

Title: What Girls Need: An examination of prevention and support services within schools settings and how they contribute to girls' positive development

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Introduction: In considering recent statistics, present and future conditions for adolescent girls and women appear bleak.

- ⇒ In 2002, 53% of twelfth graders reported having used an illicit drug in their lifetime.
- ⇒ Women report attempting suicide during their lifetime about three times as often as men (Krug et al. 2002).
- ⇒ Data from the National Women's Study, a longitudinal national survey of women at least 18 years of age, show 683,000 women report being forcibly raped each year. In all, 84% of rape victims do not report the offense to the police.
- ⇒ Every year 3 million teens--about 1 in 4 sexually experienced teens--acquire a sexually transmitted disease.
- ⇒ 1% of females suffer from anorexia, while 4% struggle with bulimia nervosa.

These statistics illustrate the risks girls are facing everyday, in every part of the country. Regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or location, girls are dealing with societal problems that need to be addressed. The purpose of this study is to find what physical and emotional conditions are associated with specific issues, and more importantly to evaluate the resources that are available to females within their school settings. School's role in teenage life cannot be underestimated, whether as an anxiety producing one or a place of safe haven. Schools are often one of the largest influences in a teen's life. With this in mind, it could be argued that the school environment has an equally great need to be the one that provides support and prevention for the myriad of problems facing today's adolescent females. In addition to the present practice of supplying counseling facilities to those with problems, schools and communities should be fostering prevention services to make schools positive influences on developing adolescents. To what extent are they meeting those needs?

Rationale:

Thus far in my Saint Joseph's career, all of my courses have introduced me to students' needs that go beyond just the academic realm. Schools in Society (Spring 2005), Educational Psychology (Fall 2005), and Introduction to Sociology (Fall 2005) have all acted as prerequisites for this proposal. The class that taught me the most about students', especially females, emotional and psychological needs was my Perspectives of Women in Education (Spring 2006) course, taught by my proposed faculty mentor, Dr. XXXX. Within this course, we studied the needs of females in the classroom, in society, and amongst their peers. The work that Dr. XXXX and I did within this course was a solid introduction as to what we would like to further research this summer. Since the course, I have had a much stronger understanding of girls' problems as well as from my work completed last summer. For the summer of 2006, I was a head counselor for fifty high school freshmen and sophomore girls at a residential camp. This job ranged from disciplinarian to role model to nutritionist to guidance counselor. All of my tasks

increased my interest in the issues girls face as teenagers. As conflict resolution, eating disorders, and sexual identity were all issues that I faced daily, I could not help but ask myself, to what extent, if any, are these issues being addressed in their schools?

Along with our interest in this topic and my intended future as a school psychologist, my mentor has an extensive background that makes this project a perfect match. Dr. XXXX has degrees in human development and educational psychology, both of which contribute to the expertise needed in this work. Her work at Saint Joseph's University with women's studies and students' affective needs will assist me in my efforts to understand what females are receiving in terms of prevention and support in their schools and what is still missing from these services.

Statement of the Problem:

Numerous attempts have been made to highlight difficulties faced by teenage girls. One study of note is the American Psychological Association's *Task Force on Adolescent Girls' Strengths and Stresses (2006)*, which stated as its mission "to integrate current knowledge regarding adolescent girls in order to focus on the strengths, challenges, and choices of adolescent girls today". While the obviously larger APA study will inform our future practices in assisting adolescent girls, I don't believe it will substantially answer my questions regarding regional, local, and city girls to the extent I would find useful. So I would like to examine local schools' roles in identifying and supporting girls' issues and at the very least compare my findings against the anticipated National Task Force results.

Methodology:

My project will be to research different services providers, supports, and strategies that aim to assist female adolescents. After collecting information about the supports and their effectiveness, I will interview local school administrators, counselors, and school psychologists in private, public, and parochial high schools to assess how they address students' needs in various areas. In these interviews, I will analyze what problems are affecting a diverse population of female students in different areas of the Philadelphia region and what is available for students. A secondary goal is to find trends that might exist between different teen issues and their gender, socioeconomic status, or designated education. Afterwards I want to evaluate how Philadelphia schools are handling each sub-category of issues specifically conflict resolution, stress management, body image, drug and alcohol abuse, depression and suicide, sexual identity, spirituality, and peer relations. An intended outcome in concluding our research on schools and teen programs, will be to attempt to perform "link ups". These pairings will be our chance to recommend certain services to schools in need and hopefully initiate change concerning teenage needs in our local school districts. This can be performed with a small conference, journal articles, follow up presentations at specific schools, or the creation of a website.

References:

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