

Gangs and Violence in California's Youth Correctional Facilities: A Research  
Foundation for Developing Effective Gang Policies

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# INTRODUCTION

## Research Aims and Scope of the Report

The goal of this study is to systematically gather and assess information about youth gang/racial violence in DJJ facilities in order to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses the needs of the current DJJ population and develop strategies for responding to youth violence. Three broad research questions derive from this general goal:

- 1) What is the scope, nature and impact of gang involvement in violence within DJJ facilities?
- 2) What programs, routine practices and policies are currently in place in the DJJ to respond to youth gang/racial violence?
- 3) How can DJJ merge knowledge about gang/racial involvement and violence in the facilities with knowledge about current and best practices to inform the development of a comprehensive, evidence-based, gang reduction strategy?

This report offers analysis of DJJ official data combined with original data gathered by researchers to assist DJJ in the development of violence reduction strategies, curriculum, and staff training. We begin with a brief overview of recent policy changes that shape the special context for this study. We offer other contextual materials in Appendix A: a summary analysis of trend data from DJJ monthly gang reports, an overview of the socio-legal context of the *Farrell* consent decree, a summary of research on gangs and violence in juvenile correctional facilities, and a review of the research on treatment in juvenile correctional institutions. We follow the introduction with a brief summary of the research methods because we provide a thorough description in Appendix B.

We present the study findings in five sections. The first four presents findings for males, while the last addresses female youth. The first section describes the various indicators of gang membership available and uses several of these measures to compare gang youth with other youth in the DJJ population and our interview sample. Next, we examine violence patterns from a variety of perspectives. In the third section, we briefly describe the strategies suggested by youth and staff to reduce violence in DJJ. This is followed by our assessment of the patterns of therapeutic service delivery to youth. The final section of findings covers all these topics for females in DJJ.

We conclude the report with a summary of the key findings and the implications for programmatic and policy changes derived from our study.

## California's Youth Correctional Facilities as a Research Context

This study is situated in a policy environment that, on the one hand, created the circumstances that made it possible to conduct the study, and on the other, may render the findings as applicable only to this time and place. In 2004, the Department of Corrections entered into a consent decree to settle the *Farrell v Allen* lawsuit (see Appendix A). This required the California Youth Authority (CYA) to file remedial plans to address all areas of deficiency identified by the court experts, including Safety and Welfare (see Krisberg, 2011). In July of 2006, following a major reorganization in which the state correctional agency became the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and CYA became the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Safety and Welfare remedial plan was accepted by the court. The plan recognized high levels of gang activity and violence in DJJ facilities and directed

DJJ to consult with nationally recognized experts to design strategies to reduce gang and racial violence. In late 2009, DJJ invited the Principal Investigator to conduct a study to gather and collate data to inform the development of prevention and intervention programs.

By the time the research team began collecting data toward the end of summer 2010, it was abundantly clear that DJJ was an agency in transition. One facility staff member baldly stated: “We’re an organization in decline.” Certainly, the numbers of youth housed in DJJ have been declining for several years, likely due to a combination of lower crime rates, higher costs and changing attitudes toward incarcerating youth in state-level facilities. From 1999 to 2009, the population counts in DJJ decreased from 7761 to 1602 (Office of Research, 2010).

The nature of the population placed in DJJ facilities changed as well. Historically, youth who committed their crimes before the age of 18 and were found by local juvenile court judges to be inappropriate for incarceration in county facilities were remanded to the jurisdiction of the CYA/DJJ for a period of time determined by the correctional agency, but not to exceed age 25. Youth transferred to and convicted by the adult court could be housed in CYA/DJJ facilities until age 25. In 2007, the California legislature mandated that only youth convicted of violent or serious felonies (defined under PC 707b) that could result in prosecution in adult court or certain sex crimes (which require registration as defined in PC 290) could be committed by the juvenile court to DJJ (Office of Research, 2010). A later policy change requires all adult court commitments to be transferred to a CDCR facility (state prison or fire camp) at age 18.

Lower numbers, budget pressures and aging buildings led to closures of half of the facilities that were operating at the turn of the century. Facility closure requires relocating youth (and some staff), creates inevitable disruption in programming, causes constraints on housing choices, and increases tension between youth as friendships and rivalries (both social and gang related) get sorted out. At the time of our data collection, three facilities were located in northern California, two in the city of Stockton and another nearby in Ione. Of the two facilities in the southern portion of the state, Ventura houses all females (between 50 and 60 young women). We obtained population lists of youth to interview during September 2010, when about 1200 youth were housed in five facilities. One southern California facility that housed older youth and parole violators had been closed within the previous six months, necessitating the transfer of those youth to other facilities. A northern facility that was included in our study closed in June 2011 and one of the southern facilities closed this fall. That leaves just three facilities across the state at this report’s date. The rapid pace of change in the DJJ population, staffing and facilities since the data were gathered require that the findings be reviewed with this specific policy context in mind. For example, characterizations of individual facilities may not be currently applicable and therefore we only rarely compare patterns by facility in this document.

Even while these dramatic changes in the DJJ population were occurring, the *Farrell* lawsuit required massive changes in service delivery and the conditions of confinement. There are annual or semi-annual audits of staff and youth to ensure progress. This means that the facilities are under constant scrutiny. In fact, along with the usual assurances of confidentiality and research protections, we began our interviews with the disclaimer that we were not law enforcement or social workers, lawyers or auditors! Thus, we conducted this study during a period of rapid institutional change and staff job insecurity. Staff perspectives on safety and violence issues most certainly reflect this and youth perceptions were affected as well. Moreover, the rapid pace of change in the DJJ population, staffing and facilities since the data were gathered require that the findings be reviewed with this specific policy context in mind. For example, characterizations of individual facilities may not be currently applicable and therefore we only rarely compare patterns by facility in this document. Nevertheless, our

recommendations are grounded in a systematic and thorough analysis of the wide range of data that were available to us and therefore should be useful to guiding DJJ policy into the future.

## RESEARCH METHODS OVERVIEW

The research agenda for this study necessitated a multi-pronged research design. The primary methods we used to gather relevant data include 1) interviews with purposely-selected DJJ staff, 2) interviews with randomly-selected DJJ male youth and the entire female population, and 3) analysis of existing databases maintained by DJJ. A detailed description of the research methods appears in Appendix B. Wherever possible, our intent is to compare official with self-reported data and to contrast youth perspectives with those of DJJ staff members.

We conducted face-to-face interviews with 64 staff members that worked in the five facilities in capacities that suggested they would be good informants about gangs and violence. Interviews took place in confidential settings during the fall of 2010. We conducted interviews with Gang Information Coordinators, Youth Correctional Counselors, Crisis Resolution Team members and Case Managers in most facilities, along with a range of other employees. Questions were worded broadly and covered the topics of youth and staff safety, institutional and street gang violence issues, gang and race dynamics, programmatic responses to violence, and suggestions for more effective responses to gangs and violence. The average interview time was 43 minutes. We audio-recorded most of the interviews and transcribed them. These transcriptions were each coded by two different coders to maximize reliability; the codes were then analyzed for thematic content.

We interviewed a representative sample of 306 males in all five facilities and as many females as would agree to participate (n=47). We achieved an overall study participation rate of 84% and found only minor deviations in comparing the males we interviewed to the entire DJJ population in mid-September 2010. We conducted youth interviews in September and October of 2010. All took place in confidential settings, with the verbal consent of all participants. The youth interview was more structured than the staff interview, but still generated some qualitative data. The topics included perceptions of violence and safety, services received, street and institutional gang involvement, level of participation in violence, as well as detailed descriptions of the three most recent violent incidents in which the youth was involved, and a range of other items of special interest to the study team. Data were entered and coded by undergraduate research assistants.

DJJ provided us with data from several datasets they maintain. The WIN and OBITS datasets generated data on youth demographics and various classifications, the current commitment offense and incarceration history, among others. We also analyzed data from the disciplinary (DDMS), use of force, grievances, treatment records and movement data series, also contained in WIN and OBITS. We received paper copies of violent and gang incident reports, and will report on these at a later time. Some data elements appeared to be maintained more systematically than others and this report draws primarily from the elements that were tracked most thoroughly.

## **FINDINGS**

We report the study findings in five sections. The first examines gang involvement among DJJ youth using the wide variety of measures at our disposal. We draw first from the data provided by DJJ to describe the scope and nature of gang involvement. We interrogate the correspondence between the primary official gang designation and other indicators of gang involvement in the official data. We utilize a similar approach with the interview data and investigate the different types of gang involvement reported to us by the youth. Using a self-report approach to defining gang membership, we then assess the nature of differences between gang and nongang youth on a wide variety of indicators drawn from both official DJJ data and our interviews.

We then turn to a second focus of the study, which is violence in California's youth correctional facilities. Our means for examining violence patterns from official DJJ data sources are limited at this point; the reports of officially-detected violent incidents have not yet been converted to electronic form. Disciplinary actions for violent misconduct and incidents of staff use of force are alternative indicators of violence involvement. In this report, we draw primarily from the rich data reported to us in interviews by youth and staff. We begin this section with a description of perceptions of safety and violence in DJJ facilities. We then turn to youth reports of the prevalence of their own involvement in violence. We examine patterns of violent incidents, paying close attention to the gang and race dimensions that are at the forefront of concern by officials and the public. We conclude this section with a discussion of the intersection between gang and race issues in violence.

In the third section, we chronicle responses to gangs and violence as youth and staff reported them to us. This is followed by a section on treatment services. As with the violence data, we found that the official DJJ data on treatment were of limited usefulness. Youth and staff offered views on the services currently provided and ideas for more effective strategies for violence prevention and intervention. In the final findings section, we describe the young women we interviewed. We use a range of interview and official characteristics to compare females and males, including gang and violence involvement. We close the findings section with an assessment of treatment services that females receive.

These analyses then set the stage for a concluding section that summarizes the key findings and draws implications from them for DJJ programs and policies. This in turn provides the foundation for a later collaborative discussion on how the data we describe here might best be used to expand effective responses to gang violence in DJJ.

### **Gang Membership Among DJJ Youth**

Researchers have debated the optimal approach to defining gang membership for many decades, but most survey researchers rely on a straightforward question that asks youths to identify themselves as gang members. Increasingly, local, state and federal law enforcement agencies also maintain databases on individuals that they consider to be gang members, often times relying on designation policies that derive from self-identification, behavioral or physical indicators, and/or statements by informants. There have been attempts to compare gang identifications made by law enforcement with youth reports to researchers (Curry, 2000), but it is rare that researchers are afforded this opportunity. Typically, we rely on global depictions of the volume and patterns of gang membership to conclude that law enforcement and survey researchers capture quite different segments of the gang population with their respective designation practices (see Klein and Maxson, 2006, ch. 1). In this study, we are positioned to examine

the scope and nature of gang involvement from a variety of perspectives. We begin with the official DJJ data sources.

## **Gang Membership as Recorded by DJJ**

DJJ data offers a variety of mechanisms to examine gang membership. The most widely used indicator is the gang designation as determined by the Gang Information Coordinators (GIC) in each facility; the Gang Operations Unit, Office of Correctional Safety, reviews this information. Each youth is interviewed about gang involvement upon entry to a facility, both at the initial placement and every time there is a transfer to another facility. The data from DJJ's OBITS system we were provided included indicators for both street gang membership and institutional gang affiliation, group names for both, and the sources for making the determination of gang affiliation.

Among the 1212 youth residing in DJJ facilities on September 15, 2010, 835 youth (11 females and 824 males) are designated as gang affiliated. Every individual that has a street gang affiliation also has an institutional gang affiliation recorded, indicating that officials perceive a seamless and automatic transition from street to institutional gang affiliation. It may be that street gang affiliation is not recorded unless the GIC determines that the youth will be active in DJJ. We were informed that these designations are kept up to date, but could find no indication that a youth transitioning away from gang membership within the institution, even while they maintained their street gang identity, would have this affiliation changed in the database.<sup>1</sup> DJJ personnel reported to us that a high proportion of youth are gang members, and this view is certainly supported by the 72% gang membership rate among young men in the official data.

We record the distribution of institutional gang names among the 824 male gang members in Table 1 (see last entry, population figures in the far right column).<sup>2</sup> By far the most common group is Southerner (40%) and the second most common is Northerner (19%). At the time of our data collection, Asian (2%), Bulldog (2%), Taggers (1%) and white supremacist (2%) affiliations were rare. There are about 340 unique street gang names among the 824 males, including several residual codes (e.g., miscellaneous Crip). We have not yet identified a meaningful typology of street gang names that permits further analysis.

<Table 1 about here>

The data system permits recording of up to five of 10 possible sources of gang designation for each youth, reported in Table 2. According to these data, nearly all youth who are designated as gang members (98%) identify themselves as such to DJJ staff. About two thirds of youth are also identified through writing or drawing about the gang, slightly over half by tattoos, and half through "miscellaneous activity." About one-third are identified through a PC186.22 offense<sup>3</sup> or registration requirement. In contrast, mail sent or received, other agency identification, and gang association appear to be uncommon sources of affiliation designation. Only a few youth are identified through photos or documents. We were intrigued by the numbers of youth that are designated as gang members but do not self-identify and therefore checked the sources of affiliation for these 13 males. Association (n=7) and miscellaneous activity (n=6) are the most common sources indicated for this group.

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<sup>1</sup> There are no indicators for former gang members in the DJJ databases.

<sup>2</sup> This table is discussed thoroughly in the methods appendix (see Appendix B) and is replicated in Table App-4).

<sup>3</sup> PC186.22 is the section of the California Penal Code that enumerates offenses that are subject to sentence enhancements for gang activity under the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act.

< Table 2 about here >

While a figure of nearly three-fourths of the DJJ population as officially-designated gang members seems quite high, the data suggest that the figure could be even higher. We investigated other gang indicators in the official DJJ data, including gang enhancement charges, gang-related DDMS incidents and gangs indicated on Use of Force incidents. When we identify nongang youth that have gang indicators from these sources, 84% (or 963 males) could be considered gang-involved in DJJ. Until we better understand these alternative indicators of gang involvement, we have opted to conduct our gang analysis on the officially-designated group of 824 males.

### **Are Gang Youth a Distinct Group?**

In order to provide a context for the comparison of gang youth with nongang youth, both within the entire study population and our interview sample, we embarked on a series of analyses to understand the composition of the DJJ population more generally.

#### **DJJ population characteristics**

The data offered in Table 1 provide an overview of the distribution of selected characteristics for the 1153 males in residence (see the far right columns) to add to the gang information reported in the prior section. Most of the youth are Latino/Hispanic (56%) or African American (30%). The average age is just over 19 years, yet only 36% have attained the equivalent of a high school degree. Nearly all (89%) are US citizens, but just 65% use English as a primary language. Catholicism is the most common religion (38%), followed by Protestantism (33%).

Slightly more than half of the youth (55%) are from a Southern California county with just over a quarter (26%) from Los Angeles County specifically. The distribution of the most serious commitment offense reflects the laws and policies that governed DJJ placements at this time: three quarters (76%) of the youth are convicted of a violent crime (including 10% for homicide) and 17% are convicted of a sex offense. The vast majority of youth (87%) are in DJJ for the first time but parole violators represent 13% of the population. Nearly three-quarters (73%) have more than six months to release.

We expect that some youth, especially from rural counties, may be placed in DJJ in order to receive mental health services not available on the local level. About 15% of youth receive inpatient mental health treatment and 15% receive outpatient treatment.

#### **Exploring subpopulations: Gang, sex offender, mental health, and other youth**

At the time of the study, we understood that youth were placed in DJJ due to the seriousness of their commitment offense, special treatment needs (either for mental health or sex offending) or pending transfer to adult prison. We were interested in determining how distinct these populations are, particularly gang members, mental health youth, and sex offenders. For these analyses, we use the official DJJ gang designation to identify gang youth. Youth convicted of a sex offense or those required to register as a sex offender comprise the sex offender category. Mental health youth include youth that receive either inpatient or outpatient mental health services. Youth not placed in any of these groups are included in the other category. Table 3 displays the distribution of the DJJ male population among these categories. It is striking that just 11% of DJJ youth are not placed in one of the three categories.

< Table 3 about here >

The degree of overlap between these subpopulations is displayed in Figure 1. Many youth—most notably two-thirds of gang members—do not fall into multiple categories, but there is considerable overlap, particularly between gang and mental health issues. Slightly less than 30% of officially designated gang members are mental health youth and nearly 70% of mental health youth are gang members. In contrast, only 9% of gang members are sex offenders. About one-third of sex offenders are gang members, and one-third have mental health issues. Just 20% of mental health youth are sex offenders. Only 27 youth manifest all three issues. Even as we proceed with comparisons of gang to nongang youth, it is important to recognize that the nongang group includes—but is not limited to—a high proportion (60%) of either mental health youth and/or sex offenders.

< Figure 1 about here >

### **Comparing DJJ gang members to other youth in the DJJ population**

Surveys of youth in community settings typically reveal youth who participate in gangs to be quite distinct from their nongang counterparts on a variety of individual, family, school, peer and community characteristics. In our analysis of the study population, we can draw from a number of datasets provided by DJJ. We present the analysis of official data in three segments. First we investigate demographic and individual characteristics to determine whether gang members are different from other youth. Next, we look at a series of offense or legal characteristics. Finally, we assess indicators of the youths' behavior in DJJ facilities, including grievance activity and misconduct.

*Demographics:* Gang males appear to be distinct from nongang youth on a variety of demographic indicators reported in Table 4, including race/ethnicity, age, religious preference, sex offense registration and outpatient mental health services. As is typical in gang research in the US, gang youth in DJJ are more likely to be Latino or Black and less likely to be White or belong to the “other” category than their nongang counterparts. The overwhelming majority (93%) of gang members is Black or Latino compared with 71% of nongang youth. Gang youth are slightly older, are far less likely to be registered sex offenders (9% versus 40% of nongang youth) and are less likely to receive outpatient mental health services (13% compared with 21% of nongang males). Individuals identified as gang members in the official data are proportionally more Catholic, Muslim, and Native American than the nongang males, who have a higher proportion of Protestants.

Over one-third of both gang and nongang youth have their high school degree or GED. While there are no significant differences, the slightly higher percentage of nongang members with a high school degree is notable given their slightly lower mean age. The two groups are similar regarding whether they have children, although there are substantial missing data for this variable

There are few regional differences between gang and nongang youth. About 45% in both groups are from Northern counties (defined as North of Bakersfield/Kern County). A slightly higher proportion of gang youth are from Los Angeles county (28% versus 22%), but this difference only approached significance ( $p < .10$ ).

< Table 4 about here >

*Offense/legal status:* Table 5 displays the distribution of several characteristics of the youths' DJJ placement, commitment offense and sentence and all reveal statistically significant differences between gang and nongang individuals. Most youth in the DJJ population are first-time admissions, but a

relatively higher proportion of gang members (16% compared to 5% of nongang youth) serve terms as parole violators rather than for a new offense. Commitment offenses are proportionally more likely to be violent among gang members (86% compared with 56% in nongang males). These differences emerge in each type of violent offense; gang members are committed more often for homicide (12% versus 4%), robbery (33% versus 26%), and assault (41% versus 26%) than nongang youth. Accordingly, a much higher percentage of gang youth use a weapon in their offense, although the high number of missing cases, here, is a concern. As reflected in the demographics of registered sex offenders, nongang youth are far more likely to be committed for sex crimes (40% versus 8% for gang members). Gang members are slightly older (15.8 years versus 14.8) at the time of committing the offense.

< Table 5 about here >

Reflecting the seriousness of their commitment offenses, gang members have longer sentences. The proportion of youth with life sentences is nearly three times higher for gang youth while nongang youth are twice (14% versus 7%) as likely as gang youth to be committed for three or fewer years. Given the increased emphasis on tough prosecution of gang violence during the past two decades, it is surprising that a higher proportion of nongang youth (24% versus 15%) are adult (superior) court commitments, especially since gang members have longer sentences. A more detailed assessment of youth committed to DJJ from superior court should illuminate some of these processes.

*Behavior in DJJ and grievance activity:* Table 6 shows data on behavior measures, which indicate that gang youth engage in more problem behavior and/or generate more negative responses from DJJ staff for their misbehavior.<sup>4</sup> A lower proportion of gang members have a low security classification and they are more than twice as likely to have a medium-high or high classification (46% as compared with 19% of nongang youth). There is a consistent pattern of higher levels of disciplinary responses: gang members are involved in more use of force incidents, discipline for misconduct, demotions and have slightly fewer privileges granted.

< Table 6 about here >

One might conceptualize grievance filings as proactive efforts to address issues with DJJ conditions in a peaceful manner or to complain about perceived slights or staff misbehavior. Gang members appear to utilize grievances more often than other youth (see Table 7). They are more likely to file all types of grievances than nongang youth, although filing for incidents of disrespect is not statistically significant. We also detect a higher volume of grievance activity for gang youth, whether in total number of grievances filed (2.79 compared with 1.86 for nongang youth), those filed during the past year, emergency grievances or group grievances. It is noteworthy that the one measure of grievance activity upon which gang members are statistically lower is the number of successful grievances filed (.28 compared to .94 among nongang youth). Given that they are more likely to ever file a successful grievance, we suspect that this means there are relatively small numbers of nongang males that file a lot of successful grievances, perhaps related to special needs that are not being met. Our interviews with youth provide the opportunity to examine youth engagement with the grievance process in more depth, in a later section of this report.

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<sup>4</sup> We are cautious in interpreting these measures as awareness of the official gang designation of an individual may consciously or unconsciously influence the response of DJJ staff to misbehavior.

< Table 7 about here >

The analyses we have presented in this section suggest that, despite some ambiguity in the gang designation process and overlap between the gang and mental health populations, officially-designated gang members in DJJ are distinct from other youth. They vary on several demographic features, offense and legal status characteristics and behavioral measures. We continue the assessment of gang/nongang differences with the interview data in the next section.

### **Gang Membership as Reported by the Interviewed Sample of DJJ Youth**

A primary purpose of this study is to describe gang membership among DJJ youth and to explore gang involvement in violence from the perspective of youth, as well as DJJ staff and official records. Thus, we hope to triangulate data sources to obtain a more complete depiction, while recognizing that data vary according to reliability and validity in ways that we are not able to assess. In this section, we draw from interviews with 306 male youth to describe patterns of street and institutional gang membership. In the first segment, we limit the discussion to the prevalence of street gang membership and the few questions we asked about participation. Next, we convey perspectives about gangs in DJJ facilities as reported by all interviewed youth. We then offer more detail about the prevalence and patterns of institutional gang membership. Following an analysis of the intersection between membership in the two types of gangs, we examine the intersection between self-reported gang membership and the official gang designation. We conclude this section with an extended comparison of self-reported gang members to other young men in DJJ.

#### **Street gang membership**

We asked youth: “Have you ever been a member of a street gang in the community?” and, if so, “Are you currently a member of a street gang in the community?” Of the 283 male youth who answered the street gang membership questions, 204 stated that they had ever been a member of a street gang (72%). This is exactly the same percentage of street gang members recorded officially for the study population (N=1153) in the DJJ dataset. We asked these youth at what age they joined their street gang. Among those who were willing to discuss their membership, the most common age of joining, reported by about a quarter of members, is 12 years. The typical age of joining street gangs reported by community gang researchers is 13 to 15, so DJJ youth likely join gangs earlier than most other youth. It is not uncommon for other members of their street gang to be concurrently living in the same DJJ facility. Forty-three percent of the street gang members who answered the question know of such youth.

About two-thirds of the street gang members (129 of 199 youth replying to the question) remain current members. We asked former gang members when and why they left their street gangs. The age of leaving is less interesting than how recently they left, which we calculated from their current age. According to this measure, 47% (28 of the 60 former members responding) left their gang within the previous year. Youth volunteered a variety of reasons why they chose to leave their street gang. The most frequent reason (n=16) is they “just didn’t want to be in it anymore.” Other reasons for leaving include being more mature (n=12), being kicked out over their offense (n=12) and wanting to do better in the future (n=11). These numbers suggest that DJJ does not have a mechanism in their data for capturing youth who no longer consider themselves gang members.

#### **Institutional gang membership**

We queried all youth about how and what they had heard about gangs in their current DJJ facility before they arrived and their perspectives on whether gang members are treated differently by staff and other youth. Of the 228 young men who discussed how they learn about the institutional groups (multiple answers were allowed), 7% learn about the groups from their family, 45% from youth in another facility, and 23% from other youth in their communities or local facilities.

What they hear about gangs in the DJJ facility varies, as shown in Table 8. The most common description is on the order of “gangs here are violent and crazy,” reported by just under 30% of those responding. Additionally, 26% of males state that they heard nothing about gangs. These two expectations are vastly different and suggest that the youth might benefit from better information about gangs at their current facility. Interviews with staff members illustrate the misconceptions that youth often hold regarding anticipated violence within DJJ facilities. For example, the following passage from one staff informant refers to such expectations, attributing them to purported rules in gangs:

R: When they come in from the county they hear that Preston is a place where they have to fight, they used to have a nickname, “the Gladiator School.” But when they actually get here they see that we have a swimming pool, they see that we got sports programs, they see—

I: It’s beautiful—

R: Yeah. But a lot of them, when they first come here from county you know we get a bad rap, they think that they have to fight. For instance, the Norteños used to have a rule, an unwritten rule, that when you get here you have to fight within the first fourteen days. And fourteen is for Norteños obviously. The Sureños had a rule; you have to fight within the first 13 days. Some of them had fourteen minutes, if you saw a rival enemy, and then some of them had a rule you have got to fight the enemy on sight...and some of them do fight when they first get here because of that gang mentality [11-26]

< Table 8 about here >

We asked youth: “Have you ever been affiliated with any gang or group while in DJJ?” And, if so, “Are you still affiliated with this gang or group in DJJ?” Forty-six percent of the male youth responding to this question said that they had affiliated with an institutional group while in DJJ. This rate is considerably lower than the 72% figure for official institutional gang designation among the DJJ male population reported earlier.

Of the 112 young men who were willing to discuss the age they joined their institutional group, just 12 (11%) joined before age 14 (compared with 78% of street gang members). Most began their institutional affiliation between the ages of 15 and 17 years. Youth most commonly (68%) become affiliated with institutional gangs at the two reception centers maintained by DJJ at the time of our study (SYCRCC and PYCF). While these two facilities also house other types of youth, this suggests a pattern of affiliation early in the stay.

Interviewers asked the youth to cite their reasons for joining an institutional group and youth were allowed to give multiple reasons. Social and instrumental purposes are reflected in the most common responses. Of the 134 youth who discussed their reasons for joining, 40 % said they joined because a family member belonged, 31% mentioned joining to gain respect, 28 % said that a friend was a member of the institutional group and 19% said that the gang made them feel like they belonged to something. Joining because a friend or family member belonged was most commonly endorsed as the most

important reason for joining. Interestingly, few youth felt that participating in gangs in DJJ interfered with work or school (12%), treatment services (5%) or their participation in voluntary activities (8%).

As with street gang membership, we asked youth if they still affiliated with gangs in DJJ. Among the 123 males (46%) that ever belonged to an institutional gang, 76% considered themselves current members at the time of the interview. Among the 26 former institutional members that could tell us the age they stopped participating, 65% of the males stopped in the past year.

We asked all institutional gang members a series of questions about their group in the DJJ facility where they were residing at the time of the interview. Over 100 gang members completed this process and we display these data in Table 9. Compared to the DJJ official institutional gang affiliations shown in Table 1 for the whole sample and the rest of the population, the distribution of respondents is quite similar: 18% are Crips or Bloods; 22% are Northerners (slightly less than the population) and 46% are Southerners. As anticipated, the most common characteristic of institutional gangs reported is that their gang was okay with doing illegal things (82%). Over three-quarters of the youth say their gang has special signs or styles and about two-thirds describe special rules that members of their gangs have to follow. Less than one-fifth of respondents perceive that youth need to do special things to become members; induction rituals do not appear to be a feature of institutional gangs. A similar proportion (17%) say their gang does not claim any particular area of the facility as its territory suggesting this feature of many street gangs does not translate well into juvenile correctional environments. Finally, just about one-third of the males identify subgroups or cliques within their gangs and just fewer than 40% have recognized leaders.

In many ways, these institutional gangs appear less structured (territoriality, subgroups, entry policies) than many would expect and far less structured than expected of gangs in the adult prison system, based largely on anecdotal accounts (Pyrooz, Decker & Fleisher, 2011). Even when combining gangs less represented into the “other” category, the cells sizes are too small to permit statistical tests and we are cautious in making comparisons. Nevertheless, it appears that youth in the Northerners describe their groups in less structured ways: they are less likely to have recognized leaders and be oriented toward following group rules than Crips/Bloods, and far less likely to have special signs or styles.

< Table 9 about here >

We also asked gang members to describe levels of involvement in the DJJ facility of their group in violence, fights with other gangs and drug use. The prevalence rates of criminal involvement were quite high: 99% reported violence; 98% fights with other gangs and 79% drug use. There are no meaningful differences among the most frequent gang types. We examine gang involvement in violence in much greater detail in the next major section of this report. At this point, we observe that the youth we interviewed appeared to be forthcoming regarding the nature of the gangs in which they participated, although about 20% of self-identified institutional gang members did not respond to these questions.

Strikingly, only one young man told us he heard that he would be expected to join a gang when entering DJJ. This suggests that youth are not forced or pressured into gang involvement in the facilities by other youth. We asked youth directly if they feel any pressure to affiliate with gangs in DJJ and only 11% (30 of the 284 responders) say they do. Occasionally, youth described pressure to join gangs as an unintended consequence of DJJ gang designation, as in the following:

When I got arrested, I felt pressure to join the Southerners. My brother was a Southerner. I didn't bang, but staff put down Southerner on my paper because I was from 55th in

Alameda. So I kept getting attacked because wards would see my paper and they thought I was lying, so I just joined the South. [03-034]

Staff members suggested that non-affiliated youth may experience pressure to join if they are part of a racial/ethnic group that is outnumbered:

Other ethnic minorities, they basically would come in and there's other Latinos, Blacks, you know whatever that aren't banging but when they come here they got pressure put on them: "you gotta be with us or you gotta be by yourself." It's kind of gang-tied, but I've seen a lot of, especially with the weaker Caucasian kids that come in here, all the sudden they're Norteño or something and it's like "why?" "Well I had to because they're gonna jump me." It is kinda racial in that sense but then they join and they're part of the clique they hook up with. [11-02]

Oh yeah, they generally align themselves with one group or another, and they seek strength in numbers and identifying with the numbers. You may have four or five guys on a living unit of thirty-eight that aren't necessarily gang affiliated or gang entrenched and then the other thirty-four are all, either deeply entrenched, identified, their committing offenses are gang related. Now the guys that aren't affiliated, they have a hard time, you know, unless they're stronger, bigger or smarter. [12-06]

### **The intersection between self-reported gang (street and institutional) membership and official DJJ gang designation**

We were alert to the ambiguous distinction between street and institutional gang membership in youth correctional facilities before we initiated this study and this dynamic is of major interest to us. In some accounts, institutional affiliation is a seamless extension of street gang membership; institutional gang affiliation is dictated by street gang affiliation. In other situations, the street and institutional affiliations are viewed as one and the same (e.g., Bulldog on the street; Bulldog in DJJ). Sometimes, realignments are necessary due to small numbers (Crips/Bloods become Blacks or 415/Bays; most street gang members of Asian descent become Asian members). Finally, there are important regional divisions that portend institutional affiliation (e.g., all Latino street gang members from the southern portion of the state become Sureños).

This ambiguity surfaced in our youth interviews when we asked questions about when and where joining institutional gangs occurred. "It's the same" was reflective of the types of comments we sometimes received:

I: Where did you join [institutional gang name]?

R: When I joined [street gang]. [02-127]

I: Which institutional gang?

R: Once you get into a gang that represents 13, you are always going to be Southerner.  
[04-064]

I've always been Southerner. [02-121]

These youth responses appear to support the DJJ designation practice of recording an institutional gang affiliation to all street gang members. However, our data suggest that it is not the same, as individuals indicate affiliation with one type of gang or the other, current and/or past.

We are interested in the convergence between street gang and institutional affiliation (whether current or former) and how either type of membership may be captured by the official DJJ gang designation process. Turning first to the self reports of the two types of gang affiliation, we distinguish in Table 10, current from former members of the two types of gangs, also indicating youth that did not answer the questions, as these missing values will have an impact on our more detailed analyses. Fifty-eight youth stated that they had never been a member of either a street or institutional gang and 75 (24% of the entire interviewed sample or 29% of the 259 cases for which there is full information) youth self-reported both current street and institutional membership. Relatively few males (n=19) are former members of both street and institutional gangs. Belying the perspective the street and institutional gang membership is one and the same, several individuals report one type of gang involvement but not the other. Very few males that have no street gang involvement join institutional gangs (7 current; 2 former), but a number of current (n=43) and former (n=39) street gang members decline any association with institutional gangs.

< Table 10 about here >

Along with the intersection between self-reported street and institutional gang membership, we examine the relationship between self-report measures and official designations of gang membership. As described earlier, there is a one-to-one correspondence between official records of street gang and institutional affiliation in the DJJ records: every street gang member has an institutional gang membership and vice-versa. Figure 2 displays these relationships for those with any affiliation while Figure 3 limits the focus to current affiliation.<sup>5</sup> Turning first to *any* self-reported gang membership, 102 young men (or 43% of the 238 youth included in this analysis) converge across the three sources of gang membership. Just 33 youth that denied in the interview they have ever been affiliated with either type of gang are designated as gang members by DJJ. Conversely, 45 males reported to us they had participated in either street or institutional gangs but are not labeled as such by DJJ. Of course, these youth could have suspended street gang membership prior to entry into DJJ or have been removed as a gang member by DJJ upon renouncing gang ties.

<Figure 2 about here>

The best test of the convergence of self-report/official gang designation is with current gang membership and these figures are displayed in Figure 3. As expected, the proportion of young men that share all three sources decreases to 30% (63 youth) and the number of youth that are solely officially designated increases from 33 to 65. The number of youth that are self-reported current street or institutional gang members, but lack official gang designation is 27, including the 16 individuals referred to above whom stated in the interview that they were current institutional gang members.

<Figure 3 about here>

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<sup>5</sup> The number of cases included in these figures are nonmissing responses for both institutional and street gang affiliation. There were no missing cases on official DJJ gang designation. The size of the overlapping area is not to scale.

The foregoing analyses reveal that defining gang membership in the context of correctional settings (as elsewhere) is a complicated business. We have shown that while there is considerable convergence with self-report and official sources, many youth officially designated deny current gang membership in the interview and a few assert gang status to researchers even while they do not appear as such in the official record. According to some youth, all youth in DJJ are gang members, whereas others assume the official designation process captured everyone, whether or not they are actually members:

Everybody's in a gang. [01-155]

You're always going to be labeled as a gang member. [04-183]

The inherently fluid nature of gang membership further complicates the process. One youth explained that he is not a member, but he gets along with all Blacks:

I don't go with Crips, Bloods or Bays: All Blacks, no specific group. I'm not assigned but I do affiliate. [01-065]

Some youth and staff made little distinction between street and institutional gangs. This youth view is illustrated by the following quotes:

Just like everywhere else- gangs are gangs. [04-064]

I'm out in the streets with all these gangs, so it's nothing new. [04-153]

And from a staff member:

I: Do youth become affiliated in the facility?

R: No. It starts outside.

I: They come in that way.

R: Because it's the neighborhood, the neighborhood they come from. And a majority of the guys who are here are gang members, and all their friends are here and their older homies are here. This is what they hear about before they got locked up. [16-05]

Conversely, a different staff member notes the primacy of race in forming institutional gang affiliations, with a total disregard of street gang identity:

Here, the street gangs get put to the side. Here it's always about race, you know, if something is gonna go down on the street, you know how on the streets right, Hispanics are killing Hispanics or Mexicans are killing other Mexicans because they're from the wrong gang or they're from a different gang. Here you're more likely to hook up with that guy from the rival gang outside, just to have the numbers against the Blacks or the other way around you know. [14-16]

Thus, according to both qualitative and quantitative accounts, the transition between street gang membership and institutional gang membership is not as seamless as suggested by the DJJ designation policy. While we expect that not all DJJ-designated gang members would have self-reported gang membership, we also find that some DJJ-designated gang members indicated to us that they were former members. In order to proceed with comparisons of gang and nongang youth with the data derived from the interview, we examined patterns of current and former gang membership as well as street versus institutional gang membership. These analyses are detailed in Appendix C, which describes how we settled the complicated issue of whom to place in the self-reported gang group and also the composition of the nongang comparison group. In recognition of the ambiguous nature of street and institutional gang identity, our measure includes current affiliation with either type of gang, as we found few meaningful differences between the two groups. Unlike the DJJ-designation policy, we exclude those who reported to us they no longer affiliated from the gang group. Our analyses uncovered several substantive differences between former and current gang members, and this leads us suggest that DJJ change their approach to official gang designation in the last section of this report.

### **Are self-reported current gang members different from other DJJ males as reflected by survey data?**

We sought to compare gang with nongang youth on a variety of measures. Drawing exclusively from the information we gathered in the confidential interviews with youth, we begin with a presentation of demographic and family characteristics, history of contact with the juvenile/criminal justice system and their experiences, attitudes and behavior in DJJ. These comparative analyses include only the 285 males for which we could construct current gang status; the lower sample numbers present limitations for statistical tests of significant differences but we provide the data while noting where tests are inappropriate.<sup>6</sup>

*Demographics and family history:* About half of the interviewed boys identify as Latino and 22% as African American. Their average age at the time of the interview was 18.5 years. The current gang members we interviewed are significantly more likely to self-report Latino ethnicity (60% versus 37%) and younger ages (by nearly 11 months) than nongang youth (see Table 11). High proportions of both groups were born in the US. We asked youth several questions about the person that primarily raised him. Among the group as a whole, young men reported that the adults who raised them were mostly employed and did not often have trouble paying bills. Gang youth less often described their primary caretaker as usually employed although there was no difference between the two groups regarding having difficulty paying bills. A large majority of both groups identified family members (or adults with which they have lived) with incarceration histories, but gang youth did so more often (84% as compared with 70% of nongang males). The average number of household members with incarceration did not vary (boys on average have more than two close adults who have been locked up) and there is no difference between gang and nongang youth when we separated incarcerated people into immediate family members, extended family members or other adults with which the youth lived.

< Table 11 about here >

*Offense and incarceration history:* We display features of the youths' description of their own arrest and incarceration history in Table 12. As expected from the current DJJ population, individuals in this

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<sup>6</sup> However, it is also instructive to be aware of the distribution of the interview responses for the entire sample and we include those measures for all 306 youth in the far right columns of Tables 11-13 and where relevant in the narrative.

sample have extensive arrest and lengthy incarceration histories. Overall, youth report an average of seven arrests, but this number did not vary among gang and nongang youth. Gang members were about 8 months younger at their first arrest (an average of 12.9 years old as compared with 13.6 years among nongang males). Youth report an average length of 43 months of incarceration throughout their lifetimes (total time spent in state and county youth and adult facilities), but we detected no significant gang/nongang difference in total incarceration. The two groups are not significantly different regarding the amount of time spent in county youth correctional facilities or whether they had been in adult jails or prisons. However, gang youth recalled they had been in any DJJ facility for about eight months less than nongang males and four months less in the current DJJ facility in which we interviewed them. Both groups expect to be in this facility for about 12 more months. Gang males are no more likely to indicate they are committed to DJJ by an adult criminal court than nongang youth.

< Table 12 about here >

*Experience, attitudes and behavior in DJJ:* About one quarter of the DJJ interview sample has a job and nearly three quarters attend school (see Table 13). Gang youth are less likely to describe attending a job on a typical day but are equally likely as nongang youth to say they attend school. We gathered information about visits, phone contacts and letters from family and friends. Fewer people visit gang members in a typical month (1.89 versus 3.19 among nongang youth), but gang males more often report that more of their visitors are family members. On average, individuals receive about seven letters and 10 phone calls per month, but this type of contact does not vary with gang membership.

< Table 13 about here >

Examining gang and racial violence in DJJ facilities is a primary focus of this study and thus we asked youth about race relations. The vast majority of both types of youth report that members of different racial/ethnic groups get along with one another. Youth of different races hang out together in living units and other places most days (if not every day), although nongang youth were slightly more likely to report higher levels of racial integration outside living units than gang youth. Youth generally do not experience racial discrimination by other youth or staff on a regular basis.

Gang youth are significantly less likely to report achieving the best incentive level (A level). Further, gang members scored higher on the Street Code scale ( $\alpha=.74$ ), a series of seven questions regarding toughness and willingness to use violence to respond to conflict. Perhaps related, gang males are less likely to consider themselves trusted by staff members, as reflected in a series of questions ( $\alpha=.69$ ).

Most individuals are familiar with the grievance procedure and would feel comfortable filing a grievance, although less than half of the youth feel that filing a grievance is a good way to address problems. Gang members are significantly less likely to feel comfortable filing a grievance (61% versus 75% among nongang males) but there were no other group differences in the attitudinal orientations toward the grievance process.

### **Are self-reported current gang members different from other DJJ males as reflected by official data?**

In this section, we retain the self-reported definition of current gang membership to repeat the analysis of gang/nongang differences using official DJJ measures. The data described earlier in Tables 4-7 use exclusively official measures to analyze gang/nongang differences in the population of 1153

boys. Repeating these measures on self-reported membership among the 285 interviewed individuals allows us to expand our understanding of the situations of young men in DJJ and to further explore the implications of official as compared with survey approaches.<sup>7</sup>

*Demographics:* As we show in Table 14, gang males are more likely to have DJJ designations as Latino than are nongang youth (69% versus 45%). The official recording as African American also distinguishes the two groups: current gang members are less likely to be African American than nongang youth (22% versus 37%). Also, gang members are nearly a year younger on average. These patterns resemble the age and racial/ethnic patterns in self-report identification (see Table 11) except the difference among self-identified African Americans is not statistically significant. However, the DJJ population analysis using the DJJ gang designation described earlier (see Table 4) found that gang members are *more* likely to be African American and are slightly *older* than nongang youth. These different patterns suggest that the constructed category of self-reported current gang members may be capturing a different group than the DJJ official gang designation. It is important to keep this in mind as we review the remaining officially-derived characteristics of self-identified, current gang members.

< Table 14 here >

The other demographic characteristics in the interview sample closely resemble the patterns we reported for the DJJ population. There are no statistically significant differences between self-identified current gang males regarding attainment of a GED/high school degree, region of residence, US citizenship or parenthood. Youth who identify as gang members are proportionally more Catholic than their nongang counterparts, who are mostly likely to be officially-recorded as a Protestant. A much lower proportion of gang youth are required to register as sex offenders (over 20% fewer). Finally, there is no difference between the two groups in terms of the proportion receiving either mental health inpatient or outpatient services. However, in the population analysis, DJJ-designated gang members are slightly less likely to receive outpatient services.

*Offense/legal status:* As expected, fewer offense and legal characteristics achieve statistical significance among interviewed youth (see Table 15) than in the population analysis (see Table 5), but there are also differences in some of the patterns. Interviewed gang members are not more likely to be parole violators than other males, as is the trend in the population. Similar to the population analysis, self-identified gang members generally commit more serious offenses, although robbery does not achieve statistical significance and the higher proportion of homicide commitments among DJJ-designated gang members in the population does not emerge among interviewed young men. In the population analysis, gang males are less likely to be committed by the Superior Court, but this is not the case among interviewed youth. The longer sentence length observed among DJJ-designated gang members compared with the rest of the population does not emerge in the interviewed sample. Age at which crime was committed (no difference) and use of a weapon during the commission of the crime (gang higher) reveal similar gang/nongang patterns among interviewed males as in the population analysis, but neither is statistically significant.

< Table 15 here >

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<sup>7</sup> Because we have already reported these measures on the full interviewed sample of 306 boys in Table 1, the next series of tables (Tables 15-17) report the total distribution in the 285 youth with current gang membership information in the far right columns.

*DJJ behavior and grievance activity:* All the official indicators of misbehavior in DJJ manifest the same patterns in the interview sample (see Table 16) as in the population analysis (see Table 6). Self-identified gang members have higher security classifications than their nongang counterparts. While their higher use of force incidents and total DDMS incidents are not significantly different from nongang youth, interviewed gang members have a significantly higher mean of gang-related DDMS incidents. They also have, on average, a higher number of demotions, and significantly fewer privileges granted.

< Table 16 here >

As seen in Table 17, young men in our interview sample who self-identified as gang members did not differ significantly from nongang youth on any variable related to grievance filing activity. This pattern is substantially different from that observed in Table 7 for DJJ-designated gang members in the population analysis. Gang members are consistently more likely to file grievances of all kinds (except disrespect) in the population analysis and generally file them more often (except successful grievances). As we noted earlier, the gang members we interviewed are less comfortable in filing grievances (61% versus 75% among nongang males; see Table 24), and this may explain the stark difference in these two analyses.

< Table 17 here >

*Summary of self-identified gang/nongang comparisons:* We have identified several distinctions between the gang youth we interviewed and those who denied current gang membership, although these differences are more muted than those typically observed in community samples. Self-identified gang members less often grew up with a caretaker that was employed most of the time and more often lived with adults that had been incarcerated. They were younger at the time of their first arrest, but have spent less time in DJJ than nongang males. Gang members are less likely to have a job and they receive visits from fewer people. Gang youth have higher security classifications, lower incentive levels, more gang-related DDMS incidents and demotions, while also receiving fewer privileges. This orientation toward getting into more trouble is reflected in their views of themselves: gang members feel that staff trust them less than other youth even while they express values toward toughness and aggression in response to disrespect or conflict. These comparisons have provided a solid foundation from which to explore violence and safety issues in DJJ facilities.

### **Safety and Violence in DJJ Facilities**

Youth and staff provided general accounts of their perceptions of the scope and nature of violence in DJJ facilities and we asked youth to chronicle up to six specific violent incidents in which they had been involved as either perpetrator or victim. In this section, we begin with the more general descriptions about feelings of safety and the frequency of different types of violence. We then report the volume of violence experienced by these young men, although these specific counts are prone to recall limitations. Narratives about specific violent incidents are more revealing; we draw material from the three most recent incidents in which youth were directly involved to describe the patterns and dynamics of violence in DJJ.

## Perceptions of Safety and Violence in DJJ

DJJ males report relatively high levels of feeling safe in the facility in which they reside. Responses to the question “how safe do you feel in this facility most of the time?” hovered around “safe” with a mean of 4.08 on a scale of 1 (very unsafe) to 5 (very safe). Interestingly, one-third of youths (32%) feel safer in the facility than in their neighborhood. It is rare for safety concerns to limit youths’ mobility within DJJ facilities; just 12% say they avoid a place for safety reasons. None of these items produce significant differences between self-reported current gang members and nongang youth.

Given that only 12% of youth avoid specific places within the facility, and that nearly a third of these young men feel safer in facilities than in their neighborhoods, we analyzed the staff interviews to better understand how staff contribute to this environment of safety. Our staff interviews reveal different surveillance techniques that staff members utilize to preserve not only their own safety, but to create a safe environment for youth. Staff emphasized surveillance as well as having good rapport with youth as important elements to peacefully resolving conflicts between youth:

I’ll see that the guy had had an issue. I’m going to confront him right then, I’ll wait, I’ll back off, I’ll catch him one-on-one, look that he’s a little upset: “What’s going on?” Sometimes you can let them work it out and they’ll work it out. Other times, you’ve got to be able to read it. You got to be able to read that body language, the tones, the facial expression, the intensity of how it’s being said to know that you need to step in and assist them in bringing some closure to that situation. [16-21]

Picking up on visual cues is one way staff identify situations of potential conflict. With an awareness of youths’ actions and feelings, staff knows when it is necessary to intervene in youth conflicts. In the following excerpt, one staff member discusses specific instigators of youth conflict and the need to identify tension and step in as needed:

There are a lot of arguments that take place when we bring out programs and they’re instructed to sit down until we give them instructions for programs and they’ll start arguing about a chair. I’m sitting right there in my seat and they’ll sit down and I wait and I just watch and see how they resolve— whether the guy’s actually going to move. The other guy says “Is it really worth arguing about where I sat down earlier? Why did I move?” That kind of thing. And then they’ll – if I see that it’s taking more time, then I would – I’ll just give them another set of instructions for everyone. I generalize a set of instructions, and I call their name and I call them up to the counter. I’ll say the instruction; I’ll distract them. I’ll break them from that. [13-12]

Using the same safety scale as we did for safety generally, we asked youth specifically about assaults from youth and from staff. They report slightly lower levels of feeling secure from youth assaults (mean of 3.84, SE=.06) than from staff assaults (mean=4.23, SE=.06), but both figures reflect feelings of relative safety. Gang youth are significantly less likely to feel secure from staff assaults than their nongang counterparts (gang mean=4.01, SE=.09; nongang mean=4.44, SE=.08). These elevated levels of feeling secure present a ceiling for our questions about what might be done to improve safety. For example, just 20% of youth responded positively to a query regarding whether or not they would feel safer if there were more youth of their race/ethnicity in the facility. We report on other strategies to improve safety in a later section.

In addition to asking about personal security from violence, we asked several questions about the amount of different types of violence in the current facility, as shown in Table 18. The mean of 2.52 places the average youth perception of the frequency of youth on youth assault (defined as “hit, kicked, punched or otherwise assaulted by other youth in this facility”) as halfway between “occasionally” and “most days.”<sup>8</sup> We coded the most frequent responses to the open question, “what is it usually about?” and the categories of “gangs” (52%), “disrespect generally” (28%) and “minor issues” (19%) surface most often. “Race” is offered far less frequently (11%) and “property,” rarely (6%). Assaults rarely involved a weapon, other than hands or feet (mean=.54, SE=.05, on a scale of 0=never, to 4=all). About one-fourth (27%) of males who had been in the facility for more than five months thought that youth violence had increased. There are no significant differences among gang and nongang young men in any of these perceptions about youth assaults.

< Table 18 about here >

Interviews with staff support the finding that violence is most often related to gang issues and disrespect:

The majority of it, you know I said that a lot of it comes, stems down from disrespect, a lot of the times these guys will fight because, you know an example is, if they spell something like “CK” you know, then the Crips are upset with whomever said it because that means “Crip Killer” or, if they’re doing repetitions in gym and they count out, you know, and they skip the number thirteen or they skip the fourteen, well then either the Southerners or the Northerners are gonna be disrespected by that, and so either it’s seemingly irrelevant... what, why are you fighting over that to you or I, but to them it’s just everything because, one of the things, the premium here is your respect, and I got my respect, so, I’d say the majority of the fights start out related to, they say disrespect but disrespecting their gang or their city or something like that. [12-06]

Finally, we also include the youths’ views on the frequency of youth/staff assaults in Table 18. Assaults on staff occur rarely (mean=.85, SE=.05) and staff assaults on youth even less so (mean=.68, SE=.05). Staff interviews support the idea that they generally do not feel threatened by youth, and speak to the importance of building rapport as a method of developing that level of trust and safety:

I feel safe, I’ve worked with them for nine years and uh you know, I’ve never met a staff that had ... problems with the youth. I’m a firm believer if you’re fair, firm, and consistent with them and treat them with respect and they’re going to treat you with the same respect. And that there are some extreme examples, where staff even that practice safe practices have been assaulted, and you can never predict that, so it’s always good to caution on the safe side, you know. I’m pretty familiar with their dynamics and reading, uh you know, body language and being aware of what’s going on the halls, I think that’s important. Briefing with your staff, kinda know what’s going on, really listening to the wards and lot of times they’ll let you know what’s going on, I think because my experience with them. [13-01]

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<sup>8</sup> These frequency questions used the same time scale: 0=never, rarely, occasionally, most days and 4=everyday.

The youth interviews suggest that assaults on staff that do occur arise from youths' emotional state of anger or frustration (33%) and are sometimes due to staff provocation (26%).

Youth perceptions on the context of staff assaults on youth most often (40%) are coded as "unconventional conduct" (e.g., "staff having a bad day and one of the wards pissed him off") or 20% of youth say they derive from the course of normal staff duties, for example, when a youth gets in the way of staff trying to resolve a situation of conflict.

## **Youth Involvement in Violence in Youth Correctional Facilities**

Our interview data also permit us to explore violence through the young men's accounts of their personal involvement. We can do so in two major ways. First, in this section we analyze responses to our questions about the number and type of incidents in which they were involved as either a victim or offender. In the following section, we describe features of individual incidents and investigate patterns among different types of events.

We asked each youth whether he had "ever been involved in a violent incident with another youth or adult inmate in any correctional facility. In other words, have you been assaulted or have you done these things to other youth?" If answered affirmatively, we asked how many times, and how many of the incidents involved "some kind of gang issue" and also, "a race issue." We recognize these counts may not be accurate, especially when youth have been incarcerated for long periods of time or may be frequently involved. Interviewers probed general responses such as "a lot" or "everyday" for a more specific number.<sup>9</sup>

The vast majority of DJJ males have been involved in violence in a correctional facility: 274 (92%) of the 299 young men responding to this question report personal participation in violence. Most (n=266) that are involved provided the interviewer with an estimate of the total number of incidents; the mean is 39 incidents, with a sizeable standard deviation of over 80 incidents. As expected, the total number of incidents is correlated with the total amount of incarceration time the youth reports ( $r=.303$ ). The youth estimate an average of almost 16 gang incidents and 11 race incidents.<sup>10</sup> We calculated the proportion of the youth's total incident count that involve gang or race issues: 45% of the incidents involved a gang issue and 19% a race issue. The correlation between the proportion of fights that are racial and that are gang is not statistically significant. These proportions—but not the counts of each type—differ significantly between gang members and nongang youth in expected ways: gang youth have a higher proportion of gang incidents in their count profiles and nongang youth report a higher proportion of race incidents.

### **Who are the high rate participants?**

The foregoing violence counts refer to the youths' entire incarceration history. Involvement in violence in only DJJ facilities is also quite high: 85% of youth report being assaulted or assaulting another youth in DJJ. We employ multivariate statistical analytic methods to identify the characteristics of youth that are most strongly associated with volume of violence, as indicated by the total counts of self-reported violent incidents in DJJ facilities, the total number of officially-recorded violent incidents (i.e. DDMS violent incidents) and the number of officially-recorded violent incidents in the year prior to the interview. None of the models we tested explained a meaningful amount of variance, although some variables achieved statistical significance. A more useful approach derived from dividing the youth

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<sup>9</sup> The means on these estimates are biased by high, outlying numbers.

<sup>10</sup> We are not able to identify which of these incidents included both gang and race issues due to the manner in which we asked these count questions.

sample into quartiles of the violence measure and testing models for the highest rate participants.<sup>11</sup> The males in the highest quartile of self-reported violence in DJJ reported a mean of 38 incidents. The highest quartile of officially-recorded violence had a mean of 14 total DDMS incidents and 13 in the past year. As shown in Table 19, the models included demographics such as age, race/ethnicity (comparing each race to Latino), county of residence, commitment offense characteristics (age of offense; committing court), support measures (# visits from family/friends, access support from staff), and grievance activity. For simplicity, we have entered “+” to indicate a statistically significant positive relationship to the outcome and a “-” if the relationship is negative. For example, older youth are less likely to be high rate participants according to self report but not official measures.

<Table 19 about here>

Self-reports of current gang membership and mental health classification (either in or out patient) are the only factors that are associated with all of the violence indicators. White youth are less likely to be high rate DDMS offenders (total) than Latinos/Hispanics and sex offenders are less likely to be high rate, recent DDMS offenders. It is striking that so few variables are statistically associated with either self report or official violence. These analyses underscore the import of addressing the connection between gang membership and violence in DJJ, and suggest also that increased attention should be paid to those with mental health conditions.

We also considered the facility where high volume offenders resided when we interviewed them (with VYCF as the omitted category). Facility was not related to the self-reported high rate violence measure. The high rate DDMS group was far more likely to reside in PYCF as compared with VYCF (total and past year). The only other facility effect was that the high rate, DDMS in past year group were more likely to reside in SYCRCC. These facility findings are surprising, considering the view that VYCF has experienced more violence, particularly in the year prior to the interviews.<sup>12</sup>

### **Nature of Violent Incidents in DJJ Facilities**

In this section, we explore the patterns of specific violent incidents in which young men participated. We asked them to tell us about the most recent three youth-on-youth violent incidents that occurred in a correctional facility. Further, we asked youth to describe the “worst” event, the worst gang related event, and the worst race related event in which they were involved. These worst categories were not mutually exclusive: 10 incidents were all three. For the purposes of this report, we will focus only on the three most recent events, selecting only those that happened in DJJ facilities. The young men reported a total of 786 incidents in DJJ facilities and 583 of these fall into the three most recent category. These incidents include 97 worst events, 50 worst gang events and 38 worst race events. About 75% of the incidents occurred in the year prior to the interview, so the reader can reasonably interpret these data as characteristics of youth violence in DJJ in 2010.

We display a selection of the characteristics of these 583 recent incidents in Table 20. We coded the youth’s description of what happened as “mutual combat” (i.e., participation by both sides of the conflict) in the majority (63%) of events, and as a “riot” in just 21%. Most fights (64%) engaged only one other participant. A prior conflict was connected in some way to 41% of the incidents, and usually (60%) the youth was directly involved in that prior event as well.

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<sup>11</sup> We control for the varying length of stay in DJJ in these analyses.

<sup>12</sup> As with all facility comparisons reported herein, we caution the reader that these patterns may no longer be applicable due to facility closures since these data were gathered.

< Table 20 about here >

The location of violent incidents is a critical concern for DJJ staff concerned with securing these youths' safety. Among the recent events described by the study sample, fights occur most frequently in the day rooms (34%) of residential units and rarely in bunk areas or sleeping rooms (9%). More than one-fourth (27%) of the incidents are located in the school area, where youth of all types are together. Numerous staff members across all facilities emphasized their view that the school area has more violence than any other location in a facility. The following quote from a staff interview speaks not only to school area violence, but also to the need for unit staff to communicate with each other about inter-unit conflicts prior to allowing certain youth to interact in the school area:

You know we've done a lot of studies on that in our Violence Reduction Committee and we really look at that, and it seems like the majority of the fights take place in the school, and the reason why is because the guys are separated by the living pods, you know, their living units, and if they have an issue with a guy—now this is outside of gangs, right, if there's a North and South disturbance then, you know all bets are off and they have this automatic...But, in the school, you have guys from living unit A, or a guy from living unit A, and he's got a beef with a guy in living unit B, never sees the guy, is not able to talk to him, not able to intervene, but, he sees him in the school, "hey you called me this or that" and, that's where we've seen the majority of our fights take place, so, I would have to say, based on our own data, that it's in the school area, where the wards mix the most freely.  
[12-06]

This quote illustrates one way that staff understands youth violence location within the facility. Because the wards are separated by living units, school is the place that brings together youth who may have individual conflicts. An important aspect of this statement is the distinction between gang conflicts. The staff member notes that gang conflicts can happen anywhere.

Only 28 of these events occurred in a facility that had been closed by the time of the interview in fall 2010. The remaining five facilities are similarly represented (between 18-23%) except for a slightly lower proportion having taken place at NACYCF. Slightly fewer than half (45%) of the fights required medical attention, sometimes because a chemical agent was used and protocol requires a medical checkup. A primary rationale for conducting youth interviews was the opportunity to solicit depictions of violent incidents that are not observed by staff. Surprisingly, most violence that occurs in DJJ is detected by staff and responded to in an official capacity. Youth say that staff was aware of 92% of these fights and an official report taken in nearly all (95%) of them.

We asked youth, "what do you believe this was mostly about?" and coded responses into categories that we expected would capture a range of motives. Multiple motive types might be coded for the same incident. Table 20 shows that motives for these fights are quite eclectic. Youth rarely describe drugs, informing on other youth to authorities ("snitching"), debts, increased status, random violence (no reason) or emotional outbursts, property, retaliation or minor issues as the cause of violent interactions. Reasons offered more frequently are disrespect (13%), race (15%) and interpersonal conflicts (16%). The most common motive coded is gang (33%). While the previous analysis suggest that both staff and youth generally think violence in DJJ is about gangs or race, the incident-based analysis reveals that most fights are about something else. After the youth provided a narrative of the event, we asked him directly, "was it about race/ethnicity?" and "was it about a gang issue?" The incidents can be

categorized according to these two dimensions<sup>13</sup> (see Table 21) and further analyzed for distinct patterns among these different types of events. According to this measure, nearly half (49%) of the fights are “about” neither gang or race issues, a stark contrast to our earlier youth-based analysis from counts of the number of different types of incidents in which they participated throughout their incarceration history. More than one-third (35%) of the recent, DJJ events are gang-related but not about race, just 13% about race but not gang, and only 3% both gang- and race-related.<sup>14</sup>

< Table 21 about here >

### **Comparing gang, race and other incidents**

Before we report the patterns of gang only, race only and those incidents that have neither race nor gang motives, we offer examples of the youths’ characterizations of each type of incident. Beginning first with gang incidents, we have selected typical youth descriptions of what happened, including incidents that were instigated by community issues as well as institutional gang culture.

I was walking on line, towards school, by the classrooms and he called me out. "You pushing [same as banging] the county?" He started running towards me; I stepped out of the line and we started fighting. He's a Northerner from Alameda and I'm a Southerner from Alameda. [03-034]

He was my enemy from my town - rival gang. I talked to him, said we could handle it in the cuts [a location that isn't observed by DJJ staff], so we did. We just fought - like 20 seconds - then, went our separate ways. [06-094]

A couple of my homies were mad about a Sureno that had a [symbol N crossed out] on his arm. And they weren't supposed to be in receiving if they had a tattoo. So all the Northerners had a meeting, ten minutes meeting, with fourteen people deciding. Two Northerners went to talk to the Sureno guy. They set it up so that one person would go and ask to fight, 1 on 1. [03-071]

The first passage illustrates a spontaneous fight between two youth over gang affiliation while the second recalls an incident that involved some planning (meeting in the “cuts”). The third also details a scheduled event, in this case, following a discussion of the whole gang.

Like gang events, race incidents also occurred spontaneously or might be planned:

[It was a fight] with a Hispanic that came from BTP. I knew him up North (DJJ): he used to diss my race and our organizations. In class, he gave me thumbs up and we fought. [04-153]

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<sup>13</sup> As this categorization depends on incidents having valid responses to questions about both gang and race issues, the number of cases available drops from 583 to 549.

<sup>14</sup> The interviewer was also required to make their assessment of whether the incident was gang and/or race-related or not. The cross-tabulation of the interviewer’s judgment produces figures that are quite close to those offered in Table 21, based on youths’ views. Interviewers judged slightly more cases (39%) to be about gang but not race issues, and proportionally fewer to be about neither (44%).

The respondent felt disrespected by another ward, who was saying, "Nigger." Respondent got mad, and talked back, saying to me, "I told him, man, "don't be saying that' and he felt disrespected." A few minutes later, they fought. [02-065]

[It was] Hispanics vs. Blacks. One of the Blacks messed up our program, so we decided to fight... one of the [youth] went over and attacked; Hispanics and Blacks faced off. One of the Hispanics wanted me to join in [did this outside], so I did. I started going after them when it kicked off. [02-105]

The following description illustrates how a racial conflict can turn into a riot:

[It happened] over a juice. One of the African-American boys was on a special diet and he was supposed to get 2 little juices. His stuff didn't show up. He asked if he could order stuff to a staff. He started yelling at her. She told everyone to go down; she didn't call for back up. Another youth called him a bitch. The African American boy hit him [he was Hispanic]. He hit the table and his hand flew back to catch his balance and he hit another African American boy. He started hitting the Hispanic and Hispanics jump up, African Americans jump up. All started fighting [R included]. [06-061]

Below, a staff member refers to disrespect as a catalyst for racial incidents and how such events can grow in size. This passage also illustrates how these group incidents can have race dimensions, but that they involve gang dynamics as well:

You walk in the day room; everybody is talking and hanging out. But as soon as a disrespect level happens and it'll split and you'll have... mostly what we have found is Hispanic and African Americans. And if there is a disrespect issue that happens within the group then that will usually spark any type of racial issue. Mostly, if one kid comes over and – it's rules. They have these rules if, for the Hispanics, if the Sureños are disrespected as a group they have to fight the entire group of Blacks. And if an African American, if they fight a Hispanic one-on-one and another kid jumps in then all of them have to jump in. And they have these little rules that they kind of came with or these belief systems that that's the way it has to be. [16-03]

The "other" incidents also reflect responses to perceived acts of disrespect, as illustrated by the first two quotes below.

He kept disrespecting me, kept going, disrespected my mom. So we were going to fight in a blind, then he didn't want to. I was waiting, and got mad. I skipped church, and rushed the guy.[03-064]

Youth was talking loud and was told to shut the fuck up by another youth; he felt played. Both felt slighted so agreed to fight at another location/time. Ended up being friends afterwards.[01-036]

Many of these “other” incidents have a flavor of adolescent immaturity and lack of anger control, as suggested by the passage below. We coded these as “minor issues” but it was not unusual for youth to report that violence in DJJ was often about “stupid shit.”

Watching TV, someone else got mad that I was watching Spongebob and he took the remote and turned off the TV. I was eating a sandwich and he knocked it down, so I knocked his Skittles down and we started fighting. But we were cool after that.[02-133]

Staff also referred to petty reasons that youth fight one another, as revealed in this quote:

I mean it’s kind of ridiculous, the youth on youth violence. These guys just feel like they have to do stuff sometimes. That peer pressure. It’s a microcosm of society, stuff that happens out there in high schools, like little arguments or disagreements blow up into something and they turn around and they make up and they’re friends again. That’s the same thing here. These guys will have a little disagreement or say something or do something or say something that offends someone and they’ll fight and the next day they’re friends again. It’s kind of ridiculous. Their culture, it’s got unwritten rules and these guys are just- I don’t know, but the most youth on youth violence is out of just sheer impulsivity. These guys like do stuff and they don’t even know why they’re doing it; they’re just used to fighting. You have to look at it like “that was stupid” and they’re friends again. One day they’re fighting and the next day they’re living with each other. It’s kind of dumb actually. [12-16]

These qualitative descriptions provide a rich context for the quantitative comparison of these types of incidents. We first report comparisons of individual characteristics across the three types (see Table 22). Not surprisingly, gang members, whether identified as such by self-report or official DJJ designation, more often report gang-related incidents. Gang incidents are more likely to be reported by Latinos that were interviewed and less likely to be chronicled by Black youth. Race-related and other types of incidents are quite similar regarding the race/ethnicity of the respondent who told us about them.<sup>15</sup> Gang fights are more likely to include a prior precipitating event. Race-related cases more often are coded as a riot and less often as mutual combat. They involve more participants and greater likelihood of the necessity for medical attention than the other two types of incidents. It is interesting that gang-related events share a similarity with the other category (nongang/non-race) regarding size and nature of the event; it appears that race-related fights are the distinct category. However, in data not reported on Table 22 because we constructed the type variable differently for logistical reasons, both gang and race fights more often occur in the school area (37-40%) than the other type of incidents (18%) which more often (43%) are located in the day room of living units.

< Table 22 about here >

We conducted multivariate analyses in order to clarify these patterns of differences between the three types of incidents. The findings displayed in Table 23 reveal several distinctions. Gang incidents are more likely to occur during movements and have more participants on the opposing side, but are less

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<sup>15</sup> Further analyses suggest that attribution of an incident as gang- or race-related may be influenced by the number of participants. Latinos respondents were more likely to perceive an incident to be gang-related if it involved just one other participant whereas Black respondents tended to view group events as gang-related, and sometimes race-related.

likely to require medical attention or to be reported by Black youth. Race incidents tend to have more participants siding with the reporting youth, are more likely to involve a weapon and to be reported by Black youth and those with longer records of DDMS violent incidents. Other incidents are less likely to occur during movements, have fewer people on both sides, and are not instigated by a prior exchange. Like race incidents, they are more likely to be reported by a Black youth and less likely to be reported by a gang member. The multivariate analyses suggest that, taken number of participants and other incident characteristics into account (“all things being equal”), the “other” incidents are more likely to require medical attention. Thus, even though Table 22 shows race incidents to more often require medical attention, this is likely due to more participants.

<Table 23 about here>

A supplemental analysis of the ethnic/racial characteristics of participants and the size of the incidents is revealing. The largest portion of incidents involves Latinos fighting Latinos, and then fights between Blacks and Latinos. Black versus Latino incidents are about as likely to be about something other than race or gangs as to be about race; youth rarely perceived these events to be about gang issues. Latino versus Latino fights are usually about gangs or something else and are rarely about race. If more than two participants are involved, then the event is more likely to include both Blacks and Latinos. Youth perceive more than half of these events to be about race issues. Blacks rarely fight each other during group incidents. Fights between just two people are rarely about race.

The nature of incidents varies by facility. Compared with VYCF, gang incidents are two to three times more likely to occur at OHCYCF or PYCF although not at SYCRCC or NACYCF. Two closed facilities had higher rates of gang incidents than VYCF. Youth reported proportionally more race incidents at VYCF than NACYCF, OHCYCF, PYCF and one of the closed facilities, but not at SYCRCC. This suggests that self-reported violent incidents with racial aspects were proportionally more likely to occur in a facility located in southern California. Interestingly, there are no significant differences by facility in the reported rates of “other” incidents.

In summary, our different approaches to assessing violence in DJJ facilities yield some intriguing contrasts. Both staff and youth appear to feel quite safe in DJJ institutions, even as they perceive that high levels of violence occur there. In general, youth on youth violence in DJJ is felt to be mostly about gangs and/or race. When we asked young men about the violence in DJJ that they experienced directly, they report high levels of involvement, particularly so for gang members and those with mental health status. Interestingly, the specific incidents that youth describe are more often about something other than race or gangs. While the race/ethnicity and gang involvement of the interviewed youth influences the type of violence in which they are involved, other characteristics distinguish the three types of incidents. In particular, the “other” incidents appear to have fewer participants, less often occur during movements, less often result from a prior altercation and more likely require medical attention. We draw special attention to these other events because DJJ staff appears to focus more on gang and race incidents, even though these data suggest they are less frequent and perhaps less serious.

### **Strategies to Reduce Violence in DJJ Facilities**

Youth appear to have a safety net in DJJ from which they can draw if they need help. About two-thirds (67%) of the youth we interviewed say there is someone they can count on if they have trouble of any kind (see Table 24). We asked about the types of people on which they could rely, and interestingly, gang members are nearly twice as likely to cite only other youth rather than staff (65% versus 38% of

nongang males). The vast majority of these young men know how to find help if they are assaulted or threatened, but gang youth are slightly less likely to indicate this awareness.

< Table 24 about here >

In a different attempt to obtain information about successful violence resolution strategies, we asked youth, “What usually keeps an argument here from turning into a physical fight?” We coded the open responses into a variety of categories; the most frequently used is “just drop it/walk away” (27%). Illustrative comments by youth in this category include:

Just stick to self. Mind your own business; don't get involved. [01-037]

I just stay to myself, try not to cause problems and getting along with everybody...Talk to people with respect. [02-127]

Maintaining my program, going to my job, keeping to myself. Staying away from drama. [05-182]

Just 16% of the youth describe staff intervention and 11% cite youth intervention. Others (12%) refer to verbal, problem-solving skills as providing positive resolution to conflict. Just 8% of males volunteered statements consistent with the orientation that youths' motivation to do well in DJJ prevents violence.

We asked both youth and staff about their ideas for improving safety in DJJ facilities. We call these our “million-dollar questions”: “If you were in charge and I gave you a pot of money to reduce violence among youth, what would you do?” We referenced violence in general, and also probed for specific ideas among gang and/or racial violence. We are able to code the most common responses into several categories. We display these quantitative data in Table 24. In the case of all three questions, “there's nothing you can do” is the most common response. Gang members are more likely to offer this response to the gang violence follow-up question (47% versus 33% among other young men). We captured any suggestion reflecting segregation of youth by race, or gang, or some other quality,<sup>16</sup> and such policies are the second most frequently suggested approach in each type of violence. More staff or security or more treatment services are rarely advised.

Our qualitative analyses of these youth narratives also reveal these common themes. Many youth mentioned the need for racial integration services, and these often overlapped with gang integration. The youth talked about recognizing other races as still being human and expressed the desire to learn more about other cultures. They believed it would ultimately be effective in increasing tolerance in the facilities. Some examples of how the youth talked about the need for racial integration are as follows:

Having youth from different races involved in weekly talks. More activities together, like sports....More integration. Weekly talks on violence between gangs. Avoiding collisions and learn to improve communication.[01-031]

Open up groups to talk to each other- 'peace treaties.' Just cause he's a different color doesn't mean he's not human.[02-002]

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<sup>16</sup> Most of these suggestions are a variation on segregating by risk. Examples from youth are: “segregate the people who are scared for their safety” and “use DDMS classification for high versus low risk.” Some suggested separating by age, which DJJ has attempted to do by using OHCYCF for younger youth.

The football team helped. It went from segregated to all buddy-buddy. [04-214]

Youth also spoke about the need to keep youth busy as a way of making environments safer. They suggested offering sports and other activities:

Keep them busy - working, school, activities (movements to gym, pool, field). They don't do shit for us, but expect a lot from us. We're in CYA for being bad, not for being angels. [01-043]

Wake these mother fuckers up. Make them work - sometimes this place is too friendly. We have a lot of fields out here - we could grow crops and raise animals and support ourselves instead of taking taxpayers money... I'm pretty sure that if they're working 12 hours a day, they won't fight. And give rewards. [06-001]

Give us activities to do [because] if we're bored, we're gonna have violence. Have sports, and crafts, and anything. [03-010]

Get more stuff to do. Too much idle time when people get in each other faces. More recreational stuff, stuff that would benefit you on street and more jobs. Teach more hands-on training. [They are] not using resources they got. [03-040]

More programs/ activities so they wouldn't just be in the day room. Like sports, stuff like that. [04-134]

Several youth believe DJJ should offer more counseling and mentoring. This might entail family or community involvement, or perhaps role models from the CDCR population (for example, former inmates who have changed their ways and are now leading productive, law-abiding lives). According to the youth:

They let staff choose which groups to run instead of letting us learn what we need to. It's assigned by counselor, so you don't have a choice....I would be more into activities with them, interact more with the wards: all staff gets a caseload. Get involved more in goals and in program. Some staff say that 'you're not going to get nowhere. You're not going to get released.' But if you tell them what you gain, then they won't do that anymore. Mentors that are also older youth would help. Also get involved with mentors and family members get to see them. They used to have a program in Ventura that bussed visitors to facilities.....They let staff choose which groups to run, instead of letting us learn what we need to. [06-064]

Try to get more programs, more people to come in and interact from the streets. More college programs.[04-184]

Bring older people from CDCR here into the institution as older peers, older role models...problems can be dealt with by a third person...people will listen cause they're

older and have experience and respect....Programs are a waste of time; bring wards from prison into this institution. [06-153]

Staff members also offer insightful suggestions in response to this million-dollar question. On several occasions, staff mentioned the need to hone and redirect youths' energy toward something constructive, like sports. One staff member argues in support of sporting events as an effective part of their rehabilitation:

They just went through this football league and played some football and I really truly believe that their behavior changed. And when you have them involved in something they really want to be involved in that they're having fun doing, you can slide in there some things that will really teach them. So, they don't want to just sit in here and someone talking to them. Their ears just close up. So give them something that they really, really want and the idea that, "someone might take that away from me, if I don't do what I'm supposed to do," and that's what works. [14-32]

Football is one sporting activity that had a very positive impact on youth, according to several staff comments. Male youth looked forward to playing and enjoyed it as a rarity in their day-to-day programming. Playing football caught their attention in a way resource groups and counseling do not. This staff member observes that youth are more receptive when they are engaged by an activity they find fun and entertaining, and this has an indirect impact on their violence involvement. Simply tiring youth out through practice sessions could also have an impact on the levels of violence. What's more, this staff notes a significant opportunity to bolster treatment by coupling certain therapeutic principles with sporting activities. Incentivizing involvement could encourage youth to check their own behavior, maintaining their elevated phase-levels. In general, this individual argues that positive reinforcement should drive this process.

We also asked youth specifically what staff could do to reduce violence, and again, the most common response coded (29%) is "nothing." Other suggestions fall into the topics of increased surveillance (14%) and increased rapport with youth (7%). Some youth (15%) suggest increasing staff awareness of violence, but our direct question regarding how much of the youth violence staff know about produces answers quite similar to those apparent in the individual violent incident analysis: most youth (78%) believe that staff is aware of all or most of the violence that occurs in DJJ.

### **Treatment Services**

In this section, we bring together the information on treatment needs and services provided to DJJ youth that we are able to glean from our interviews. We asked youth about the kind of problems that might require treatment that they experienced before entering DJJ as well as some current treatment issues. These data are displayed in Table 25. Few young men indicate they experienced mental health issues before arriving at DJJ, but fewer gang youth (9%) do so than other youth (20%). About one-fourth (27%) of all interviewed youth that responded acknowledge prior problems with alcohol use and 39% report drug problems. We asked whether they had experienced difficulty controlling emotions or behavior within the past thirty days. The mean for the whole group on each of these (.7) translates to less than rarely, but gang members significantly more often acknowledge both types of control issues, albeit rarely. About one-third (32%) of youth tell us they need treatment for a specific problem. The most

common types of help they sought are vocational (35% of those acknowledging need), anger issues (30%), drugs (28%), emotional control (15%) and gang issues (15%).

< Table 25 about here >

The need for vocational training is echoed in numerous staff interviews. One staff member speaks to the need for facilities to implement vocational training that was once effective, but has since been eliminated due to funding:

R: And another thing is they took away all the programs that helped these guys. They used to have vocational programs—they don't have a vocational program. We're telling these guys "you got to go out here and go to school and get a job." But the third of this country that's looking for work—these guys don't have any job skills. Where are you going to get job skills if you never get a chance?

I: When did they take away those programs?

R: When they start shutting the institutions down and all these budget things, they snatched all of that out. We're pretty much telling them, "You need to do this but you gotta find it yourself." I'm getting ready to go give a class on how to find jobs but three quarters of the guys in that room I know are not ready for that. They're not ready for what I'm getting ready to go tell them. And they're not going to be able to make it when they go out on that street. Like what I tell them is, "the country is looking for work, chances of you finding a job is slim and none. So my suggestion is you need to go to school." This is a school and they don't even want to go. "So how are you going to make it in junior college? How are you going to make it in vocational school? You're not. Because it's too easy to walk out of class, go back to your unit, go back to your room, and put on your headphone." [16-05]

Staff members often mention the kind of vocational training that facilities *used* to have, and emphasize the need to resurrect vocational classes from the past. Examples of effective vocational training they offer include auto mechanics, carpentry, and masonry. Lack of strong educational motivation and job skills training in the facilities emerges here. Youth leaving facilities are unable to adequately compete with the third of the country (many of whom are more skilled) that is looking for work right now. This staff member implies that the lack of vocational training tends to breed apathy among the youth.

Also noteworthy in Table 25, most youth (69%) say they receive the treatment services that are indicated in their respective Individual Change Plans but 38% indicate that there are services that would help youth that are not offered. These unmet needs include treatment for anger issues (24% of youth who responded affirmatively to the need), drugs (12%), education about gangs (11%) and alcohol treatment (10%).

Regardless of the perception of unmet needs, these young men report receiving a wide array of services in DJJ (see Tables 26 and 27). We asked specific questions about the particular programs/services we had been told were offered in DJJ and also solicited open responses. We list the frequency distributions for the specific, formal services we asked about in Table 26 and the services that we coded—to the best of our understanding of the resource groups typically offered in DJJ—appear in

Table 27. Counseling is the most frequently provided service: nearly four out of five (79%) males receive group counseling and 55% receive individual counseling.

<Tables 26 and 27 about here >

During our interviews with staff, individual counseling is discussed in two ways: informal counseling interactions delivered by Youth Correctional Counselors and other direct care staff on the units, and more formal psychotherapy delivered by a psychologist or psychiatrist. With regard to more informal interactions, staff emphasize the need to engage in frequent conversations with the youth throughout their daily activities to keep the environment safe and secure. Several staff members appear to believe in the importance and utility of informal interaction as a violence prevention mechanism. This theme emerged from interviews with 10 different staff members, representing each facility. Below, a staff member discusses the importance of these informal interactions:

So I think the CRTs have been very important to us, helping us. When we have attention on the living units, when the kids respect the CRTs, so it's like automatic, "Can I talk to [name], can I talk to [name], I need to talk to him, there's something brewing, I wanna talk to my CRT." So you know, they help. And I'm glad the department created those positions, that they strictly go, the attention on the living units...talk with the kids, find out what you can do to stop the incident from going, or if it already went, what we can do to integrate them that's gonna be peaceful. [11-07]

Here, it is clear that the addition of the CRT to facilities creates extremely valuable extra ears and eyes. The CRTs approach youth to intervene, and occasionally the youth reach out to the CRTs when there is a potential problem. This intervention is often as simple as the CRTs pulling youth aside to talk about what is happening or what issues might exist. Another staff member emphasizes the need to adopt a similar technique of informal interactions:

I feel safe on a daily basis and it's largely due to my interaction with the guys. In my years of doing this job I've dealt with group disturbances. I've been involved in staff assaults. I've always believed that your first safety net in doing this job is honest communication. It's a sense of integrity. And it's weird with these guys that, despite their criminal behavior and the warped thought processes that some of them have, they have this really weird sense of honor. It's kind of like "If you told me the truth then to the best of my ability I'll tell you the truth." [16-21]

This staff member speaks to the need for honest communication with the youth as a necessary method to use in order to create and maintain a safe environment.

Beyond these informal interactions, some youth also receive mental health treatment from a facility's psychological staff. During the course of our staff interviews, staff members discuss the fact that this service is provided to some youth, but express the need for two things: 1) to increase the number of staff who are trained to treat specialized mental health issues, and 2) through increasing staff, provide mental health services – specifically individual therapy – to a higher number of youth. The following examples speak to this perspective that is voiced by different staff members:

[We need] more training for staff on how to deal with specific types of youth. We have a lot of mental health guys here with ADHD, I have guys who are learning disabled and maybe don't necessarily hear what you are saying, so I think that more training in that regard would be also helpful, because when people are communicating, they are less violent. [13-08]

I would like to see the youth go to more specialized counselors, counselors that have more information than we do. You know, that can do groups a lot better than the YCs can. Because right now, it's kind of hard for YCs to wear the security hat and the counseling hat. And I've worked in other institutions where you don't have to wear those hats. You don't have to make those kind of choices. They put COs on the living unit, give out toothpaste and take them all these places. And the counselors do the counseling. They can focus in on the counseling. Find out where all these places they go. Instead of having a broad bunch of categories saying, "When a kid needs help in this area," and sometimes there's no areas that YCs are specialized in to help them. And then YCs aren't specialized to help them. They won't get any help in that area. Especially if you they're not marked severely or if you're ability to function isn't so severely marked that you fit into a mental health, then there's a crack. And it's really a big crack, it's not a small crack, it's a really big crack. Because you have somebody who has an anger problem, who needs a specialized anger work, but he's not crazy. So if I only know a tiny bit about anger, because I've never been angry enough to tell anybody, about somebody with rage, or somebody who's been molested, who's watched their sisters-I don't know anything about that kind of stuff. That's quite a big crack. [14-01]

The argument here is that counseling needs to be more individualized and targeted toward unique populations that exist within DJJ. Many staff members feel that they are ill-equipped to treat the quickly-growing mental health population that resides within DJJ's walls. Moreover, as we report shortly, gang youth also would likely benefit from more individualized counseling.

In addition to variations in individual counseling and therapy, youth also receive different formalized programs, some of which are delivered via treatment groups. Most youth (70%) reported that they receive IMPACT, the gang prevention/intervention program offered in all five facilities (see Table 26). In addition to youth reporting that they receive IMPACT, staff members also discussed the aspects of this program that make it particularly effective:

As you know we got the IMPACT program that comes on Tuesdays and Thursdays... I like the IMPACT program. These kids tend to buy into it because some of the IMPACT facilitators, actually one of them was incarcerated here, several years ago. And the kids buy into it because these are also inmates like themselves. And these inmates, when they tell them, "Hey if you keep on doing what you are doing you are going to end up like" in San Quentin or where they was housed at, "and do a lot of years." So a lot of the kids buy into it, it's just another program to where there it's not like staff always pushing in on them. It's someone who's been incarcerated like themselves, they buy in, most of them buy into it... It's not mandatory... Right, it's up to them. And usually the counselor kind of supports it. Most counselors kind of recommend a good case load, participating in IMPACT. It's not mandatory. He does not have to go if he chooses not to go. But most of our guys usually go. [11-26]

Our study did not measure the effectiveness of IMPACT, but as a program that utilizes cognitive-behavioral techniques, it is consistent with evidenced-based programming (see Appendix A, section 4). IMPACT focuses on redefining the negative, deeply ingrained beliefs of what it means to be a man and teaching appropriate social responses through this redefinition. There is an emphasis on decreasing violence, improving relations with others, and increasing self-responsibility.

In addition to IMPACT, over one-third (36%) of youths visit with Foster Grandparents (see Table 36). Other services are less frequent: a cognitive-behavior program called Counterpoint (15%), Americorp (14%), an anger management program called ART (12%) and Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous (11%). The effectiveness of these other programs emerges in our staff interviews as well. While other programs are also mentioned, the following example speaks to the effectiveness of Counterpoint, specifically:

Counterpoint...is basically a cognitive behavioral treatment program...it takes about three to four months to complete and the group meets twice a week. But I'm finding a big difference...In the group we teach them how activating events, their belief systems, reactions, and the consequences on the outcomes of behaviors based on their belief systems. And how these guys think that we're trying to change those thoughts, risky thoughts, that they're having and replace them with more positive thinking. Therefore, their actions will end up being better. I've noticed that the guys will come to me and say "Hey, I almost did this today but I thought about my killer bees." That's what they call their killer beliefs. "I used my calming, coping skills that you taught me in the group today. I walked away from staff instead of arguing with them." So I'm seeing that Counterpoint group, just with the seven of them, a huge difference. [16-03]

This staff member clearly has the perception that Counterpoint produces substantial positive change among the youth that exist beyond the confines of the group therapy sessions.

Youth report an average of about three such services and gang youth receive fewer services. However, this difference appears to be a function of the lower rates of gang members obtaining individual counseling. This is an issue to which we will return in the study recommendations section.

Gang youth more often report receiving no resource groups (37% versus 22% among nongang males) and mention fewer resource group experiences (an average of 1.5 versus 2.4 for nongang youth) (see Table 27). Nongang youth are two to three times more likely to receive stress management, criminal thinking errors and anger management, although the numbers are low in some of these services, so caution should be exercised. Interviewed staff members feel that one of the primary barriers to treatment service delivery is disruptive behavior exhibited by gang rivalries.

Sometimes, some people that we would like to put in a group, we might not necessarily be able to put in a group because they've chosen to not program with people from other gang affiliations. So if there's already been a problem and at the time the tension is just too much, they still haven't hashed everything out, then we don't necessarily want to take them into a situation like that because it's not going to be very productive. [11-13]

Disruptive gang rivalries appear to encourage segregation as a means of delivering a higher quality of treatment services.

I think sometimes the barriers are within the youth who can't get along. And so if you have two Hispanic youths who—maybe one is Northern and one is Southern, they can't get along. And it's hard to have a small group with a group of them and they can't get along. It really becomes individual. Most of the guys will talk to you a lot more openly individually than within the group. Because in the group, there's an image they wanna portray—that they're hardcore, that they don't care. So that kind of makes a difference. [14-07]

Some staff members believe that the impact of gang rivalries diminishes when an individual is removed from the group therapy setting. Peer pressure is always evident, but especially strong when influencing gang rivalry dynamics. Some staff members believe that certain gang members who may refuse to participate in a group can be very effective in an individual treatment setting. Despite this staff belief, however, gang members appear to be significantly underserved compared to nongang youth in receipt of individual counseling.

Regardless of the reason, the pattern is clear: in nearly every service type shown in Tables 26 and 27, gang members less often receive the particular service. Perhaps related, gang members report significantly less positive feelings about the treatment services they receive in DJJ (a mean of 3.43 on a scale of 1-5 as compared with the nongang mean of 3.76, see Table 25). This may be due to behavioral issues, but this service difference is a pattern that should be considered by DJJ management.

### **Female Youth in DJJ Facilities**

Females in the juvenile justice system have generally received far less attention from scholars than have males, and this is particularly true of females in carceral settings. Accordingly, we made every effort to fully include females in our study of DJJ gangs and violence, although their small numbers severely limit the scope of analyses. In this section, we begin with a brief overview of the characteristics of the female population and of our interviewed sample in order to note the ways in which the data differentiate females from males. We then describe the female youths' levels of gang and violence involvement as captured by our various measures. We conclude this account with an assessment of the levels and types of treatment services received by the young women we interviewed. We elaborate the analysis of youth data with staff observations as appropriate.

We initiated interviews with 80% of the 59 females housed in DJJ in mid-September 2010. The females we interviewed were virtually identical to the full population in age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, US citizenship, DJJ-designated gang membership, sex offender and admission status. The young women we interviewed were slightly more likely to have children (20%) than the full female population (15%). Therefore, the interviewed sample of females is generally representative of the full population and to be consistent with the boys' analyses, the remaining analyses will focus exclusively on that sample.

### **Comparison of Female and Male Youth**

It is critical that we have a clear understanding of the similarities and differences between male and female youth in DJJ prior to developing policy recommendations based on the study findings. Accordingly, we performed statistical tests of differences where appropriate and looked for broad

patterns.<sup>17</sup> As we describe in this section, data derived from our interviews, as well as official agency data provided by DJJ reveal relatively few gender differences.

*Youth interview data:* The only demographic difference evident in the interviews is that the females we interviewed were more than a year older than the males (19.9 years versus 18.5 years). The two groups are statistically similar regarding US birth, race/ethnicity, whether the primary caregiver was mostly employed or had trouble paying bills, and whether a family member had been incarcerated. Significantly more immediate family members of females have been incarcerated compared to the males' sample. Regarding their own offending history, the young women we interviewed report an average of just under 12 arrests, as compared with 7 among males, but age of first arrest and detention are similar. There are no gender differences in the average time spent in county or state correctional facilities.

While in DJJ, females are more likely to have a job (41% versus 23% of males), but have similar levels of school attendance. Since there is just one DJJ facility for females necessitating more travel for visitors, it is not surprising that females less often receive a visit during a typical month (39% versus 70% of males) and fewer visitors (1.4 versus 2.6). Young women receive similar numbers of letters and phone calls as young men.

There are no gender differences regarding perceptions of racial harmony among youth or experiences of racial discrimination, although females report more racial integration (i.e., youth of different races hanging out in living units or other areas), likely due to fewer housing units. Females report similar levels of trust by staff as males, and surprisingly score similarly on the street toughness scale. Their attitudes regarding the grievance process (for example, comfort with filing a grievance and views of efficacy) are not different from males, although the official data we describe in the next section reveals that females are much more likely to utilize the grievance process.

*Official DJJ data:* As with the interview data, demographic characteristics of interviewed male and female youth as recorded in official DJJ datasets are statistically similar regarding race/ethnicity, educational attainment, region of residence, US citizenship, religion and parenthood. Females in DJJ are more than one year older than males. There are large differences between the two groups regarding special classifications. Interviewed females are far less likely to be designated by DJJ as gang members (18% versus 67% of males) and registered sex offenders (4% versus 20% of males), but much more often are classified as either inpatient (31% versus 12% of males) or outpatient (51% versus 16% of males) mental health. This may indicate higher levels of service need compared to boys.

Similar to males, the vast majority of interviewed females are first admissions, rather than parole violators. There are two differences between female and male primary commitment offenses: young women commit a higher proportion of robberies (42% versus 28% of young men) and male youth commit a significantly higher proportion of sex offenses (19% versus 4%) than female youth. There is no significant difference between the proportion in the female and male youth interview samples with a homicide, assault, burglary, or miscellaneous felony commitment offense, which includes arson, kidnapping, and extortion. A higher proportion of males were committed to DJJ by superior (adult) court; just 7% of females are adult court commitments compared to 20% of males. There are no differences between the two groups regarding the age at which they committed the offense, whether a weapon was used, or length of sentence. At the time of the interview, females had been in DJJ for 7 months longer (about 29 months versus 22 months for males).

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<sup>17</sup> In this section, we provide specific numbers on females only if their patterns of responses differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ) from males using standard statistical tests of differences. We note marginal differences ( $p < .10$ ) where they appear to be substantively interesting.

Turning to official measures of misconduct and privileges, it appears that females are sanctioned more often for behavioral problems than males. The young women we interviewed have more incidents related to use of force (an average of 15 versus 8 among men) and more DDMS incidents during the year prior to the interview (28 versus 12 among men). While the two groups do not differ regarding average number of violent, Level 3, gang or violent gang DDMS incidents in the prior year, females display a significantly higher mean of Level 2 DDMS incidents (25 versus 10 among males), as well as a higher mean of DDMS allegations related to treatment program failure (12 versus 2 among males). These differences in the past year are not merely a reflection of longer stays, but it is worth noting that the same patterns of gender differences emerge in analyses of DDMS incidents throughout youths' entire stay. It is possible that females may be monitored more closely and sanctioned more than males, particularly regarding non-violent, less serious institutional misconduct (as reflected by the difference in Level 2 allegations and those related to treatment program failure). There are no significant differences by gender in security classification, number of demotions or privileges granted.

The young women we interviewed are much more active in filing grievances than men. Three fourths of the females filed at least one grievance whereas 55% of males did so. This difference is apparent in every type of grievance we analyzed (emergency, staff, disrespect and group) and females more often filed a successful grievance as well (26% versus 9% among males). Not only are females proportionally more likely to file grievances, but they also filed more of each type of grievance over their entire stay than males (a mean of six total grievances as compared to three by males), although the total number filed in the past year was not statistically different. In the passage below, one staff member describes differences in the types of grievances filed:

The female grievances will grieve more on a personal level, and we have categories: money, education, food, clothing... They'll complain if the food isn't warm enough, "My cold food isn't cold enough," "My money didn't post into my account," "I didn't get my Avon order." Whereas the males tend to be more concrete – Oh, the females also always grieve their movements. They didn't get any movements today. They weren't allowed to go outside; that's their biggest grief. Where the males will tell you, "You know what? We're not receiving breakfast on time." It doesn't matter if it's hot or cold it's a, "We're not receiving it" type thing. Or, they want it at nine o'clock and it comes at eight-thirty, that kind of a thing. They're more concrete. [14-18]

According to this person, grievances reflect different concerns held by male and female youth. The staff member considers the female grievances to be more "personal," compared to the "concrete" nature of males' grievances, even though the examples they give are similarly specific. Instead, this quote seems to reflect the perception of females as grieving more often and about a wider variety of categories compared to males.

On the whole, these gender comparisons suggest that DJJ females and males have similar demographic profiles (except that females are older), offending histories (except females have more arrests) and are placed in DJJ for similar offenses. However, the young women evidence more behavioral problems, possibly due to issues they bring into the setting (perhaps indicated by mental health status), difficulties adjusting to the DJJ setting or differential enforcement. Given these behavioral issues, it will be particularly important to explore the patterns of services that females receive in DJJ. In the next section, we examine young women's experiences with gangs and violence, prior to assessing the therapeutic services they receive.

## **Gangs, Safety and Violence Experienced by Females in DJJ**

Females in DJJ are far less likely than males to be gang-involved by any measure. As we reported earlier, just 18% of the young women we interviewed are officially designated as gang members by DJJ. While 49% of 41 who answered our questions about gang membership) females say they had been members of street gangs at some point, just nine are current street gang members. Just four young women identify as currently active in a gang in DJJ, although 3 more had previous institutional gang involvement. Only 24% of females fall within our constructed category of self-reported, current gang membership. The number of gang members is too low to support statistical comparisons with females that do not participate in gangs.

Notwithstanding lower levels of gang involvement, females report feeling less safe in DJJ than do males. The mean score of females on the 5-point safety scale is 3.33 as compared with the male average of 4.08. Furthermore, just 12% of young women (versus 32% of young men) feel safer in DJJ than in their neighborhoods. Like males, they feel safer from being assaulted by staff than by youth and generally know where to find help if assaulted or threatened. Although females report feeling less safe, their perceptions of how often assaults between youth occur is quite similar to males. Their perceptions regarding what violence is most often about are also quite similar; like males, females attribute facility violence most often to gang issues, disrespect generally or minor issues.

Females are marginally less likely to say they could count on someone in DJJ if they were in trouble (52% versus 67% among males). Along with the lower rates with which females receive visitors, this might indicate that they have less social support from which to draw when they experience fear or threats to their safety. Just 9% of young women (versus 20% of men) indicated that they would feel safer if more youth of their race/ethnicity were in the facility.

Similar to males, females report very high rates of involvement in violence in correctional facilities: 85% of the young women we interviewed report direct experience as a victim or offender in a youth on youth assault in any correctional facility and 79% experienced violence in the DJJ facility in which they are currently housed. Controlling for time spent in DJJ, young women report significantly fewer violent incidents per month incarcerated (.46 versus 1.04 for males). Females are less likely to be involved in any gang (43% versus 70% of males) or racial (8% versus 47% of males) violence, and consequently, report fewer of these incidents.

As with males, we asked females to describe specific aspects of the three most recent violent incidents in which they were involved. The characteristics of the 68 incidents occurring in DJJ reported by 32 females who offered accounts are displayed in Table 28. Most of the incidents involve just one other participant and victim/offender roles are blurred. Incidents most often take place in the day room of the living unit or at school, and are often precipitated by a prior conflict. Staff is usually aware of the event and completes an official report. These patterns of violence are quite similar to those detected among males (see Table 20). In stark contrast, physical altercations among females are most often related to interpersonal matters (46% versus just 16% among males) rather than gangs (18% versus 33% among males) or race (3% versus 15% among males).

<Table 28 about here>

We have detected few substantial differences in females' perceptions and experience of violence in DJJ, as compared with males. Like males, young women report high levels of perceived violence and experience it directly at high levels as well. Although the situational aspects of the violent incidents experienced by females are similar to males, the violence involvement is far more likely to be instigated

by interpersonal conflicts rather than by gang or race issues. Even while the analyses of male violence suggested that DJJ should attend to these “other” types of violence, this implication is even more evident regarding female violence. There are few suggestions from these young women about how to achieve more safety. Proportionally more females suggested that some types of youth should be segregated from the general population (23% versus 8% of males), which would be difficult to achieve given the constraints on housing options. Female responses to our query about strategies to keep arguments from turning into a fight were quite similar to males, except they were significantly less likely to nominate “just walking away” (11% versus 27% among males). However, staff views this form of violence avoidance as a key indicator of program success. One staff member describes young women’s use of this strategy:

A lot of times you’ll see youth that are really frustrated with each other. Some are learning to control their – they may be at a place where they’re controlling their anger in a better way so they’ve learned to walk away from the situation or they’ve been in a really good program so they don’t want to mess it up. So, they do keep that in mind and when they feel themselves getting to a certain point they’re able to walk away from it. I’ve had a lot of girls come to me and just say, “Can I please go to my room so that I don’t blow up? So that I don’t go off on so and so,” or “I don’t hit someone.” And we’re more than happy to let them go to their room. It shows that they’re actually utilizing the skills that they’re being taught. [14-20]

### **Treatment Services for Females**

The young women we spoke with indicated that they experienced problems with alcohol and drugs prior to coming to DJJ at significantly higher rates than men. Forty-two percent of women had problems with alcohol (versus 27% of men) and more than half had drug problems (58% versus 39% of men). Females were no more likely than males to report mental health problems prior to incarceration. However, females more often acknowledge trouble controlling emotions and feeling hopeless in the past 30 days. Combined with their high reports of violence involvement and feeling less safe than males, these patterns suggest that females have a need for treatment services at least as great as, if not greater, than males. Indeed, two-thirds of these young women, as compared with 32% of men, stated that they needed treatment for a specific problem. The types of problems they specify are similar to those identified by males: drugs, lack of vocational skills, anger and poor emotional control. In the quote below, one staff member cites the value of vocational training for females, albeit in a gendered manner:

I would love to see more vocation. Definitely, a trade. Cosmetology for the girls; I think that would be a great, just like the dog grooming... Yeah, why not? Why not be licensed? Why not have a certificate in something where you can go into a job... That’s a self-esteem builder, right there. I mean come on, being independent, making your own money. That means a lot to a lot of people. A lot of these kids when they get out there can’t find a job... [The] economy is bad... What’s the rate now, 11.2% unemployment? Could be more. So yeah, I think [a] trade like that would be great for the girls. [14-17]

Females receive resource groups at similar rates as males but are far less likely to receive all formal treatment programs except individual counseling and Americorp. As we display in Table 29, females report an average of just 1.32 services whereas males receive 2.93 services. No females receive

ART, Counterpoint, visit with Foster Grandparents, and just one woman had participated in IMPACT.<sup>18</sup> Fewer young women participated in group counseling (55% versus 79% of males). Less than half of females received treatment services consistent with their ICP whereas 69% of males did. Not surprisingly, females express more negative feelings about DJJ's treatment services, averaging 2.67 on a scale from 1 (very negative), to 5 (very positive), compared with 3.59 reported by males.

<Table 29 about here>

Ventura Youth Correctional Facility (VYCF) has been housing increasingly more males and staff recognizes that programming for females has suffered. Females are no longer the focus of the institution. In the passages below, two staff members express beliefs about the need for intervention programs that specifically target female youth:

The girls, sadly to say, over the last six months or so have been kind of pushed to the side, which is a really unfortunate thing for them. Everything recreational-wise is kind of based on males. Not even that, the point of the institution. When you have a living unit that might have a riot over there, the institution goes on lockdown or goes on temporary lockdown status. Then, girls' needs are affected severely. During the football season – unfortunately for the girls because we only have one field – they get left out. We've attempted to start a flag football team for the girls, but they started getting frustrated and a lot of the female living units started to erupt. Groups and services had multiple fights... So, they've been kinda pushed to the corner. Now that we're dealing with the males and the type of males and the point of the institution – which they have every right to say, "this is a female institution." [41-31]

The girls always seem to fall by the wayside because they're the least ... So all the money really goes to the other. So, I always say "Don't forget the girls." Right now we have a very good group called Girls Moving On... it's also cognitive behavioral type of intervention. It helps the girls build their personal capital, their personal resources, because a lot of the girls don't have a network of support ... Even though our pop is small, you can't forget 'em cause they're still our charges. There's not so much violence between the girls, and so violence is not really an issue for the girls like it is for the boys, but I still think that's important. [14-27]

Even though the second staff member quoted above views violence between females as less of an issue than for boys, s/he views attention to violence as an important service issue. As funding and the female population decreases, programs have been eliminated or combined together in ways that some staff fear might be harmful and even potentially dangerous, as illustrated by the second quote below:

For the girls, our options got limited as their numbers went down. So now, we just have one low core program and then we have the mental health program. So now, that girl that has a high level of violence, we don't really have a behavioral treatment unit for them. [14-11]

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<sup>18</sup> Programs delivered only to females may not be included in this count.

That's changed, yea, within the last nineteen months. Prior to that we had an I.C.P. which was more for the female individual who was more suicidal, self-inflicting behavior. And then we had S.C.P., which was more for the more aggressive female: more violence, you know fighting, staff assaults. General population and the budget, they combined the two programs, which, since then has taken on amazing dynamics. You have girls that are cutters that are terrified of the predators of the violence; they're all in the same program together now. Which, based on my experience, it's amazing that we haven't had anything severe over there yet. [14-31]

The young women we interviewed appeared to want and need more therapeutic services. The low numbers of females in DJJ renders them a challenge to DJJ to retain this as a priority. High levels of use of force and DDMS incidents suggest that adequately serving females might present a different type of challenge, but further evidences the critical need —and potential benefit from—therapeutic programs.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to provide correctional officials an empirical foundation with which to improve programs and policies aimed at reducing gang involvement and violence in California's youth correctional facilities. We do so using a multi-method approach that relies on both personal interviews and official data provided by the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). The interviews were conducted with staff and youth in five DJJ facilities. Official data was used to conduct quantitative analyses to supplement our interviews. We interviewed 306 males to approximate the DJJ population in September 2010 as well as 47 young women (27% of males and 84% of the full female population). The 64 staff members we interviewed were purposively sampled according to job titles that reflected relevance to the study topics. Here, we provide a summary of key findings on gang involvement, violence and services, along with policy recommendations derived from these findings. As all analyses were conducted separately for males and females, we conclude with a separate section on females and highlight their violence patterns and treatment issues.

This study was conducted in a specific policy environment. The consent decree that settled the *Farrell* lawsuit provided the impetus to engage an outside gang expert to assess gangs and violence in DJJ in order to inform the development of prevention and intervention programs. By the time the research team began collecting data toward the end of summer 2010, it was abundantly clear that DJJ was an agency in transition. The number of youth housed in DJJ had been declining for several years. The reasons for this decline include lower crime rates, higher costs, changing attitudes and legislative limits placed on incarcerating youth in state-level facilities. The nature of the offenses of the youth placed in DJJ facilities grew more serious with these declining numbers and a higher proportion of commitments from adult court. Lower youth population counts, budget pressures and aging buildings led to closures of half of the facilities that were operating at the turn of the century. Since our data collection in the fall of 2010, two of the five facilities included have closed. Facility closure requires relocating youth (and some staff) and creates inevitable disruption in programming, constraints on housing choices, and increased tension between youth as friendships and rivalries (both social and gang related) get sorted out. Thus, we conducted this study during a period of rapid institutional change and staff job insecurity which may be reflected in the data we report herein. Moreover, the rapid pace of change in the DJJ population, staffing and facilities since the data were gathered require that the findings be reviewed with this specific policy context in mind. For example, characterizations of individual facilities may not be currently applicable, and therefore we only rarely compare patterns by facility in this document. Nevertheless, our recommendations are grounded in a systematic and thorough analysis of the wide range of data that were available to us, and therefore should be useful in guiding DJJ policy moving into the future.

### Gang Participation

Gang membership among DJJ males is quite high by any measure. DJJ personnel officially designate 72% of males in the population as gang members, and 67% of the males we interviewed self-reported current or former gang membership. All gang members are listed in DJJ records with both street and institutional gang affiliations (i.e., all street gang members have institutional gang affiliations and vice-versa). Our analysis of official data finds that the proportion of designated gang members could go as high as 84% of the population if nongang youth with gang registration requirements, gang felony enhancements, or nongang youth who have been involved in gang DDMS incidents are added. Also, a high proportion of youth with special mental health and sex offense statuses are designated as gang

members. Notwithstanding these high levels of gang membership, youth report little pressure to affiliate with gangs within DJJ.

Our youth interview data suggests the records may overstate the association between street and institutional gangs. While we detect a considerable convergence between official and self-report gang measures, more than half of the youth that reported no gang involvement to the interviewer are designated as such by DJJ.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, we find that street and institutional gang membership are not synonymous. Our analyses reveal that the distinction between street and institutional gang membership is complex and ambiguous. While some youth and staff firmly believe that institutional affiliation is inherent in street gang membership, this is not always the case. This facility/street connection may vary by racial/ethnic group. Our qualitative analysis suggests that blacks maybe more loosely bound to institutional affiliations than Latinos. Most of the DJJ-designated gang members who did not self-report current gang membership to the interviewers were either former gang members or designated by DJJ as “Bay” (a black group in Northern California).

Youth in this sample join street gangs at relatively young ages, indicating that the gang population with which DJJ contends includes serious, long-term members. Youth who join institutional gangs do so early in their commitment, suggesting the need for focused prevention at reception centers and within intake units. Unfortunately, the evaluation literature does not provide strong guidance for evidence-based strategies for institutional gang prevention. Program content might be extracted from the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) curriculum and be modified for the older DJJ population.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, since our interviews with youth reveal that they arrive at DJJ with either misperceptions or no information about DJJ gang dynamics, it would be useful to incorporate accurate, DJJ-specific information into early sessions of a modified G.R.E.A.T. program. A content review of the IMPACT program may reveal that some elements could be incorporated into a version of an institutional gang prevention program delivered on intake units. It also might be appropriate to target these services before youth arrive at DJJ. DJJ administrators may want to explore the feasibility of collaborating with county-level facilities in this regard.

Institutional gangs appear to be less structured than might be expected; youth describe relatively low levels of territoriality or initiation rites, and just 40% say their groups have recognized leaders. The characteristics of institutional gangs offered by DJJ youth suggest that they are more similar to street gangs than they are to prison gangs (Maxson, 2011; Maxson and Scott, 2012). Thus, the content of intervention programs delivered in community settings may be appropriate for the DJJ population, a point to which we will return shortly.

Analyses of interview data reveal significant differences between former institutional and current gang members (street and/or institutional) even while we detected few differences between current street and institutional gang members. The substantial distinctions between current and former gang members should be recognized by correctional officials. Former gang members are older and present fewer behavioral problems in DJJ. These findings suggest that DJJ reconsider the official gang designation practice and recognize a category of inactive and/or former gang membership. Further, DJJ should be aware and recognize changes in gang embeddedness or identity over the period of commitment.

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<sup>19</sup> While some youth may have been hesitant to disclose gang membership to the interviewer, we noted that youth appeared to talk quite freely about the details of violence and other potentially sensitive topics. Therefore, we believe that underreporting of gang membership is not a major source of bias in these measures.

<sup>20</sup> The recently modified G.R.E.A.T. program emphasizes self-management, social and refusal skills that may enable youth to better resist attractions of gang participation. Preliminary evaluation results find that youth that received G.R.E.A.T. in community schools manifest a 39% reduction in the odds of joining a street gang than non-treated youth (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor and Osgood, 2011).

Youth who self-report current gang membership display more severe offending histories and DJJ disciplinary issues than nongang youth, but differences between the two groups regarding other characteristics are more muted than typically observed in community settings. Gang members are less likely to have a job in the facility and receive fewer visits from friends and family outside the facility. Gang youth have higher security classifications, more gang-related DDMS incidents and demotions while also receiving fewer privileges (as indicated by lower incentive levels). This orientation toward getting into more trouble is reflected in their self-perceptions: gang members feel staff trust them less than other youth even while these youth express values toward toughness and aggression in response to disrespect or conflict. These characteristics highlight the need for treatment and other services among gang members while simultaneously presenting challenges for service provision.

Accordingly, we recommend that DJJ consider altering staff training and gang designation policies at intake/reception. Street gang affiliation might be recorded at intake, without the presumption of institutional gang affiliation (unless the youth identifies as such during prior incarceration). At periodic intervals, the youth might be monitored for institutional gang activity and these assessments might be recorded with an ordinal metric that is more nuanced than the current, static binary measure of member or not. The administrative record should reflect the youth's varying level of institutional gang activity over the course of the stay in DJJ. Gang Information Coordinators appear well-versed in institutional gang activity, but additional staff training would be required to implement this new approach to gang assessment. Ultimately, a procedure for designation of inactive (if not former) gang members might be implemented. Regardless of recording practices, DJJ should offer meaningful incentives to designated gang members who do not participate in violent and disruptive gang activity.

While gang scholars argue that prevention and intervention programs should be tailored for known *gang* risk factors and group processes, our data suggest this may not be the case for programs in DJJ. We find few distinctions between gang and nongang youth that would guide specific program content. This is a point to which we will return when we discuss treatment services.

### **Youth Violence in DJJ**

Although we detected some interesting patterns of violence in different facilities, and controlled on facility in multivariate analyses, we do not address facility patterns in this summary and recommendations section. Facility closures and the resulting reconstitution of the youth population render facility-specific recommendations inappropriate.

Both youth and staff feel safe in DJJ facilities. Youth feel slightly less secure about being assaulted by youth than by staff; youth/staff assaults are rare. Although gang members feel slightly less secure about assaults from staff, the overall sense of security experienced by youth suggests that DJJ staff members are successful in producing a safe atmosphere. However, youth report that facility violence happens fairly frequently (between occasionally and most days) and a very high proportion of young men (85%) are involved in assaults between youth in DJJ facilities. During our interviews, youth reported an average of 38 incidents for each year incarcerated. There is a sharp contrast between general youth perceptions of safety and the violence in DJJ that they experience, indicating that violence may be normalized for youth in this setting. These levels of violence underscore the necessity for sound violence prevention strategies, including attempts to alter the normative perceptions of youth violence in DJJ facilities.

Both staff and youth perceive violence among youth in DJJ to be primarily about either gangs and/or race, but the youths' reports about specific, recent incidents in which they were involved suggests otherwise: a high proportion of these incidents are about things other than gangs or race. Most often,

these “other” incidents are sparked by disrespect or relatively minor issues. This finding implies new directions for violence reduction policies that DJJ should consider.

First, youth indicate that a very high proportion of all youth violence comes to the attention of DJJ staff and an official report is prepared. In order to better utilize this information, DJJ should develop a system for tracking and investigating patterns for all types of youth violence, in a manner similar to that employed by the Office of Correctional Safety for gang cases. Current practice is that youth-on-youth violence generates a Serious Incident Report (and if appropriate, a Gang Incident Report) only if the incident is a group disturbance or another major event involving staff; the far more common, one-on-one incidents are not subject to this reporting mechanism. Whether at the executive level or in facility Violence Reduction Committee meetings, appropriate attention should be paid to incidents that have little to do with gangs or race, as these appear to be quite common and may escalate into larger events. Programming for *all* youth should attend to issues of mutual respect and nonviolent conflict resolution.

Second, our findings suggest that violent racial conflict between male youth is less frequent than youth and staff perceive. Just 16% of the 549 incidents described to us are attributed by youth to be about race. Moreover, most young men (86%) indicate that youth of different races get along well in DJJ, although they would like to see more programs in this arena. While DJJ staff and administrators may well have special concerns regarding racial violence—and these incidents typically do involve more participants and therefore, a higher likelihood of injury—we would caution against the neglect of non-racial incidents.

In general, violence between DJJ youth is primarily a one-on-one, rather than a group, event. Typically, both participants are engaged in the fight; “pure” victimization or offending is relatively rare. Often, these events are related to a prior altercation, suggesting further the value of peaceful resolution of conflict and the development of healthy coping mechanisms, so that an argument does not precipitate later violence.

Fights occur most frequently in dayrooms of living units or in school areas. Therefore, DJJ administrators should reconsider the structuring of time spent in the dayroom. The dayroom appears to be an ecological opportunity for violent interchanges between youth, particularly regarding issues other than gangs or race. One response might be to increase staff supervision, but another could be to increase the structuring of this time where most often youth watch TV, play dominoes, or engage in unstructured leisure. DJJ might review the concept of “programming” and what it means for males of this age. Youth indicate a desire for more sports and vocational training and staff interviews confirmed that these activities promoted positive youth behavior. Such programs might offer incentives to youth to reduce violence.

School areas are also venues for gang and racial violence. Staff members report that school areas can be chaotic, particularly during movements when youth from different units are together. DJJ personnel may want to review security needs during these times. Perhaps school sites might be possible venues for gang and race conflict resolution programs.

Analyses of high rate offenders reveal that self-reported, current gang members and youth with mental health statuses are significantly more likely to be in this category. While there is substantial overlap between gang membership and mental health status, our findings suggest these are independent effects. DJJ has a variety of measures in place to address gang issues (e.g., Gang Information Coordinators and IMPACT); DJJ administrators may want to consider additional avenues for violence prevention among the mental health segment of the DJJ population.

The contrast between youth reports of feeling secure in DJJ and the high incidence of violence involvement is intriguing. One explanation for this apparent contradiction emerged from the qualitative accounts of youths' responses to questions about safety.

The safety's pretty good...could get into a fight for 3-4 seconds, then get sprayed. [04-032]

I feel safer from dying here [than in the neighborhood], but [safer] from the small shit on the outside. [04-132]

Over there [in the youth's neighborhood] there is too much tension and drama. [04-097]

In the first excerpt, the youth comments that while violent incidents do occur, it is not long before staff intervene using chemical agents in this case. Youth in our second and third excerpts suggest conditions in youths' neighborhoods are far worse than those in the facility. In the second, while the youth feels chances of dying are far less in the facility, consequences for seemingly minor conflicts, such as those discussed above, are far greater on the inside. These are poignant reminders that safety is relative and that the youth in DJJ's population likely experience severe threats to personal safety in their home communities.

### **Responses to Violence and Treatment**

Youth indicate they have someone they can count on if they get into trouble in DJJ, although gang members more often report that they could only count on other youth, and report lower levels of trust from staff. This reinforces the need to build stronger relationships between gang-involved youth and DJJ staff.

Youth recognize their need for additional treatment services. A substantial proportion of youth we interviewed acknowledge problems with alcohol (25%) or drugs (39%) prior to incarceration, and many youth recognize treatment or service needs beyond those currently offered by DJJ. The most common types of unmet service needs reported by youth are vocational, anger, and drug issues. DJJ should reconsider the levels and types of service responses offered in these areas. Interestingly, staff identify that youth need more specialized mental health services that might address the heightened violence risk we report above. Specifically, staff members argue that more youth should receive professional psychological services and that staff with specialized training should deliver treatment. Youth report much higher levels of group (79%) than individual (55%) counseling.

We find that self-reported gang members are significantly less likely to receive formal programs, especially individual counseling (48% of gang members versus 64% of other youth). Moreover, gang members receive fewer resource groups, especially anger management (19% versus 35% of other youth). Undeniably, gang members are a challenging population for service-providers; self-reported gang members have more DDMS incidents, lower incentive levels and other indicators of problem behaviors. They report more aggressive attitudes and lower levels of trust from staff as well as more negative attitudes about treatment services, all of which are detrimental to building the rapport needed for effective service delivery. Moreover, active gang conflicts present logistic issues and other service barriers. Nevertheless, gang members in DJJ clearly need services and staff should anticipate their behavioral issues.

The Conflict Resolution Teams are viewed by staff as successful in reducing violence. DJJ should consider expanding this promising program.

Another program, IMPACT, is highly visible and readily recognized by youth. Most gang and nongang youth receive IMPACT and speak highly of it. Our research cannot address the effectiveness of DJJ programs, but IMPACT's reliance on cognitive-behavioral therapeutic techniques is consistent with the evidence-based practice literature. The best practices literature emphasizes fidelity in implementation of programs or strictly delivering programs consistent with the treatment model. As Mark Lipsey (2009: 145) notes, "It does not take a magic bullet program to impact recidivism, only one that is well made and well aimed."

We cannot address this issue of the fidelity of delivery of IMPACT or any other DJJ program, but it is an issue to which DJJ should attend. We strongly recommend that an independent process and outcome evaluation of IMPACT be conducted. Armed with solid evidence of the program's effects, DJJ might collaborate with county-level officials to implement the program in county youth facilities, particularly for youth pending DJJ placement.

As we suggest earlier, there is no indication that gang members require different services than other youth in DJJ. It is quite possible that gang members would benefit from strategies that have proved successful with other serious offenders. The Blueprints for Gang Prevention Initiative (Thornberry, 2008) has identified three model programs that appear particularly relevant for gang programming: Multisystemic Therapy (MST) (Henggeler, Mihalic, Rone, et al., 1998), Functional Family Therapy (FFT) (Alexander, Barton, Gordon, et al., 1998), and a program that targets the transition from institution to community, Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) (Chamberlain & Mihalic, 1998).<sup>21</sup> The Gang Blueprints initiative is working with the three program developers to adapt these programs for gang issues, and is currently developing randomized clinical trials to test the modified programs. While these are programs typically delivered in community settings, DJJ may investigate methods by which they might be adapted to institutional settings.

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<sup>21</sup> All three programs have demonstrated reductions in antisocial behavior in multiple clinical trials and have yielded substantial cost-effectiveness ratings by independent economic analyses. MST targets antisocial behavior of offenders and tries to modify such attitudes and behavior while taking into consideration multiple systems (e.g., school, family, peers, and neighborhood) that exist within that youth's environment. This intervention depends on highly individualized treatment plans based on the characteristics of each youth's specific situation. This program is delivered in an intensive dose of on average four months in duration at a high intensity of several hours of treatment per week.

FFT is a family-based prevention/intervention program for high risk youth. It is a short-term intervention consisting of up to 26-30 hours of direct services for more difficult cases (8-10 hours for less). The sessions are delivered in multiple settings by a FFT therapist or case manager, who may be a mental health professional or probation officer. The program is organized around three phases: engagement and motivation, behavior change including problem solving and conflict management, and generalization. During phase 1, the program applies reattribution (reframing) and related techniques intended to produce trust between the therapist and the family as well as within the family. In phase 2, the emphasis is on enhancing individual and developmentally appropriate skills and behavior. Phase 3 seeks to have the youth and family members adopt new skills into their normal environment.

MTFC provides a highly structured, multifaceted program based on social learning theory. MTFC involves specialized and intense training and supervision of foster parents who deliver a structured daily behavior management program that unfolds in three levels over six to nine months. Additional youth interventions are individual, skill-focused therapy and monitoring of school performance and peer relationships. The youth's family of origin receives therapy and training on the MTFC behavioral system and stepped, structured and supervised home visits. Close contact is maintained by the MTFC case manager who also engages the probation officer, teachers, employers and other adults with influence over the youth. Heavy emphasis is placed on clear rules and consequences, consistent discipline and reinforcement, development of interpersonal skills and participation in pro-social activities.

DJJ might also consider whether programs would optimally be delivered on an individual basis. A group setting for service delivery raises concerns about contagion of violence, the transfer of gang culture and reinforcement of gang identity, and safety issues. It may be that this population could most benefit from one-on-one services to the extent it is possible for DJJ to deliver them. Staff also identifies the need to clarify responsibilities for counseling to certain job categories – YCC’s to counsel, YCO’s to discipline. This separation would allow for more focused individual counseling on the part of YCC’s.

### **Females in DJJ**

Finally, we note that females in DJJ receive far fewer services—of almost every type—than males. Our data argue that they are just as much in need of, and likely need more, services than males. They have less social support outside of DJJ, and enter DJJ with more alcohol and drug issues than males. Further, evidence from the interviews indicates that gender stereotypes lead to females having less access to structured group activities like sports. The data from interviews with females present a compelling case that they are underserved by DJJ, as compared to males. This issue is widely recognized by DJJ staff, and deserves further attention. This inequity is underscored when highly visible programs, such as football, are offered to the males but not the females.

Females have higher rates of DDMS and use of force incidents, and also file more grievances. Although they are less likely to be gang members than males, they are more likely to have a mental health status. Like males, a high proportion of females experience violence in DJJ, although they report lower rates. Female violence in DJJ has a similar pattern to that of males (i.e., they usually involve just one other participant, take place in the day room or at school and are precipitated by a prior conflict). However, violence incidents among female youth are far more likely to stem from interpersonal, rather than gang or race, issues.

## **NEXT STEPS**

We continue to investigate patterns in the officially-reported violence incidents (SIRs), as well as refine and expand analyses of the data reported here. We look forward to further collaboration with DJJ personnel in the development of the implications of these data for improved programs and policies in DJJ.

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