



**Qualitative Analysis**

# **GENDER- RESPONSIVE PROGRAMS**

for Girls in the Juvenile  
Justice System in Saint Lucia



## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
BTC	Boys Training Centre
CASP	Community After-School & Summer Programme
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGA	County Gender Assessment
CJA	Child Justice Act
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DEPT	Department
DGR	Department of Gender Relations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOAF	Girls of A Feather Saint Lucia Inc.
GoSL	Government of Saint Lucia
JJ	Juvenile Justice
JJRP	Juvenile Justice Reform Programme
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBTH	New Beginnings Transit Home
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLP	Saint Lucia Labour Party
SLPPA	Saint Lucia Planned Parenthood Association
SSDF	Saint Lucia Social Development Fund
ToR	Terms of Reference
UGGC	Upton Gardens Girls Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWP	United Workers Party
YEP	Youth Empowerment Project

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Girls of A Feather St. Lucia Inc. (GOAF) was founded in 2014 as a non-profit mentorship organization. It has helped shift the narrative about girls whose lives are shaped by societal and systemic failures that have deprived them of opportunities to live safely and fully. GOAF is also one of the referral agencies under the gender-based violence referral pathway plan for St. Lucia – offering counselling and social support for survivors of abuse. They have worked alongside state agencies since 2018 when the pilot of the *Girls with Goals* mentorship programme, targeting 12-17 year olds, was launched. In 2019, an assessment of the implementation challenges showed that besides internal limitations such as programme design and technical capacity to respond, there were additional external factors contributing to the attrition of mentees, specifically those referred through the residential care facilities.

This current paper is an output of an investigative process on gender-responsive programming in Saint Lucia led by Girls of A Feather St. Lucia Inc., a grantee partner of the Women’s Voice and Leadership Caribbean, a project implemented by the Equality Fund and the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, and funded by the Government of Canada.

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Dr. Julietta Raymond served as research consultant and Julia Mandeville was research development project lead. The review committee consisted of Firhaana Bulbulia, Dr. Gabrielle Hosein, Brenda Wilson, Sade Jemmott, and Karen Philip.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This situational analysis is Phase 1 of a three-phase project. It reports on services and interventions tailored to vulnerable girls 18 years old and younger, who are in contact with the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia. This study was undertaken on behalf of Girls of A Feather St. Lucia Inc., a grantee partner of Women’s Voice and Leadership Caribbean, a project implemented by the Equality Fund and the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, and funded by the Government of Canada.<sup>1</sup> It assessed what currently exists, with the intention of addressing potential gaps in service as much as it is feasible to do so. Another goal is to make recommendations for a much more transformational approach to be adopted in the best interest of the target population.

Gender-responsive programs are designed with girls in mind and consist of specifications that broaden the understanding of risk factors to vulnerable girls; the links between risk factors that lead to these girls deviating from social norms; and the protective factors that ameliorate conditions of safety, overall health, social support, and self-actualization. This project focused on programming, perspectives, and experiences that contextualize developmental differences among girls in Saint Lucia.

For this qualitative study, eight (8) key stakeholders were interviewed, and their responses aggregated and analysed. The study examined five research questions:

- What are the key issues that lead to girls 18 years and younger having contact with the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?
- What is the specific legislation that has been written for girls 18 years and younger who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?
- What are the policies or practices that have been designed and implemented to address the specific needs of girls 18 years and younger involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?
- To what extent are residential care facilities and rehabilitation centres in Saint Lucia aware of gender specific programming and girl-centered approaches?
- To what extent have residential care facilities and rehabilitation centres in Saint Lucia included gender-responsive strategies and girl-centered approaches in their programming?

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Policymakers, practitioners, and agencies are guided by the stipulations presented in the recent Child Justice and Child (Care, Protection and Adoption) Acts (CJA) of 2018 as they seek to provide interventions and services to children and adolescents who are 0-18 years. However, currently, no established national gender framework exists in Saint Lucia. Consequently, there are limited gender-specific and gender-responsive programmes tailored for girls 18 years and younger, who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia. Practitioners reported limited resources to

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<sup>1</sup> Women’s Voice and Leadership – Caribbean Multi-Year Funding for Caribbean Women’s Rights and LGBTIQ Organizations. <https://equalityfund.ca/what-we-do/womens-voice-and-leadership-caribbean/about-wvl-caribbean/>

properly enact the laws and expressed their need for capacity building – staff training, program offerings, data collection and analysis specific to the experience of girls. Girls and young women who find themselves in conflict with the law, including those who need care and protection in Saint Lucia, continue to be deprived of proper rehabilitative interventions and employment opportunities. Their deprivation is further compounded by the absence of a residential facility to safeguard them from their abusive homes and detrimental neighbourhoods (Mohammed, 2020).

A history of abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics, family poverty, and negative peer association have been identified, through this study, as some risk factors that should be considered when developing gender-responsive programming in Saint Lucia. The findings illuminate the importance of focusing on girls' needs, as a priority, in Saint Lucia; and ensuring that policymakers, practitioners, and agencies work collaboratively to ensure those needs are not neglected.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report generated recommendations at the governmental and agency levels:

### *Governmental-Level*

1. Enact national gender policy to address agencies serving girls and women.
2. Adopt a gender framework which includes guiding principles for gender-responsive practices and instructions on implementing CJA provisions within the context of girls' needs.
3. Ensure that all governmental departments are provided with the requisite resources to facilitate effective gender-responsive programming and training of staff.
4. Develop a residential program designed to serve girls exclusively.
5. Establish a research and monitoring unit that collects and utilises gender-responsive data to inform agencies about best practices and standards, trends, and effective programming related to girls in conflict with the law.

### *Agency-Level*

1. Implement gender-responsive aftercare services that highlight the unique needs and best interest of girls for facilities serving girls.
2. Establish formal linkages and MOUs among agencies that provide service delivery and intervention to vulnerable girls.
3. Advocate to ensure that girls are involved in the process of developing a national gender policy.
4. Implement gender-normed assessments for girls' therapeutic needs.
5. Provide continuing professional training in gender-responsiveness.

Additionally, twenty-first century juvenile justice actors must understand what works best for court-involved girls, including those who need care and protection. The system must demonstrate that it is not applying responses framed for boys to address the unique needs of girls. A policy shift is needed to transform systems; leaving behind social structures, values, and norms that perpetuate the oppression and victimization of women and girls –subjugating them to positions of disempowerment, inferiority, and disadvantage.





# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to ascertain gender-responsive care in Saint Lucia. Its emphasis is girls who need care and protection, including those who are in conflict with the law – specifically the juvenile justice system. Also a priority, the national programming designed to support girls, 18 years and younger, who enter this system.

It was designed to understand what causes girls in Saint Lucia to enter the juvenile justice system, to identify ways in which their needs are being met once in the system, and to identify opportunities for engagement of agencies delivering social services to these girls. This project reflects the aims of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.2, focused on eliminating all forms of violence – including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation – against all women and girls in public and private spheres; and Goal 5.3, which is to eliminate all harmful practices – such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations.

This research project is Phase 1 of an overall project that intends to develop a gender-responsive model for St. Lucia and within the Caribbean. In Phase 2, beneficiaries will be engaged to capture their experiences to effectively inform the resultant programming which will be developed. Phase 3 will focus on monitoring and evaluating girl-centered programming developed from the results and recommendations from the first two phases.

The Caribbean region struggles with effective gender-responsive programs and approaches to support a comprehensive focus on the development of girls. Gender-responsive programs consider the unique characteristics of girls involved in the juvenile justice system. Given that girls typically have different pathways to incarceration, this type of programming addresses those underlying factors. This means more focus on mental health, women-specific issues (e.g., motherhood, reproductive health), and treatment for trauma. The development of gender-specific programming also includes the perspectives of those with lived experience and involves reviewing data and outcomes by gender. It is also critical to acknowledge that the girls may have heightened risk of exposure to certain factors such as sexism, victimization, and poverty.

## A. ST. LUCIA CONTEXT

A 2017 UNICEF report identified Saint Lucia – a member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) – as having rising crime rates, with girls committing some of the same crimes as those of their male counterparts (UNICEF, 2017). In this troubling pattern, girls are arrested for serious crimes such as murder, drug and firearm possession, and

assault, and processed in a system that has been normed on boys. The age of adult criminal responsibility in St. Lucia is currently 18. At present, girls (under 18) may enter the juvenile justice system through two avenues: the Department of Human Services (when girls are in need of care and protection) and the Department of Probation and Parole Services (when girls are at risk of or commit criminal offences).

In response to rising crime rates among girls, Saint Lucia has made some progress in reforming the system to address crime and other social issues by updating its legislative efforts and policies to benefit children and other young vulnerable groups. However, specific interventions, policies, and practices for girls involved with juvenile justice have not been developed. Evidence of this weakness also shows prominently in the absence of an appropriate detention facility for girls. This has led to vulnerable girls who are in conflict with the law being detained in a section at the Bordelais Correctional Facility – an adult prison. This institution is not suitable for the proper rehabilitation and reintegration of young people. In 2021, 39 youth (under 18) were apprehended, according to the Department of Probation, with 8% of those being girls. In addition, there were 41 young people detained or held in custody in the juvenile justice system (none of which were girls). (personal communication, 2022) According to the Department of Human Services, 190 children were processed by the Department, 138 (73%) of those being girls. Those cases were reported due to various issues, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, or verbal abuse (personal communication, 2022).

## **B. JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY HISTORY**

In 2011, the OECS, launched the Juvenile Justice Reform Project (JJRP), partnering with USAID (USAID, 2019). Housed in the Human and Social Development unit, this eight-year initiative aimed to modernise the juvenile justice system in the Eastern Caribbean. It provided support to address deficiencies in the system, build capacity of the system and its personnel, and improve the legal and regulatory frameworks. Through consultation with the Member States and multilateral partner agencies, the project scope covered reviews, updates, amendments, and establishments of laws related to social protection and child justice (Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States, 2020).

The project is currently in Phase II (JJRP II) where the focus is on youth in conflict with the law, and ways to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society. Project activities are categorised under three pillars –

Pillar 1. Effective diversion system

Pillar 2. Evidence-based rehabilitation systems

Pillar 3. Successful reintegration

– spanning OECS Member States like Saint Lucia. During this Phase, legislation, specifically the Child Justice Act and the Child Care Protection and Adoption Acts, were passed in Saint Lucia (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, 2020). This project builds on the work initiated within the JJRP project, particularly the juvenile justice framework developed with the Child Justice Act.

The Child Justice Act (CJA) (Saint Lucia, 2018b) and the Child (Care, Protection and Adoption) Act of 2018 (Saint Lucia, 2018a) were both introduced in St Lucia in 2018. Both pieces of legislation seek to protect the rights of children, among other benefits. Following the passage of both Acts, Saint Lucia began reform efforts to ensure compliance with the law. The CJA stipulates that the background, age, and developmental needs of the child be considered in selecting the level of detention (Saint Lucia, 2018a).

While certain stipulations are outlined in the Acts, Saint Lucia still lacks some of the basic necessities or resources to effectively implement the new laws. Additionally, the Acts do not address the unique biological and psychosocial needs of girls. This omission may cause situations where vulnerable girls can be re-victimized in a system that makes the claim for the protection and safety of vulnerable children. Considering this mandate, the needs of both boys and girls must be accommodated to satisfy the requirements of the law.

Furthermore, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, 1985 (Beijing Rules 26.4) (United Nations General Assembly, 1985) stipulates that *“young female offenders placed in an institution deserve special attention as to their personal needs and problems.”* However, current programming for children and adolescents are lacking in their reintegration and rehabilitation efforts in so far as therapeutic and gender-specific interventions and aftercare services are concerned. There is also an absence of effective systems in place to monitor the progress of youth offenders on their release in Saint Lucia (USAID, 2018).

### **C. CURRENT JUVENILE JUSTICE PROCESS**

Based on provisions in the Child Justice Act, the continuum of services for youth referred to the juvenile justice system should include several options. The current child justice process includes the following steps:

1. Initial inquiry and officer contacted.
2. The youth is charged.
3. The parent is included and invited to participate in the assessment and investigation.
4. An officer conducts risk and needs assessment and mental health screening.
5. The youth is referred to a diversion program.
6. If not referred to diversion or unsuccessful in a diversion program, the youth goes to trial.
7. If found guilty, the youth may have alternative sentencing.
8. If no alternative sentencing, the youth is taken into custody.

According to the Child Justice Act, the Department of Probation is required to send referrals to the Department of Human Services (DHS) for behavioural health programs.

The most common offences reported by the Department of Probation are stealing (robbery, burglary) and possession of firearm/ammunition. The current service continuum available to young people in conflict with the law includes community service to make amends to victims and the community under supervision of the Probations and Parole Department; residential care; counselling; skills training programs through the National Enrichment and

Learning Unit (NELU) and the National Skills Development Centre (NSDC); psychoeducation programs; employment opportunities; and aftercare for those exiting the residential facility for up to two years. For girls referred to the Department of Human Services who cannot remain safely at home, usually a recommendation is made by the court to remove the child from the home. First priority goes to a family member. The second option is the New Beginnings Transit Home, which houses both boys and girls. The department typically relies on Family Court, the Wellness Centre, the Crisis Centre, and the district counsellors for referrals for services.

Currently, there is limited programming in St. Lucia that would allow for girls' unique needs related to abuse, exploitation, mental health, and underlying developmental issues to be addressed effectively. Therefore, placing vulnerable girls in settings that have been recognized as not suitable for rehabilitation places them at increased risk for trauma and related behavioural problems. With persistence in delinquent or criminal behaviours associated with more problematic behaviours (Caufman et al., 2015), it is critical to examine those risk factors that predispose girls to delinquency or criminal behaviour as a major step in addressing their needs.

Nonetheless, even with the limitations outlined, Saint Lucia is well-positioned to provide the requisite services and interventions to vulnerable girls and boys; that is, with the backing of the law and international standards from various bodies.

## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed for this study underscores the unique needs of girls involved in the juvenile justice system and the best approaches for policy and programming that considers the needs of girls.

### A. FACTORS LEADING TO JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT FOR GIRLS

#### *Pathways to juvenile justice involvement for girls*

The extant research gives evidence that boys and girls enter the juvenile justice system for similar reasons but through different pathways. Research indicates that girls tend to enter the juvenile justice system because of the criminalization of behaviours related to exposure to gender-related trauma and violence (e.g., sexual assault). In addition, girls are more likely than boys to be detained for non-serious offences (Watson & Edelman, 2012).

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2013) found that girls who run away from home, are truant, stay out late, are promiscuous, self-mutilate, or engage in underage alcohol use are generally found to be victims of abuse and trauma. The study further states that such status offences by girls are often “attempts at self-preservation” and less an act of rebellion. Status offences are offences that are not considered crimes when committed by adults. A marked difference has been found between court-involved girls and court-involved boys. The literature further explains that court-involved girls “tend to be more relationship-oriented and internalize responses to trauma in the form of depression, self-mutilation, and substance use” and that there is a higher incidence of court-involved girls as victims of incest, rape, and battering than boys.

In a study of 319 girls in the juvenile justice system in Florida, more than half indicated that they had been referred to the child welfare system for abuse and more than a third reported abuse from their parents (Patino et. al, 2006). In that same study, 61 percent had juvenile justice system involvement due to an offence against a family member.

Girls have been found to have an earlier age of onset for anti-social behaviour due to victimization (Caufman, 2008). A 2010 Title 11 update by the Illinois Department of Human Services revealed that vulnerable girls have unique needs linked to “sexually-transmitted disease, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health issues, abuse and exploitation, as well as their patterns of delinquency”, which requires gender-specific programming. This area has not received sufficient attention in the Caribbean.

### *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)*

Ge et al (1994) found that girls experience more traumatic and adverse life events than boys during the pubertal years and may be more sensitive to those ACEs especially when they originate from familial settings. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are negative events occurring during the formative and developmental years of a person's life that may result in poorer health and social outcomes in adulthood (Waite & Ryan, 2019). In a study conducted by Jeremiah et al (2017), a 10-item ACE scale was developed and has been subsequently used to identify the presence or absence of traumatic experiences and abuse during childhood. ACE scores range from 0 to 10 based on the number of experiences a person has. ACEs include neglect, witnessing or experiencing violence, various types of abuse, witnessing substance use and abuse, racism, having a family member involved in the criminal justice system, and parental separation or divorce. The research shows that these exposures, especially depending on the frequency and intensity, can result in toxic stress (Oral et al., 2016). Additionally, the more ACEs an individual experiences, or the higher the ACE score, correlates with worse outcomes in adulthood.

In 2014, Baglivio et al, in their research of juvenile justice-involved juveniles, found that girls, while reporting more exposure to sexual abuse and bullying, also reported generally higher rates of exposure to all ACEs when compared to their male counterparts. The study attributed differences in the types of ACEs girls and boys experience, as well as how they processed the resulting trauma and toxic stress, to behavioural outcomes. Another study (Davis et al., 2016) also had similar results with the female offenders in that population reportedly experiencing significantly more ACEs when compared to the male offenders (23% of female offenders experienced 9+ ACEs compared to 3% of male offenders). Again, the female offenders reported higher incidents of sexual and physical abuse when compared to their male counterparts. Within recent years, criminal justice research has begun to incorporate the use of ACE scores and the events of early childhood trauma in evaluations of negative outcomes for individuals involved in the system (Wolff et al., 2018).

Since exposures and experiences to and with ACEs can differ depending on gender, the response to addressing the resulting trauma warrants intentional and potentially individualised trauma-informed interventions (Oral et al., 2016). To not do so could result in lower self-esteem, difficulty with self-actualization, and increased vulnerability among girls. This, in turn, could lead to higher incidence of trauma and involvement with a juvenile justice system not designed to meet their needs (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014; Reed et al., 2021). Keyes et al (2020) reported that "...When compared to male counterparts, female justice-involved youth report significantly lower levels of global self-worth and self-esteem within the domains of athletic competence, physical appearance, scholastic competence, and behavioural conduct." (Thomann et al., 2020)

## **B. GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING AND BEST APPROACHES**

The need to focus on gender-responsive frameworks in programming has ignited interest among low-to-middle-income countries around the world because they recognized that girls' unique needs and concerns matter (Population Council, 2018). The research shows that more work needs to be done to ascertain the level of effectiveness and durability of gender-responsive programmes, with an emphasis on both multisectoral interventions and an individualized approach as required. The Population Council findings also revealed a need for more rigorous and scientific evaluations of girl-centred programs to ensure that girls' needs are adequately addressed.

It is important to understand what works for girls. The Girls Center for Innovation, Research and Learning (n.d.) through the Population Council conducted rigorous impact evaluations in nine countries around the world with very useful results that can inform gender-responsive programming for girls. The findings revealed that interventions that focus on empowerment and asset-building for adolescent girls can lead to improvements in educational, health, economic, social capital, gender-equitable attitude, and violence outcomes for them. An emphasis is placed on the economic empowerment of girls using interventions that focus on financial literacy, savings groups, and programs to build skills and improve livelihoods. These interventions will reduce girls' vulnerability to child marriage and domestic violence (Amin & Sapna, n.d.). Interventions that combine sexual and reproductive health with economic empowerment were also highlighted, by Edmeades et al (2016), as being important to address the needs of vulnerable girls.

A recently published study that sought to understand the needs of girls in juvenile detention centres in the US, outlined that the inclusion of the girls in the system as stakeholders, and providing them with the opportunity to give feedback, not only improved treatment outcomes for the residents but also led to a decrease in the detention population (Reed et al., 2021).

Within a girl-centred design framework, policymakers and programme specialists approach their process with the goal of solving problems which specifically impact girls (Population Council, 2010) by including girls as stakeholders during all stages of the process. A toolkit developed by Population Council has been used globally to facilitate this process. It outlines several key components of capacity building and increasing social protection specific to the development of girls. These include asset building, economic strengthening, sexual and reproductive health concerns, and addressing sexual and gender-based violence.

Youth programmes touted as "gender-neutral" tend to be gender-discriminatory as they do not address the social, physical, and emotional needs of girls when compared to boys (Population Council, 2010). As it pertains to the juvenile justice system, a recent evaluation report of the PACE Center for Girls documented the utility of applying a gender-responsive approach when designing and implementing programming for girls (Millenky et al., 2019). This agency provides social and academic support to girls from 10 up to 18 years, who are at risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system in Florida. Over 1,120 girls across 14 centres were enrolled.

The study had two arms. One cohort of attendees would receive gender-responsive programme services and another group – the control – received the standard programme. Gender-responsive services included providing a mix of academic and social services that took into consideration girls’ development and needs by focusing heavily on relationships, building on individual strengths, and being trauma-informed.

The evaluators of the US-based agency found that while girls in both groups were hopeful about their futures and reported low rates of risky behaviour after one year, those enrolled in the programme group had access to more specific professional services (academic and social), than those in the control group. Additionally, school enrollment, attendance and overall academic outcomes increased for those enrolled in the programme group. Future research into the long-term effects of this programming – i.e. how it positively impacts delinquency rates for at-risk girls – was suggested (Millenky et al., 2019).

The Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, Rules 28-30 of the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (United Nations, 1990b) and Article 37 (c) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations Children’s Fund, 1989) outline that juvenile offenders should be housed in separate facilities from adults when detained in the justice system, with relevantly trained staff, and established policies. Rule 28 specifically states:

*“The detention of juveniles should only take place under conditions that take full account of their particular needs, status and special requirements according to their age, personality, sex and type of offence, as well as mental and physical health, and which ensure their protection from harmful influences and risk situations. The principal criterion for the separation of different categories of juveniles deprived of their liberty should be the provision of the type of care best suited to the particular needs of the individuals concerned and the protection of their physical, mental and moral integrity and well-being.” (United Nations, 1990b)*

While there may be lower numbers of female offenders, the CRC Committee is resolute in its stance on the provision of a separate facility for girls where staff are trained “in gender-based sensitivity and gender-based violence” (UNODC, 2013). Another important issue that must be considered when addressing the needs of vulnerable girls is the quality of interventions used in programming efforts. Research indicates that effective girl-centred design programming must ascertain the root causes of vulnerability for girls. Gender-specific programming considers various structural drivers (discriminatory gender norms, harmful traditional practices, gender blind laws and policies) that lie at the root of women’s and girls’ vulnerability to poverty and deprivation (UNICEF Office of Research, 2020).





Unequal Gender Roles. Unequal Power Relations. Exclusion from Rights, Entitlements & Opportunities.

**GENDER INEQUALITY PATHWAYS  
STRUCTURAL & INDIVIDUAL DRIVERS**



**Figure 1: Gender inequality, Poverty and Vulnerability<sup>2</sup>**

The UNICEF Office of Research (2020) has also aptly captured the utility of investing in a gender integration continuum to ensure maximum transformation against discriminatory and harmful gender and social norms that hinder the development and empowerment of women and girls. They highlighted an application of a life-course lens in this process to capture risks and vulnerabilities at each stage of the developmental process. It is also noteworthy to highlight that every effort needs to be made towards leveraging social protection systems using a gender lens, to ensure that the ameliorating conditions of gender inequality no longer exist. To do this, a reset is needed in the system using change levers that focus on political commitment; gender-responsive financing; capacity building and strengthening of government partners; gender-responsive institutional norms, rules, and practices; monitoring and evaluation at all stages of the policy cycle; and social movements that advocate for the support and protection of women and girls (UNICEF Office of Research, 2020).

“One of the key challenges that the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission has to address” is the social development of OECS populations (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, 2020). The lack of application of a gender lens in this project is a concern. The 2020 Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection Conceptual framework from UNICEF outlines a “gender integration continuum” that describes gender integration efforts for programmes and policies as ranging from “gender discriminatory to gender transformative” (UNICEF Office of Research, 2020).



**Figure 2: Gender Integration Continuum<sup>3</sup>**

2 Adapted from Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A conceptual framework

3 Adapted from Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A conceptual framework.

Social protection programmes or policies that do not consider gender or critically apply a gender lens in their development are considered gender discriminatory. Outcomes of such policies, whether or not it is unintentional, may still leave women and girls vulnerable as negative gender norms and assumptions, which contribute to gender inequality in systems and structures, will still be present. The framework states that the goal is for policies and programming to eventually be reviewed through a gender-sensitive and transformative lens, which not only responds to the individual needs associated with gender but also addresses the root causes of gender inequality (UNICEF Office of Research, 2020).

To do so, in this context, it would mean the development of programmes that are built on how girls perceive and interact in their environment, and seek to address their concerns (Gleicher, 2015). Thus an understanding of the risks and protective factors when developing programming in Saint Lucia is needed (Table 1).

**Table 1: Some risk and protective factors that should be considered when developing gender-responsive programming (Gleicher, 2015):**

<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>Protective Factor</b>
History of abuse	Prosocial skills & competence
Early sexual initiation	Delay of sexual initiation
Dysfunctional family dynamics	Positive family dynamics and support
Family poverty	Economic empowerment
Negative peer associations	Self-awareness and assertiveness training
Academic failure and school disconnectedness	School connectedness

Furthermore, mechanisms must be established through which girls engaged in the juvenile justice system have access to services and resources that are designed to support their developmental needs in the identified areas (socioeconomic, emotional, physical), and address the underlying factors which historically have made them vulnerable (UNICEF Office of Research, 2020).

### **C. GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICYMAKING IN JUVENILE JUSTICE**

Gender-responsive policymaking ensures that the needs and priorities of all, inclusive of males and females, are being addressed. An inclusive policy also ensures that important subgroups within the larger context of gender are examined (e.g. people with disabilities). (International Republic Institute, 2020).

An appropriate gender analysis in policymaking involves asking two basic questions:

- “How will gender norms, roles and power imbalance affect policy results?
- How will the results of the proposed policy affect both women and men?” (International Republican Institute, 2020).

The International Republican Institute developed a policy handbook which stipulates important elements of a policymaking process that considers and includes the needs of girls. The framework includes four key elements:

- **Problem Identification:** Defining the policy goal and assessing whether it addresses different impacts of the problem on girls and boys and has a broader commitment to improving gender equality.
- **Policy Design:** Conducting an environmental scan, identifying stakeholders, collecting gender-sensitive data, and designing a policy intervention to address the identified problem. The intervention should understand the extent that it contributes to greater gender equality and how it addresses historical disadvantages between girls and boys.
- **Policy Adoption:** Identifying advocacy tactics, mobilising allies and stakeholders, framing the right message, and developing a gender-responsive communications plan.
- **Policy Implementation and Oversight:** Developing a gender-responsive implementation plan to ensure that gender is effectively mainstreamed, creating a monitoring framework to assess the impact on girls and boys, determining methods for data collection, analysing data related to gender, and assessing how the intervention helped to create greater gender equality.

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (2021) stipulates 4 important levers to ensure policymaking that acknowledges the needs of girls:

1. **Commitment, vision and leadership**, which are important for gaining buy-in across the administration.
2. **Equitable and evidence-informed policy-making**, which is based in quality data and information that is disaggregated by gender, and examines impact by gender.
3. **Whole-of-government coordination**, which outlines clear roles and responsibilities across government agencies to prevent silos.
4. **Innovation and change management**, which ensures that a gender and intersectional lens is applied to encourage innovation that addresses the needs of all persons.



## CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

### A. BACKGROUND

This report presents findings from a two-month study on gender-responsive programming, which draws from qualitative structured interviews that were conducted with both governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Saint Lucia. It examines legislative documents, to include the Child Justice and Child (Care, Protection and Adoption) Acts of 2018, which serve as critical documents in Saint Lucia's reform efforts particularly as relates to the needs of and rights of children from 0-18 years.

This report draws on the experiences and knowledge of program directors/coordinators, program staff, and other government officials who directly and indirectly work with juvenile justice serving agencies. It seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the realities of gender-responsive programming in Saint Lucia, with an emphasis on girls (18 years and younger) who are in conflict with the law and those who need care and protection services.

### B. OBJECTIVES

The following were the main objectives in the development of the research protocol:

1. To use a situational analysis to find out the competencies of social service agencies, residential care facilities, and rehabilitation centers for adolescent girls in need of care and in conflict with the law in Saint Lucia.
2. To identify the key issues of girls from the Juvenile Justice System and how the institutions are addressing their needs (including laws and policies).
3. To identify opportunities for potential trainings/resource provision that would help address constraints or challenges.

### D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were developed from the above list of objectives:

- What are the key issues that lead to girls 18 years and younger having contact with the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?

- What is the specific legislation that has been written for girls 18 years and younger who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?
- What are the policies or practices that have been designed and implemented to address the specific needs of girls 18 years and younger who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?
- To what extent are residential care facilities and rehabilitation centres in Saint Lucia aware of gender specific programming and girl-centered approaches?
- To what extent have residential care facilities and rehabilitation centres in Saint Lucia included gender-responsive strategies and girl-centered approaches in their programming?
- Research Design and Implementation

The Researcher utilized a triangulated method to include qualitative means (specifically structured interviews and secondary data) to answer five research questions. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for the study. Details on sampling can be found in the sampling section of this document.

While key informant interviews provide several advantages including gathering information from experts who have expertise in the sector, this process also includes related limitations. The data analysis period was lengthy. The researchers sought to address this and interviewer bias with a limited number of key stakeholders from across the sector, the preparation of different interview guides for the different interviewees, and limiting the interview topics.

The project researchers anticipated that access to key personnel as well as some relevant policy, procedural, and programming documents may have been limited. Some individuals were not readily available to engage in the interview process in the specified time frame. Additionally, with key informant interviews, self-reported data can be limited due to recall bias. While this limits the scope of the analysis, the researchers employed triangulation of data with other sources they accessed to evaluate the information.<sup>4</sup>

## E. DESK REVIEWS

Specific emphasis was placed on the analysis of the Child (Care, Protection and Adoption) Act, 2018 since it represents the legislative instrument adopted by Human Services to allocate people in need of care and protection to suitable persons and institutions. In addition to the Child Justice Act, the Consultant used other relevant sources of information:

The extant literature on gender-responsive care and juvenile justice was also considered during the desk review, to ensure that the investigation on programming for girls in the system is conducted thoroughly. Emphasis was placed on evaluating programs aimed at meeting the unique needs of vulnerable girls, as well as the realities of juvenile justice programming in Saint Lucia, regionally, and internationally.

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4 Riyadh Guidelines (UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, 1990); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, 1990 (JDL); UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, 1985 (Beijing Rules); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); National Child and Adolescent Health Policy; National Child and Adolescent Multi-sectoral Work Plan.

## F. KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

A purposive sampling approach was employed in collecting data for this investigation. Key stakeholders were selected based on the nature of the services and intervention that they provide to vulnerable young people. A group of stakeholders, to include both governmental and non-governmental agencies who provide direct care and policy directives to juvenile facilities, were selected for this study. See the appendix for the list of agencies.

A total of nine stakeholders participated in the project. The interview instrument was pilot tested to ensure that the items selected for the questionnaire (Appendix C), accurately addressed the research questions, and that the questionnaire was “comprehensive, well-defined, clearly understood and presented in a consistent manner” (Hassan et al, 2006).

A search of governmental and non-governmental agencies was conducted using the online government of Saint Lucia portal and discussions with local juvenile justice agencies. As COVID-19 protocols limited physical contact, stakeholder interviews were conducted via Zoom (Zoom Video Communication Inc) for a maximum of one hour. Stakeholders were informed about anonymity measures and aggregate formatting of the data in the report.



*There is a significant increase in the last five years of girls' involvement with capital offenses, which is a 10% increase. Before it was mainly for supervision due to altercation with another girl. Their contact is similar to that of boys but distinct differences e.g. boys charged with actual possession, girls charged due to proximity to crime.*

-Key informant



## CHAPTER 4:

# RESULTS AND ANALYSES

This analysis uncovered several important themes as it relates to girls 18 years and younger who are in conflict with the law and those who need care and protection in Saint Lucia. Those themes are outlined using the five research questions that were considered in this study:

### **1. *What are the key issues that lead to girls 18 years and younger having contact with the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?***

Stakeholders (both direct care and policy-level agencies) indicated that the key issues that lead to girls 18 years and younger having contact with the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia are: abuse, neglect, truancy, violent crimes, and other anti-social behaviour, to include serving as accomplices to crime with male counterparts. A major concern among stakeholders about girls who are processed in the system is their high risk for sexual abuse and reproductive issues (particularly teen pregnancy, STIs), and the need for care and protection due to abuse.

The desk review uncovered a similar pattern among girls in Saint Lucia, as well as the wider Caribbean (International Labour Organization, 2018; Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports, 2019; UNICEF, 2017). Notably, one of the major risk factors highlighted in the research that led to girls' contact with the juvenile justice system is abuse (particularly sexual abuse). To escape abuse, vulnerable girls tend to run away, become truant, associate with peers who engage in risky behaviour, and can also become violent.

It is important to convey the urgent need for the integration of gender-responsiveness in the juvenile justice system as girls have been identified as a population of "children who are likely to face discrimination" when in conflict with the law (UNODC, 2013).

Aside from the usual problematic abuse patterns (sexual and physical), Saint Lucian children are at risk of neglect when their basic needs are not being met by parents or caregivers. Children originating from poor and dysfunctional households also have food insecurity issues. When this happens children, especially girls, are at an increased risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse due to exploitation when seeking to obtain food.

This pattern presents a troubling reality for vulnerable girls who originate from dysfunctional homes; and who contend with issues of abuse and poverty with a resulting pull towards anti-social behaviours and contact with the juvenile justice system.

## **2. What is the specific legislation that has been written for girls 18 years and younger who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?**

Policymakers, practitioners, and agencies are guided by the stipulations presented in the Child Justice and Child (Care, Protection and Adoption) Acts of 2018 as they seek to provide interventions and services to children and adolescents who are 0-18 years.

Both pieces of legislation seek to protect the rights of children among other benefits. The laws raised the age designation for young people involved in juvenile justice from 15 to 18. Following the passage of both Acts, Saint Lucia has started reform efforts to ensure compliance with the dictates of the law. Section 50(3) of the CJA stipulates: "A child who is sentenced to attend a secure residential facility shall not be detained in a correctional facility or in police custody pending designation of the place where the sentence is to be served". (Saint Lucia, 2018b)

The CJA also stipulates in Section 1 that the Court shall, after a finding of guilt in relation to a child, impose a sentence on the child in accordance with this Part to: "(b) Promote an individualised response that is appropriate to the circumstances of the child and proportionate to the circumstances surrounding the offense; (c) Promote the reintegration of the child into the family and community; and (d) ensure that necessary supervision, guidance, treatment, or service which form part of the sentence, assist the child in the process of reintegration and rehabilitation." (Saint Lucia, 2018b)

The CJA mandates that if detention is necessary, the least restrictive type of detention that is "appropriate to the child and the offense should be selected." Considering this mandate, Saint Lucia must ensure that effort is made to not only accommodate the needs of boys who are in conflict with the law but girls as well. It must be noted, however, that in the absence of an appropriate detention facility for girls, those who are in conflict with the law have had to be detained at the Bordelais Correctional Facility—an adult prison. While there is a separate facility for boys, The Boys Training Centre, there is no designated residential facility that is appropriate to house girls.

Prior to the passing of the CJA, persons who were 18 years were not considered to be children but with the new law those who are 18 years and younger are considered to be children, with the age of criminality remaining at 12 years old (Saint Lucia, 2018b).

Some stakeholders are concerned that Saint Lucia is not adequately positioned to satisfy the requirements of the law based on the following beliefs:

*"Saint Lucia does not have the required resources to respond to the needs of girls for care and protection. Making it very difficult to fulfil the mandate in the Child Justice Act as lack of appropriate placement for girls is a significant issue. We do not have a residential facility for girls and thus the decision would be to have girls detained*

*at Bordelais Prison facility if the offense is serious. Integration of Acts is three-fifths completed; however, some persons are still not acquainted with the legislation.”*

Other stakeholders are concerned with the little to no resources available to educate other staff about the provisions of the laws. While respondents have a general awareness of the legislation that was enacted, they could not speak to whether or not the Acts or any associated policy were gender-informed or responsive.

Stakeholders articulated a need for a residential facility as one of the first steps to address the issue of girls who find themselves interfacing with the law as well as for those who need care and protection.

### **3. What are the policies or practices that have been designed and implemented to address the specific needs of girls 18 years and younger who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?**

The Caribbean region still struggles with effective strategies to address the unique needs of vulnerable girls and those who are in conflict with the law. A 2017 UNICEF report identified that girls are currently engaging in comparable crimes as their male counterparts. However, the system is deficient in addressing those issues including utilization of programming focused on girls, related to victimization, abuse, poverty, mental health, and developmental issues.

Stakeholders shared, that agencies have established general policies and practices that they adhere to, but they also indicated that they did not have any gender-specific policies that they are guided by. However, they recognised a need to focus on approaches that account for the unique needs of girls. The views of stakeholders are captured below:

*“Having a seat at the legislative table and having some influence in terms of political directorate on island, there is a lot more that we can do. In Saint Lucia, many people who enter politics do not have social science background, and do not understand issues or realize there is a need. Older civil servants have archaic beliefs re sexual and reproductive health and vulnerability.”*

*“Our programs are not gender-specific. Moving forward this is something to focus on.”*

*“No specific framework exists; however, [we] understand that the work needs to happen.”*

The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, 1985 (Beijing Rules 26.4) stipulates that:

*“Young female offenders placed in an institution deserve special attention as to their personal needs and problems. They shall by no means receive less care, protection, assistance, treatment, and training than young male offenders. Their fair treatment shall be ensured.”(United Nations, 1985)*

Signatories are mandated to adhere to the rules and regulations set forth by those treaties. Any deviation by Party States would constitute a clear violation of those rules and regulations. Saint Lucia is one of the member states that does not have a detention facility for girls, even with mounting evidence that girls are engaging in deviant behaviour comparable to their male counterparts.

In response to concerns about addressing the unique needs of girls and complying with legislative mandates and international standards, Saint Lucia, and other members of the OECS have embarked on reform efforts. However, progress has been slow. Saint Lucia piloted a formal pre-adjudication diversion program, the Court Diversion Project (CDP), from 2011 to 2014 but it ended due to lack of funding. This project targeted both boys and girls.

Other agencies such as the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) have implemented frameworks to address gender inequalities within member States, including Saint Lucia. One such effort is CDB's Country Gender Assessment (CGA) for Saint Lucia, which seeks to address development needs related to gender equality. One of its major thrusts is "gender-responsive planning and programming as part of a process of mainstreaming gender into CDB's mission and project activities" (Ranjitsingh, 2016).

Ranjitsingh (2016) also indicated that the country's prior lack of a national gender policy created challenges for the Department of Gender Relations (DGR) in effectively meeting its objectives as an agency. The CGA report explains that DGR has been challenged in meeting its goals due to financial and human resource limitations. "Saint Lucia does not have a system of gender focal points" and the issue of "gender mainstreaming is absent in all government ministries" (Ranjitsingh, 2016).

Given this finding, the CGA made recommendations to support integrative gender-mainstreaming initiatives throughout agencies and governmental ministries. A DGR representative, in a July 2021 statement, revealed that a national gender policy draft has been submitted and is awaiting approval from the relevant authorities.

#### **4. To what extent do residential care facilities and rehabilitation centres in Saint Lucia include gender-responsive strategies and girl-centered approaches in their programming?**

Stakeholders held the view that residential care facilities and rehabilitation centres in Saint Lucia are trying their best to meet the needs of their clients to include vulnerable girls. However, they recognized their limitations as it pertains to the issue of programming specific to girls. Some held the view that the only agency advocating for gender-responsive interventions and services is Girls of A Feather Saint Lucia Inc. (GOAF).

Section 3 of Article 3 of the Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC) which has been ratified in Saint. Lucia, stipulates that signatories must:

*"Ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision."* (United Nations Children's Fund, 1989)

However, current programming for children and adolescents is lacking in the areas of reintegration and rehabilitation, due to there being no residential facility for young girls, and only limited aftercare services. There is also an absence in Saint Lucia of effective systems to monitor the progress of youth offenders on their release (USAID, 2018). The Department of Human Services does not run any of their own programmes and refers girls to other community agencies.

The findings of a USAID 2018 report revealed that staff convey the message that Saint Lucia Bordelais prison has extensive programming. But the reality is that the youth who are sent to the prison spend most of the days in “solitary confinement, lacking access not only to rehabilitation but also time outside of their cell.” The report also documented realities of physical abuse, unmet mental health needs, and poor conditions of confinement for those youth. The report elucidates a need to focus on girls since they require more care and protection especially in the absence of a residential facility for them. Upton Gardens is a day program that provides rehabilitative services to girls, but the organisation does not have capacity for a residential centre.

In Saint. Lucia, stakeholders who work with vulnerable children who are also involved in the juvenile justice system reiterated that adverse childhood events – such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse; maltreatment; and neglect – are among the most prevalent risk factors among the girls with whom they work. However, they are unable to effectively provide gender-specific interventions to vulnerable girls.

##### **5. What resources are needed to implement a girl-centered community service program for the target population of girls 18 years and younger involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia?**

All respondents indicated they hope to develop gender-responsive programming soon to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the law as well as the needs of their beneficiaries. They are utilising what they think is best for their client population. But they highlighted among the remaining needs, the ability to physically accommodate more clients, having more access to funding, access to training, increased staffing with psychosocial and gender-mainstreaming expertise, and access to systems and software to monitor and evaluate their programs effectively.

At the time of this publication, only one programme caters to the needs of children (boys and girls from 0-18 years) who need care and protection. The agency is limited in terms of how many children they can accommodate. The programme can only accommodate up to twenty-one children. This reality further compounds adverse situations for vulnerable girls who need care and protection but, due to the system’s lack of adequate resources, may be returned to dysfunctional environments.

It is important to note that most agencies have resources (material or non-material) that help with daily processes, but the consensus was that they could benefit from more resources to meet the level of need with which they are confronted. Stakeholders also recognized that they were not following any gender-specific guidelines although they felt that they were doing the best that they could to address the presenting needs of girls.

Some stakeholders also felt that they needed more sophisticated data capture systems to help inform them about best strategies in meeting unmet needs of vulnerable populations. Stakeholders articulated the following areas of concern:

*“There is no gender guidance note to refer to. However, individualized plans are developed. The unique needs of females are considered, and services tailored to them.”*

*“Documentation in terms of where we are, where we’re headed and how we’re going to get there is important. Varying individuals may have a different vision in mind. Need to have meeting to discuss what are the services to provide to individuals, how to make them more inclusive, gender and shock responsive. A strategic document that guides operations and shows offerings of gender responsive nature is important.”*

*“There is a tremendous challenge in the absence of concrete data, which makes it difficult to speak to success. There are challenges in terms re-integration since we do not have a comprehensive aftercare programme for vulnerable girls and boys.”*

Another major limitation for agencies is their deficit in providing training to staff that help recognize and respond to the needs of girls. Generally, staff in the juvenile justice system in St. Lucia are qualified in their areas of expertise but, due to the absence of established gender-responsive policies, agency staff engage in ad hoc methods as they seek to best address the unique needs of vulnerable male and female populations. Some staff members recognize the need for training and have opted to get training on their own.

## CHAPTER 5:

# CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Vulnerable girls remain a neglected and marginalised segment of Saint Lucia's society. Young people represent approximately 22% of the country's population with one in three adolescents being poor and a third being educationally disconnected, unemployed and untrained (UNICEF, 2021). Of major concern also is the involvement of young girls engaging in similar deviant behaviours as their male counterparts in a system that is not well-positioned to address their needs. The juvenile justice system was predicated on what may be considered a gender-neutral approach. However, not having programs focused on girls' specific needs may inadvertently creates the gaps that contribute to the inability to address the aforementioned specific needs of girls when they become involved in the system.

Based on the findings of the situational analysis, several recommendations have been considered. The list of recommendations is by no means exhaustive but serves to provide guidance towards gender-responsivity and mainstreaming in Saint Lucia by all departments and agencies who provide services and interventions to vulnerable children and young people, with emphasis on girls.

### **GOVERNMENTAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **1. Enact national gender policy to address agencies serving girls and women.**

Lack of political commitment, resources, and money were among a few factors identified by stakeholders as hindrances to implementation of programming for girls. Political will is paramount in ensuring that a national gender framework is approved by Cabinet, which can serve as a first step in ensuring that all Government Departments and Non-governmental Agencies are provided with and adhering to standard guidelines of gender-programming and mainstreaming in the delivery of services to the citizenry.

A national gender policy would be integral in laying the groundwork for a framework from which these agencies could build their programming. As stated earlier, there is a fundamental need to address gender inequity in Saint Lucia. While the stakeholders we interviewed stated that a seat at the legislative table would be ideal for them as care providers, it is also critical that care providers consider including their beneficiaries in the developmental process. As noted above, the DGR has developed a gender policy draft that can be adopted.

**2. Adopt a gender framework which includes guiding principles for gender-responsive practices and instructions on implementing CJA provisions within the context of girls' needs.**

Gender-mainstreaming focussed on equitable access and benefits for both males and females is an issue that requires critical focus in Saint Lucia, a country that still, as a norm, engenders different treatment in the political and educational/social sectors, and labour market. This posture, when embraced by any society, can lead to a perpetuation of victimization and discrimination with harsh impacts on the poor and other marginalized groups.



*We can do more in terms of advocacy and advocating for the rights of girls in Saint Lucia. It was difficult to get persons in positions of power to understand why access to resources is important.*

-Key informant

It is, therefore, imperative that more effort is directed towards developing and establishing a national gender framework that will provide guidance to both governmental and non-governmental agencies in their programming efforts. This is especially true for this context as, while new Child Justice laws have been enacted, more work is needed to ensure that the guidance put forth is well understood by all stakeholders and that any potential deficiencies are effectively resolved.

The lack of gender-specific policies or practices in programmes for girls raises concern. Traditionally, these types of programmes may still implicitly feature discriminatory gender norms, practices, and expectations

which contribute to negative psychosocial and socioeconomic outcomes for women and girls. Thus, the programmes would not adequately address the social, physical, and emotional needs of girls (Population Council, 2010). One of the critical factors identified that can support the transformation of systems to becoming more gender-responsive is the adoption of gender-responsive institutional norms, rules, and practices (UNICEF Office of Research, 2020).

This type of transformation, in addition to the application of the gender-responsive lens, would be more effective with stakeholders understanding the concept of ACEs, trauma, and their impact, and the distinct pathways through which girls enter the juvenile justice system, when developing their policies and practices. Stakeholders should also assess their programs using the gender continuum to identify how current policies rate from gender-discriminatory to gender-transformative.

At this juncture, there is the potential to include beneficiaries in a consultative process. Including those with lived experiences and for whom the policies and programmes would be developed, girls who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Saint Lucia, would be valuable.



Understanding the specific needs of girls in Saint Lucia, as well as the facilitators and barriers to their psychosocial and biological development, would be central to strengthening any proposed intervention. Inclusion of the youth voice into programming targeting them is also one of the Fundamental Principles (Principle 3) of the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines) (United Nations, 1990a).

Currently, there is no language within these pieces of legislation that speaks to accommodating the physical and psychosocial needs of girls who come into contact with the law. As such, the juvenile justice system is not sufficiently equipped to address their needs at this time. A national gender framework should serve as a useful resource in the legislative reform process, with the aim to better address the needs of underserved populations, with emphasis on girls 18 years and younger.

**3. Ensure that all governmental departments are provided with the requisite resources to facilitate effective gender-responsive programming and training of Staff.**

Furthermore, aside from not having gender-specific guidelines to address the needs of girls, agencies that provide services to vulnerable children are not equipped with sufficient resources to effectively address the needs of their client population and address the stipulations within the Child Justice Act. Agencies which serve the interests of vulnerable girls should be provided with assistance from governmental agencies. Failure to provide attention and resources can result in programs not being able to effectively address the needs of vulnerable girls, thereby hindering their ability to achieve their full potential. On the contrary, efforts that are geared towards supporting gender-specific interventions can accrue great value in helping vulnerable girls have a voice and empowering them to be fully self-actualized.

Given that girls generally participate in less violent crimes than boys, more resources are needed for alternative diversionary programs that prevent detention. The Government of Saint Lucia should also consider investing in prevention programs focused on education, workforce development, and psychosocial programming to address the root causes of girls involved in juvenile justice and to prevent deeper involvement in the system.

**4. Develop a residential program designed to serve girls exclusively.**

Given that the only residential facility in St. Lucia is an adult detention facility which is not suitable for youth or girls, a residential facility should be designed to serve girls only. Research indicates that girls are committing more serious crimes which may require increased capacity for residential settings. Gender-responsive components should be incorporated in programming. This should include:

- Psycho-emotional care for at-risk girls, ensuring that their sexual and reproductive needs are addressed in therapeutic interventions
- A space or setting that protects and nurtures girls 18 years and younger
- Social/life skills training to vulnerable girls with emphasis on building self-esteem, capacity, self-awareness, and empowerment

- Mentoring components that strengthen girls' support networks to mitigate the impact of ACEs
- Interventions that engender independent living for older vulnerable girls who are no longer in school
- Vocational and academic training/assistance to facilitate improved educational outcomes and school connectedness among girls at risk of negative life outcomes

**5. Establish a research and monitoring unit that collects and utilises gender-responsive data to inform agencies about best practices and standards, trends, and effective programming related to girls in conflict with the law.**

The government should mandate that organisations that serve girls throughout the juvenile justice continuum track data specific to girls, and regularly participate in program evaluation activities to determine if their programmes positively impact outcomes using a gender-specific lens. In addition, organisations should track program performance to assess whether program activities are appropriate.

## **AGENCY-LEVEL**

**1. Implement gender-responsive aftercare services that highlights the unique needs and best interest of girls for facilities serving girls.**

It is best that interventions start no less than 60 days prior to community release of girls to prepare them for reentry. Upon reentry, they are to receive community aftercare services to protect and support them toward achieving their full potential. It is recommended that aftercare services for vulnerable girls follow the girls design model, which embraces three core principles to include (1) identify the girls, (2) listen to them, and (3) design programmes with them. Effort must also be placed on addressing ACEs in programming interventions that are specific to girls' experiences. Service interventions must also accentuate and maximize on the strengths of individual clients. Aftercare services should be provided in alignment with diversion programs that seek to prevent or divert girls away from confinement.

Gender-responsive aftercare services should use a trauma-informed approach. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines the trauma informed approach as one which considers that:

*"...all people at all levels of the organization or system have a basic realization about trauma and understand how trauma can affect families, groups, organizations, and communities as well as individuals. People's experience and behaviour are understood in the context of coping strategies designed to survive adversity and overwhelming circumstances. ."*(SAMHSA, 2014)

In considering trauma, recent studies assessing ACEs and root causes, have recommended examining the use of gender-specific interventions as female and male offender needs may vary due to the gendered difference associated with the cause of and response to the trauma as well as their entry into the juvenile justice system (Davis et al., 2016; Michael T. Baglivio, Nathan Epps, Kimberly Swartz, Mon Sayedul Huq, Amy Sheer, 2014).

**2. Establish formal linkages and MOUs among agencies that provide service delivery and intervention to vulnerable girls.**

Several stakeholders mentioned the lack of resources available to implement provisions in the Child Justice Act. Limited resources also prevent the delivery of a seamless continuum of supports when girls come into contact with the juvenile justice system. Establishing formal partnerships among agencies can help to identify areas that need to be targeted for services, and ensure that agencies work together to give vulnerable girls access to services they need. With formal partnerships, agencies can better leverage public resources to ensure that the right girls get the services they need.

**3. Advocate to ensure that girls are involved in the process of developing a national gender policy.**

To catalyse efforts made by the existing Juvenile Justice Reform Project in Saint Lucia, the project wishes to suggest the use of an evidence-based, girl-centered approach to constructing programmes and policies, personalizing for every girl's needs by assessing her social, physical, financial, and human assets and offering her the respective services to improve them. This evidence-based, girl-centered module has been used at an international level and designed by *Population Council* (Population Council, 2010) and *GirlSPARKS* (GirlSPARKS, n.d.), two reputable organizations focused on research to improve policies, programs, and products in three areas: HIV and AIDS; poverty, gender, and youth; and reproductive health.

**4. Implement gender-normed assessments to assess for girls' therapeutic needs.**

In-addition to standard existing tools such as the Structured Assessment of Violent Risk in Youth (SAVRY) and TheraScribe, and as part of standard therapeutic care, which measure the risk factors leading to high risk levels of crime, GOAF should consider using other tools that have been normed on girls. For example, the *Early Assessment Risk List for Girls* (EARL-21G) can be used during the intake process to ensure that all levels of risk are assessed. Other assessment instruments can be used such as the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory - Adolescent Version (SASSI-A2), especially since substance abuse has been identified as a risk factor in the literature for Saint Lucian adolescents. The Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory - Screening Version (YLS/CMI-SV) can also be used in conjunction with the above-mentioned assessment tools to ascertain consistency of results, among other benefits. It is also best that qualified female psychologist/therapist/counsellors provide services to GOAF's client population of vulnerable girls.

**5. Provide continuing professional training in gender-responsiveness to staff.**

Through this research, stakeholders were found to have a better understanding of girls' issues and behaviours based on their research and the patterns that they see during their work with vulnerable girls. Most of the stakeholders who work with vulnerable girls see the need to embrace changes that focus on gender sensitivity and mainstreaming in all programming efforts that deal with vulnerable young people. Recognizing that need, some of the stakeholders who have not received gender-responsive training at agencies that serve young populations are opting to receive training by using personal funds to do so.



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