

Need for Gender-Responsive Reentry Services Supported by Local Data

For the past couple of decades, practitioners and researchers have recognized that male and female offenders may have contact with the justice system for different reasons, present with different underlying issues, and respond differently to various treatment strategies¹. With an increasing number of ex-offenders returning to our communities and a greater-than-ever need to efficiently utilize limited resources, it is even more important to acknowledge these gender differences and consider possible implications. Locally, 65 percent of adult female arrestees tested positive for at least one drug compared to 56 percent of adult males as part of the 2009 Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program (not shown). In addition, a significantly larger percentage of female arrestees had prior drug treatment, mental health issues, housing and employment needs, and had children. Additionally, adult female arrestees were more likely to have had prior foster care placement as a youth and involvement with a partner who had contact with the justice system, speaking to a possible lack of positive family and social relationships.

**Table 1
FEMALE ARRESTEES HAVE DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND NEEDS THAN MALE ARRESTEES***

	Female	Male
Received prior drug treatment	42%	27%
Exchanged sex or sexual favors for drugs, money, or other things	22%	10%
Have children	73%	49%
Ever had an open case with Child Welfare Services	36%	11%
Ever had a mental health diagnosis	34%	20%
Ever been in the foster care system	16%	9%
Unemployed and looking for work	67%	47%
Ever been homeless	56%	41%
Ever had a partner that was arrested and booked into jail	68%	26%
Total	96 - 271	243 - 495

*Significant at the $p > .05$ level.

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2009.

These SAM data regarding gender differences among arrestees have been consistent over the years and support the efforts in the field to revise the type of treatment and care women receive both in custody and upon release. Gender-responsive assessments, treatment models, and correction programming appear throughout the nation. Locally, several entities working with women have adopted these best practices, including San Diego County Probation Department, local treatment centers, and jail facilities (i.e., Las Colinas). While strides have been made, the research is clear that more efforts are needed to support women in their successful reentry back into the community. More information about arrestee drug use can be found in the CJ Bulletin, 2009 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in San Diego Region located at www.sandag.org/cjc.

¹ Bloom, B., Owen, B., and Covington, S. (2003). *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders*. Washington D.C.: US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. See also, Buell, M. (2005). Women in contact with the criminal justice system have specific needs. **Corrections Today**, December 1, 2005.