

# An Evaluation of the Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court 2021

A Collaborative Project Between the Judicial Council of California  
and the University of California, Los Angeles



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*“There should be a STAR Court in every court building there is.”*

*~STAR Court graduate*

## Introduction

The Judicial Council’s Center for Families, Children & the Courts partnered with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), to conduct a comprehensive study of the Los Angeles Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court. The STAR Court is a juvenile collaborative court program focused on diverting commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) or youth at risk of exploitation from the traditional juvenile court and providing trauma-informed services by specially trained court staff.<sup>1</sup> The STAR Court is one of 11 girls’ courts or CSEC courts in California and is nationally recognized as a model for working with youth in the juvenile justice system.<sup>2</sup>

The court was created in 2012 in an effort to provide the same support and resources in the juvenile justice system that youth victims in the child welfare system receive, as well as to build on the strengths of youth who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and reconnect them with healthy relationships and behaviors. This was in response to observations of poor outcomes for youth experiencing CSE in the delinquency system.

In Los Angeles, 85 percent of youth found in sex trafficking raids have a history with child protective service.<sup>3</sup> There are no estimates about how many girls in the juvenile justice system are trafficking victims or at risk of sexual exploitation. However, girls account for approximately 30 percent of juvenile arrests annually.<sup>4</sup> Anecdotal data suggest that nearly all girls in the juvenile justice system have been sexually exploited at some point.

In 2016, the California Governor signed Senate Bill (SB) 1322 to decriminalize prostitution for youth under the age of 18 since they cannot consent to sex and are thus automatically considered to be a commercially sexually exploited child.<sup>5</sup> Under SB 1322, victims of suspected child sex trafficking are referred to the county child welfare department rather than arrested for a prostitution-related offense. Because victims are often arrested for offenses that are not prostitution-related, such as petty theft, selling drugs, or fighting, SB 1322 has not decreased the number of trafficking victims in the juvenile justice system, however.

This report details the results of a process and outcome evaluation of the STAR Court.

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<sup>1</sup> For information on girls’ courts and CSEC courts, see [www.courts.ca.gov/documents/JCJC\\_Models\\_Girls\\_and\\_CSEC\\_courts.pdf](http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/JCJC_Models_Girls_and_CSEC_courts.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> A.J. Bacharach & D. Strobel, *An Overview of California’s Girls’ and CSEC Courts: Process Evaluation Report* (2021). Retrieved from [www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Girls-Court-Process-Evaluation-Report-FINAL2.pdf](http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Girls-Court-Process-Evaluation-Report-FINAL2.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> M. Ackerman-Brimberg, K. Walker Brown, & A. Newcombe, *Los Angeles Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children, What We’ve Learned: A Four Year Look* (2018). Retrieved from [www.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/FRP-4-year-review-191104b.pdf](http://www.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/FRP-4-year-review-191104b.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> C. Puzzanchera & S. Ehrmann, *Spotlight on Girls in the Juvenile Justice System* (2018). National Center for Juvenile Justice. Retrieved from [www.ncjj.org/publication/Spotlight-on-Girls-in-the-Juvenile-Justice-System.aspx](http://www.ncjj.org/publication/Spotlight-on-Girls-in-the-Juvenile-Justice-System.aspx).

<sup>5</sup> Stats. 2016, ch. 654.

## Review of the Literature

Due to the relative novelty of girls' courts in general, there has not been enough research to determine the effectiveness of these courts. There have been only two studies published: Researchers of the Honolulu's girls' court, which is a general girls' court not specific to CSEC, found positive results in reducing recidivism and running away and encouraged its replication.<sup>6</sup> However, an evaluation of a human trafficking court docket in Ohio revealed high attrition rates and a failure to keep participants from leaving "the life."<sup>7</sup> The authors of that study suggested that the court's conflicting framework of defining participants as both victims and delinquents contributed to the court's failures thus far. That court is also a mandated program versus the STAR Court, which, like most girls' and CSEC courts, is voluntary. Other girls' courts and CSEC courts have reported informal, unpublished positive results.<sup>8</sup> Given the dearth of available research on the efficacy of these courts, this study seeks to fill a critical gap in the literature.

The first phase of the current evaluation provided descriptive data about STAR Court participants and examined participants between the time they entered the program and the time they exited. Results showed a reduction in the number of housing placements, as well as in the average number of days spent in placement, between those times. In addition, recidivism, defined as rearrests in the juvenile justice system, was reduced by about half, a statistically significant reduction.<sup>9</sup> This report details results of the subsequent phase using comparative analyses.

## Study Objectives

The main objectives of this evaluation were to (1) understand how the STAR Court operates and describe the court; (2) examine the outcomes of the STAR Court and describe the court's impacts; and (3) gain insight into the experiences of participants of the court and those who work with these youth.

Although the STAR Court is open to those of any gender, almost all participants have been cisgender girls, and all cases included in this study are girls. Thus, this report will refer to participants as "she," understanding that others may be participants.

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<sup>6</sup> J. Davidson, L. Pasko, & M. Chesney-Lind, "'She's Way Too Good to Lose': An Evaluation of Honolulu's Girls Court" (2011) 21(4) *Women & Criminal Justice*, 308–327.

<sup>7</sup> M. Luminais, R. Lovell, & M. McGuire, "A Safe Harbor Is Temporary Shelter, Not A Pathway Forward: How Court-Mandated Sex Trafficking Intervention Fails to Help Girls Quit the Sex Trade" (2019) 14(5) *Victims & Offenders*, 540–560.

<sup>8</sup> Bacharach & Strobel, *supra*, note 2.

<sup>9</sup> A.J. Bacharach, S. Godoy, D. Strobel, & E. Bath, "Research Update: STAR Court Study: Initial Results" (2020). Retrieved from [www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Research-update-star-court-study.pdf](http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Research-update-star-court-study.pdf).

## **About This Evaluation/Method**

This study used a mixed-methods approach to conduct both a process and outcome evaluation. The process evaluation examined *how* the court program works through a content analysis while the outcome evaluation examined *whether* the program works through comparative analyses.

Prior to the study, the researchers obtained a court order from the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, juvenile division, approving the study procedures and granting a limited waiver of confidentiality to review the case files and collect and analyze the data from those in STAR Court and those in both comparison groups. Additionally, the study received approval from the UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and researchers from both institutions signed an Individual Investigator Agreement.

### **Process Evaluation Method**

The qualitative approach included the following sources for data, detailed below:

1. Focus groups (one with professionals who are part of the multidisciplinary team and one with STAR Court graduates);
2. Interviews with the judge;
3. Collateral material; and
4. Court observation.

The researchers conducted one focus group in 2017 with six members of the STAR Court's multidisciplinary team, including probation officers, attorneys, treatment providers, and advocates, as well as one focus group in 2017 with a sample of transitional age youth who successfully completed the STAR Court program. The questions in the latter group were primarily about their experiences with the court, their overall impressions of the court, what about the court was most helpful, and how the court could be improved. In addition, researchers conducted four interviews with the judge between 2017 and 2019.

With permission from the participants, the focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed, and data from interviews were transcribed from notes taken during the interviews. All focus groups and interviews took place in Los Angeles County. When available, researchers also collected collateral material, such as program manuals, memoranda of understanding, pamphlets or other advertising material, and annual reports, as well as any participant data that the court tracks. They also observed the court four times between 2017 and 2019. The researchers used the analytic software Dedoose to (1) identify overarching themes, (2) create a list of codes representing those themes, and (3) conduct a content analysis of all these qualitative data.<sup>10</sup>

### **Outcome Evaluation Method**

The outcome evaluation began with an exploration of the characteristics of STAR Court participants and went on to examine the STAR Court's impact on traditional outcome measures related to

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<sup>10</sup> Dedoose Version 7.0.23, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2016). Los Angeles, CA: SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, [www.dedoose.com](http://www.dedoose.com).



recidivism (defined as rearrest), placements, absent without leave (AWOLs), bench warrants, victimization, child welfare history, general health, mental health, and substance use.

The researchers conducted an exhaustive review of case files for the 364 girls who began the STAR Court program between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2016. Subsequently, researchers conducted propensity score matching to select a matched comparison group with a 95 percent confidence level. A total of 370 girls from the general delinquency court population who entered the court system within the same time frame were selected in this process. Due to court access and availability of files, the matched comparison group totaled 327 cases. An additional comparison group of 72 self-disclosed youth experiencing CSE in the general delinquency court population was also identified. Researchers then conducted a case file review of all girls in the comparison groups, analyzing data from between the time they entered and the time they exited court.

Researchers conducted univariate and bivariate analyses to examine STAR Court participant descriptive data and comparative data from the time they entered the program to the time they exited the program. Further analyses compared participants in STAR Court to those in the comparison groups on several variables.

Case files may not have contained data for all variables used in this study. Therefore, for some variables, varying percentages of data from each cohort were missing from the analysis. These missing data may have created bias in the analyses and should be interpreted with that potential bias in mind. An explanation of how missing data were handled and the percentage of missing cases in each analysis are listed in the methodology appendix.

Study data were collected and managed using the REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) electronic data capture tools hosted at UCLA. REDCap is a secure, web-based software platform designed to support data capture for research studies, providing (1) an intuitive interface for validated data capture, (2) audit trails for tracking data manipulation and export procedures, (3) automated export procedures for seamless data downloads to common statistical packages, and (4) procedures for data integration and interoperability with external sources.

## About STAR Court: Process Evaluation Results

The STAR Court was created from an observation that youth with a history of exploitation seem to have worse outcomes in the delinquency system than do others. The judge wanted to provide an opportunity for these youth to receive services and have their records expunged, decriminalizing their victimization. One graduate interpreted the court's purpose as to "look at us as victims and not people doing [bad] stuff" or as "bad kids," and other graduates talked about the importance of not feeling judged. It took a few years for court stakeholders to begin to understand the population and buy in to the idea, but after receiving training in CSEC, it "started to make sense," as the judge put it. It is now a nationally recognized court and model for jurisdictions around the country. The STAR Court is a postadjudication program, meaning youth participate in the court after going through the adjudication process (known as a trial in adult criminal court) and the petition has been sustained (known as a guilty verdict in adult criminal court), or the youth submitted a guilty plea.

The focus of the STAR Court is to empower participants in a trauma-informed way. The court and its partners do this by "meeting the girl where she is at" and having realistic expectations. For example, the cycle of victimization in trafficking has been described as very similar to that in domestic violence.<sup>11</sup> Court stakeholders therefore understand that victims will likely return to their trafficker several times before leaving for good.

The court was funded for the first two years by a block grant. Since that grant ended in 2014, the funding comes from the Probation Department and Board of Supervisors, which makes it easier to fund travel, services, and rewards/incentives than if the funding was through the court directly.

### Court Operations

The court is voluntary, and if referred, youth can choose to participate or not. Participation means attending hearings with the judge every four to six weeks, attending counseling, keeping appointments with their probation officer who is specially trained in working with exploited youth, not running away, and attending school.

While reducing recidivism is always a goal of a court, the STAR Court's overarching goals include keeping youth safe and empowering them to improve their lives. In the focus group, the court's stakeholders define that success as youth leaving their trafficker and staying out of "the life"—referring to commercial sexual activity—as well as making positive adult connections and completing high school. The judge defined it as "getting them to their 18th birthday alive with the belief that they can do something with their lives and they have a choice in the future." However, everyone in the court recognizes that success may be a long-term plan for this population. One probation officer pointed out that it could be a year or more after a youth leaves the program that they'll hear from her, excited about taking a step such as graduating or getting a first job.

*"Success is getting [the youth] to their 18th birthday alive with the belief that they can do something with their lives and they have a choice in the future."*

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<sup>11</sup> C. Dabby, "Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking: Advocacy at the Intersections" (2019). Retrieved from [www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/news/domestic-violence-and-human-trafficking-advocacy-intersections](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/news/domestic-violence-and-human-trafficking-advocacy-intersections).

Participants receive services such as life skills training, educational advocacy, tattoo removal, victim advocates who accompany them if they are testifying against their trafficker, and other services. They also have opportunities to talk to other youth with similar life experiences to learn from and support each other. The court also plans special events, such as an annual camping retreat with survivors. In addition, collaborating organizations help the girls transition from the system to independent adulthood, helping them with their rights through Assembly Bill 12, which extends services to foster youth until age 21 rather than 18.<sup>12</sup> These organizations also help the girls find housing and employment as they age out of the system. One person described the court as “the glue between a bunch of different other agencies.” Successful completion of the STAR Court program results in the girl’s delinquency record being expunged.

### **Multidisciplinary Team**

Like other collaborative courts, the STAR Court has a nonadversarial multidisciplinary team (MDT) of professionals to consistently support the youth. This includes, but is not limited to, the judge, probation officers, attorneys, social workers, counselors, and education advocates, all of whom have been specially trained to support youth experiencing human trafficking and CSE. The MDT meets before court to discuss the cases and discuss which next steps might be most appropriate for each girl. In talking about the importance of the MDT, one person said, “It helps because we make informed decisions for the youth as a team. It’s not just one person deciding for them. It’s all about trying to do

*“We make informed decisions for the youth as a team.”*

what’s best for them, which is everybody’s priority.” The consistency of the MDT is important for the youth’s success since it takes time to build trust and rapport. The graduates talked about the MDT as being “like a little family,” and pointed out how it is nice to have people besides their own attorney looking out for them and asking them how

they’re doing. Indeed, members of the MDT talked about the joy they have in celebrating the youth’s successes. Several MDT members also mentioned the importance of collaboration for a successful court.

Graduates also discussed how the judge had a large impact on their success. One graduate described how the judge shows that she hears her and understands that she didn’t ask to be “in the system” or to “have gone through things.” Another graduate described how the judge “never thought I had an anger problem, she just thought I had a problem with expressing myself.” Several agreed that it seemed obvious to them that the judge did not view them or her role as “her job,” but rather as family whom she genuinely wants to help.

Supervision of STAR Court participants is unique. The youth have significantly more frequent contact with their probation officers and attorneys than do those in any other court. One MDT member suggested that the youth have some contact with someone from the MDT every three days, which far exceeds the expectation that probation officers see their clients twice a month. The MDT prioritizes conveying the message that the youth are not alone and can count on them, despite a lack of consistency in their lives in the past. And that message is clearly heard and experienced by the youth: One graduate talked about how she realized that the MDT members were her support system, and she could call them any time and they “wouldn’t leave [her] hanging.” Another referred to the MDT as

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<sup>12</sup> Stats. 2010, ch. 559

“the hotline, helping you, supportive, all the time.” All of the graduates participating in the focus group echoed the idea that the court was a consistent social support system that doesn’t give up on them, regardless of the circumstances.

## Eligibility and Referrals

Any youth under the age of 18 who is in the juvenile justice system and has been involved in or may be at risk for CSE or sex trafficking is eligible to participate in the STAR Court. Referrals come from various professionals interfacing with youth throughout the justice system, including social workers in child welfare and probation officers. In 2014, Los Angeles County developed a first responder program in which a coordinated multiagency response serves youth from identification through the first 72 hours of contact.<sup>13</sup> Using a victim-centered approach, agencies that are part of the protocol may also provide referrals to the STAR Court. Focus group participants and the judge pointed out that youth impacted by CSE can enter the justice system on charges that are not glaringly related to exploitation. The first responder team can identify these youth as potential STAR Court participants.

## Challenges

Defining and measuring success in any CSEC or girls’ court is challenging, and the STAR Court is no different. One focus group participant noted, “We define success every day or we wouldn’t achieve any.” Like similar courts, the STAR Court measures success in both traditional ways—decreased recidivism and violations, increased graduation rates, decreased number of AWOLs—and nontraditional ways, such as small, incremental accomplishments specific to each youth’s circumstances, similar to how success in domestic violence is measured. Since that measurement of success is individualized, it is challenging to compare measures across participants or courts.

Another challenge the STAR Court faces, similar to other CSEC or girls’ courts, is recruiting and retaining staff who are committed to the nonadversarial nature of the court and are able to work against burnout. One focus group participant summarized, “Retaining people is hard because of burnout.”

*“Retaining people is hard because of burnout.”*

Additionally, some individual stakeholders do not fully understand the population or embrace a nonadversarial, collaborative model. Thus, having everyone trained in and knowledgeable about CSEC is a challenge. Another focus group participant noted, “We are still battling traditional methods and personalities.”

Internal structures and longstanding overarching policies could also pose a challenge. As one example, female graduates highlighted how uncomfortable and unsafe it felt to be kept in a holding tank with boys. In the focus group, one graduate stated, “it just needs to be a separate unit” for the girls waiting to go into the courtroom because there is a feeling that the boys know they’re in STAR Court and will have expectations of them when they see them “on the out.” Another said, “Every time you walk out of the tank, the guys act like they ain’t never seen a female in their entire life.”

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<sup>13</sup> Los Angeles County, *Law Enforcement First Responder Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC)* (2015). Retrieved from <https://youthlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Los-Angeles-County-Law-Enforcement-First-Responder-Protocol.pdf>.

Finally, since many youth experiencing CSE do not identify as a victim or do not want any stigma attached to being in a court “for a certain type of person,” some have declined participating in the court. It can be a challenge to overcome that stigma to ensure eligible youth are getting the services they need.

### **Model Practices of the STAR Court**

The importance of collaboration and communication was highlighted in several ways. One stakeholder in the focus group noted, “Whenever something goes on with the girls, everybody lets everyone who needs to know, know, to either support or intervene.” Others pointed out how everyone on the MDT is flexible and committed to the youth and will answer the phone at any time. Other practices highlighted as particularly helpful included having realistic expectations of the youth using a trained, trauma-informed way of communicating with them.

The specialized training for everyone involved with the court and anyone who will be in contact with the youth was described as integral to the court’s and the youth’s success. That training, coupled with honest communication with the youth, allows stakeholders such as probation officers and advocates to establish the trust and rapport necessary to help them. The graduates in the focus group identified the court staff’s comprehensive understanding of their situation, as well as opportunities to hear from and talk with successful survivors, as the most helpful to them during their time in the court program. One graduate shared how talking with survivors at empowerment events made her feel like, “Okay, I’m not alone. I have support.” Finally, many people pointed to the first responder program and a commitment to seeing the youth within 24 hours of their arriving in a group home or juvenile detention as a model practice.

## Outcome Evaluation Results

Prior analyses provided descriptive characteristics of STAR Court participants and showed improved outcomes from the time they entered the court program until the time they exited, which was often when they turned 18 and aged out of the juvenile justice system.<sup>14</sup> For example, STAR Court participants had a significant reduction in the number of citations, number of placements, and number of substantiated child welfare cases between starting and ending the STAR Court program. There was also a significant reduction in the number of youth who had additional child welfare referrals while involved in the court.

### Summary of Results

Results from the current analyses of case file data show that those in STAR Court had a significantly larger reduction in recidivism—defined as rearrest—than did those in the matched comparison group or self-disclosed group. Results also suggest that those in STAR Court are more similar to those in the self-disclosed group than to those in the matched comparison group in several aspects. For example, youth in those groups have similar histories of gang affiliation, mental health issues, substance use, victimization, child welfare involvement, AWOLs, and recidivism during their court involvement.

Each of the following variables have been analyzed for all three groups and detailed on the following pages: Demographics, court participation, education, general health, mental health, substance use, past victimization, child welfare involvement, placements, AWOLs, bench warrants, and arrest history and recidivism.

### Statistical Method

The comparative analyses detailed on the following pages primarily used ANOVA with a Tukey posthoc analysis and chi square, substituting separate Fisher's Exact tests when expected values from small sample sizes made that test most appropriate. All comparative analyses used an alpha level of .05. When data were obtained only from a subset of cases, the correct *n* is indicated. All analyses examined all available case file data or subset of data from each cohort, regardless of when the youth entered the court system. In several analyses, a large percentage of data were missing. In those cases, results should be interpreted cautiously. The methodology appendix describes how missing data were handled.

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<sup>14</sup> Bacharach, Godoy, Strobel, and Bath, *supra*, Note 9.

## Demographics

The following data show demographic characteristics of participants in the three groups. There was a total of 364 participants in STAR Court, 327 in the matched comparison group, and 72 in the self-disclosed group, most of whom were girls of color. Those in the STAR Court and self-disclosed groups were similar—and similarly different from the matched comparison group—in terms of prior gang affiliation.

- Nearly all cases in all groups were female. There were two male participants and two transgender participants in the STAR Court group and one transgender participant in the matched comparison group.
- A majority of youth in all three groups identified as Black or Latinx (see chart 1).
- The median age of entry to court was 16 for girls in STAR Court and the matched comparison groups and 15 for those in the self-disclosed group.
- About one-third of STAR Court youth (31.3%) and self-disclosed youth (37.1%) had prior gang affiliation, significantly more than those in the matched comparison group (11.9%),  $\chi^2(2, N = 729) = 42.2, p < .02$ . The difference between the STAR Court group and the self-disclosed group was not significant (see chart 2).

Chart 1  
Racial Composition of Groups

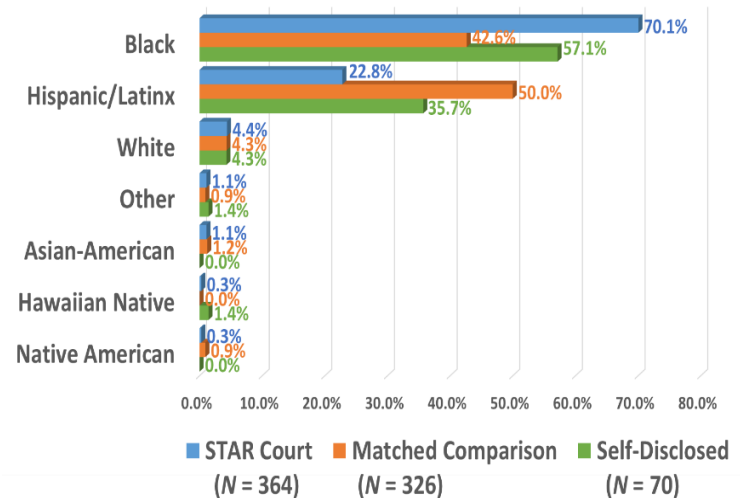
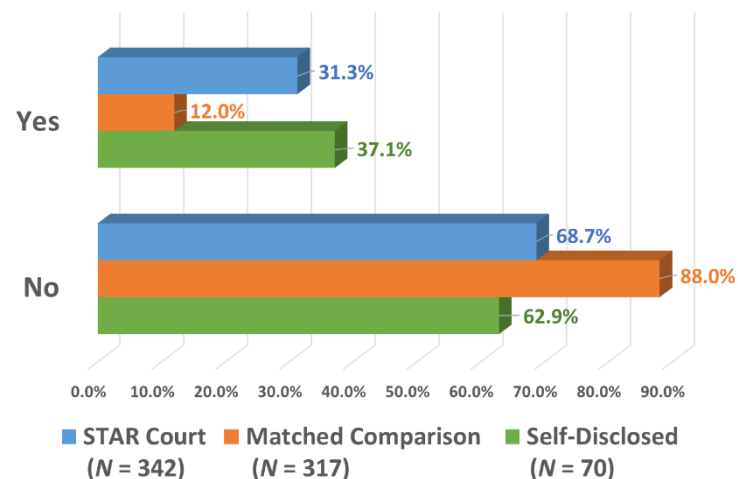


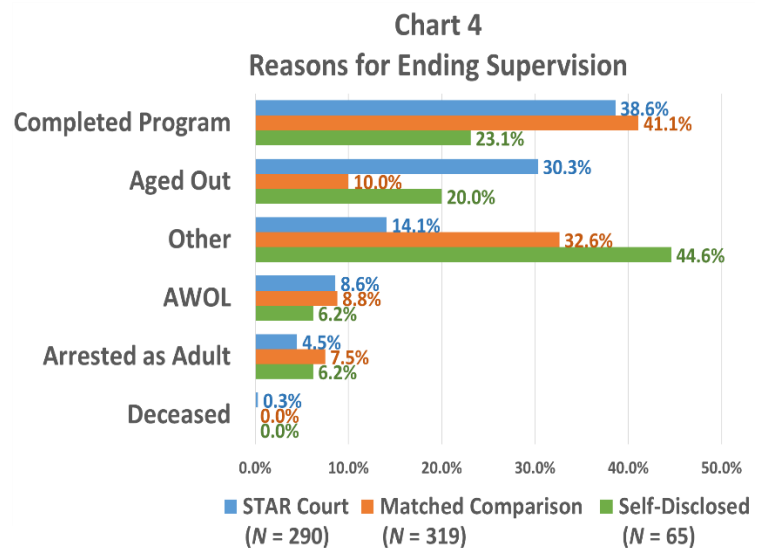
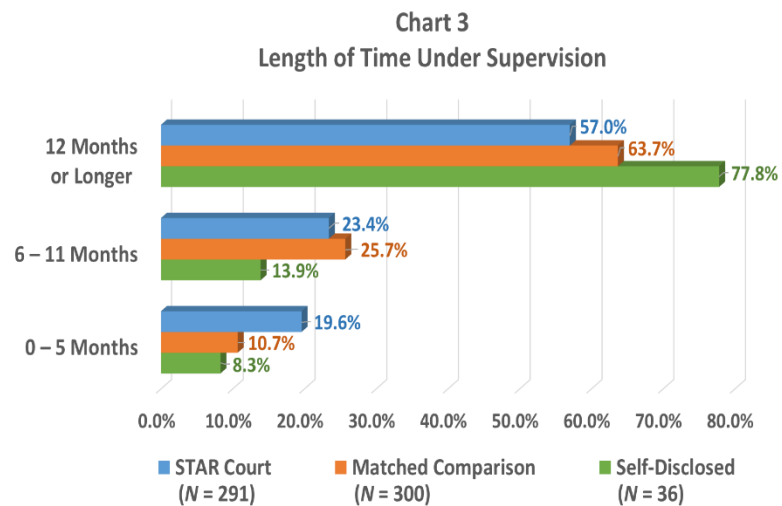
Chart 2  
Gang Affiliation



## Court Participation

Youth in STAR Court generally stayed in the program until they aged out of the system, at which time they were considered to have completed the program or terms of probation, assuming they had been participating in the program and not AWOL the entire time, in which case their case is simply closed due to age. However, aging out and completing the program have been categorized separately here because youth can complete the program before reaching the age of 18. Notably, those in STAR Court spent the least amount of time under supervision compared to the other two groups. This could be due to the emphasis on services and treatment over criminalization and punishment. However, the self-disclosed and STAR groups were missing a large percentage of relevant data, so results from that comparison should be interpreted carefully.

- A one-way ANOVA showed significant differences in length of supervision among the groups. A Tukey post hoc analysis showed that those in the self-disclosed group (M = 28.8 months) stayed in supervision significantly longer than did those in the matched comparison (M = 20.5 months) and STAR Court (M = 15.4 months) groups. The difference in time under supervision between those in the matched comparison and STAR Court groups was also significant ( $F(2,624) = 20.0, p = .00$ ).
- The majority in all groups remained under supervision for at least 12 months (see chart 3).
- Of those for whom data were available, more than one-third of those in STAR Court (38.6%) and the matched comparison group (41.1%) left the court system because they successfully completed the program or probation, significantly more than those in the self-disclosed group (23.1%). Nearly half in the self-disclosed group ended supervision for “other” unknown reasons (see chart 4).
- On average, those in STAR Court ended supervision by aging out of the system at 18, those in the matched comparison group by being arrested as an adult, and those in the self-disclosed group by being AWOL.





## Education

Stakeholder focus group participants noted that a major challenge for the youth is “getting their education in order” because so many have missed a lot of school. Of those for whom data were available, most of the youth have a history of truancy, which could be related to the high number of placements they had assuming they moved around. However, one stakeholder focus group participant pointed out, “It’s not realistic to assimilate back into school.” Several participants mentioned the importance of credit recovery programs, and how obtaining credit even for one class could give youth enough of a confidence boost to believe they can graduate, especially given that many feel they are too far behind to bother trying. These variables had high percentages of missing data, so results should be a starting point for further research.

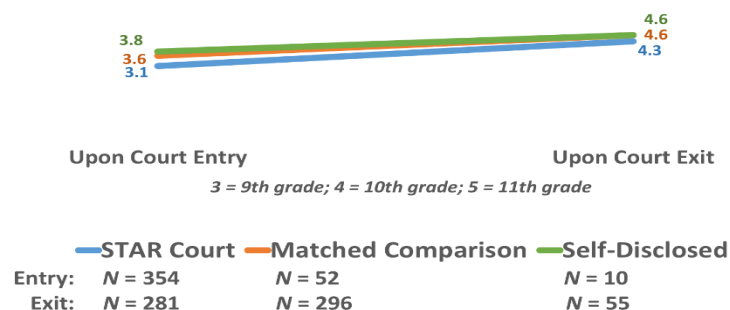
### Prior to Court Entry

- Of the limited data that were available in the matched comparison group, a Fisher’s Exact Test, used to accommodate small sample sizes, showed that significantly more youth in the STAR Court (94.6%) than in the matched comparison group subset (70.6%) had a history of truancy ( $p = .00$ ). The percentage of youth in the self-disclosed group for whom we had truancy data was too small to analyze.
- Upon court entry, a Tukey post hoc analysis of a one-way ANOVA ( $F(2,413) = 5.98, p = .00$ .) found that youth in the matched comparison group ( $M = 3.6$ ) had completed a significantly higher grade level than did those in STAR Court ( $M = 3.1, p = .01$ ). There were no significant differences in highest grade level completed between the STAR Court and self-disclosed ( $M = 3.8$ ) groups or between the matched comparison and self-disclosed groups. At court entry, on average and across all groups, youth were in ninth grade.

### Upon Exit from Court

- Upon court exit, a one-way ANOVA again found significant differences between groups ( $F(2,629) = 3.3, p = .04$ ). The Tukey post hoc analysis showed that those in the matched comparison group ( $M = 4.6$ ) retained a significantly higher completed grade level than those in STAR Court ( $M = 4.3, p = .04$ ). There remained no significant differences among the other groups. The average of all groups upon court exit was 10th grade.
- Youth in STAR Court increased their grade level between court entry and court exit more than did those in the other two groups, although not significantly ( $F(2,338) = 2.2, p = .11$ ) (see chart 5).
- Significantly more youth in the matched comparison group (57.8%) than in STAR Court (40.4%) were still enrolled in school when supervision ended,  $\chi^2(4, N = 605) = 32.1, p = .00$ .

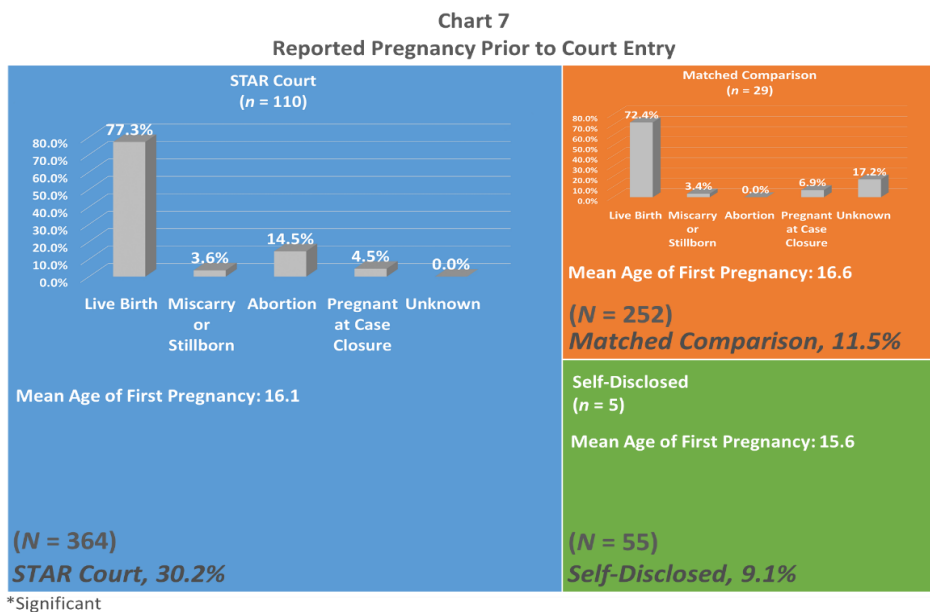
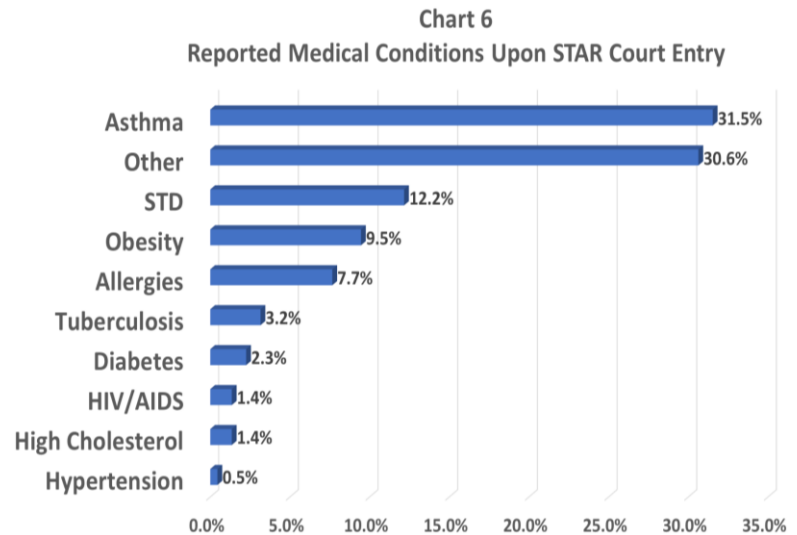
Chart 5  
Grade Level At Court Entry and Exit



## General Health

Researchers obtained general health information for those in STAR Court; however, those data were not available for those in the other two groups. The only exception was pregnancy-related data, for which about 30 percent of cases from the matched comparison group and a quarter of cases from the self-disclosed group were missing, so results should be interpreted with that in mind.

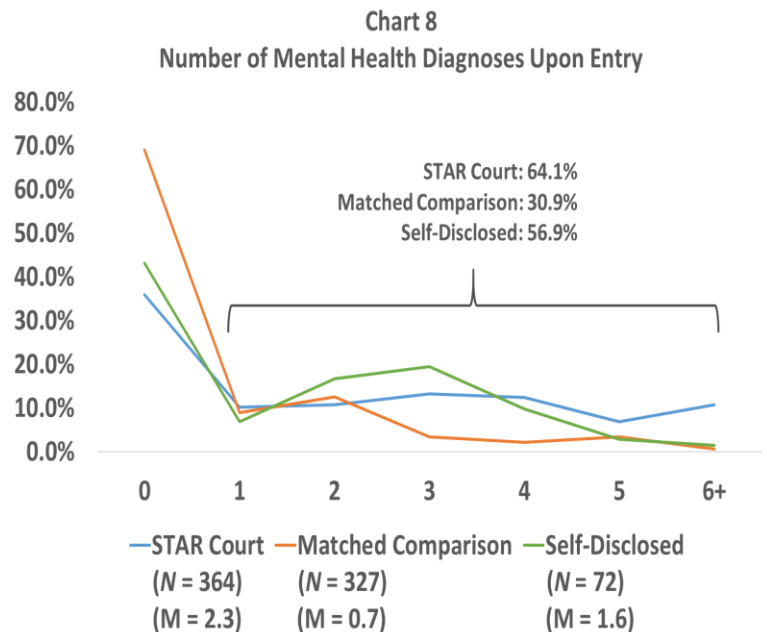
- Nearly half of youth in STAR Court (41%) had a reported medical condition upon court entry. Of those, nearly one-third (32%) had asthma. A smaller percentage of youth had sexually transmitted infections (12%) or obesity (10%). Nearly a third reported “other,” the most common of which were anemia, scoliosis, enuresis, and ovarian cysts (see chart 6).
- Of the 229 STAR Court youth for whom we had full data, a quarter (24%) had their first reported medical exam after starting court supervision. Of the remaining 76%, an average of nine months had passed between the time they had their last medical exam and the time they began court supervision.
- Significantly more youth in STAR Court (30.2%) than in the matched comparison group (11.5%) had a pregnancy prior to entering court,  $\chi^2(2, N = 763) = 36.4, p = .00$ . There were not enough cases in the self-disclosed group to draw adequate results from that group (see chart 7).
- The average age of first pregnancy was 16 for those in the STAR Court and matched comparison groups and 15 for those in the self-disclosed group with no significant differences. About three quarters of youth in STAR Court (77.3%) and in the matched comparison group (72.4%) carried their first pregnancy to term. There were not enough data available for the self-disclosed group to analyze.



## Mental Health

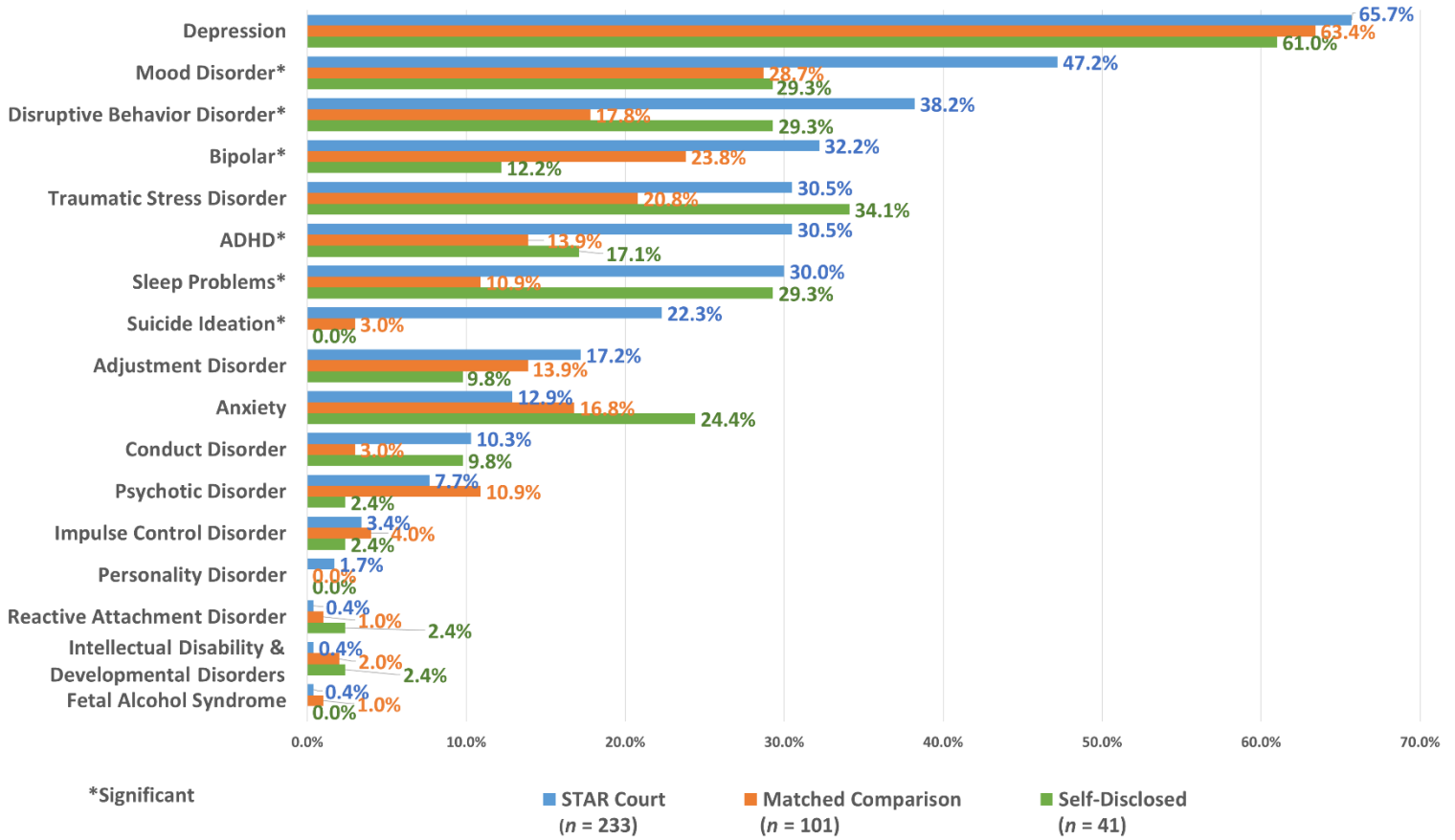
Court exit mental health data were available only for those in STAR Court.<sup>15</sup> These comparative analyses were for baseline data upon court entry only. Youth in the STAR Court and self-disclosed groups were more similar than were those in the matched comparison group in terms of mental health background.

- A significantly higher percentage of youth in the STAR Court (64%) and self-disclosed (56.9%) groups than the matched comparison group (30.9%) had at least one mental health diagnosis upon court entry. The difference between the percentage of youth having a diagnosis in the self-disclosed and matched comparison groups was also significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 763) = 77.6, p = .00$ .
- Similarly, significantly more in the STAR Court (53.8%) and self-disclosed (50.0%) groups than in the matched comparison group (22.0%) had co-occurring diagnoses,  $\chi^2(4, N = 763) = 84.8, p = .00$ .
- Youth in the STAR Court ( $M = 2.3$ ) and self-disclosed ( $M = 1.6$ ) groups had significantly more co-occurring diagnoses than did youth in the matched comparison group ( $M = 0.7$ ) ( $F(2,760) = 58.0, p = .00$ ). The difference between the number of diagnoses between youth in the STAR Court and self-disclosed groups was also significant (see chart 8).
- A significantly higher percentage of youth in STAR Court (22.5%) than in the matched comparison group (9.5%) reported prior suicide attempts, although there were no differences between the STAR Court and self-disclosed (15.7%) groups,  $\chi^2(2, N = 640) = 96.4, p = .00$ . Significantly more youth in STAR Court (14.3%) than the other two groups also reported suicidal ideation prior to court entry. However, the large percentage of missing data related to suicide attempts could have impacted these results.
- Of those who had a diagnosis at entry, the most common diagnosis for all groups was depression (see chart 9, next page).
- Although the vast majority of youth in all groups for whom we had information received counseling prior to court entry, significantly more in the self-disclosed (97.4%) and the matched comparison (92.2%) groups than in STAR Court (81.3%) had received prior counseling. Of those who had prior counseling, significantly more in the self-disclosed group than in STAR Court received an unspecified type of counseling other than anger management and family counseling,  $\chi^2(2, N = 325) = 9.6, p = .008$ . There were no other significant differences among groups (see chart 10, next page). The large percentage of missing data related to counseling could have impacted the results, however.

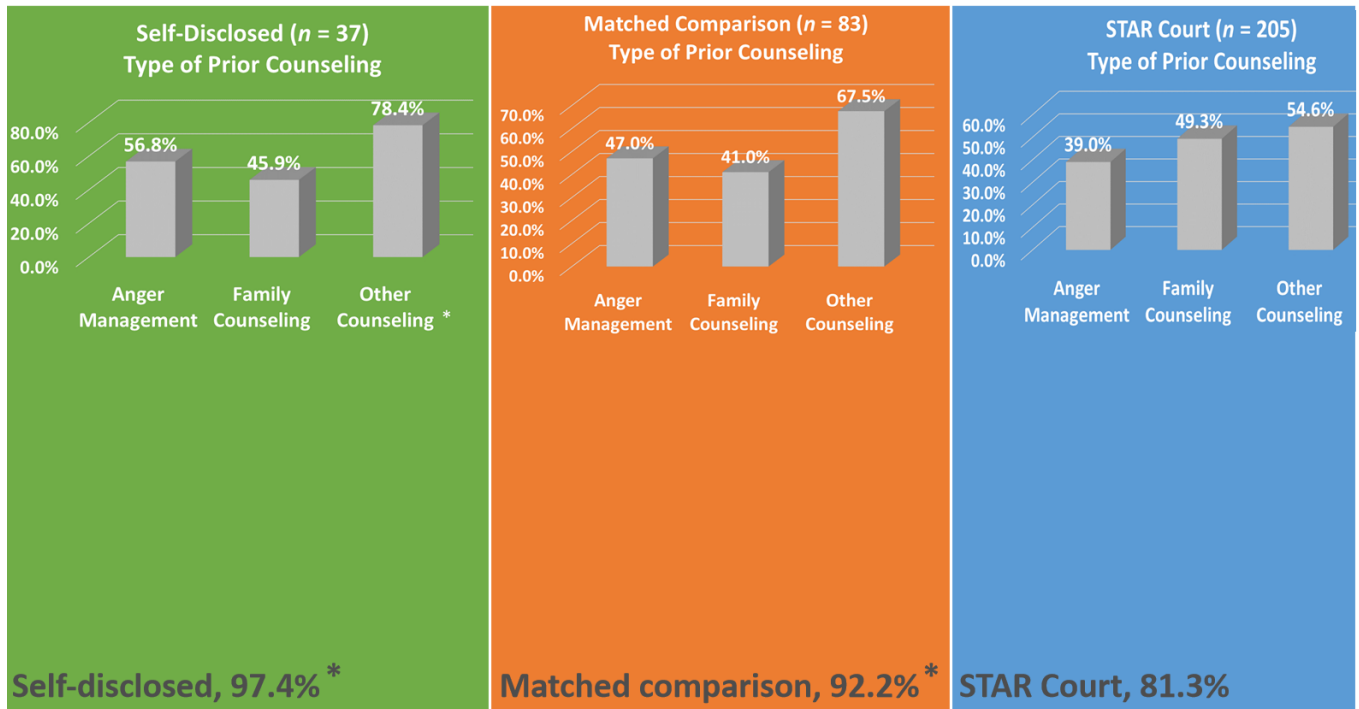


<sup>15</sup> See Bacharach, Godoy, Strobel, and Bath, *supra*, Note 9.

**Chart 9**  
**Mental Health Diagnoses Upon Court Entry**



**Chart 10**  
**Counseling Received Prior to Court Entry**



\*Significant

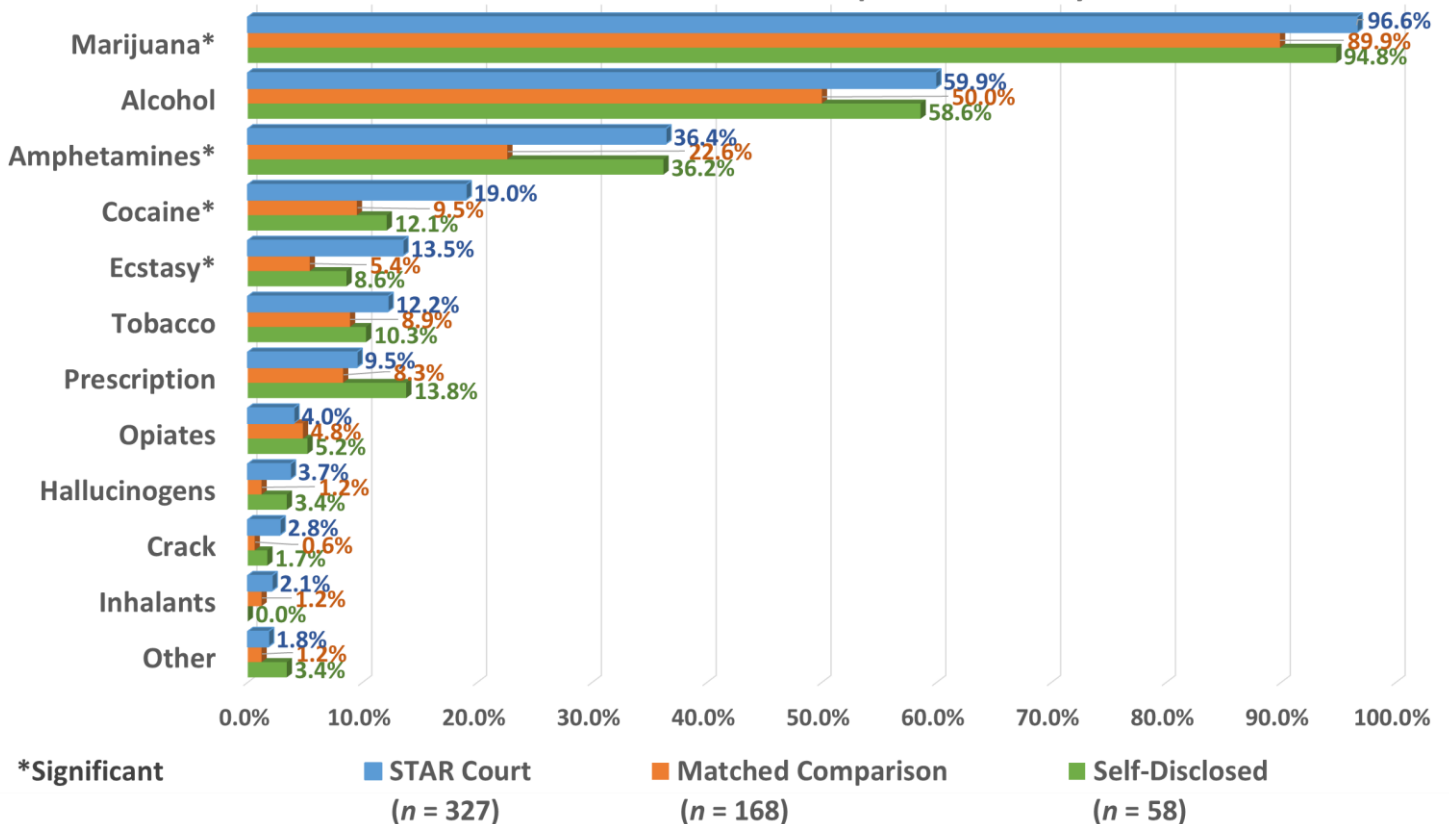
## Substance Use

Substance use data were available only for court entry and had a moderate percentage of missing data for those in the matched comparison and self-disclosed groups. Youth in the STAR Court and self-disclosed groups were more similar than those in the matched comparison group in terms of substance use background.

- Significantly more youth in the STAR Court (90.1%) and self-disclosed (92.1%) groups than in the matched comparison group (68.3%) reported using one or more substances prior to court entry,  $\chi^2(2, N = 627) = 52.3, p = .00$ .
- Significantly more in the STAR Court (77.4%) and self-disclosed (74.1%) groups than in the matched comparison group (62.5%) reported polysubstance use,  $\chi^2(4, N = 553) = 14.6, p = .006$ .
- A Tukey post hoc analysis of a one-way ANOVA ( $F(2,550) = 10.9, p = .00$ ) found that those in STAR Court used significantly more substances ( $M = 2.6$ ) upon court entry than did those in the matched comparison group ( $M = 2.0, p = .00$ ). There were no significant differences between either group and the self-disclosed group ( $M = 2.5$ ).
- Of those with reported substance use, the most used substances for all groups were marijuana, alcohol, and amphetamines (see chart 11).

Chart 11

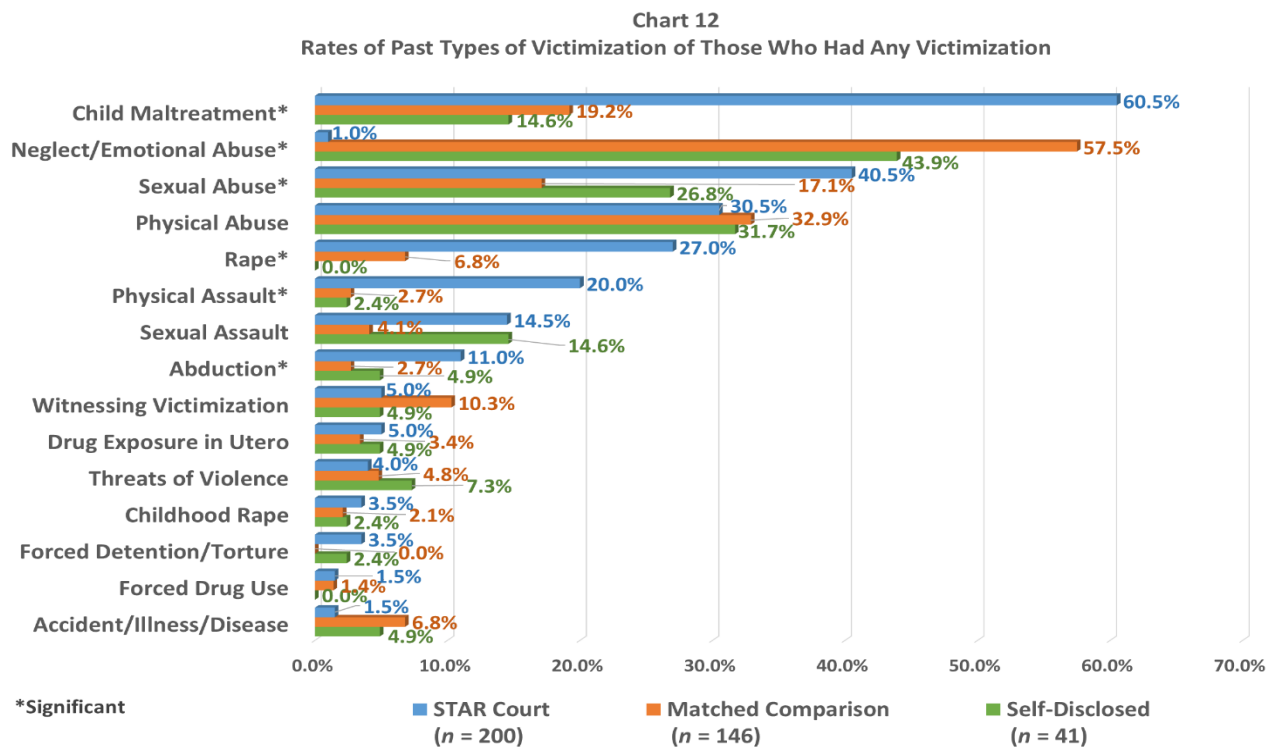
Substances Used Upon Court Entry



## Past Victimization

Youth in the STAR Court and self-disclosed groups generally had more similarities than with the matched comparison group regarding past victimizations. Of those who had a history of victimization, significantly more in STAR Court (42.5%) than in the matched comparison (11.0%) or self-disclosed (17.1%) groups had a history of sexual victimization, including rape, childhood rape, and sexual assault,  $\chi^2(2, N = 387) = 44.4, p = .00$ . A large proportion of the groups were missing victimization data, however, which could have skewed the results.

- Of those for whom data were available, significantly more youth in STAR Court (54.9%) than in the matched comparison group (44.6%) had a reported history of victimization,  $\chi^2(2, N = 763) = 8.5, p = .014$ . Although slightly more in the self-disclosed group had a history of victimization (56.9%), there were no significant differences between that and the other two groups.
- Of those with reported victimization history, youth in the matched comparison group ( $M = 2.1$ ) had been victimized significantly more times than those in STAR Court ( $M = 1.6$ ) ( $F(2,473) = 8.3, p = .00$ ). There were no significant differences between either group and the self-disclosed group ( $M = 2.0$ ).
- Of those with a reported history of any victimization, youth in STAR Court were most likely to have experienced child maltreatment and sexual abuse while those in the matched comparison and self-disclosed groups were most likely to have experienced neglect and physical abuse. Significantly more in STAR Court had experienced maltreatment, sexual abuse, rape, physical assault, and abduction. Significantly more in the matched comparison group had experienced neglect (see chart 12).

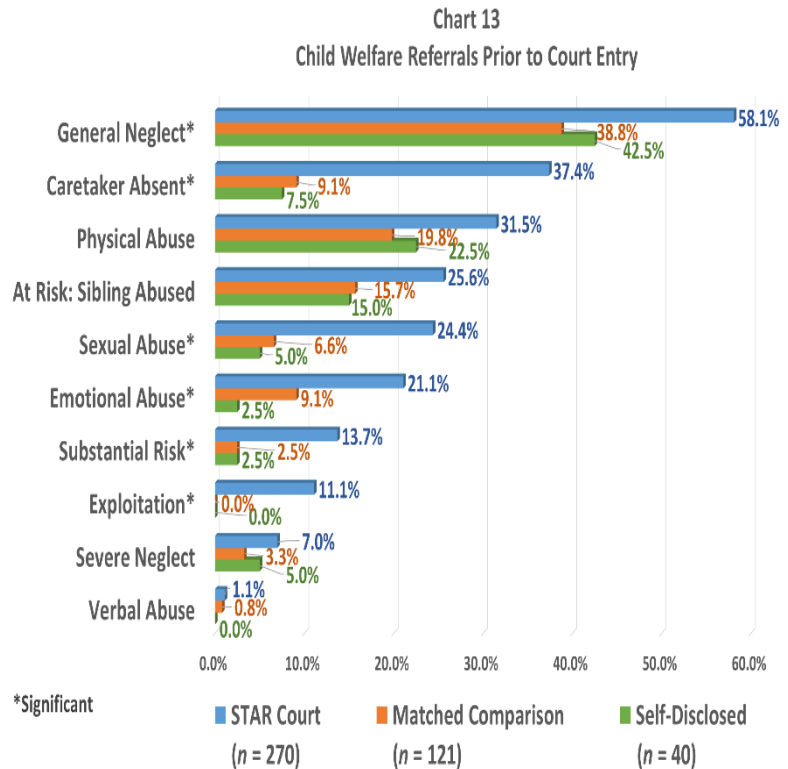


## Child Welfare History

While youth across all groups had a reduction in child welfare referrals between entering and exiting the court system, those in STAR Court had the largest reduction. That could be due to the collaborative approach of the court, which involves the family when possible, including wraparound services.

### Prior to Court Entry

- Significantly more youth in STAR Court (74.2%) than in the matched comparison (38.5%) or self-disclosed (57.1%) groups had at least one referral to the child welfare system prior to entering court,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 748) = 87.7, p = .00$ . Significantly more in the self-disclosed group than the matched comparison group also had prior involvement.
- Of those who had child welfare involvement, those in STAR Court ( $M = 10.6$ ) also had significantly more referrals prior to entering court than did those in the matched comparison ( $M = 6.4$ ) or self-disclosed ( $M = 6.3$ ) groups ( $F(2,490) = 18.0, p = .00$ ).
- Of those who had child welfare involvement, significantly more youth in STAR Court than in the other two groups had referrals for general neglect, having a caretaker absent, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, being at a substantial risk, and exploitation (see chart 13).



### Upon Exit from Court

- During their time under supervision, a significantly higher percentage of those in the self-disclosed group (17.6%) than in STAR Court (3.9%) had at least one additional child welfare referral,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 756) = 87.2, p = .00$ . There were no significant differences between either of those groups and those in the matched comparison group (7.1%).

## Housing Placement History

The percentage of youth who had at least one placement decreased between court entry and exit in the STAR Court and matched comparison groups but increased in the self-disclosed group. Upon court exit, those in the self-disclosed group had the highest number of placements, whereas those in STAR Court had the highest number upon court entry. The moderate level of missing data related to placement history in the matched comparison group should be considered in interpreting these results.

### Prior to Court Entry

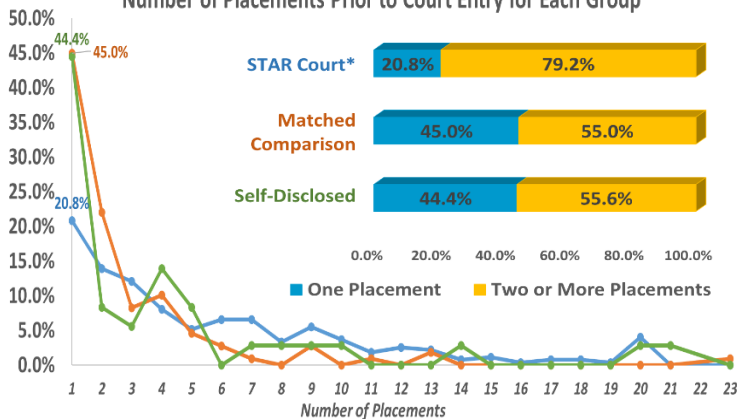
- Significantly more youth in STAR Court (76%) had at least one placement prior to entering court than did those in the matched comparison (35.4%) and self-disclosed (55.4%) groups. The difference between the self-disclosed and matched comparison groups was also significant,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 734) = 111.4, p = .00$ .
- Of those who had housing placements prior to court entry, significantly more in STAR Court (79.2%) than in either the matched comparison (55.0%) or the self-disclosed (55.6%) groups had two or more placements prior to entering court,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 419) = 26.5, p = .00$ , and those in STAR Court had significantly more placements than did those in the matched comparison group ( $F(2,416) = 15.4, p = .00$ ) (see chart 14).
- The average age of first housing placement across all groups was between 8 and 10 years old.

### Upon Exit from Court

- Significantly more youth in the STAR Court (71.4%) and self-disclosed (74.5%) groups than in the matched comparison group (34.7%) had at least one placement during their time under supervision,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 735) = 101.1, p = .00$ .
- Of those who had at least one placement, significantly more in the STAR Court (70.4%) and self-disclosed (78.0%) groups than in the matched comparison group (58.6%) had two or more placements,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 409) = 7.1, p = .028$ .
- Of those who had at least one placement, those in the self-disclosed group ( $M = 3.7$ ) had significantly more placements than did those in the STAR Court ( $M = 2.6$ ) or matched comparison ( $M = 2.5$ ) groups ( $F(2,406) = 22.8, p = .002$ ) (see chart 15).

Chart 14

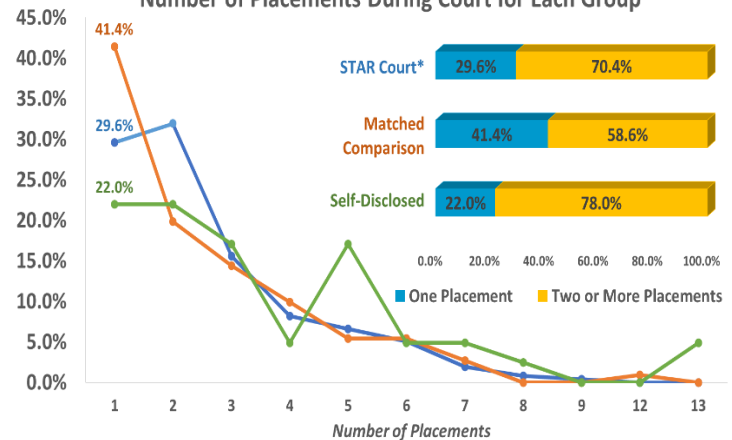
Number of Placements Prior to Court Entry for Each Group



\*Significant  
 STAR Court (n = 274) (M = 5.6)\*  
 Matched Comparison (n = 109) (M = 2.8)  
 Self-Disclosed (n = 36) (M = 4.2)

Chart 15

Number of Placements During Court for Each Group



\*Significant  
 STAR Court (n = 257) (M = 2.6)  
 Matched Comparison (n = 111) (M = 2.5)  
 Self-Disclosed (n = 41) (M = 3.7)\*



## AWOL History

Upon entering court, nearly all youth in STAR Court for whom data were available had a history of running away, designated by the court as “absent without official leave” (AWOL). STAR Court youth had a significant reduction in number of AWOLs during the study period while those in the other two groups had a significant increase. This could be due to Probation’s approach to AWOLs in STAR Court, such as being willing to negotiate returns from AWOL and establishing trusting relationships with the youth. However, the high percentage of missing data for each group should be considered when interpreting these results.

### Prior to Court Entry

- Of those for whom we had data, significantly more in STAR Court (98.4%) than in the other two groups had at least one AWOL prior to court entry,  $\chi^2(2, N = 539) = 179.3, p = .00$ . Significantly more in the self-disclosed (68.3%) than in the matched comparison group (38.3%) also had at least one AWOL.
- Of those who had at least one AWOL, those in the self-disclosed group had significantly more AWOLs ( $M = 6.2$ ) than did those in the matched comparison ( $M = 4.8$ ) and STAR Court ( $M = 2.7$ ) groups ( $F(2,337) = 29.5, p = .00$ ) (see chart 16).

### Upon Exit from Court

- During the study period, of those for whom we had data, significantly more in the self-disclosed group (87.7%) than in the STAR Court (51.2%) and matched comparison (54.9%) groups had at least one AWOL,  $\chi^2(2, N = 743) = 30.0, p = .00$ .
- Of those who had at least one AWOL, those in the self-disclosed group continued to have significantly more AWOLs ( $M = 5.7$ ) than did those in the matched comparison ( $M = 3.5$ ) and STAR Court ( $M = 2.0$ ) groups (see chart 17).
- Youth in STAR Court had a significant reduction in the average number of AWOLs between starting and ending supervision while those in the matched comparison and self-disclosed groups had an increase (see chart 18).

Chart 16  
AWOLs at Court Entry

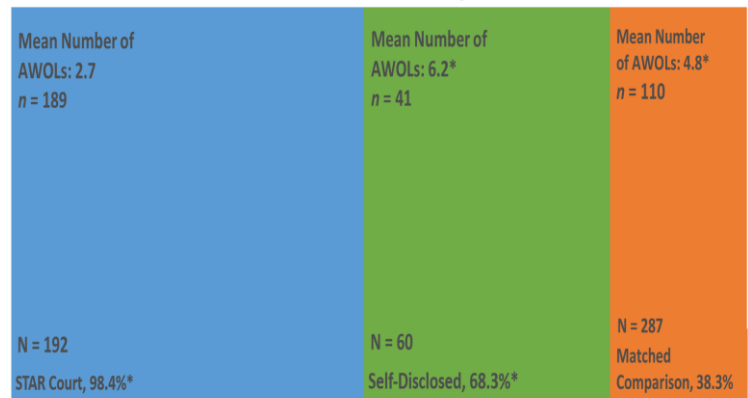
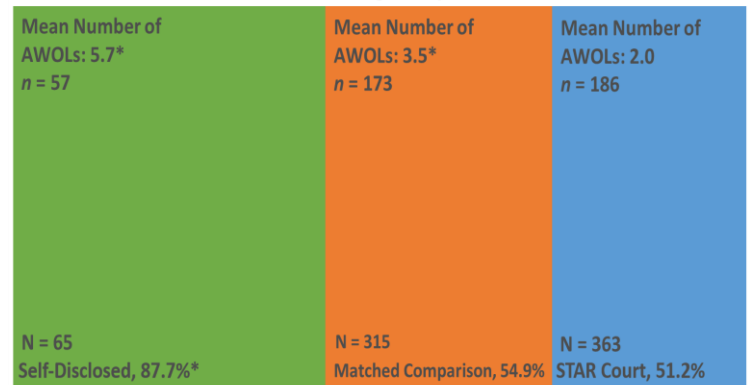
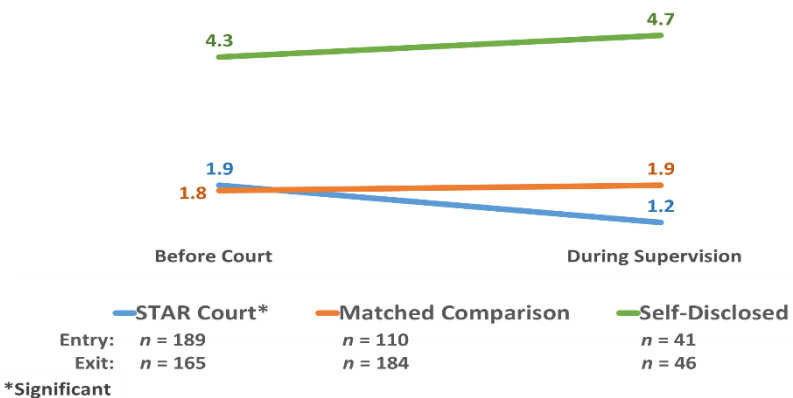


Chart 17  
AWOLs During Study Period



\*Significant

Chart 18  
Mean Number of AWOLs Between Starting and Ending Supervision



## Bench Warrant History

Between entering and exiting the court, all of the groups saw an increase in the number of youth with at least one bench warrant. In addition, the number of bench warrants in each group increased.

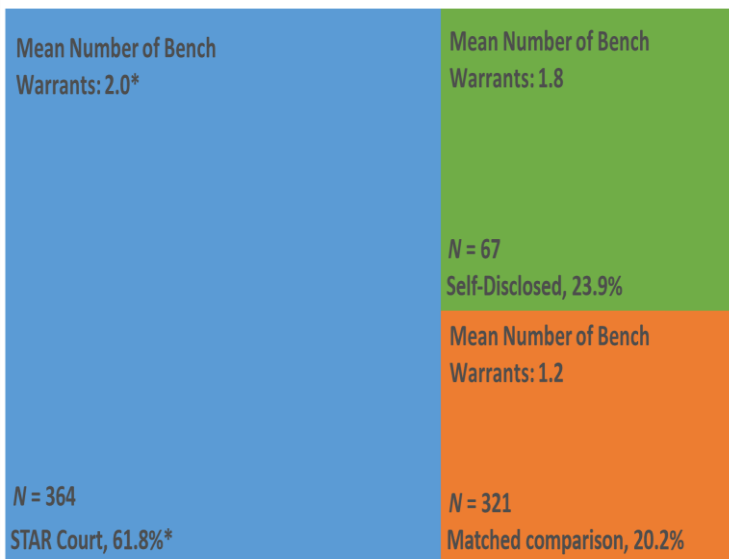
### Prior to Court Entry

- Upon court entry, significantly more in STAR Court (61.8%) than in the matched comparison (20.2%) or self-disclosed (23.9%) groups had at least one bench warrant,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 752) = 150.9, p = .00$ .
- Of those who had at least one bench warrant, those in STAR Court ( $M = 2.0$ ) had significantly more bench warrants than did those in the matched comparison group ( $M = 1.2$ ). There were no significant differences between those in the self-disclosed ( $M = 1.8$ ) group and those in the other groups ( $F(2,303) = 11.9, p = .00$ ) (see chart 19).
- Of those for whom data were available, nearly all first bench warrants were issued because of an AWOL. A small percentage of bench warrants were issued because of a violation of probation (4.3% in STAR Court and 1.7% in matched comparison group). The reasons for all subsequent bench warrants followed the same percentage pattern.

### Upon Exit from Court

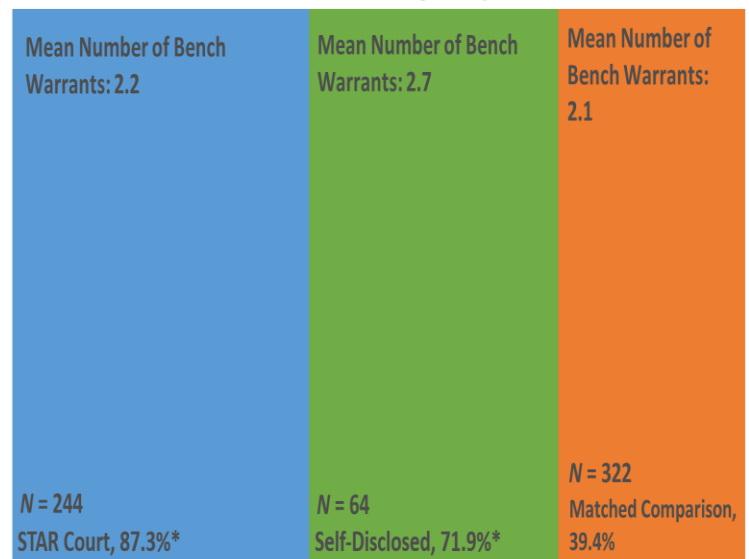
- During their time under supervision, significantly more youth in STAR Court (87.3%) than in the matched comparison (39.4%) and self-disclosed (71.9%) groups had at least one bench warrant issued,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 630) = 137.3, p = .00$ . The difference between the matched comparison and self-disclosed group was also significant.
- Of those who had at least one bench warrant, there were no significant differences in the average number of warrants among groups (see chart 20).
- Nearly all bench warrants during supervision were due to AWOLs for youth in the STAR Court and matched comparison group. For those in the self-disclosed group, although a large proportion of bench warrants were also from AWOLs, almost 11 percent were due to a violation of probation.

Chart 19  
Bench Warrants at Court Entry



\*Significant

Chart 20  
Bench Warrants During Study Period



\*Significant

## Arrest History and Recidivism

This study defined recidivism as rearrest, and all recidivism data refer to arrests. Although significantly more youth in STAR Court than the other groups had additional arrests during their time in court, it should be noted that the group's arrest rate fell by nearly half and the STAR Court group was the only group to show reductions in all charge types. The charges in the groups in this study mirror the national statistics: theft, assault, and drug-related charges are the most common charges among girls in the juvenile justice system.<sup>16</sup>

### Prior to Court Entry

- Upon court entry, 100 percent of those in the STAR Court and matched comparison groups and 97 percent of those in the self-disclosed group had prior arrests,  $\chi^2(2, N = 760) = 12.3, p = .002$ .
- Those in STAR Court had a significantly higher number of prior arrests ( $M = 6.0$ ) than did those in the matched comparison ( $M = 1.6$ ) and self-disclosed ( $M = 2.0$ ) groups ( $F(2,754) = 237.6, p = .00$ ).
- The majority of arrests in the matched comparison and self-disclosed groups were for assault and theft, while the majority in the STAR Court group were for prostitution, with assault and theft as the next most common (see chart 21, next page).

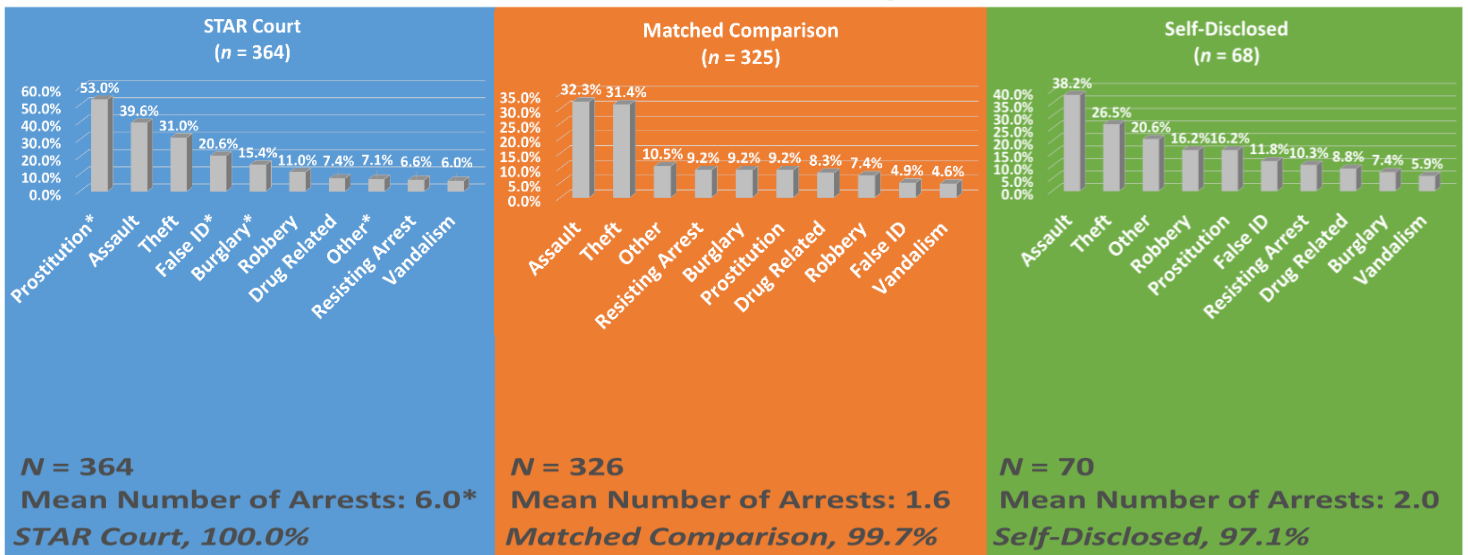
### Upon Exit from Court

- During the study period, significantly more in the STAR Court (52.6%) and self-disclosed (47.1%) groups than in the matched comparison group (25.2%) had additional arrests,  $\chi^2(2, N = 756) = 54.8, p = .00$ .
- Youth in STAR Court ( $M = 2.9$ ) had a significantly higher average number of arrests than did those in the matched comparison ( $M = 1.8$ ) ( $F(2,302) = 10.0, p = .00$ ). There were no significant differences between either of those groups and the self-disclosed group ( $M = 2.5$ ). However, youth in STAR Court had the largest reduction in the average number of individual rearrests, a significant reduction of 3.1 (see chart 22, next page).
- Despite the other two groups having larger overall reductions in the percentage of youth with rearrests, those in STAR Court showed the largest reductions in almost all charge types (see chart 23, next page). Significantly more in the matched comparison than in STAR Court had additional arrests for theft and drug-related charges. Significantly more in the self-disclosed group than the other groups had additional arrests for assault, robbery, and resisting arrest.

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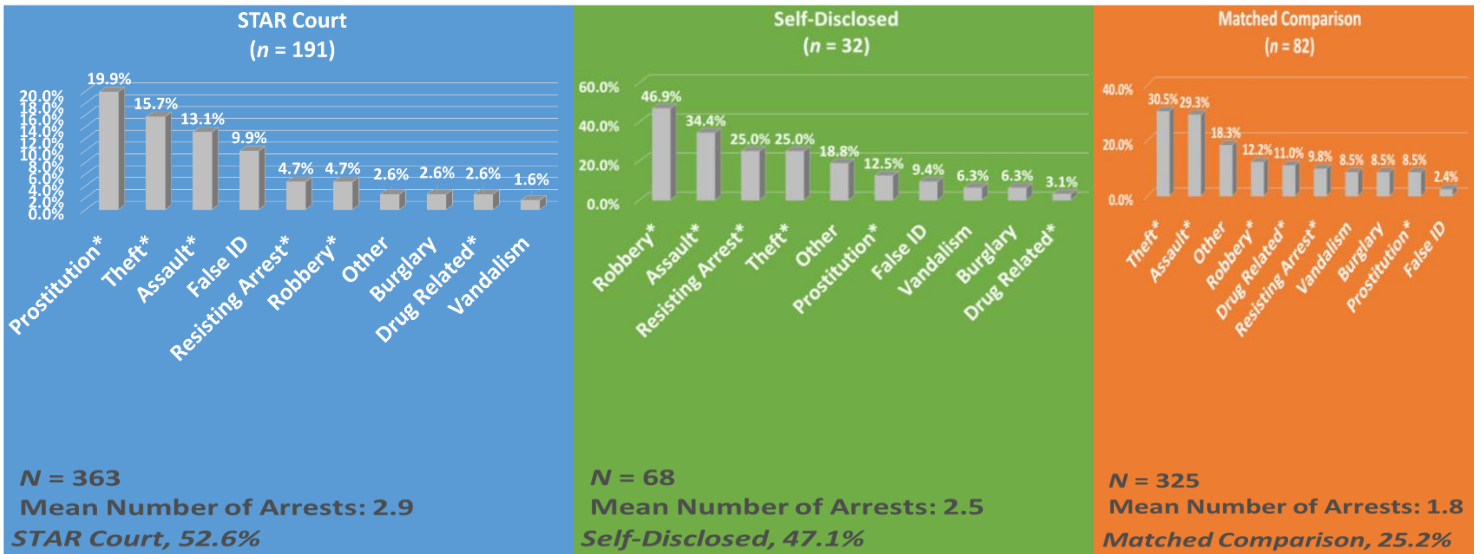
<sup>16</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Statistical Briefing Book, Law Enforcement & Juvenile Crime" (2019). Retrieved from [www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/ucr.asp?table\\_in=1](http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/ucr.asp?table_in=1).

### Chart 21 Arrests Prior to Starting Court



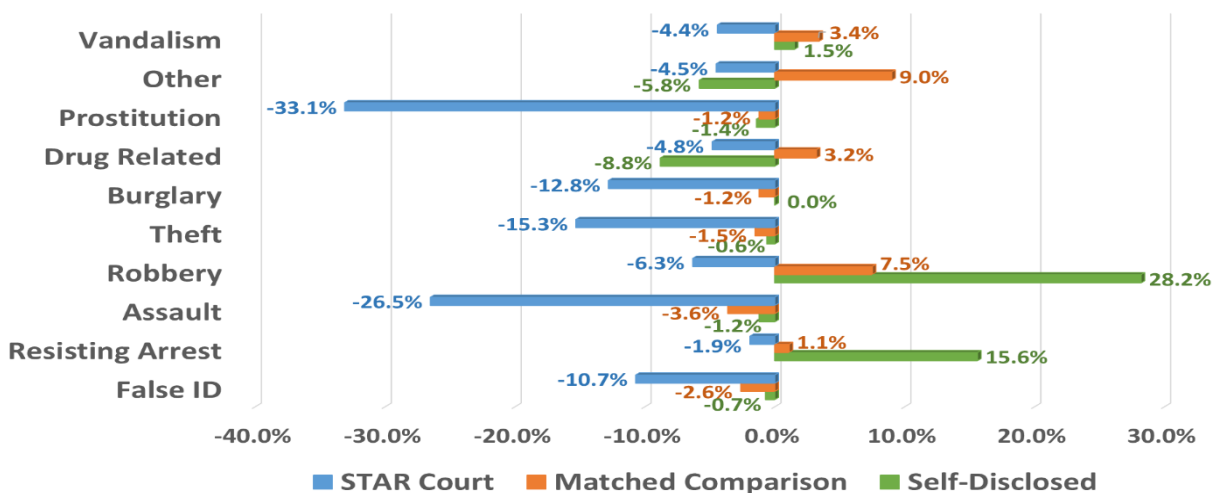
\*Significant

### Chart 22 Arrests During Time in Court



\*Significant

### Chart 23 Changes in Arrest Rates During Time in Court



## Discussion/Summary of Findings

These findings here are consistent with prior literature on characteristics of youth impacted by CSE and girls in the juvenile justice system.<sup>17</sup> Most youth in all groups were girls of color who entered the court between 15 and 16 years old. Several reports have shown disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system,<sup>18</sup> and of all juvenile arrests in California in 2015, nearly three-quarters were youth of color.<sup>19</sup>

The results of this study illustrated similarities between youth in STAR Court and youth known to have experienced CSE who are in the general population of the juvenile justice system, particularly related to mental health, substance use, victimization history, child welfare involvement, and rearrests. Results also suggest that the STAR Court works to reduce child welfare involvement, number of placements, number of AWOLs, and overall recidivism, discussed below. Consistent with prior analyses on the STAR Court cohort data,<sup>20</sup> findings here additionally suggest that a similar court model could help in attaining educational achievement. Having school advocates as part of the multidisciplinary team facilitates credit recovery, which encourages youth to remain in school, according to the qualitative data.

There were significant differences among groups in the amount of time spent under supervision, with those in the self-disclosed group being under supervision the longest and those in STAR Court having the shortest supervision time. This suggests that this court model could reduce supervision time for youth experiencing CSE. More than three-quarters of youth in STAR Court either “aged out” of the system (i.e., terminated the program when they turned 18 and were no longer allowed to stay) or successfully completed the program and terms of probation.

Significantly more youth in STAR Court than in the matched comparison group had a history of truancy, and those in the matched comparison group had completed a significantly higher grade level than did those in STAR Court prior to court entry. Additionally, significantly more in the matched comparison group than in STAR Court continued to be enrolled in school upon exiting court. Experts in CSEC have suggested that attending school is especially hard for youth who have experienced

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<sup>17</sup> See Melissa A. Cyders, Taylor Hunton, & Alexandra R. Hershberger, “Substance Use and Childhood Sexual Abuse among Girls Who are Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation” (2021) *Substance Use and Misuse*, 1–7; Maureen C. Kenny, Claire Helpingstine, Haiying Long, & Maria Clara Harrington, “Assessment of Commercially Sexually Exploited Girls upon Entry to Treatment” (2020) 100 *Child Abuse & Neglect*, DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104040; Jennifer E. O’Brien, Kevin White, & Cynthia Fraga Rizo, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Among Child Welfare–Involved Youth: An Exploratory Study of Correlates” (2017) 22(3) *Child Maltreatment*, 265–274; S. Varma, S. Gillespie, C. McCracken, & V.J. Greenbaum, “Characteristics of child commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking victims presenting for medical care in the United States” (2015) 44 *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 98–105; and D.S. Wolfe, J.K.P. Greeson, S. Wasch, & D. Treglia, *Human Trafficking Prevalence and Child Welfare Risk Factors Among Homeless Youth: A Multi-City Study* (2018), <https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/6230-R10-Field-Center-Full-Report-Web.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> See Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)* (2014). Retrieved from <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/mpg/literature-review/disproportionate-minority-contact.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> California Dept. of Justice, *Crime in California 2015*. Retrieved from <https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/cjsc/publications/candd/cd15/cd15.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Bacharach, Godoy, Strobel, & Bath, *supra*, note 9.

CSE.<sup>21</sup> Qualitative data in this study confirm that these youth often have trouble attending school regularly, but can be successful in obtaining a diploma if offered credit recovery and an individualized education plan (IEP).

Nearly a third of youth in STAR Court had at least one pregnancy prior to starting court, significantly higher than in the matched comparison group. In both groups, about three-quarters of those with a prior pregnancy carried the pregnancy to term. These findings are consistent with those from the largest study in the country of pregnancy outcomes of girls impacted by CSE, which found a 31 percent rate of pregnancy among this population.<sup>22</sup>

With baseline data from court entry only related to mental health, results showed that significantly more youth in STAR Court and in the self-disclosed group similarly had at least one mental health diagnosis prior to court entry and significantly more co-occurring diagnoses. This is consistent with research showing strong relationships among youth experiencing CSE, a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and poor mental health outcomes, particularly among justice-involved youth.<sup>23</sup>

Data on substance use were also available for baseline at court entry only. Significantly more youth in STAR Court and the self-disclosed group than in the matched comparison group reported using one or more substances prior to entering court. In addition, youth in STAR Court used significantly more substances than did those in the matched comparison group. Like mental health, prior research has shown relationships between youth involved in CSE and substance and polysubstance use, as well as the intersection of both with ACEs.<sup>24</sup>

Significantly more youth in STAR Court than in the matched comparison group had reported victimization prior to entering court. As with other measures, those in STAR Court were more similar to those in the self-disclosed group than either were to those in the matched comparison group. Those in STAR Court were also more likely to have had sexual victimization in particular prior to entering court, including rape, childhood rape, and sexual assault. In research comparing ACEs between youth with and without CSE, 60 percent of youth with a history of CSE had a history of sexual abuse compared to 10 percent of those who did not.

Although all groups saw a reduction in child welfare referrals between entering and exiting court, those in STAR Court saw the largest reduction, which was significantly more than the reduction in the self-

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<sup>21</sup> San Diego County, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Refocusing our Lens* (n.d.). Retrieved from [www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/cs/cws/CWSResourcesandGuides/SpecialPopulations/HHSA\\_CS\\_EC\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/cs/cws/CWSResourcesandGuides/SpecialPopulations/HHSA_CS_EC_Brochure.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> E.S. Barnert, S.M. Godoy, I. Hammond, M.A. Kelly, L.R. Thompson, S. Mondal, & E.P. Bath, “Pregnancy Outcomes among Girls Impacted by Commercial Sexual Exploitation” (2020) 20(4) *Academic Pediatrics*, 455–459.

<sup>23</sup> J.B. Folk, K. Kemp, A. Yurasek, J. Barr-Walker, & M. Tolou-Shams, *Adverse Childhood Experiences Among Justice-Involved Youth: Data-Driven Recommendations for Action Using the Sequential Intercept Model* (2020). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/content/qt98g4m26v/qt98g4m26v.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> See S.E. Jaeckl & K. Laughon, “Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States: A Perspective for Nurses” (2020) 25(3) *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. Retrieved from <http://ojin.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TableofContents/Vol-25-2020/No3-Sept-2020/Sex-Trafficking-of-Minors-in-the-United-States-A-Perspective-for-Nurses.html>.

disclosed group. Nearly three-quarters of youth in STAR Court had at least one child welfare referral prior to entering court. Upon court exit, fewer than 17 percent of those in STAR Court had an additional referral, a decrease of 58 percent. These findings suggest that this court model could help to reduce involvement with the child welfare system. The qualitative data suggest that most youth who experience CSE have a history of child welfare involvement, so these findings could have long-term implications for families.

Between entering and exiting court, those in STAR Court saw a significant reduction in not only the percentage of youth who had at least one AWOL, but also in the number of AWOLs that individual youth had. The other two groups saw a significant increase in the percentage of youth who had at least one AWOL. These findings are important and suggest that the court model's approach to handling AWOLs can help to reduce running away. The reduction in AWOLs did not seem to reflect a similar reduction in bench warrants, however. Between entering and exiting court, both the percentage of youth receiving a bench warrant and the number of bench warrants individual youth received increased.

Finally, although the matched comparison group saw a larger reduction in the percentage of youth having a rearrest during their time under supervision than did the other two groups, it is notable that the STAR Court cohort reduced their rearrest rate by almost half, to 52.6 percent. To compare, in California, the most recent rearrest data available from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation show a statewide juvenile rearrest rate of 76.4 percent in 2015, coinciding with the timeline for this study.<sup>25</sup> It is also notable that those in STAR Court and those in the self-disclosed group continued showing similarities in comparison to the matched comparison group. This suggests that youth experiencing CSE are unique in the justice system and require unique, CSEC-specific interventions.

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<sup>25</sup> California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, *Recidivism Report for Youth Released from The Division of Juvenile Justice in Fiscal Year 2014-15*, (2019). Retrieved from [www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/174/2021/03/Recidivism-Report-for-Youth-Released-from-the-Division-of-Juvenile-Justice-in-FY-2014-15.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/174/2021/03/Recidivism-Report-for-Youth-Released-from-the-Division-of-Juvenile-Justice-in-FY-2014-15.pdf).

## Conclusion

These findings present one of the first looks at how the STAR Court operates and works to serve youth at risk or with confirmed histories of CSE in the juvenile justice system. Despite safe harbor laws that attempt to prevent youth experiencing CSE from being criminalized, these youth still can and do end up in the juvenile justice system when their arrests are not directly related to or perceived to be related to their exploitation, according to the qualitative data offered here.

The results of the outcome evaluation suggest that the STAR Court is a promising model that could be successful for youth experiencing CSE in other jurisdictions. The reductions in child welfare involvement, number of placements, number of AWOLs, and recidivism with shorter supervision time than those in the general delinquency system, coupled with the positive comments from graduates of the program, suggest that the STAR Court's holistic, multisystemic, trauma-informed services mitigate the participants' adverse childhood experiences that increase their risk for CSE.

The graduates of the program with whom we spoke suggested that their experience with STAR Court was incredibly helpful to their overall well-being and involvement in the juvenile justice system. As one graduate noted, "There should be a STAR Court in every court building there is."

STAR Court staff pointed to collaboration, open communication, and specialized training as keys to the court's success. In addition, most highlighted as integral to the court's success a commitment to the collaborative model and working together to help the youth, even if that means altering traditional expectations. Having realistic expectations was noted as especially important.

There are limitations to this study that should be noted. Inconsistency in available data within case files presented a challenge to the current research. In each analysis, the correct  $N$  and  $n$  is provided to indicate subsets of data. In addition, court exit data for variables such as health, mental health, and substance use were unavailable for the comparison groups, limiting the ability to adequately analyze these important variables. In some analyses, such as length of time under supervision, reason for ending supervision, and prior pregnancies, the  $N$ s were small, which could have impacted the validity of those analyses. In other analyses, such as those for education, the  $N$ s for the self-disclosed group were so small that the group was excluded from analyses. Finally, as this study included only girls, results may not be generalizable to boys or transgender youth. Nor might results be generalizable to other youth' or CSEC courts that have various models, notably because of the challenges noted in the process evaluation results regarding the use of both traditional and nontraditional methods of measuring success, but also due to the variations in models and protocols that different courts use.<sup>26</sup>

In the future, researchers should attempt to find full administrative data sets to confirm whether the trends in these analyses hold true. Future research should also examine long-term impacts of the court utilizing data from the adult justice system. In addition, general health, mental health, and substance use should be examined and compared longitudinally to determine whether the STAR Court impacts those variables.

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<sup>26</sup> Bacharach & Strobel, *supra*, note 2.



## Methodological Index

Research methodology describes the plans and reasoning for a research method (the instruments and tools) used for the research, which is described in the method section. As one expert analogized to building a house, “Research methods are the tools in the carpenter’s toolbox. Research methodology is the construction plans.”<sup>27</sup>

The mixed-methods approach used in this study involved qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. It was important to use this approach so one analysis could compliment or build on the other since each approach alone only tells a part of the story. This is especially true in research in juvenile justice. Conducting rigorous research in juvenile justice programs has been historically challenging due to the availability of data.<sup>28</sup> This research was no exception. For the case file review to collect quantitative data, most case files did not contain 100 percent of the information used in this study. Therefore, for many variables, data were missing.

There have been varying opinions in the literature regarding an acceptable percentage of missing data before results are deemed too biased to be utilized, with no standard cutoff for that percentage.<sup>29</sup> Researchers have suggested rules of thumb regarding acceptable levels of missing data ranging from 5 percent to 50 percent.<sup>30</sup> Some researchers have suggested, however, that the percentage of missing data may be less important to results than their patterns and mechanisms.<sup>31</sup>

The pattern of missing data appears to be arbitrary. The data were either never included in the case file or did not exist because there were no data. For example, if there were no data about mental health diagnoses in the case file, the researchers wouldn’t know if that was because the data were never entered into the case file or because the youth did not have any diagnoses.

The mechanism of missing data refers to how the data are missing.<sup>32</sup> In this study, data were missing at random (MAR). Because data were MAR, the missing data were removed rather than imputed to reduce bias. Analyses were conducted using pairwise deletion in order to preserve data from other variables that were not missing for each relevant case. Future analyses on these administrative data may consider incorporating a method of imputation as another way to deal with missing data.

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<sup>27</sup> T.L. Brink, *Research Methods VS Research Methodology* (2019, July 19). ResearchGate discussion, [www.researchgate.net/post/Research-Methods-VS-Research-Methodology](http://www.researchgate.net/post/Research-Methods-VS-Research-Methodology).

<sup>28</sup> See M.G. Vaughn, C. Pettus-Davis, & J.J. Shook, *Conducting Research in Juvenile and Criminal Justice Settings* (2012). Oxford University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Y. Dong & C.Y.J. Peng, “Principled Missing Data Methods for Researchers” (2013) 2 *Springer Plus*. Retrieved from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3701793/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3701793/).

<sup>30</sup> See P. Madley-Dowd, R. Hughes, K. Tilling, & J. Heron, “The Proportion of Missing Data Should Not Be Used To Guide Decisions On Multiple Imputation” (2019) 110 *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 63–73 and C.M. Salgado, C. Azevedo, H. Proença, & S.M. Viera, “Missing Data” (2016) in MIT Critical Data (Ed.), *Secondary Analysis of Electronic Health Records* (pp. 143–162). Springer.

<sup>31</sup> B.G. Tabachnick & L.S. Fidell, *Using Multivariate Statistics* (2012). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

<sup>32</sup> M. Soley-Bori, *Dealing with Missing Data: Key Assumptions and Methods for Applied Analysis* (2013). Retrieved from [www.bu.edu/sph/files/2014/05/Marina-tech-report.pdf](http://www.bu.edu/sph/files/2014/05/Marina-tech-report.pdf).

The table below indicates the percentage of missing data for each comparative analysis of the entire group of each cohort (Ns).

<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Chart Number</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Percent Missing</b>
Racial composition of groups	1	10	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	0%
			Self-Disclosed	3%
Gang affiliation	2	10	STAR Court	6%
			Matched Comparison	3%
			Self-Disclosed	3%
Length of time under supervision	3	11	STAR Court	20%
			Matched Comparison	8%
			Self-Disclosed	50%
Reasons for ending supervision	4	11	STAR Court	20%
			Matched Comparison	2%
			Self-Disclosed	10%
Truancy	NA	12	STAR Court	3%
			Matched Comparison	84%
			Self-Disclosed	86%
Grade level completed, entry	5	12	STAR Court	3%
			Matched Comparison	84%
			Self-Disclosed	86%
Grade level completed, exit	5	12	STAR Court	23%
			Matched Comparison	9%
			Self-Disclosed	24%
Prior pregnancy	7	13	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	23%
			Self-Disclosed	24%
Result of prior pregnancy (subset of those who had a prior pregnancy)	7	13	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	0%
			Self-Disclosed	NA
Suicide attempt history	NA	14	STAR Court	33%
			Matched Comparison	0%
			Self-Disclosed	3%
Mental health diagnosis at entry	8	14	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	0%
			Self-Disclosed	0%
Whether counseling was received prior to court entry	10	15	STAR Court	31%
			Matched Comparison	72%
			Self-Disclosed	47%
Substance use at court entry	NA	16	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	25%
			Self-Disclosed	12%

<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Chart Number</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Percent Missing</b>
Reported history of victimization	NA	17	STAR Court	45%
			Matched Comparison	55%
			Self-Disclosed	43%
Referrals to child welfare system prior to court entry	13	18	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	4%
			Self-Disclosed	3%
Referrals to child welfare system during court period	NA	18	STAR Court	24%
			Matched Comparison	3%
			Self-Disclosed	10%
At least one placement at court entry	NA	19	STAR Court	1%
			Matched Comparison	6%
			Self-Disclosed	10%
Number of placements at court entry (subset of those who had a placement)	14	19	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	0%
			Self-Disclosed	0%
At least one placement at court exit	NA	19	STAR Court	1%
			Matched Comparison	5%
			Self-Disclosed	12%
Number of placements at court exit (subset of those who had a placement)	15	19	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	0%
			Self-Disclosed	0%
AWOL history	16	20	STAR Court	47%
			Matched Comparison	12%
			Self-Disclosed	17%
AWOLs during court period	17	20	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	4%
			Self-Disclosed	10%
Bench warrants prior to court entry	19	21	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	2%
			Self-Disclosed	7%
Bench warrants during court period	20	21	STAR Court	33%
			Matched Comparison	2%
			Self-Disclosed	11%
Arrests prior to court entry	NA	22	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	1%
			Self-Disclosed	3%
Arrests during court period	NA	22	STAR Court	0%
			Matched Comparison	1%
			Self-Disclosed	6%