CASE STUDY

Gender Responsive Programming

Los Angeles County (California) Sheriff's Department

Maria Valdovinos Olson and Karen L. Amendola

problem solving

organizational transformation

community partnership

COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

National Policing Institute
PURSUING EXCELLENCE THROUGH SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

Compendium Contents

Part 5.3a Contents

**Los Angeles County (California) Women's Jail:
Century Regional Detention Facility**

Current Sheriff: Alex Villanueva

Sheriff during study: Jim McDonnell

Number of beds/inmates: The focus of gender responsive programming was primarily on the pregnant inmate population, which ranged anywhere between 50 and 70 pregnant inmates per day.

Overview

In 2017, the National Police Foundation (now National Policing Institute) completed a process evaluation into the implementation of gender-responsive programming at the Los Angeles County Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF), also known as the women's jail. In this featured program, we highlight the program implementation process and the most innovative, successful, and promising components of the gender-responsive program in place at the Los Angeles County Women's Jail between 2014 and 2017.

What is gender responsive programming?

Gender responsive programming is based on the recognition that there are key differences in how men and women experience and respond to incarceration. Gender-responsive principles are intended to guide "the design of programs, practices, or policies that address the specific circumstances of women's lives, their unique risk and need factors, and research on women that guides policy and practice" (King and Foley 2014, 2). The sidebar on page 6 describes the various principles.

Gender-Responsive Guiding Principles

- **Gender.** Acknowledge that gender makes a difference.

- **Environment.** Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.

- **Relationships.** Develop policies, practices, and programs that are relational and promote healthy relationships.

- **Services and supervision.** Address individual rehabilitative needs through comprehensive and integrated services and supervision.

- **Socioeconomic status.** Provide women with opportunities to improve their socio-economic conditions.

- **Community.** Establish a system of community supervision and re-entry with comprehensive and collaborative services.

Source: Gender Responsive Guiding Principles (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2002)

How does gender-responsive programming exemplify the principles of community-oriented policing?

Community-oriented policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of community partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues (see figure 1). In the women's jail, safety was less of a concern than it was in the men's jail. A key concern for CRDF command staff was the health of the pregnant inmate population.

Components of community policing include problem solving, the development of community partnerships, and organizational transformation. In the CRDF, the implementation of gender-responsive programming encompassed both problem solving through components such as the Gender Responsive Advocate and the development of community partnerships via the Community Transition Unit. Command staff's goal was to achieve organizational transformation through a systemwide implementation of gender-responsive principles and policies, rather than those principles being restricted to a program delivered by an external provider in a specific housing unit.

Figure 1. Community policing components

Source: COPS Office, "About the COPS Office," accessed December 9, 2021, https://cops.usdoj.gov/aboutcops.

How did the women's jail come to implement gender-responsive programming?

Gender-responsive programming at the CDRF began in 2014 under the leadership of Assistant Sheriff Terri McDonald. During a period of realignment, incarcerated populations, staff roles, and policy responsiveness were assessed to ensure things were being done right.

The assessment revealed that the CRDF had, on average, 50 pregnant inmates per day in custody and that there could be as many as 70 on any given day. It became clear to CRDF leadership that this population constituted a high-risk population with a unique set of needs requiring additional efforts to ensure their safety, health, and wellness while under custody.

Gender-responsive programming: Problem solving and partnership components

Gender-responsive programming at the CRDF reflects the coming together of various programs, jail management decisions, and units and processes. The programming components include the orientation module, gender-responsive rehabilitation (GRR) services provider (HealthRIGHT 360), Gender Responsive Advocate (GRA), Education-Based Incarceration program (EBI), and Community Transition Unit (CTU), as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. Main components of gender-responsive programming

Gender responsive rehabilitation services provider (HR 360)

Gender Responsive Advocate

Orientation module

Education-Based Incarceration program

Community Transition Unit

Gender responsive model at the Los Angeles County Century Regional Detention Facility
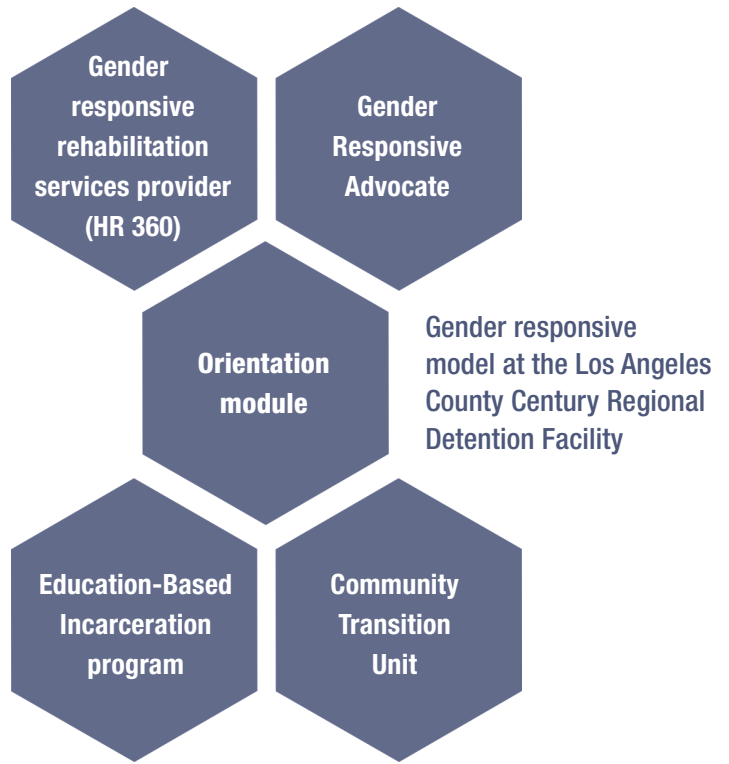
Orientation module. This module was designed to offer each inmate a comprehensive and detailed overview of what the Los Angeles County jail system can offer; the goal is to align rehabilitation needs with the correct programs and services. To ensure women coming into custody are engaged in rehabilitative work as soon as possible, the CRDF employs a triage process. This process is designed to triage women into either the special high observation housing or the intake dorm. Women triaged into special high observation have limited options because of their severity of needs or risks. Women triaged into the intake dorm are immediately assessed for need and eligibility and offered trauma-focused and other types of programming.

"It is the first thing we do, see who can get released into a program . . . . This is what we do in our orientation module. It's like a one stop shop. All of the providers come in and they assess them to see who they can take.''

— CDRF staff member

GRR services such as trauma-informed programming and services are administered by a qualified provider. For Los Angeles County, this provider was HealthRIGHT 360 at the time of the process evaluation conducted by the National Police Foundation. With trauma-informed programs and services, the therapeutic interventions are informed by the research literature on trauma, abuse, poverty, and other primary factors that lead women into addiction and criminal behavior.

The position of GRA / Pregnant Inmate Liaison was created specifically in response to the CRDF's initial assessment of a sizable pregnant female population and the need for staff development to make the CRDF a truly gender-responsive environment. There was no template for this position, which allowed for experimentation to determine what worked best. The primary responsibilities of this position are oriented toward problem-solving and include (a) rapport building, (b) information sharing, and (c) case tracking focused on the pregnant inmates. The GRA also provides on-the-job modeling of gender-responsive practice for other staff in the jail.

EBI is an approach to criminal justice that focuses on the deterrence and mitigation of crime through education and rehabilitation. The EBI philosophy was implemented through a robust selection of classes which broadly fell into the following categories: high school, technical and vocational career education programs, and drug rehabilitation.

CTU. Oriented toward the development of community partnerships, the CTU maintains a network of service providers in the community that can play a role in the rehabilitation of the women as they transition from jail into community supervision.

"The providers we have [HealthRIGHT 360] are outstanding. They are making such a difference with the women. They themselves are a connection to the outside partners and help line up services for the women prior to their release."

— CRDF Command Staff

How did command staff go about implementing gender-responsive policies and programs?

The implementation of gender-responsive programming has been both iterative and incremental, with various program components added, revised, or eliminated over time. The selection of the GRR services provider took place through a request for proposals for a provider of gender-responsive services. HealthRight 360 was ultimately selected, and the CRDF continually praised HealthRight 360 for its excellent work and fit with the women's jail.

In reviewing various aspects of the implementation, command staff noted that the intention had always been to implement the gender-responsive model systemwide. However, as CRDF command staff noted, relying so heavily on contracted services and external funding made it difficult to take the gender-responsive model from a program or series of programs to a systemwide set of policies and procedures.

The creation of a GRA / Pregnant Inmate Liaison position has been instrumental to meeting the goals of GRR and ensuring the well-being of the pregnant inmate population. The position duty statement was created with specific characteristics in mind, such as exceptional listening skills, sensitivity to the nuances of pregnancy, and the ability to understand and empathize with mothers separated from their children. Command staff worked to identify the person in the jail best suited for this role and allowed the selected GRA considerable freedom in designing and tailoring the key responsibilities of this position to ensure that desired outcomes and needs of pregnant women were met.

Although the CTU was overseen by a division director, it also included external community oversight through the Los Angeles County Gender Responsive Advisory Committee, which was made up of a diverse group of stakeholders to provide oversight and make recommendations for promoting a gender-responsive environment, programming, services, and community collaboration to improve outcomes for incarcerated women.

Does gender-responsive programming work?

Evaluation metrics or similar. As a partner to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) and with funding from the California Endowment, staff from the National Police Foundation worked with command staff in the women's jail to conduct a process evaluation of program implementation. The focus of this evaluation was on the program implementation process rather than on the impact of gender responsiveness or inmate perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Nevertheless, Valdovinos Olson and Amendola (2019) did assess alignment between the program implemented in the Los Angeles County Women's Jail and gender-responsive theory and practice. For nearly two decades now, gender-responsive rehabilitation has been recommended as a best practice in corrections by both researchers and the National Institute of Corrections (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003).

Key indicators. In assessing the effectiveness of gender-responsive programs, agencies should collect and consider the following participant data, paying particular attention to changes in response or recovery from trauma, abuse, or victimization:

- Trauma history, which can be measured using a variety of validated psychological instruments such as the Child Abuse and Trauma Scale CATS (Sanders and Becker-Lausen 1995; adaptation by Kent and Waller 1998) as well as self-reporting

- Abuse and victimization history, which can be measured by validated scales such as the Childhood Abuse Scale (Malik and Shah 2007) and the Adult Physical Assault Scale, a 12-item scale adapted from the Abusive Behavior Inventory (Shephard and Campbell 1992)

- History of substance use and abuse as well as treatment and recovery

- History of mental illness, anxiety, and depression (including treatment and recovery), which can be measured using a variety of validated scales such as the Beck depression inventory II (Beck, Steer, and Brown 1996)

- Behavioral patterns, which can be measured using attitudinal scales and risk assessment instruments such as the Missouri Women's Risk Assessment (Van Voorhis et al. 2008), used to integrate gender-specific questions into standardly employed risk/needs instruments for predicting criminal behavior and misconduct, such as the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (Andrews and Bonta 1995) and the Northpointe COMPAS (Brennan, Dieterich, and Oliver 2006)

- Self-esteem, social support, and related dynamics, which can be measured via self-report and scales such as the Relationship Support, Relationship Conflict, and Relationship Dysfunction Scales (Wright, Salisbury, and Van Voorhis 2007), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1979) and Parental Stress Scale (Avison, Turner, and Noh 1986); focus should include positive changes in self-esteem and in the nature of family relationships, as well as parenting and reunification with children

- Criminal history indicators such as history of violence, number and nature of current and prior offenses, etc.

- Indicators that can inform recidivism risk such as educational attainment, employment, housing, treatment for any mental illness and substance use issues, and social support

- Program participation, completion, and discharge

Collecting these types of indicators pre- and post- is key in testing the efficacy of various gender-responsive programs and gender-informed treatment options.

Successes. Prior to the development and implementation of gender-responsive rehabilitative programming, the needs of the pregnant population were not being adequately and consistently met. This created a high-risk scenario for both the jail and the women. The GRA position helped resolve this issue by have a dedicated person who could follow through on medical and other needs. Having one consistent and dedicated person also allowed for rapport building between the inmates and jail staff. Other components of the gender-responsive model at the CRDF also proved very successful. The process of triage and needs-based placement that took place during the orientation module (and which was met through HealthRight 360 and EBI programming) set the stage for women to be able to focus on their rehabilitation from day one. The network model of services and partnerships in the CTU subsequently worked to help women continue their rehabilitation once they left the confines of the jail. Throughout this model development and implementation process, CRDF staff displayed a ready willingness to apply lessons learned. For example, the prior approach involved a segregated housing model for pregnant

women (because of safety concerns). However, they found that the segregated unit ended up impeding the ability of the women to receive the rehabilitative programming they needed. Specifically, while housing the pregnant women together helped staff ensure pregnancy needs were being met, rehabilitative needs were often overlooked because the women were not housed with other women who had the same or similar rehabilitative needs (e.g., support for addiction to drugs). Further, in many of the programmatic components of the GRR model at CRDF, we can see principles of community-oriented policing such as problem solving and community partnerships at work.

Challenges. The CRDF faced a few challenges in implementation. Among the challenges were (a) funding and sustainability concerns, (b) data management and evaluation constraints, and (c) capacity limitations for some of the model components. For example, continued growth in the number of women incarcerated placed significant strain on the sole GRA, eventually requiring command staff to consider what a two-GRA model might look like. Although the network model of partnerships worked well in helping to facilitate the delivery of services in the face of state funding constraints, sustainability in the face of funding shortages remained an ever-present concern, as did the ability to take the gender-responsive model from a set of programs to a systemwide set of policies and procedures. At the CRDF, the main sources of funding for the GRR model in 2016 were the Inmate Welfare Fund, provider networks with external funding, and grant funding directly awarded to the jail. From year to year, the amount

and reliability of these funds depended on varying circumstances, which made sustainability and institutionalization difficult. Among community-oriented policing principles, organizational transformation always seems to pose the most challenges.

Finally, the lack of a database and modern technological infrastructure posed significant challenges for CRDF. Successful gender-responsive practice requires access to a wealth of information about each inmate so that services can be tailored to individual needs. Without an electronic database and infrastructure, it is not possible to collect all the information needed and ensure that information can be kept current and easily accessible. Furthermore, the improvement of gender-responsive practice is also dependent on data regarding obstacles and outcomes and the progress of service providers. Program evaluation becomes extremely important when funding threatens the elimination of programs. This limited evaluation capacity also restricted the CDRF's ability to take the GRR model systemwide, or in other words, to make it fully compatible with the policies and procedures of the facility.

Why are these findings important for jail management?

The findings of this process evaluation are important with respect to jail management because they highlight how a large county jail undertook the process of improving the quality of correctional service delivery by recognizing women's gender-specific needs and embarking on the process of aligning program development and implementation to existing theory on gender responsiveness. In addition to improving

the quality of correctional service delivery, policies, programs, and procedures that are designed in response to and aligned with gender specific needs are believed to

- make the management of female offenders more effective, which has implications for both inmate and staff safety and wellness;

- enable correctional facilities to become more appropriately programmed and staffed because of expanded funding and partnership opportunities and appropriate training;

- decrease staff turnover because staff can see that employing gender-appropriate services, programs, and strategies is proving effective and creating meaningful change and improvement for inmates;

- decrease the likelihood of litigation because programs and strategies are evidence-based and attuned to gender specific needs such as pregnancy.

Other findings important for jail management with respect to the implementation of gender-responsive programming include the identification of challenges in implementation, areas for improvement, and strong or innovative programs and procedures that can potentially serve as models for other jurisdictions.

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About the Authors

Maria Valdovinos Olson is a Senior Research Associate at the National Policing Institute and doctoral candidate in sociology at George Mason University. Ms. Valdovinos Olson's primary area of research focuses on issues of safety, health, and wellness in the administration of justice, and she has expertise in policing, jails, and re-entry. She is currently co–principal investigator on a National Institute of Justice–funded project investigating the adverse impacts of organizational stress on officer health and wellness.

Her portfolio of work spans the areas of safety and wellness in policing and corrections, community policing in the United States and Mexico, and the impact of a procedural justice intervention on crime hot spots and police legitimacy. Recent work on gender responsive programming in jails, impact of restorative justice programming on recidivism, and development of a work-family conflict scale for police officers and their families has been published in, respectively, *Women and Criminal Justice, Journal of Offender Rehabilitation,* and *Policing: An International Journal.* Ms. Valdovinos Olson earned her BA from Northwestern University and her MA in sociology from George Mason University.

Karen L. Amendola, PhD, is Chief Behavioral Scientist at the National Policing Institute, where she has worked for more than 25 years. She has worked with numerous law enforcement agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. Just a few examples include Arlington, Texas; Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago; Detroit; Newark, New Jersey; Seattle; Travis County, Texas; and Washington, D.C. Dr. Amendola recently completed a study with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department on community policing and gender responsiveness and has worked with other sheriffs' offices on the *Hiring in the Spirit of Service* initiative. With her colleagues, Amendola recently developed a work-family conflict scale published in *Policing: An International Journal (2021).* Currently she is the lead investigator (with her peers) on a study of organizational stress and its impact on police officers and sheriffs' deputies.

As an industrial/organizational psychologist, Dr. Amendola conducts research on officer safety, eyewitness identification, dog encounters, psychological measures, shift schedules, and community policing training and evaluation. She currently serves on the American Psychological Association's Presidential Committee on Use of Force against African Americans and recently served as the Chair of the Division of Experimental Criminology of the American Society of Criminology (2018 – 2019). Dr. Amendola is also a member of the American Society of Criminology, IACP, and the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology. With her colleagues, she won the prestigious Outstanding Experimental Field Trial for her examination of the impact of 8-, 10-, and 12-hour shifts and the impact of hours on health, safety, performance, and quality of life.

About the National Policing Institute
(formerly known as the National Police Foundation)

The **National Policing Institute i**s a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to pursuing excellence through science and innovation in policing. As the country's oldest police research organization, the National Policing Institute has learned that police practices should be based on scientific evidence about what works best, the paradigm of evidence-based policing.

Established in 1970, the National Policing Institute has conducted seminal research in police behavior, policy, and procedure and works to transfer to local agencies the best new information about practices for dealing effectively with a range of important police operational and administrative concerns. Motivating all of the National Policing Institute's efforts is the goal of efficient, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

To learn more, visit the National Policing Institute at www.policinginstitute.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than $20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.

- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office–funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.

- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.

- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, https://cops.usdoj.gov.

Jails are communities in and of themselves, whose members are the individuals incarcerated and the correctional staff employed there; they are also part of the broader communities in which they are located, where the correctional staff live and to which the incarcerated population will eventually return. Community-oriented policing is as important in jails as it is in towns, cities, and counties; this compendium of community policing and procedural justice practices and programs, developed by the National Policing Institute and the National Sheriffs' Association, features research and promising practices as well as eight successful programs operated by seven sheriffs' departments that will be illuminating for other agencies nationwide.