.

RQ5. How Effective Have Existing Programs Been for Girls in Conflict with the Law, and Do Outcomes Vary Across Educational Levels and Settings (i.e., Rural vs. Urban)?

**Theme: Inadequacy**

The analysis revealed that behavior modification programs have been inadequate, and there were no variations in outcomes across educational levels and settings. The study measured effectiveness based on four parameters: relevance, resource, responsibility,

and measurability. While the participants could describe the programs and their objectives, they found them to be unrelated to the prevailing needs of girls. The analysis also indicated that programs lacked critical resources based on inadequate staff, limited financial support, and limited infrastructure.

Finding existing programming to be inadequate was expected, given that practitioners rarely used in-depth psychological or mental health assessment tools to develop case plans or inform referrals to specific treatment. Instead, practitioners tended to rely upon outdated instruments and rudimentary evaluations that created challenges for them. When staff lacked a deep understanding of girls, managing them became a struggle. This lack of knowledge and effective management may escalate the occurrence of extreme behaviors, which likely stems from the stress of psychological confinement and adaptations to more delinquent tendencies. Therefore, girls in conflict with the law might appear more disengaged than not, even when they are interested in change. Regardless of the girls participating in programming, practitioners expressed concern that girls might choose to participate, hoping their program participation would translate into a reduced sentence for them.

Compounding further the issue of inadequate programming are negative staff attitudes, a lack of political will from the Government of Jamaica, and limited stakeholder interest in delivering effective programs. Additionally, concerns persist about the misallocation and misappropriation of funds intended for program development and continuity. These challenges underscore the critical need for comprehensive reforms and strategic interventions to address the root causes of inadequate programming, fostering a more conducive environment for developing and implementing effective initiatives.

Overall, from the analysis, the researcher gleaned that program inadequacy resulted further in two types of harm for girls: disparity and inequity. Under these circumstances, the researcher proposes integrating evidence-based research into policymaking and practice. By incorporating evidence-based models into system responses, practitioners can better understand girls who offend and empower them to become [positive] change agents.

RQ6. What Recommendations Can be made to Improve the Effectiveness of Programming for Girls in Conflict with the Law Based on the Factors Related to Variability in the Outcome?

**Theme: Relevance and Responsivity**

In Jamaica, juvenile facilities are packaged as the solution to provide troubled youth with a structured environment and services, both educational and behavioral, that facilitate their development and reintegration (DCS, 2019). However, in many ways, this study showed that juvenile facilities operate in ways that run counterproductive to effective rehabilitation and reintegration of girls into Jamaican society. Notably, the legal system seems to have become a criminogenic risk in and of itself, as girls tend to fare worse after system involvement. This study exposed that girls' experiences inside the facilities mirrored their experiences outside of it. Therefore, it means that girls have the potential to demonstrate prosocial behaviors when they participate in programs that address their needs effectively and are relevant to them. The analysis revealed several recommendations for improving the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law and enabling positive outcomes for them. Greater emphasis is put on girls' psychological and emotional needs as they adjust to a life in and after confinement.

Overall, the analysis indicated a thrust toward gender-responsive programming that adheres to the risk-need-responsivity principle when catering to the treatment needs of girls who offend. Specific recommendations are:

1. Prioritize services for girls most likely to re-offend.
2. Eliminate generic programming that does not improve girl outcomes.
3. Increase funding to support programs and services shown to reduce girl delinquency.
4. Develop and validate culturally appropriate screenings and assessments to identify girls with mental health and substance use needs and match them to services.
5. Evaluate recidivism rates and outcome data of girls and use the data to inform policy, programs, practice, and resource allocation.
6. Engage families and caregivers through family-focused interventions.
7. Incorporate intersectionality within Jamaica's criminal and juvenile justice framework. For example, to improve relationships between correctional staff and girls in custodial care.
8. Integrate cultural sensitivity with conflict resolution management intervention.
9. Develop and regularly update programming continuity plans that outline steps to ensure the continued delivery of essential support services during disruptions.

### **Policy Implications**

This study indicated that Jamaican girls who came in conflict with the law were almost always victims of prior offenses. Appreciating the victim-offender overlap for

girls is, therefore, necessary to sufficiently understand the interlocking structures and influences that lead to adverse outcomes for girls in Jamaica. This finding has implications for primary delinquency prevention and interruption efforts, given that it foregrounds girls' criminogenic risks and needs within the cultural, historical, and socioeconomic conditions that create and reinforce disadvantages for them.

Early intervention remains promising in preventing girls' offending and victimization. Therefore, increasing and augmenting parent and family-focused interventions is urgent, along with formalizing psychological and mental health screening for children in schools and upon their first appearance in court as offenders.

Other implications include:

1. Focus on pre-arrest diversion of girls, which would require law enforcement to connect girls to help and support services when they exhibit behavioral challenges instead of detaining them.
2. Strengthen pre-trial diversion initiatives in the family court by employing new, updated, and culturally specific assessment tools that inform service and program delivery to girls in conflict with the law, especially when their offending proceeds from various forms of abuse, maltreatment, or neglect.
3. Cross-train justice practitioners to increase their flexibility at work, achieve productivity, and reduce workplace frustration.
4. Integrate culture with conflict-resolution approaches to inform programming that leads to more positive developmental outcomes for children.

This study is also instructive in advocating for multisystemic therapy to effectively address the family – and – community-related risks that predispose girls to

delinquency. Moreover, it evidences the need for trauma-informed care for children in custodial care as one arm of rehabilitation and integrating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) into gender-responsive modalities. CBT is used in the United States and has empirical support for its effectiveness in lessening aggression and increasing prosocial attitudes and behaviors in children six years and older (Deupree & Affuembey, 2023). An approach towards CBT from a gendered lens might encourage proactive and preventative possibilities that acknowledge female agency and empower them to become change agents.

### **Conclusions**

This study used qualitative inquiry to address the extent to which those involved in Jamaica's justice system perceived that the island's response to female delinquency was effective. Results indicated that the current system's response is inadequate, given that programs and services are misaligned to the needs of girls in custodial care settings. These failings, under the circumstance of competing priorities, put more girls at risk of recidivating in Jamaica. Thus, the work done here is an original attempt at problematizing the issue of girl offending, with hopes that Jamaica's Correctional Service can augment its approach to rehabilitating girls who eventually become system-involved.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While writing this dissertation, several limitations emerged, which the reader should consider as caveats. These limitations related to challenges accessing all relevant persons and documents within the specified timeline, which caused a severe delay in data collection and analysis. First, the researcher experienced delays in obtaining IRB approval from the PVAMU and the Ministry of National Security Jamaica, given the

complexity of the study. To redress these delays in the IRB processing, the researcher acted proactively in following up with the review processes and responded promptly to requests for additional information or changes.

Second, the researcher experienced challenges overcoming bureaucratic red tape in Jamaica, delaying data collection by several months. Regardless of initiating earlier contact with the Department of Correctional Services, Jamaica, seven months before producing the analysis, the researcher contended with multiple barriers to effective communication given that some communication channels impeded the flow of information and created interruptions for the research process. The researcher attempted to resolve the issue by following the institutional protocols outlined, speaking directly with the authorities occupying various levels of the chain of command, and even escalating the situation. When these events proved unsuccessful, the researcher began documenting their impact on the research process, intending to recommend more open and transparent communication that facilitates evidence-based research on the island to inform effective policy and practice.

Beyond procedural setbacks, the researcher also contended with the limited availability of practitioners owing to consecutive interruptions generated by the public holiday of Heroes' Weekend, inclement weather due to the hurricane season that usually begins on June 1 and ends on November 30, an earthquake of 5.6 magnitude on the island on October 30, 2023, and departmental activities. The Department of Corrections staff were occupied mainly with delivering activities inside penal facilities during Corrections Week that began on October 23 and ended on October 27 impeding the data collection plan.



Although the study attempted to address what happened to girls not confined to juvenile facilities after they showed up in court, this attempt was unsuccessful. Some practitioners alluded to the child diversion program but explained that they knew very little about it. Nevertheless, a few of them suggested that the child diversion program suffered delays and disruptions due in part to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home protocols that lasted until May 31, 2020 (ESSJ, 2019). In addition, the researcher could not locate or access evaluation reports detailing program strategies and success in the island-wide prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation of female offenders, thus reducing the scope of the research.

Finally, as expected, there was low participation among the formerly incarcerated girls, which was related to constraints on time and their current living situation. For example, some girls lived at different points of the island, and one currently resided in the United States. At the same time, given the post-colonial context of Jamaica, low participation among the girls might also relate to cultural biases, such as the deep-seated culture of secrecy and distrust among Jamaicans.

Notwithstanding that the small sample of girls might present difficulty in extrapolating the study's findings, the task is not impossible. The study's findings are instructive for future work related to immigration, crime, and security, as well as studies on girls in other contexts. These are exciting times to research the intersections between Caribbean immigrant populations, acculturation, and criminal/juvenile justice involvement, also giving attention to the role of gender, sex and sexuality, social class, nationality, race, and ethnicity in developing and developed countries. In this regard, the absence of available or reliable data, which also emerged as a significant limitation for

this study, inadvertently created a niche for the researcher to provide groundbreaking discoveries with an intergenerational impact.

### **Future Work**

Given the absence of program evaluation data, current knowledge of Jamaica's delinquency programming and prevention efforts is limited. Programming evaluation is crucial for optimizing resources, improving outcomes, and ensuring that interventions are tailored to the population's unique needs, ultimately contributing to a more effective and equitable juvenile justice system for girls. Therefore, by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry, future research might be helpful to clarify the knowledge gap and inform future programming that is relevant and responsive to the needs of justice-involved girls. Although the current study makes great strides in uncovering the prevention efforts targeting girls in conflict with the law, there remains an opportunity to expand on the findings documented here.

First, there is a need for current data regarding the root causes of female delinquency and describing girls' delinquency patterns beyond 2021 in Jamaica to observe and address the present criminogenic risks for girls. Second, there is much room for expanding Caribbean theorizing of girl offending based on the victim-offender overlap and the shared disadvantages emerging within postcolonial societies. Beyond evaluating the socio-economic and cultural contexts of the Caribbean that lead to girl offending today, future research is required to develop theories that are grounded in the data. Third, researchers should commit to examining the formation and evolution of girl cliques in Jamaican high schools and female gangs to inform gang prevention and interruption efforts on the island. Fourth, future work can examine recidivism rates

among girls to measure the nature and scope of program success or failure in Jamaica. Fifth, to confront the modern-day challenge of homosexual activities among system-involved girls, future research must explore girls' coping responses to confinement in Jamaica.

Further, there needs to be a closer examination of LGBTQ youth in conflict with the law in Jamaica, given the broader socio-cultural reactions toward same-sex relationships. Sixth, efforts at juvenile justice reform on the island require an exploration of where Jamaica stands with pre-arrest and pre-trial diversions, which would give girls an opportunity to be connected to the behavioral health programs and services they need to achieve more positive outcomes for themselves. The insights offered from those studies must inform programming for girls in the juvenile justice system such that they address the root causes of both victimization and offending. Finally, future work can investigate the effects of programming on girl offending using quantitative approaches to supplement the data described in this work. Broadly, a holistic response to crime and security problems in Jamaica and the Caribbean requires using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches to explain phenomena. Integrating quantitative work with qualitative descriptions in research provides a more nuanced, validated, and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, offering valuable insights for theory and practice.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A: Preliminary Code List – Classification by Research Questions*

Research Questions	Concepts/Codes	Sub-Codes	Type of Code (A-priori, deductive, inductive)
(RQ 1) How do girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica experience victimization?	Being beaten Being bullied at school Cursing Shaming Sexual abuse Physical abuse Verbal abuse Abandonment Neglect	Parenting (poor supervision) Peer relationships Adult exploitation (criminal, sexual) Volatile communities Early pregnancy Homelessness Truancy	A-priori, deductive (numbers coding scheme)
(RQ 2) How does the justice system respond to girl offenders who have also been victims?	Victim services Restorative justice Diversion Education programs Vocation training Capacity-building training	Counseling Trauma-informed care Educational support (e.g., PASS) Multisystemic therapy	A-priori, deductive (numbers coding scheme)
(RQ 3) What are the needs of girls in conflict with the law in Jamaica?	Education or vocational services Nutritional Health-related mental health services physical health services Social support Safety	Financial help Housing Support groups Legal services Care and therapy	A-priori (numbers coding scheme)
(RQ 4) What programs exist specifically for girls in conflict with the law?	Primary prevention programs Secondary prevention programs Tertiary prevention programs	Behavioral development programs Community-based programs (e.g., RISE) Social justice programs Social preventative programs	Inductive (numbers coding scheme)

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(RQ 5) How effective have existing programs been for girls in conflict with the law, and do outcomes vary across education levels and settings (i.e., rural vs. urban)?	Rehabilitation	Substance use Behavioral modification Therapy (group/ individual/ family) Job placement Resources (physical, human)	A-priori, deductive (numbers coding scheme)
(RQ 6) What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of programming for girls in conflict with the law based on the factors related to variability in the outcome?	Gender-responsive programming Policy changes	Local economic development Public-private partnerships Regulatory framework Social and cultural sensitivity Academic Job readiness skills Safe stable lodging Social support Mental health care Multisystemic therapy	A-priori (numbers coding scheme)

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*Appendix B: Reasons Girls Appeared Before the Court, 2017 - 2021*

OFFENSES	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Murder/Manslaughter	1	1	0	0	0
Conspiracy to attempt murder/Accessory to murder	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual Offences	16	10	4	3	7
Abduction	1	0	0	0	—
Robbery/Robbery with Aggravation/Burglary/Larceny/Predial Larceny/Break-in	10	19	15	11	4
False Pretenses/Fraudulent conversion/Forgery	0	1	0	0	0
Unlawful Possession/Receiving stolen property	1	1	3	0	—
Wounding/Assault/Assault occasioning bodily harm	126	122	96	31	29
Dangerous Drugs	3	2	2	0	1
Breaching Firearm Law/Armed with offensive weapon/Shooting with intent	21	20	15	3	1
Arson/Malicious destruction	15	16	16	5	3
Breaking Road Traffic Law	2	3	3	3	1
Breaches of the Disaster Risk Management Act, 2021	0	0	0	0	14
Minor and other offenses	23	14	24	10	5
ORDER					
Breach of Probation Order/Variation Order/Supervision Order/Protection Order	11	9	10	5	5
OTHER					
Care and Protection/Child Abandonment/Child Abuse	450	445	490	303	320
Uncontrollable Behaviour/Disorderly conduct	155	203	224	103	114
GRAND TOTAL	835	866	902	477	504

Appendix C: *Population of Girls Admitted to the South Camp Facility in Jamaica, 2017 - 2021*

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Court Order</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
South Camp Juvenile Remand and Correctional Center	Maximum(female)	Sentenced (serving a correctional order)	17	0	29	27	16
		Remand	20	37	25	31	22
		Total	37	37	54	58	38

Appendix D: *Interview Protocol – Practitioners*

Facility: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

*The first set of questions will ask about demographics and employment*

1. Gender of participant (primary investigator to complete)
2. What is your current occupation? (e.g., welfare, courts)
3. What is your current title?
4. Can you describe the responsibilities of your job?
5. How long have you worked in your current position?
6. What is your highest completed level of education? (e.g., professional training, graduate degree, no formal education)

**GENERAL**

*This set of questions will ask about girls in conflict with the law and your perceptions about the programs offered to them.*

7. In your opinion, why are girls in Jamaica in conflict with the law?
8. Are you aware of any programs for girls (for example, care and protection programs) in Jamaica? If so, please explain.
9. In your opinion, how are these programs preventing/controlling child offending in Jamaica?



### **RISK/NEEDS ANALYSIS**

*Risks and needs factors are used to identify and address the risk and needs of justice-involved children in five domains: individual, family, peers, school, and community. The following questions pertain to these domains.*

10. Does your facility use any risk/needs assessment tools? If so, please answer the following.
11. After sentencing/arrival in this facility, are the girls evaluated to determine their needs (individual, family, peers, school, neighborhood, and community) at a location either INSIDE or OUTSIDE this facility?
12. How soon after they are sentenced/arrive in this facility are the girls evaluated (within 24 hours, within days, etc.)?
13. How frequently are the girls evaluated to assess their needs, including ANY changes that may have occurred during residency here?
14. What are the most common and unique risk factors for these girls?
15. What are the most common and unique needs of these girls?
16. As part of the discharge process from this facility, are you aware if any of the girls are evaluated to determine their needs?

### **PROGRAMMING**

*Programming for girls in conflict with the law or in need of services refers to programs geared toward preventing and controlling girl offending by providing a continuum of services to girls (12 – 18) at risk of becoming in conflict with the law and rehabilitating those who have offended.*

17. Can you identify ALL the programs/services for girls at your facility?
18. For each of the programs/services that you identified, can you describe:
  - a. Name of the program
  - b. Objectives

- c. Type of services offered
  - d. Where are the services offered (i.e., in the facility or outside)?
19. Are these services specifically for girls? If so, explain.
20. Who provides these programs or services?
21. Are there any services to assist the girls once they leave? If so, please describe them.

### **PROGRAM EFFECT**

*“Effectiveness” is the level by which program activities produce the desired effect.*

22. Based on the programs you identified earlier, how are these programs meeting their objectives? Please explain.
23. In your opinion, what is the best way for the program(s) to deliver those services (or activities)?
24. What resources do programs need? For example,
- a. Are the girls adequately reached by and involved in program services or activities?
  - b. How do the girls interact with the program?
  - c. What do they think of the programs/services (for example, the level of satisfaction with the programs/services offered)?
  - d. Are you aware of how the programming functions from various perspectives (i.e., administrative, organizational, and/or personnel perspectives)?
  - e. Can you explain the effectiveness of these programs in preventing females from being involved in delinquency?

*The following questions address the needs of specific populations [For example, education levels and settings (urban vs. rural)].*

25. What are the specific needs of girls from rural areas compared to those from urban Jamaica? Please explain.
  - a. How are these needs met? (i.e., programming/services)
26. What are the specific needs of younger girls (age 12 and under) compared to older (over 12 years) girls? Please explain.
  - a. How are these needs met? (i.e., programming/services)
27. If you could change two things about how the system deals with girls involved in delinquency, what would they be?
28. Is there anything that you would like to add?

THANK YOU!

Appendix E: *Interview Protocol – Girls in Conflict with the Law*

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

1. How old are you?
2. Are you from an urban or rural area?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. Who lives in your household?
5. Why were you in conflict with the law?
6. At what age were you first in conflict with the law?

**GENERAL**

7. How did you come to be in conflict with the law most recently?
8. Have you been at a facility in the past? If so, how long?
9. How long have you been in the current facility?
10. What could have helped you to avoid a facility such as this?
11. When you first came here, do you remember whether anyone asked what your needs were?
12. Have you had any contact with family since you have been here? Describe.

**RISK/NEEDS ANALYSIS**

13. Have you had any problems where you felt you needed help/support from someone?
14. If yes (to the above), have these experiences contributed to your being in conflict with the law?

**PROGRAMMING**

15. Can you identify ALL the programs/services at the current or past facility you have stayed and are any of those programs specific for girls?
16. Have you attended/participated in the programs/services in the past (i.e., go to school, learn a trade, get counseling or medical care, etc.)?
17. Are you currently participating in ANY programming offered at your facility or through corrections? If Yes, explain.
18. Are all programs/services offered INSIDE (i.e., any location on the facility grounds) the facility? Explain.

**PROGRAM EFFECT**

19. Did the programs/services have an impact on you? If yes, please describe.
20. What other programs/services do you think are needed for girls in the system?
21. If you could change two things about how the system deals with girls in conflict with the law what would they be?

THANK YOU!

Appendix F: *IRB Approval for Study*

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**PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY**  
 A Member of the Texas A&M University System

To: **Camille Gibson, Ph.D.**, Principal Investigator  
**Regan Reid**, Co-Investigator

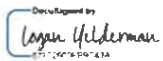
From: Logan Yelderman, Ph.D., IRB Chair

Date: November 17, 2023

Re: Protocol #2023-047  
*An Examination of the Utilization of Programming for Female Delinquency Prevention in Jamaica*

The IRB protocol amendment submitted by you on October 25, 2023 has been approved on November 17, 2023.

Any future correspondence regarding this study should reference the Protocol Title and Number. Please also make sure to use the consent forms with the PVAMU approval stamp and the expiration date.

Developed by  


Logan Yelderman, Ph.D.  
 IRB Chair  
 Email: [lavelderman@pvamu.edu](mailto:lavelderman@pvamu.edu)

As the principal investigator of this study, you assume the following responsibilities:

- **Record Retention:** Records must be retained for at least 3 years after study completion.
- **Amendments:** Changes to research study activities may not be initiated without IRB approval.
- **Unanticipated Problems/Adverse events:** Any unanticipated problems adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
- **Informed Consent/Assent:** If applicable, all subjects must be given a copy of the stamped consent assent document approved by the IRB (see attached).
- **Renewal:** If you need to continue the project, you must submit the IRB Protocol Continuing Review Form 60 days prior to the expiration date to the Office of Research Compliance at [researchcompliance@pvamu.edu](mailto:researchcompliance@pvamu.edu). Once the original approval expires, all work must cease.
- **Completion:** Once the study is complete, you must complete the IRB-Completion-Report-Form.pdf (pvamu.edu) and submit it to the Office of Research Compliance at [researchcompliance@pvamu.edu](mailto:researchcompliance@pvamu.edu).

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Office of Research, Innovation & Sponsored Programs  
 P.O. Box 519 Mail Stop 2820 Prairie View Texas 77446  
 Phone (936) 261-1553 / 1588 Fax (936) 261-3529

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Regan R. Reid** | rreid8@pvamu.edu | reid\_regan@yahoo.com | 281-777-5335

### EDUCATION

- Ph.D. Juvenile Justice, Prairie View A&M University, Texas, 2023
- M.Sc. International Public and Development Management, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 2019
- B.Sc. Major in Political Science, Minor in Criminology, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 2014

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Department of Justice Studies, Prairie View A&M University, Texas

Doctoral Teaching Assistant

- Crime in America (Fall 2021, Fall 2022 & Fall 2023)
- Introduction to Criminal Justice (Spring 2022 & Fall 2023)
- Court Systems and Practices (Spring 2023)

### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Texas Juvenile Crime Prevention Center

Graduate Research Assistant, 2020 – 2023

Conducted Criminal/Juvenile Justice research

- HighStar Consulting, Jamaica

Administrative Research Specialist

Produced a green paper around the national health infrastructure in Jamaica

## **PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL AND WORK-RELATED EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS**

- Experienced in carrying out qualitative and quantitative research
- Policy writing

## **PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS**

**Reid, R.** (2021). Review of the Book: Recidivism in the Caribbean: Improving the Reintegration of Jamaican Ex-prisoners. Dacia Leslie. *Caribbean Journal of Criminology*, 2(2).

Kethineni, S., Frazier-Kouassi, S., Sundaravadivelu, D., Moeyaert, M., **Reid, R.**, Vijayan, V., Miriyam, T.N., McIntosh, S., Shigemoto, Y., Jennings, W.G., Cardwell, S.M., Piquero, A.R., and Gay, K., “Effectiveness of Parent-Engagement Programs to Reduce Truancy and Juvenile Delinquency: A Systematic Review,” Submitted to: Campbell Systematic Review