

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF FEMALE  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

While female juvenile offending has increased in the past forty years, extant research on the causes of delinquency has often only addressed the male population (Gorman-Smith & Loeber, 2005). This lack of research focused on girls is partially due to boys having longer, more active delinquent careers (Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993). Additionally, male deviance has been considered more important than that of girls, as they are assumed to rarely deviate (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987; Chesney-Lind, 1973). The stereotype of the juvenile delinquent, therefore, is so undeniably male that the general public, as well as those who study delinquency and practitioners working with youth, rarely consider girls and issues they face which may be predictive of delinquency (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Tracy and Shelden (1992) have speculated the lack of attention granted female offenders reflects an overall lack of interest in the activities of girls.

## **Female Offending**

Contradictory to the classic assumption that girls rarely deviate, the 1970s and 1980s brought a period of increase in female juvenile offending. As of 1986, girls accounted for 22% of the delinquent arrests in the United States (Acoca, 1999, p. 3; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 2). By the year 1999, they accounted for 27% of delinquent arrests, the equivalent of 670,800 arrests of female juveniles (Acoca, 1999, p. 3; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 2). Today, girls and young women continue to be the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population, despite an overall drop in youth crime (Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003).

### **Research on the Causes of Female Delinquency**

An increase in female offending has led to an increase in the number of studies addressing female delinquency. Researchers have suggested the nature and causes of female delinquency to be distinct from those of male delinquency (Laundra, Kiger, & Bahr, 2002). Studies which have been completed since the increase in female delinquency rates began have found expectations of proper femininity, as well as various biological and psychological characteristics, to be positively correlated to a girl's criminal propensity (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Canter, 1982; Raviora, 1999). Rather than singling out only one reason for delinquency, it has been suggested that a

combination of risk factors have contributed to girls' involvement in the juvenile justice system (Chesney-Lind, 1985/86; Tracy & Shelden, 1992).

Past research addressing female delinquency is usually quite limited, if not flawed, due to preconceived notions of reasons girls commit crime (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987). Often, the importance of gender, race, and socio-economic status on the development of youth had been neglected (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001). Current research addressing the rate increase continues to offer only speculation and generalizations (Gorman-Smith & Loeber, 2005). Get-tough policies are often blamed for the increased number of girls being labeled delinquent. The belief that female delinquency is closely related to a lack of positive bond with her parents (i.e. abuse and neglect) also dominates current research (Laundra, Kiger, & Bahr, 2002).

Research focusing on negative life experiences which may have an affect on girls is important, as these possibly criminogenic risk factors must be studied more intensively. Knowledge of developmental issues female delinquents face is necessary to better understand the cause for their offending (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001). For the most part, research in this area is incomplete. Studies which have been completed consistently mention risk factors, including single parent and broken homes, a lack of supervision, the presence of substance abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse (Tracy & Shelden, 1992). Additionally, a clear link between victimization and trauma and

female delinquency has been supported throughout the literature (Bloom & Covington, 2001).

### **The Importance of Continued Research**

Not only does additional research on the risk factors of delinquent girls need to be completed, but research on issues, policies, and programs for these at risk adolescents must be completed as well. For the most part, this type of research, which is necessary to create a system properly set up to address specific issues faced by delinquent girls, has been neglected. With the proportion of delinquent female arrests in the United States currently sitting at approximately 30% (Pasko, 2006, p 4) of all juvenile arrests, research is critical. Without research addressing characteristics and risk factors of girls, intervention, prevention, and rehabilitative strategies will not be adequately created (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Huber, 2004). In addition, the failure to understand developmental issues unique to female youth may lead them to be labeled delinquent, especially due to their response to negative experiences in the home.

Violent girls have an even greater disadvantage than other girls in the juvenile justices system. This group of girls will often fall through cracks in the juvenile justice system due to their status as the minority. Additionally, they are granted fewer resources than their non-violent counterparts, even though they often have more complex reasons for

offending (Chesney-Lind, 1999). Having been victim to sexual abuse has been found to be quite common among violent girls. The importance of addressing female risk factors is exhibited in research done by Geller (1981), who found sexual abuse to be quite common among violent adolescent girls. These girls not only need assistance with violent tendencies, but also have issues with sex which must be worked through (as cited in Chesney-Lind, 1985/6).

The sudden influx of girls in the juvenile justice system has left those in charge unprepared to respond to such issues (Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003). Silence at the academic and policy levels signifies that those who work with girls have no guidance shaping programs or developing resources which can respond to the problems many girls experience (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Without this guidance, girls will continue to be misunderstood and underserved at all levels of the juvenile justice system, which may lead to adult offending (Ravivora, 1999). Without addressing adolescent risk factors, juvenile justice personnel are left unprepared to properly treat girls inside the system (Tracy & Shelden, 1992).

### **Purpose of this Study**

To ensure proper treatment is provided to offending females, a profile of the average girl entering the juvenile justice system, including risk factors associated with them, must be created. The current research

contributes to literature addressing risk factors of delinquent girls entering the juvenile justice system through further exploration in an attempt to better understand how to address the problems. The purpose of the current study is to investigate available data, present a profile of the delinquent girl, and determine which, if any, of the risk factors presented are positively correlated with a higher criminal propensity. The results should grant insight into the issues and environmental, biological, and psychological factors girls are likely fall victim to, prior to offending.

Studying girl risk factors is important for many reasons. The rate of offending for female delinquents is higher than it has been since prior to the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act of 1974 and there is no evidence supporting a drop in the future. Treatment received by offending female youth must be custom-created for their specific issues. Data analyzed in this research will provide insight as to how to tailor such programs.

### **Chapter Setup**

Chapter II will present an examination of existing literature regarding female delinquency. The literature review will look at reasons for which girls are offending, as well as trends in female juvenile offending over the past thirty years. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of risk factors often found in literature which have lead girls to higher levels of offending (i.e. abuse, family history of criminality, family structural

issues, and race).

The third chapter in this paper will explain the sample used in the study. Two hypotheses will be presented, including Hypothesis I which addresses family contributors and social environment and Hypothesis II, which addresses criminogenic and otherwise individual factors. Chapter III also addresses the independent variables (risk factors) and dependent variable (criminal propensity) used in the study.

Chapter IV explains the analyses which were used on the data. The chapter includes multiple chi-squared contingency tables, with their interpretations. The fifth and final chapter concludes the study. The major shortcomings of the study are presented as well as future suggestions and policy implications.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **A LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Girls and the History of the Juvenile Justice System**

The movement to establish juvenile courts began in the 1800's to prevent children from being tried and sentenced as adults, as well as to impose sanctions on conduct unbecoming youth (Chesney-Lind, 1973, p. 53). During the early years of court, girls were institutionalized for minor offenses including immorality and waywardness (i.e. being undisciplined or rebellious) in an attempt to protect them from future delinquency and harm. The heavy use of minor offenses increased the proportion of female delinquents in juvenile correctional facilities from 19% in 1880 to 23% in 1923 (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 191). By 1950, girls constituted 34% of the detention population; in 1960, however, the proportion had decreased to 27% (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 191).

The criminal and juvenile justice systems have sought to protect girls at a greater rate than boys due to the influence of traditional American culture, primarily family. Under this tradition, girls have been found to be more highly monitored by their parents than boys; many have been involved in the juvenile justice system on request of their parents (Piquero, Gover, MacDonald, & Piquero, 2005). Parents often refer their daughter to the juvenile justice system

for sexual behavior, parental defiance, or just to protect the girl from herself. This practice is less common with boys (Chesney-Lind, 1973). Girls are also given a narrower range of acceptable behavior than their male counterparts, with dependency and obedience to parents being expected (Chesney-Lind, 1973).

### **Policies to Help Girls**

Traditional family values continue to influence attitudes of juvenile justice personnel. Through the 1970s, the concern for protecting girls was demonstrated through their involvement in the system for status offenses and their receipt of harsher treatment than would be given male delinquents (Bishop & Frazier, 1992; Chesney-Lind, 1973; Chesney-Lind, 1999). In 1974, the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention (JJDP) Act was created, which removed juveniles from adult jails and prohibited the incarceration of status offenders (Bishop & Frazier, 1994, p. 1166; Chesney-Lind, 1985/6, p. 8; Schwartz, Steketee, & Schneider, 2004, p. 115). The reform directly benefited girls; by 1990 female offenders consisted of only 19% of those held in correctional facilities (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 191).

An amendment to the JJDP Act was attempted in 1980 to better address the needs of girls and minor male offenders (Schwartz, Steketee, & Schneider, 2004, p. 115). The amendment intended to create fiscal incentives for states which agreed to incarcerate only seriously violent delinquents and create community-based alternatives for non-violent offenders. The amendment failed, and girls have continued to be incarcerated for minor offenses. Additionally, few

treatment facilities and community-sponsored organizations committed to helping at risk and delinquent girls exist (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997, Schwartz, Steketee, & Schneider, 2004).

A goal pertaining to gender issues and agency admission was added to the JJDP Act in 1992 (Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003, p. 119). The goal was to develop and adopt policies which prohibit gender bias in placement and treatment to ensure girls access to a full range of physical and mental health services. The goal was also to implement treatment programs for physical and sexual assault as well as abuse. Self-defense training, parenting education, general education, and other training and vocational services were also to be implemented (Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003). The addition to the JJDP Act required all states applying for federal formula grant dollars to examine their juvenile justice systems and identify gaps in services provided female offenders.

### **Number of Girls Incarcerated**

Juvenile justice reform continues to be a popular topic at national, state, and local levels. Despite the attempts to help them, girls are still not of high interest for those pushing for reform. This may be due to fewer girls being incarcerated than boys. The number of girls incarcerated is, however, on the rise. Girls consisted of only 11% of the juvenile detention population in 1991, decreasing to 10% in 1993. The number of girls in detention, however, has risen disproportionately to males. From 1989 to 1998, their incarceration rates rose

56%, while the number of boys rose only 20% (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 191; Chesney-Lind, 2002, p. 84). Currently, female delinquents consist of 18% of those juveniles in juvenile detention facilities (Pasko, 2006, p. 3).

The rate of female offending is rising as well, thus predicting even more of an increase in the future. From 1988 to 1997, delinquency cases involving female offenders rose 83% (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 2). In comparison to male delinquency, from 1993 to 1997, the increase in arrests for girls were greater (or the decreases smaller) than boys in nearly every offense category (Acoca, 1999, p. 3). As of 2004, girls consist of 30% of juveniles arrested each year (Pasko, 2006, p. 3).

### **Trends in Offending**

Despite an increase in assault and other violent offenses, girls overall commit different and less serious offenses than boys. They are also one and a half times more likely to be one-time offenders (Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993, p. 7). Cullen, Golden, and Cullen (1979) found female traits to negatively predict the occurrence of violent and property crimes, as well as status offenses, while male traits have been found to positively affect delinquency levels. As discussed before, the protective and watchful eye of the family, which monitors and scrutinizes actions of females more regularly than males, keeps the level of female delinquency low (Datesman & Scarpitti, 1975).

The level of female delinquency has been on the upswing. Between 1988 and 1997, arrests of male delinquents increased 28% while the number of female

arrests increased 60% (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Huber, 2004, p. 205)

Between 1992 and 2003 the arrest for female delinquents increased 6.4%, while arrests for boys decreased 16.4% (Chesney-Lind, 2004, p. 2). Between 1990 and 1999, arrests of girls increased more or decreased less than male arrests in most offense categories (Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003, p. 120). In 1993, girls made up 24% of the arrests; this included 22% of person offenses, 20% of public order cases, 28% of simple assault cases, and 29% of larceny theft cases (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Huber, 2004, p. 206). A total of 670,800 arrests, which is 27% of all juvenile arrests in 1999, were girls (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 2). This proportion rose in 2004 to 30% (Pasko, 2006, p. 3).

### ***Status Offenses***

Forty percent of girls in the United States are involved in the juvenile justice system for truancy offenses; only 15% of boys are there for the same reason, demonstrating an over representation of females, especially when compared to self report studies (Chesney-Lind, 1985/6, p. 7). Many girls' first offense is a status offense, for which they are placed on probation. Violating this probation, even with another status offense, often leads them to incarceration. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) found a large percentage of juvenile females incarcerated (36%) to be there for probation violation (Acoca, 1999, p. 7).

***Theft***

Morris (1964, p. 82) states 10% of female delinquents are thieves. Other research has found this claim to be reliable, as girls are for the most part contained in the home and are provided fewer opportunities to offend, with the exception of shoplifting (Cullen, Golden, & Cullen, 1979). Theft is especially fitting for an adolescent female, as it allows her to prove her ability to be deviant and get away with it. The girl is left feeling that she is a “bad girl” (positive connotation) and an independent woman at the same time (Katz, 1980; Lee, 1991).

***Violent***

The percentage of female juveniles arrested for violent crime increased continuously over the last two decades, from 10% in 1980 to 17% in 1999 (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002, p. 5). The 118.1% increase in violent crimes, including a 142% increase in other assaults alone, committed by girls between the years 1987 and 1996 has researchers speculating females are becoming more violent (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 186-7). Increases in female violence have continued through 2000, rising 27.9% from 1991 to 2000; other forms of assault increased 77.9% in the same time period (Chesney-Lind, 2002, p. 83). In 1999, 22% of the arrests for girls were for aggravated assault, 30% were for simple assaults, and some 36% for larceny theft (Bloom & Covington, 2001, p. 3). Girls arrested for aggravated assault increased from 15% in 1980 to

22% in 1999; the proportion of simple assaults rising from 21% to 30% over the same period (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002, p. 6).

The number of female offenders at the state level is similar to those at the national level. In 1990, New Jersey reported 10,853 felony arrests of girls, up from 1986 when the number of girls arrested was 7,340 (Lee, 1991, p. A1); their rate for violent crime increased 60% between 1980 and 1990 (Lee, 1991, p. A1). In Connecticut, girls' simple arrest rate was up 46% from 1986 to 1990, with aggravated assault up 62% (Lee, 1991, p. A1). Self-report data has failed to exhibit these changes in offense rates (Chesney-Lind, 2002).

### ***Homicide***

Though violent female crime has increased, the number of delinquent female homicide offenders has decreased. Girls will often kill as part of a conflict rather than as a part of a second offenses. From 1984 to 1993 girls accounted for 8% fewer homicides than in the past (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 188).

### **Reasons for Offending**

There has been a visible increase in the rate of female offending. Reasons have speculated reasons for an increase. These include the implementation of get-tough policies. Also addressed in research have been expectations of proper femininity placed on young girls.

## ***Gender Issues***

The underlying issue of gender is reflected by girls having been treated differently than boys by both parents and juvenile justice officials. Gender must be seen as more than a role or an individual characteristic; it is, rather, a mechanism “whereby situated social action contributes to the reproduction of social structure (Miller, 1998, p. 38).” Performing according to one’s gender provides not only indication but also continues the reproduction of gendered social hierarchies (Miller, 1998).

Gender issues are present even at the most basic level, including manner of dress. In Hudson’s (1984) qualitative study on femininity, social workers, teachers, and students were questioned about the role of apparel in femininity. Social workers and teachers believed girls should be pretty, wearing jeans only on occasion and otherwise be present in a dress. Girls were concerned there was a time and place for dresses, school not being one of them, as school should be about learning. Teachers and social workers also agreed girls should be gentle and kind; obviously the antithesis of what adolescence would entail (Hudson, 1984). Rebellion to the expectations of femininity occurs in the form of dress which is pointed out by McRobbie (as cited by Hudson, 1984), who explains some girls assert their opposition to the school culture by exaggerating the femininity encouraged by teachers. Makeup is worn to school and boyfriends are discussed loudly in class to create a sexually tainted atmosphere and disturb the learning environment.

Adolescence on the other hand is a traditionally masculine construct. It is characterized by mischief and rough play. Attempts by girls to satisfy society's demands of femininity during adolescence are thus done in vain, as being an adolescent compels them to display a lack of femininity, in addition to the lack of maturity, associated with age.

While the traditional patriarchal society renders gender important, especially for girls, it also renders them doubly deviant when they commit even the most minor of offenses (i.e. running away). Those girls who are involved in violent behavior are treated even worse than those who are deviant on a minor scale. Those who engage in violence derive little support for this masculine expression, even from the most marginal of subcultures, because the actions violate the prescribed conceptions of femininity. The cause of the violent behavior may lend to support the female who performs the masculine actions. Feminist scholars have stated women use violence in response to their own vulnerability or to victimization in the family and/or at the hands of men. Women adopt violent presentations of self as a strategy of protection (Miller, 1998).

### ***Get-Tough Policy***

Though violence and other criminal behavior have been increasing among girls, some of the changes have been attributed to policy changes rather than changes in female behavior. Get-tough policies, which have been created to address overall delinquency, have had an enormous effect on the incarceration rates of girls. These policies have been discussed in juvenile justice literature

since the 1990s, and include the reclassifying or relabeling of status offenses into criminal offenses. Relabeling or reclassification occurs when behaviors once categorized as status offenses (i.e. running away and being a person in need of supervision) are relabeled into violent offenses (Chesney-Lind, 2004).

A common mechanism for relabeling status offenses is how police currently address domestic disturbances. Officers advise parents to block the door to stop children from running away, and instruct parents to inform the police if they are hit in the process (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 2004). This and other similar family conflicts are now treated as violent offenses, which leads more girls to delinquency and being labeled violent (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 1999).

This relabeling, in combination with the recent focus on mandatory arrest as a policy for domestic violence cases, has had a very real and unintended consequence - a dramatic increase in the numbers of girls and women incarcerated for this form of assault. Studies have found 34% of incarcerated girls to have been involved in family violence, often stemming from abuse (Bloom & Covington, 2001, p. 3). Girls' share of domestic violence arrests increased from 6% in 1988 to 16.5% in 1998 (as cited in Chesney-Lind, 2004, p. 4). Historical research (Morris, 1964, p. 82) has demonstrated 50% of incarcerated girls are there for family or sexual offenses. This claim can be supported by a review of person to person offense cases in Maryland's juvenile justice system, which found 97.9% of assault offenses committed by girls were family centered (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 187; Chesney-Lind & Paramore, p. 144)

Get-tough policies also include a decreased use of chivalrous treatment by criminal justice officials during contact with females. Though the argument is that chivalrous treatment has declined, there are those who claim the practice never occurred. Both Terry (1970) and Cohn (1970) dispute the practice of chivalry ever having occurred, as both argue that girls have always been sanctioned more severely and recommended for sentencing more often than boys (as cited in Chesney-Lind, 1973).

Findings in research done recently on get-tough policy conclude that minority girls are more likely to be arrested but not more likely to be referred after get-tough policy changes. Little change can be seen in the treatment of white females. This finding supports a prior hypothesis offered by Chesney-Lind, that formal female processing increases in a time of crackdown or policy change (McCluskey, Varano, Huebner, & Bynum, 2004, p. 20).

### **Profile of the Female Delinquent**

The female juvenile offender is most likely to be between the ages of 15 and 17, though, beginning in the 1980s, girls started to enter the juvenile justice system at earlier ages (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002, p. 13). In 1997, the majority of females (62%) charged with delinquent acts were under the age of 16 (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002, p. 13). Female delinquency is influenced by a wide range of factors which affect each child on a personal level and often differ from those of boys.

Girls' involvement in delinquency is often connected to conflicts in familial and social relationships (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003). Frequent residential moves, living in a broken home, family fragmentation, conflicts in the home, and a lack of stable and consistent social interaction within the family can all affect whether a child chooses to offend (Adamek & Dager, 1969, American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Ravora, 1999). Researchers have also found school related issues to be positively correlated to the delinquency of girls, which includes changing schools more than once, conflicts occurring in the school, academic failure, and dropping out (Adamek & Dager, 1969; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Belknap & Holsinger, 1997; Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003; Ravora, 1999).

Additionally, Sommers and Baskin (1994) claim poverty stricken neighborhoods poverty, association with the wrong crowd, and the fact girls succumb easily to the pressures of older men will lead to delinquency (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001). Violent physical, sexual, and emotional abuse brought on by adults are often cited as a risk factor for delinquency (Ravora, 1999; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Belknap & Holsinger, 1997; Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003). Emotional problems, substance abuse, mental deficiencies, pregnancy, and suicide attempts have all been associated with female delinquency (Adamek & Dager, 1969; Ravora, 1999). In most circumstances,

these risk factors have the strongest effect between 12 and 15 (Acoca, & Dedel, 1998; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 7).

### ***Minority Females***

Girls tend to have a different, less serious delinquent career than their male counterparts, regardless of race. Past research has contended, with the exception of minorities being overall consistently over represented in the criminal justice system, when studying female delinquents, a strong racial difference in types and frequency of offending cannot be found (Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997; Sheldon & Chesney-Lind, 1993). However, the racial disparity is increasing. The OJJDP reported a significant racial difference in the level of delinquency between 1988 and 1997; African American rates of offending increased 106%, Latina rates grew 102%, and white offending rates were up only 74% (Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003, p. 120).

There have been few studies which discuss the different pathways to offending amongst different races. Research has found similar rates of minor theft and vandalism among African American, Hispanic, and white girls; for more serious offenses, however, (i.e. carrying a weapon, starting a fistfight, and beating people up for no reason) African American girls were more likely to commit these offenses than the other groups (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005). Both white and non white girls are likely to enter the system for personal or minor property crimes as well as for status offenses, with running away and missing

person offenses consisting of nearly half of girls' offenses; 46.3% for white girls and 45.6% for non white girls (Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993, p. 75).

The level of offenses committed by white delinquents differs from those committed by minority girls. Cernkovick and Giordano (1979) found non white girls to be more likely to attack someone with their fists, use a weapon, participate in gang fights, commit extortion, and carry weapons (as cited in Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993). Disobeying and defying parents, drinking alcohol, using hard drugs, selling marijuana and other drugs, driving under the influence, destroying property, stealing cars, and disturbing the peace are found to be more common of white girls (from Cernkovich and Giordano, as cited in Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993).

Risk factors have a different prevalence among the race of a girl as well. African American girls with no risk factors consisted of one-third of those who reported being delinquent (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005, p. 214). The number of white girls who had no risk factors and reported being delinquent was only 9% (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005, p. 214).

While they are one and a half times more likely than boys to be one time offenders (Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993, p. 75), recidivism rates vary little between white and non white girls. With recidivism defined as having committed five or more offenses, non white female delinquents recidivate on average 8.1% of the time while white girls recidivate at a rate of 4.9% (Shelden & Chesney-Lind, 1993, p. 75).

### ***Family History of Criminality***

Families of delinquent girls often have multiple, serious stressors, which may include an inter-generational pattern of incarceration. A study completed by the NCCD found 54% of girls incarcerated in the California juvenile justice system have a mother who had been incarcerated during her childhood; 5% had mothers currently in prison or jail (Acoca, 1999, p. 6). Forty-six percent of the girls interviewed had fathers who had been in prison or jail at some point in their childhood; 15% of their fathers were currently incarcerated (Acoca, 1999, p. 6). Two thirds of those surveyed had siblings who have been, or were currently, incarcerated.

### ***Parent/Familial issues***

The home of the delinquent child appears to be much more defective, immoral or inadequate than are homes in general (Monahan, 1957). Research findings support the theory that more delinquent children come from less favorable family environments (i.e. broken and dysfunctional homes). Parent-child relations have also been suggested as risk factors for delinquent behavior. Social control and related theorists suggest inadequate parent-child relationships make a child less likely to abide by social and legal rules (Kroupa, 1988). In the homes of girls, Svensson found there to be a greater interaction between parental monitoring and peer deviance among girls than boys, unstructured parental control allowed the effect to increase (as cited in Piquero, Gover, MacDonald, & Piquero, 2005)

The 2006 National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims cites a report demonstrating juveniles who live with both biological parents have a lower lifetime prevalence of law violating behavior than do juveniles living with other family types (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Overall, 40% to 50% of delinquent children come from broken homes (Monahan, 1957, p. 250). Other studies have found children from broken homes report 10% to 15% more delinquent behavior than those from intact homes, in which two parents have the ability impose more direct controls over their children (Adamek & Dager, 1969, p. 38; Canter, 1982, p. 168). The Texas Youth Commission website claims that, of those entering, 76% have parents who were never married or are divorced or separated (TYC, 2006).

A broken home, caused by the loss of one or both biological parents, may result in economic hardship for the child, a loss of affection and a lack proper role models. The environment which comes with the broken home may positively influence criminal behavior (Monahan, 1957). Lowered barriers to delinquent friendship are another consequence of this type of home environment, which increases the probability of juvenile misconduct (Rankin, 1983). These children are also more likely to report using drugs, running away, committing theft and assault, and to carry a gun (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Broken homes have been a risk factor of female offending since 1930, when Cavan found 71% of institutionalized girls came from this kind of environment (as cited in Monahan, 1957, p. 252).

The correlation between juvenile delinquency and broken homes is stronger for minor forms of misconduct (status offenses) and weakest for serious

forms of criminal behavior (Wells & Rankin, 1991). Weeks (1940) states broken homes are most likely to be a predisposing factor in family offenses such as running away and ungovernability (as cited in Rankin, 1983). However, a study by Cernkovich and Giordano (1987), of adolescents living in a large central standard metropolitan statistical area, found family dynamics to be more important than family structure in affecting delinquency. This finding suggests no broken home effect, or simply that broken homes are not all bad and not all conventional homes are good (Monahan, 1957). Supporting this statement is a study by Nye (1958), which found 36% of delinquents to be from a broken home and 48% from unhappy conventional homes (as cited in Adamek & Dager, 1969, p. 39)

Unhappy conventional homes can be even more detrimental to children than broken homes, as they have potential to be quarrelsome and negligent, especially those which are leading up to a break (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987). Lee states the rise in crime committed by girls under the age of 17 is due to a lack of supervision, which can be caused by a negligent family on the verge of break (1991, p A1). Witnessing domestic violence which may occur in these homes may internalize problems, and cause withdrawn or anxious behavior, or externalize problems, which cause aggression and delinquency (Acoca, 1998). Abused youth often grow up in troubled families (Dembo, Williams, Wothke, Schmeidler, & Brown, 1992). Emotional abuse by parents can influence a child's perception of themselves, hindering the child's journey to adulthood (Kerpelman & Smith, 1999).

Girls are more sensitive to family conflict and tend to feel the consequences of negative family structure and internal functioning more than do males (Rankin, 1983). Family disorganization does not divert males into delinquency as firm supervision is not a normative component of the male role (Datesman & Scarpitti, 1975).

Girls are more likely than boys to fight with parents and siblings (34% and 9%, respectively), often learning in the home might makes right (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 188). Broken homes and disorganization found in unhappy conventional homes are likely to be causative factors in offenses against the family (i.e. runaways, ungovernable, and truancy) which constitute the largest proportion of delinquencies committed by females, as well as lead to sexual delinquency (Datesman & Scarpitti, 1975).

Those who come from broken homes are the norm among delinquent females (Monahan, 1957). Broken homes are likely to be a predisposing factor in family offenses (i.e. running away and ungovernability), for which a greater proportion of girls are referred (Rankin, 1983). More females than males come from broken homes, 68.1% of females compared to 39.6% of males (Weeks, 1940, p. 603).

Datesman and Scarpitti (1975) found the marital status of parents to be weakly related to gender when the type of offense is not controlled. Marital status of parents and gender are unrelated for person and property offenses, but strongly related for public policy offenses. Females referred to court for public policy offenses are more likely to come from broken homes than their male

counterparts. Females referred to court for ungovernability and running away are more likely to come from broken homes (68%) than are females who commit person (52%) or property (46%) offenses (Datesman & Scarpitti, 1975, p. 37).

Twenty-five percent of the girls in the NCCD study had been raised by both biological parents, 51% had parents who did not get along well, and 58% had witnessed violence in the home (Acoca & Dedel, 1998). Ninety-five percent of the girls lacked a stable home environment and had not been given consistent parenting.

Girls who become delinquent may have done so through striving to reach “relational goals”, which are usually fulfilled by affective relationships with parents and other family members (Morris, 1964, p. 82), but are lacking and require girls to seek affection outside the home (Datesman & Scarpitti, 1975). Bloom and Covington (2001) found girls often have unhealthy dependency issues with older males, which are due to unfulfilling relationships with their parents. Girls who report close relationships with their parents show lower levels of problem behavior than do those who report low levels of closeness to parents (Kerpelman & Smith, 1999).

Studies have been completed to refute the idea girls’ delinquency is affected greater than boys’ delinquency due to a bad family connection. Canter (1982) hypothesized girls would report stronger family bonds and lower delinquency than males. This hypothesis was not supported. Family bond measures were only moderately significantly correlated with delinquency (Canter, 1982).

### ***School Issues***

The 2006 National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims states the extent to which a child is connected with school is a factor relating to self reported delinquent behavior; the less a child has a connection with school, the more delinquent they are likely to be (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006) Specifically, delinquent girls are often years behind their peers academically and frequently fall through the cracks in the school system (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001).

The NCCD study supports this. Of those who participated, each girl had between one and three school failures (i.e. suspension or expulsion from school, repeating one or more grades, placement in a special classroom) and 85% had been expelled or suspended at least once, with 13 as the median age at girls began to have problems in school (Acoca, 1998, p. 571; Acoca, 1999, p.7; Acoca & Dedel, 1998; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 10).

Girls can lose their connection with school for a number of reasons. Sexual harassment, racism, and rivalries are just a few reasons girls may quit attending school (Acoca, 1999; Acoca & Dedel, 1998). A study by DeFrancis (as cited in Reich & Gutierrez, 1979, p. 240) shows 33% of his sample exhibited new school absences, truancy, and a higher dropout after experiencing sexual abuse. Those with problems at school are also more likely to report using drugs, running away, committing theft and assault, and carrying a gun Learning disabilities may also contribute to the academic failure displayed by this population Studies

show that a disproportionate number of female offenders have learning disabilities. These females develop negative attitudes towards school and fall below grade level in their studies.

### ***Abuse and Neglect Issues***

Girls are more likely to have experienced almost all types of abuse, including emotional, physical, sexual, and having been physically neglected (McCabe, Lansing, Garland, Hough, 2002). Several studies have demonstrated that abuse and neglect are related to violent criminal behavior. It has also been shown that abused and neglected children have a higher likelihood of arrests for delinquency, adult criminality, and violent criminal behavior (Widom, 1989; TYC, nd.). Scholars have consistently identified victimization as the first step in females' path to the criminal justice system, as well as a primary determinant of the types and patterns of the offenses they typically commit (Acoca, 1999). Of all types of childhood maltreatment, physical abuse is most likely to be associated with arrest for a violent crime later in life. The next most likely group to be arrested for a violent offense were those who had experienced neglect in childhood, as neglect leads to developmental problems (Widom, 1996). Statistics regarding the incidence of abuse in backgrounds of juvenile female offenders range from a low of 40% to a high of 73% (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002, p 16)

Research also indicates family members or close family friends perpetrate most of the abuse (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002). Those residing with a single parent have a 77% greater risk of being physically abused than those who

live in a dual parent home (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3). Children of a single parent also have a 87% greater risk of being neglected and 80% greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from abuse or neglect (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3).

Raviera (1999, p. 24) found 21% of high school aged girls have experienced physical or sexual abuse, 53% of the abuse coming from within the home and 65% having been abused more than once. The Commonwealth Fund (1997) found, of 6748 girls and boys, one in five girls in grades nine through twelve had been sexually or physically abused (as cited in Acoca, 1998, p. 564). The average ratio of female to male abuse victims is ten or eleven to one, (Raviera, 1999; Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3).

Girls are more likely than boys to be the victims of child sexual abuse. Experts estimate that 70% of the victims of sexual abuse are girls (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986, p. 46). The abuse can start as early as age three, with the median age of onset being 10.2 - 11.2 years old (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986, p. 48, Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3). Other studies have made claim more males than females are being abused (Kercher & McShane, 1984). One sexual abuse study includes a sample of 933 adult women in San Francisco of whom 28% had been sexually abused by age 14 and 38% by age 18 with 16% of the abuse being done by family member (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986, p. 44). Another study of 248 women in LA found 42% had been victims of sexual abuse as a child (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986, p. 45).

Researchers have argued when girls act out, it is as a reaction to the

abuse they have experienced rather than just because they are bad. Girls' increased risks of sexual and non sexual physical abuse are important factors in explaining female delinquency and eventual adult criminality (Belknap, Holsinger, and Dunn, 1997). It has been argued abuse is more of an issue for female delinquency than males' as they are abused more often than boys (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001).

Violent girls report greater rates of victimization and abuse than their non violent counterparts. One in five violent females believes they have been physically abused in the home compared to one in ten violent males and only 6.3% of non violent girls (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p.189). Research also shows one in four violent girls have been sexually abused compared to one in ten nonviolent girls (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 189). Violent girls report significantly greater rates of victimization and abuse; one out of every five, or 20%, of them have been physically abused at home (Chesney-Lind & Okamoto, 2001, p. 5).

Phelps et al, (1982) found of 192 females in the Wisconsin juvenile justice system, 79% had experienced physical abuse which lead to an injury, 32% had experienced sexual abuse from their family or someone who was close to the family, and 50% (96 girls) had been raped (as cited in Chesney-Lind, 1985/6, p. 7). Of the delinquent girls interviewed for the NCCD study, 92% reported being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused on at least one occasion (Acoca, 1998, p. 565; Acoca, 1999, p. 5; Acoca & Dedel, 1998). Emotional abuse was the most commonly reported abuse category (88%), 81% reported experiencing physical abuse, and 56% of them had been sexually abused (Acoca, 1998, p.

565-567; Acoca & Dedel, 1998). In the same study, 25% of the girls had been removed from their home due to parental or caretaker neglect (Acoca & Dedel, 1998).

Dembo, Williams, and Schmeidler's (1993) study of 399 males and females entering a detention center found women had experienced more sexual victimization. Sixty-one percent of them were sexually abused at least once (as cited in Belknap & Holsinger, 1997, p. 9). In a study of girls in the California Youth Authority, 66.7% of the girls surveyed had been physically abused and 44.7% of the girls had been sexually abused (from Owen & Bloom, 1997, as cited in Bloom and Covington, 2001, p. 4). Many of these girls said they had run away from home because of these experiences (from Owen & Bloom, 1997, as cited in Bloom and Covington, 2001).

Children who are victims of sexual abuse are most likely to run away and have a high rate of escape arrests in general, which also includes truancy and missing person (Acoca, 1999; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Reich & Gutierrez, 1979). Girls who have experienced abuse and end up in the juvenile justice system often have similar stories. The girl is sexually abused by her father or stepfather and runs away to escape the abuse. Once on the streets, she may rely on prostitution to survive and turn to drugs to self-medicate. The girl will often eventually sell drugs to either support her own drug habit or make money to live (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997; Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997). In the end, the girl gets busted and ends up incarcerated for something which was originally beyond her

control.

Girls lucky enough to be picked up off the street before turning to drugs or prostitution will see the juvenile court and social service systems first for status offenses. However, once placed on probation, any subsequent offense, even another status offense becomes violation of court order and leads to greater involvement in the juvenile justice system (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002).

A study by DeFrancis (as cited in Reich & Gutierrez, 1979, p. 240) shows only 11% of his sample exhibited aggressive not present before the incidence of sexual abuse, but 33% of his sample exhibited new school absences, truancy and dropout after sexual abuse. They are more likely to engage in delinquent/criminal behavior and be involved in illicit drug use (Dembo, Williams, Wothke, Schmeidler, & Brown, 1992).

There is a clear correlation between physical, sexual, and emotional victimization and high risk behaviors such as poly-drug use, unsafe sex with many partners, gang membership, school failure, truancy, physical health problems, and early pregnancy (Acoca, 1998; Acoca, 1999; Morris, 1964; Raviora, 1999). An individual may confuse the sex for love and believe gang involvement is a substitute for a family which has failed her.

Immediate consequences of being abused or neglected include physical injuries and psychological trauma, whose emotional and developmental scars may persist (Widom, 1989). Females manifest long term consequences of abuse in subtle ways such as depression or psychiatric difficulties and are at high risk of adverse developmental outcomes (Dembo, Williams, Wothke, Schmeidler, &

Brown, 1992). Abused girls also have double the risk of having an eating disorder and 49% of the girls who were abused were depressed (Raviera, 1999). Abused and neglected females may be more prone to suffer depression and perhaps undergo psychiatric hospitalization as a consequence of these early childhood experiences, rather than direct their aggression outwardly (Widom, 1989). Consequences of childhood sexual abuse have included acting out such as running away, truancy, conduct disorder, delinquency, aggressiveness, promiscuity, etc. Childhood sexual abuse occurs in the context of multi-problem homes, and may only be one of the many problems. In this study, being abused or neglected placed children at an increased risk for an arrest as a juvenile (Widom & Ames, 1994).

### ***Mental Health Issues***

Depression is extremely common among adolescent girls (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001). The Commonwealth Fund reported in 1997 that one in four high school aged girls exhibit depressive symptoms (i.e. crying often, being suicidal, feeling sad most of the time, hating oneself, and feeling alone) and self-confidence ratings in this group are also very low (Schoen, Davis, Collins, Greenberg, Des Roches, & Abrams, 1997). This study also found abused girls exhibit more than twice the symptoms of poor mental health than those who are left unharmed (Schoen, Davis, Collins, Greenberg, Des Roches, & Abrams, 1997). Even witnessing domestic violence may internalize problems such as withdrawn or anxious behavior, or externalize

problems, such as aggression and delinquency (Acoca, 1998).

Girls are more likely to have a family history of psychopathology more likely to have a family history of mental illness which suggests there may be a genetic disposition to psychopathology and more chaotic family lives. They are significantly more likely than males to meet criteria for the presence of at least one DSM-IV diagnosis, to have a mood disorder, have disruptive disorders, major depressive disorder, and separation anxiety disorder (McCabe, Lansing, Garland, Hough, 2002). Mental health problems are even more prevalent when it comes to delinquent girls (Bloom & Covington, 2001).

The prevalence of identified mental health disorders were in 84% of female juvenile offenders versus 27% of their male counterparts (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Huber, 2004, p 207) In the NCCD study on female delinquents in California, more than half (53%) of those surveyed reported being in need of psychological services; 24% also reported to have seriously considered suicide in the past (Acoca, 1999, p. 7). In the same study, 21% of those surveyed had been hospitalized in a psychiatric facility on at least one occasion (Acoca, 1999, p. 7; Acoca & Dedel, 1998). Perhaps girls are not simply being neglected for psychological treatment, but rather the treatment which they are receiving may not be adequate to treat what they are afflicted with.

### ***Medical Issues***

A significant number of female delinquents suffer from untreated medical issues The Commonwealth Fund has reported many girls do not have a regular

source of medical care (Schoen, Davis, Collins, Greenberg, Des Roches, & Abrams, 1997). The NCCD, reports 88% of girls in the California juvenile justice system claim they have experienced one or more physical health problem in the last year; 57% reported they were only now being treated for it (Acoca & Dedel, 1998).

The most common health problems reported by the girls surveyed in the NCCD study were asthma (39%), yeast infections (29%), and STDs (27%) (Acoca & Dedel, 1998). A smaller percentage of these girls (15%) reported having experienced traumatic head injuries (Acoca & Dedel, 1998).

### ***Drugs and Alcohol***

It is quite common for delinquent girls to have drug and alcohol abuse problems (Bloom & Covington, 2001). Seventy-five percent of girls in the juvenile justice system use drugs and/or alcohol and typically start at the age of 14 (Acoca, 1999, p. 5). Often, the same girls who experienced trauma in their lives (i.e. those who have been abused) use drugs and alcohol to numb their psychological pain (Acoca, 1999; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Raviora, 1999). Densen-Gerber and Benward (1976) and Wathey and Densen-Gerber (1976) have both reported, respectively, 35% and 44% of their sample of drug abusers reported earlier incestuous experiences (as cited in Reich & Gutierrez, 1979).

It has been found that the more juveniles are abused, the more likely they are to have substance abuse problems. A study in Florida of drug using youth

found large proportions to indicate they were physically abused in a variety of ways by an adult. Most of the youths were beaten or really hurt with a strap or belt; 21% percent had been hit with something hard (Dembo, Williams, Wish, Dertke, Berry, Getreu, Washburn, & Schmeidler, 1988, p 1110). These same youths reported relatively high lifetime rates of illicit drug use.

Of those abused, 26% claimed to have used marijuana 100 or more times; 21% had used cocaine more than 11 times (Dembo, Williams, Wish, Dertke, Berry, Getreu, Washburn, & Schmeidler, 1988, p 1112). Many of those studied were multiple drug users; 17% claimed to have used three or more drugs (Dembo, Williams, Wish, Dertke, Berry, Getreu, Washburn, & Schmeidler, 1988, p 1114).

### ***Socio-Economic Position***

Families of girls in the juvenile justice system are often fragmented by multiple and serious stressors including poverty. It has been found many girls who enter the juvenile justice system come from poor and urban environments (Bloom & Covington, 2001). Consequently many of the girls' families do not have the resources to protect and nurture them as they move through childhood into adolescence (Acoca & Dedel, 1998, p. 5). Acoca and Dedel (1998) found a vast majority of the offenders in their study were raised by low income, single parent families.

Children from families with annual incomes less than \$15,000 as compared to children whose families make more than \$30,000 a year were over

22 times have been found more likely to experience some form of maltreatment (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3). Those from lowest income families were 18 times more likely to be sexually abused and almost 56 times more likely to be educationally neglected and over 22 times more likely to be seriously injured from maltreatment (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Based on the information gathered through the literature review, it would be likely some of the risk factors found in prior research would be positively correlated to the criminal propensity of the girls who are incarcerated in the Texas Youth Commission. Risk factors which would be the most interesting to test include those based on the race of the individual as well as their age. Whether an individual's parents are currently married, whether they have a criminal history, and whether they abuse or neglect the child are also risk factors which can be explored through running an analysis of data received from the TYC. The mental health and the child's status of having or not having a substance abuse problem may also be run using data received.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

#### **Sample Description**

The data for this study were obtained from the intake files of the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) for fiscal years 2004 and 2005. The TYC provides for the care, custody, rehabilitation, and reestablishment in society for Texas' most serious delinquents. This file is created for every individual entering the TYC at the intake center in Marlin, Texas. A full evaluation of children coming into the TYC takes 50 to 60 days. When the evaluation is complete, it assists in placement of the delinquent (TYC, March 30, 2006).

The unit of analysis for this study is individuals; the population being those who were admitted to the TYC in the fiscal years 2004 and 2005, which were 5,139 children. Males were excluded from the study (4,614 individuals). The target sample size for the study was approximately 500 individuals; which would be 10% of the population in the TYC at any time. The actual sample was 525; the final sample size for this research being roughly 10.2% of the entire population.

## **Research Hypotheses**

The key purpose of this study is to create a profile of the average female offender while also determining which of their situational factors have a greater effect on the criminal propensity.

### **Hypothesis 1 – Family Contributors/Social Environment**

*A. Individuals who live in a broken home, including those who live with a parent who has never been married, have a greater criminal predisposition, as well as a greater propensity to violence, than those who living in dual family homes.*

The 2006 National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims cites a report demonstrating juveniles who live with both biological parents have a lower lifetime prevalence of law violating behavior than do juveniles living with other family types (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Other studies have found children from broken homes report 10% to 15% more delinquent behavior than those from intact homes, in which two parents have the ability impose more direct controls over their children (Adamek & Dager, 1969, p. 38; Canter, 1982, p. 168).

Overall, 40% to 50% of delinquent children come from broken homes (Monahan, 1957, p. 250).

*B. Girls in the TYC who have parents with a criminal history have a greater tendency to commit crime, as well as to commit violent crime, than those who have parents with no criminal history.*

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) found 54% of girls incarcerated in the California juvenile justice system have a mother who had

been incarcerated during her childhood; 5% had mothers currently in prison or jail (Acoca, 1999, p. 6). Forty-six percent of the girls interviewed had fathers who had been in prison or jail at some point in their childhood; 15% of their fathers were currently incarcerated (Acoca, 1999, p. 6).

*C. Individuals who have experienced abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment will have a greater level of criminal and violent propensity than their counterparts. Those who come from single parents (i.e. divorce, never been married, death of a spouse) have a higher rate of abuse, neglect, and abandonment than those who live in a dual parent home.*

Statistics regarding the incidence of abuse in backgrounds of juvenile female offenders range from a low of 40% to a high of 73% (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002, p.16). Girls are more likely to have experienced almost all types of abuse, including emotional, physical, sexual, and having been physically neglected (McCabe, Lansing, Garland, & Hough, 2002). Children of single parents have a 77% greater risk of being physically abused and an 87% greater risk of being neglected than children who live with both parents (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 3).

## **Hypothesis 2 – Criminogenic Factors/Individual Factors**

*A. Girls who are age 17 and older have a greater propensity to crime and violence than girls who are age 16 and under.*

*B. Those who have attempted suicide have a lower criminal and violent tendency than those who have not been documented as having past suicide attempts.*

In the NCCD study on female delinquents in California, more than half (53%) of those surveyed reported being in need of psychological services (Acoca, 1999, p. 7). While mental health issues may have been indicative of criminal propensity, only 24% of incarcerated girls had reported to have seriously considered suicide in the past (Acoca, 1999, p. 7).

*C. Those girls with substance abuse problems have a greater susceptibility to crime and violence than those who have no problems with substance abuse.*

Seventy-five percent of girls in the juvenile justice system use drugs and/or alcohol (Acoca, 1999, p. 5).

*D. Girls who are white have a lower criminal and violent propensity than those who are nonwhite.*

The assumption is that minority groups, both Hispanic and African American, will be more prone to assault, possessing a weapon, and gang participation. Cernkovick and Giordano (1979) found non-white girls to be more likely to attack someone with their fists, carry and use a weapon, and participate in gang fights (as cited in Sheldon & Chesney-Lind, 1993).

### **Variables**

The TYC data contain variables which measure many items affecting the offender's reason for offending. The subjects were analyzed in term of mental health, physical health, drug and alcohol abuse, socio-economic status, abuse, family structure, family history of criminality, race, age, offenses, etc.

## **Independent Variables**

The independent variables used in this study focused on the nature of the home environment the child experienced prior to her intake at the TYC.

Hypothesis 1 focuses on family and social environments as influential on a child's criminal and violent propensity.

Hypothesis 1A states that those individuals who live in a broken home or live with a parent who has never been married will have a greater criminal and violent tendency than those who have been raised in an intact home. Variable PMS describes the marital status of the offender's parents. The data were coded as follows: 1 = never married, 2 = married, 3 = divorced, 4 = separated, 5 = mother deceased, 6 = father deceased, and 7 = both parents deceased. To create a variable easier to interpret, PMS was recoded into a dummy variable where 0 = married and 1 = all other options.

Hypothesis 1B states that those girls in the TYC whose parents have a criminal history will have a greater criminal and violent predisposition than those who have parents without a history or criminality. Variables CRIMEF1 and CRIMEF2 indicate a female relative who behaves criminally. Variables CRIMEM1 and CRIMEM2 indicate male relatives who behave criminally. The information was originally coded 1 = birth parent, 2 = step parent, 3 = adoptive parent, 4 = grandparent, 5 = relative, 6 = non-related guardian, and 7 = other non-relative. A blank had been used for those who did not have relatives with a history of offending. The variables were combined and recoded into 1 = parent

with criminal history (includes birth, step, and adoptive parent) and 0 = parents without criminal history.

Hypothesis 1C suggests individuals who have experienced abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment also possess a greater propensity to crime and violence. Additionally, it is hypothesized those who come from single parent homes (i.e. divorce, never married, death in the family) have a higher rate of abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment.

Variables used to test this hypothesis include ABANDON, which was coded Y = yes and N = no. AEMOTION, APHYSIC, ASEX, and NEGLECT were used as well, and had been coded 0 = none, 1 = mild, 2 = moderate, and 3 = severe. The five variables were combined into one and dummy coded 0 = no abuse and 1 = abuse (abuse includes abandonment and neglect). For the second part of Hypothesis 1C, the variable PMS, parent's marital status, was also used (see Hypothesis 1A).

Hypothesis 2 gives examples of the individual criminogenic factors which influence the criminality girls. Hypothesis 2A states that individuals who are age 17 and over will have a higher criminal and violent propensity than those girls who are age 16 and under. The variable BMDY is the variable for birthday; it consists of a multi-digit number which represents the number of days after January 1, 1960 the individual was born. The variable was recalculated into an actual date in order to determine through subtraction how old the individual was at intake. The age variable was eventually dummy coded into 0 = girls 16 and under and 1 = girls age 17 and older.

Hypothesis 2B claims that those girls who have been flagged for suicide attempt(s) will have a lower criminal and violent inclination than those girls who have not made an attempt to take their own life. The variable used for this part of the hypothesis is INDSUI, which was coded Y = yes and N = no. The variable was dummy coded later into 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Hypothesis 2C states that individuals who have a substance abuse problem have a greater susceptibility to crime and violence than those who do not have substance abuse issues. SUBABUSE is the independent variable which applies to this theory. The variable has been dummy coded 0 = no substance abuse problems and 1 = current substance abuse problems.

Hypothesis 3D states the assumption that being a minority is positively correlated with crime and violence. The variable RACE measured the race of the offender which was coded B = African American, S = Hispanic, W = White, O = Other, and OL = Asian. A dummy variable was created to make race easier to work with. The variable was coded as follows: 0 = white and 1 = non white.

### **Dependent Variables**

There are two dependent variables in this study. One is the criminal propensity which is measured by the number of crimes the child has committed. The number of crimes committed by all the girls in the study has a mean of 9.33 (with a standard deviation of 5.33). The criminal propensity variables was coded according to those who had committed less than the mean number of offenses (0) and more than the mean number of offenses (1).

The second dependent variable in this study is violent propensity. This variable was created by dummy coding the offenses committed over each girl's life. The offenses were coded 0 = non violent offense and 1 = violent offense. This variable was combined into one variable; the coding remained the same (0 = nonviolent and 1 = violent).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **Methods of Analysis**

Criminal propensity was measured in two ways to increase convergent validity. First, the number of offenses which each girl committed was used as an outcome variable. The values ranged from the minimum number of offenses (1) to the maximum (28). The mean number of offenses was 9.33 (with a standard deviation of 5.33). Second, criminal propensity was measured through whether a violent offense was committed by each girl. The 28 offenses in the data were recoded into dummy variables: 1 = violent and 0 = all the rest of the offenses. Approximately 61% of the girls in the study had committed a violent offense (N=319). The research hypotheses presented earlier suggest various predictor variables measuring social background may have a relationship with these outcome variables which capture criminal propensity. The bivariate analyses presented in this chapter demonstrate that while there is some evidence to support these hypotheses, not all independent variables were indicative of a higher or lower criminal or violent propensity.

## CONTINGENCY TABLES

Contingency tables display both individual and combined distributions of two categorical variables (Miethe, 2006, p. 193). For this study, basic 2 x 2 tables will be used. The tables can be interpreted in two different ways. The first way is to compare the strength or magnitude of statistical association (Miethe, 2006, p. 200). The larger the differences, the stronger the associations are between the variables. Zero to ten percentage points are indicative of a weak or no relationship; 10 – 30% points indicate a moderate relationship between variables; more than thirty percent difference is indicative of a strong relationship (Miethe, 2006, p. 201).

The second method of interpreting contingency tables is the Chi-square test. The test demonstrates whether the dependent variable is influenced by the independent variable. An alpha level must be  $p < .05$  in order to be deemed significant.

The contingency table in shown in Table 4.1 shows the bivariate relationship between the independent variables age, criminal parent, and race and the dependent variable measuring whether the offender has committed a violent offense. As demonstrated in this table, Chi-square tests indicate a lack of significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) between independent variables age, the existence of a criminal parent, and age with the likelihood of committing a violent crime.

**TABLE 4.1: CONTINGENCY TABLE:** Bivariate relationship between Independent Variables and Dependent Variable, Violent Offense Dummy Variable.

	AGE			CRIMINAL PARENT			RACE		
	<17	≥ 17	TOTAL	NO	YES	TOTAL	WHITE	NON WHITE	TOTAL
<b>NOT VIOLENT</b>									
<b>COUNT</b>	128	78	206	128	78	206	60	146	206
<b>%</b>	38.7%	40.2%	39.2%	39.5%	38.8%	39.2%	38.9%	39.4%	39.3%
<b>VIOLENT</b>									
<b>COUNT</b>	203	116	319	196	123	319	94	224	318
<b>%</b>	61.3%	59.8%	60.7%	60.5%	61.2%	60.7%	61.0%	60.5%	60.7%
<b>Total</b>									
<b>Count</b>	331	194	525	324	201	525	154	370	524
<b>%</b>	63.0%	36.9%	100%	61.7%	38.3%	100%	29.4%	70.6%	100%
	Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.120955 df = 1 α = 0.78			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.025509 df = 1 α = 0.92			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.011323 df = 1 α = 1		

The contingency table in shown in Table 4.2 demonstrates the bivariate relationship between the independent variables parent's marital status and history of abuse with the dependent variable measuring whether the offender has committed a violent offense. Table 4.3 demonstrates the bivariate relationship between the independent variables substance abuse and history of suicide attempts with the dependent variable measuring whether the offender has committed a violent offense.

The contingency table in shown in Table 4.4 demonstrates the bivariate relationship between the independent variables age, criminal parent, and race with the dependent variable measuring the number of offenses the individual has committed. Table 4.5 shows the bivariate relationship between the independent variables parent's marital status and history of abuse with the dependent variable which measures whether the offender has committed a violent offense. The contingency table in shown in Table 4.6 demonstrates the bivariate relationship between the independent variables substance abuse and history of suicide attempts with the dependent variable measuring whether the offender has committed a violent offense.

None of the Contingency Tables demonstrated in this chapter found significant relationships between the independent variables and dependent variables.

**TABLE 4.2: CONTINGENCY TABLE:** Bivariate relationship between Independent Variables and Dependent Variable, Violent Offense Dummy Variable.

		PARENT'S MARITAL STATUS			HISTORY OF ABUSE *		
		MARRIED	NOT MARRIED	TOTAL	NO	YES	TOTAL
<b>NON VIOLENT</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	22	184	206	25	178	203
	<b>%</b>	30.9%	40.5%	39.2%	46.3%	38.7%	39.5%
<b>VIOLENT</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	49	270	319	29	281	310
	<b>%</b>	69.0%	59.4%	60.7%	53.7%	61.2%	60.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	71	454	525	54	459	513
	<b>%</b>	13.5%	86.4%	100%	10.5%	89.4%	100%
		Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 2.34509 df = 1 α = 0.152			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 1.141508 df = 1 α = 0.3		

\* ABUSE includes neglect and abandonment

**TABLE 4.3: CONTINGENCY TABLE:** Bivariate relationship between Independent Variables and Dependent Variable, Violent Offense Dummy Variable.

		SUBSTANCE ABUSE			SUICIDE ATTEMPTS		
		NO	YES	TOTAL	NONE	1 +	TOTAL
<b>NON VIOLENT</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	23	183	206	178	28	206
	<b>%</b>	37.7%	39.4%	39.2%	39.3%	38.3%	39.2%
<b>VIOLENT</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	38	281	319	274	45	319
	<b>%</b>	62.3%	60.5%	60.7%	60.6%	61.6%	60.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	61	464	525	452	73	525
	<b>%</b>	11.6%	88.3%	100%	86.1%	13.9%	100%
		Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.068048 df = 1 α = 0.8			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.020 df = 1 α = 0.899		

**TABLE 4.4: CONTINGENCY TABLE:** Bivariate relationship between Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable, number of offenses committed.

		AGE			CRIMINAL PARENT			RACE		
		<17	≥ 17	TOTAL	NO	YES	TOTAL	WHITE	NON WHITE	TOTAL
<b>&gt; MEAN</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	196	110	306	189	117	306	98	207	305
	<b>%</b>	59.2%	56.70%	58.29%	58.3%	58.2%	58.3%	63.6%	55.9%	58.2%
<b>&lt; MEAN</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	135	84	219	135	84	219	56	163	219
	<b>%</b>	40.8%	43.30%	41.71%	41.6%	41.8%	41.7%	36.3%	44.0%	41.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	331	194	525	324	201	525	154	370	524
		Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.121 df = 1 α = 0.781			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.026 df = 1 α = 0.927			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.011 df = 1 α = 1.0		

**TABLE 4.5: CONTINGENCY TABLE:** Bivariate relationship between Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable, number of offenses committed.

		PARENT'S MARITAL STATUS			HISTORY OF ABUSE *		
		MARRIED	NOT MARRIED	TOTAL	NO	YES	TOTAL
<b>&gt; MEAN</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	40	266	306	30	270	300
	<b>%</b>	56.3%	58.6%	58.3%	55.5%	58.8%	58.5%
<b>&lt; MEAN</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	31	188	219	24	189	213
	<b>%</b>	43.6%	41.4%	41.7%	44.4%	41.1%	41.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	71	454	525	54	459	513
	<b>%</b>	13.5%	86.4%	100%	10.5%	89.4%	100%
		Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 2.345 df = 1 α = 0.150			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 1.142 df = 1 α = 0.305		

\* ABUSE includes neglect and abandonment

**TABLE 4.6: CONTINGENCY TABLE:** Bivariate relationship between Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable, number of offenses committed.

		SUBSTANCE ABUSE			SUICIDE ATTEMPTS		
		NO	YES	TOTAL	NONE	1 +	TOTAL
<b>&gt; MEAN</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	34	272	306	264	42	306
	<b>%</b>	55.7%	58.6%	58.3%	58.4%	57.5%	58.3%
<b>&lt; MEAN</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	27	192	219	188	31	219
	<b>%</b>	44.2%	41.4%	41.7%	41.6%	42.5%	41.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	61	464	525	452	73	525
	<b>%</b>	11.6%	88.4%	100%	86.1%	13.9%	100%
		Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.068 df = 1 α = 0.899			Chi X <sup>2</sup> = 0.028 df = 1 α = 0.898		

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was not only to create a profile of the female offender but also determine which of the risk factors common to girls who offend are the most determinant of criminal propensity. The analysis was expected to find at least one of the risk factors (i.e. age, being a minority, having parents with a criminal history) to have been positively correlated with the criminal propensity of the average offending female. However, none of the risk factors analyzed showed any statistically significant correlation, positive or negative.

This chapter has many purposes. The first is to give a profile of the female offender, as discovered in frequency analysis prior to use of correlations and linear regressions. Next, the chapter will discuss the hypotheses individually and the results for each. Shortcomings of the study will also be mentioned, which will be followed by how the study can be replicated to find better correlations in the future. Finally, reasons to continue studying female delinquents will be given.

## **Profile of the Female Delinquent in Texas**

The majority of girls in the TYC are between the ages of 15 and 17. Ethnic make up of this group consists of 29.7% White, 32% African American, and 38.2% Hispanic. Only 14.3% of the girls in the Texas Youth Commission have parents who are married; which means that approximately 86% of them come from broken homes, homes in which their mother/father never married, or has a parent who is deceased. Those who have parents with a criminal record make up 38% of the female population. Eighty-nine percent of the female offenders in the TYC have been victim of abuse (i.e. physical, emotional, and sexual), neglect, abandonment, or a mixture of the three. Approximately 8.7% of the girls have attempted suicide; 88.4% have a substance abuse problem.

## **Research Hypotheses**

### **Hypothesis 1 – Family Contributors/Social Environment**

*A. Individuals who live in a broken home, including those who live with a parent who has never been married, have a greater criminal predisposition, as well as a greater propensity to violence, than those who living in dual family homes. Living in a broken home was shown to have no significant correlation to the criminal propensity of girls. Nor was it shown to determine whether a girl was violent.*

*B. Girls in the TYC who have parents with a criminal history have a greater tendency to commit crime, as well as to commit violent crime, than those who have parents with no criminal history. Girls with parents who have a criminal*

history were not found to have any greater criminal propensity than those whose parents had no record. A child's level of Violence can also not be predicted by the variable Parent's Criminal History.

*C. Individuals who have experienced abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment will have a greater level of criminal and violent propensity than their counterparts.*

*Those who come from single parents (i.e. divorce, never been married, death of a spouse) have a higher rate of abuse, neglect, and abandonment than those who live in a dual parent home.* The variable Abuse, Neglect, Abandonment had no significant correlation to either criminal propensity or violence score.

## **Hypothesis 2 – Criminogenic Factors/Individual Factors**

*A. Girls who are age 17 and older have a greater propensity to crime and violence than girls who are age 16 and under.* Age was not found to be significantly correlated to criminal propensity or to whether the child was violent.

*B. Those who have attempted suicide have a lower criminal and violent tendency than those who have not been documented as having past suicide attempts.*

Having been flagged for suicide attempt was not found to be positively significantly correlated to criminal propensity or violent score.

*C. Those girls with substance abuse problems have a greater susceptibility to crime and violence than those who have no problems with substance abuse.*

The variable Substance Abuse was not found to be significantly correlated to criminal propensity or violence score.

*D. Girls who are white have a lower criminal and violent propensity than those who are nonwhite.* Girls in the study who were African American or Hispanic did not have a higher criminal propensity than those who were white.

### **Explanation**

There are many reasons for which there were no significant findings when analyzing the data. The first reason is that the sample size was small. The TYC had a limited intake for the years 2004 and 2005 due to the fact that girls do offend less often than boys. With only 525 girls to run analysis on, many of whom had missing data in their file, it was hard to find risk factors which predicted criminal propensity.

Another shortcoming of the study was the data were incomplete. To have truly determined the risk factors of girls, there should have been a comparison group. This could have been done in many ways. The population of female delinquents in the Texas Youth Commission could have been compared to boys in the same system. Using the same data, a comparison could have been done between ethnicities, to determine whether one group had more risk factors than another. To expand upon the data, a comparison group of girls who were on probation or those who have yet to offend at all would have made for a good comparison study. Though the first options of including male delinquents or comparing ethnicities could have been done, to have gained data regarding girls on probation or those who have never offended would have been an insurmountable challenge for the present study.

The study may have also been biased due to the area which it had been completed in (i.e. due to the high Hispanic population in Texas). Additionally, the sample may have found significant relationships between independent and dependent variables should there have been a stratified sample had been shown, or had been done in a state with less disproportionate minority confinement.

### **To Create a Better Study**

To redo this study, comparison groups must be chosen. Either the data on males in the TYC should be added or the groups should be broken up into groups according to ethnicity, offenses, etc. If starting a similar study with different data, a larger sample should be chosen. Preferably, a nationwide selection of more than 5,000 girls should be taken which would be stratified according to the racial breakup of the nation. The data should be carefully chosen to ensure the files have less missing data for individuals who will be analyzed. Additionally, it would be helpful to find a database of girls who yet to be incarcerated in order to compare risk factors of offenders with risk factors of those who have not offended.

### **Future of Female Juvenile Justice**

It is very important to redo studies on girls to find more significant relationships between their risk factors and their criminal propensity due to their currently increasing rate of offending. In the two decades, the number of girls in

detention has risen at a disproportionate rate to males. From 1989 to 1998, their incarceration rates rose 56%, while the number of boys rose only 20% (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 191; Chesney-Lind, 2002, p. 84) and currently consist of 18% of those juveniles in juvenile detention facilities (Pasko, 2006, p. 3)

The rate of female offending is rising as well, thus predicting an even greater increase of girls in detention in the future. From 1988 to 1997, delinquency cases involving female offenders rose 83% (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001, p. 2). In comparison to male delinquency, from 1993 to 1997, the increase in arrests for girls were greater (or the decreases smaller) than boys in nearly every offense category (Acoca, 1999, p. 3). As of 2004, girls consist of 30% of juveniles arrested each year (Pasko, 2006, p. 3).

As the rate of female offending increases, their numbers inside detention centers also increase. It is important, knowing that the number of girls offending is higher than ever, to ensure there are special programs provided for the specific risk factors they are exposed to. Research must be continued to create a juvenile justice system set up to properly help this segment of the population.

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