



NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women

Girls Do Matter

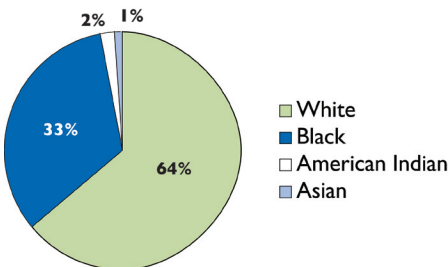
Our challenge to effectively meet the needs of girls and ensure public safety

Urgency to Act

The increasing rates of girls entering the justice system and the complexity of the issues that impact the lives of young women, underscore the urgency and our obligation to advocate for meaningful reform. Despite research and evidence documenting gender differences in offending and pathways to delinquency, girls have been considered a low priority. Girls continue to be inappropriately placed in facilities and programs designed for boys or that emphasize razor wire over treatment. Consistently missing the mark, there is an epidemic of programs that are ill equipped to effectively address girls' needs and tragically where girls are further victimized or traumatized.

Costs to the Girls and to Society

Our failure to effectively address the needs of girls has created a major public health and social welfare concern with severe short and long-term consequences. Young girls who could have their lives turned around wind up in ill-conceived lock-up facilities costing an average of \$50,000 annually per girl. Ineffective intervention to address the needs of justice-involved girls during adolescence also predicts a host of problems in adulthood including poor physical and mental health, substance dependence, and future arrests and incarceration. These girls are at a high risk of future domestic violence and other violent relationships, dysfunctional parenting and losing custody of their children. In general, if appropriate prevention and intervention services are not available, these girls will heavily utilize public health and social welfare services in adulthood.²



The Numbers

Nationally, there were 455,993 girls (28% of total under 18) processed through the court system. From here they could be released, put on probation, detained, incarcerated, or transferred to adult court.³

Data combines Hispanic and White youth into one category



Latoya is fifteen and nine months pregnant. She has had no prenatal care. She complains of chronic lower back pain. A visit to her "cell" reveals that at nine months pregnant she sleeps

on a concrete slab with a plastic mattress that is about an inch thick. She was charged with running away from foster care, prostitution and trespassing. When she violated her court order by missing school, she was placed in a residential lock-up facility. Latoya has lived in 12 foster homes since about age three. She was removed from her biological mother as a result of abuse. She never met her father. She ran away from her first foster home after her foster father sexually abused her. After that she never felt safe in other foster homes. With nowhere else to go, she ran to the streets. She has lived on the streets "on and off" since about age 10. She says she turned to prostitution to get food and shelter. Her greatest fear is that her baby will be taken from her at the hospital. She dreams of finishing school and getting a job to support her baby.

- Excerpt from NCCD Research Interview, 2006

Why Girls in Juvenile Justice need our immediate attention:

- Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population. Today, girls represent approximately 30% of arrests and 15% of incarcerations.

- Girls enter the system at younger ages than boys. Almost half (42%) of girls who are incarcerated are 15 years old or younger.
- Girls present with higher rates of serious mental health conditions including post traumatic stress disorder, psychiatric disorders⁴, attempts of self harm and suicide.⁵ It is estimated that 10% of incarcerated girls are pregnant and that 30% have children.
- The juvenile justice system's response is punitive to girls' acting out behavior and results in incarceration for less serious offenses than boys.
- The American Bar Report found that the practice of "bootstrapping," charging girls with a delinquent offense for violation of a court order, is applied disproportionately to girls and results in harsh and inequitable treatment especially of girls charged with status offenses (running away, curfew violations, etc). Although girls' rates of recidivism are lower than those of boys, the use of contempt proceedings and probation and parole violations make it more likely that, without committing a crime, girls will return to detention or a residential commitment program.⁶

Profile of Girls

The findings of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency research report* paint a haunting portrait of girls in the system:

- Girls are getting arrested at young ages (40% of girls reported committing their first offense before the age of 13);
- 79% have emotional/mental health issues (Depression, trauma, anger, self destructive behaviors, or other mental health/clinical diagnoses);
- 70% experience family conflict and/or history of family problems;
- 46% have substance abuse/addiction issues;
- 64% reported prior abuse;
- 49% self mutilate;
- 34% have history of suicide attempts;
- 35% have a history of prior pregnancy;
- 10% have children;
- 25% have or are recovering from a major illness.

* *Rallying Cry for Change* (2006), a report on girls in the Florida system.

- Girls pick up more charges inside institutions that are ill equipped to meet their needs and thus, are "fast tracked" deeper into the system.
- While the rates of abuse for girls outside facilities are higher than 50%, the rates of abuse for girls inside facilities is unacceptable and demands immediate correction. The US Justice Department has sued nine states and two territories alleging abuse, inadequate mental and medical care and dangerous use of restraints.
- The level of resources allocated for gender-specific services is significantly less than the proportion of girls in the system.
- Professionals at all levels are frequently frustrated with the lack of information and training in best practices for girls.

The NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women

We have failed our girls in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. More than reform is needed and we need to acknowledge that it is time to create and support programs that take into account the unique needs of girls and young women. The vision of the NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women is to: correct the misconceptions about girls in the system; equip staff with effective gender responsive interventions; provide services and responses that meet the true needs of girls, and in turn, improve public safety; educate policy makers and administrators with research-based best practices and information; make girls safe and not further victimized inside facilities; ensure that girls receive fair treatment; and make sure that our communities provide a continuum of services for girls at risk. For more information about the Center visit www.justiceforallgirls.org.

¹ Hipwell, A.E., & Loeber, R. (2006). Do we know which interventions are effective for disruptive and delinquent girls? *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 9(3/4), 221-255.

² Lederman, C.S., Dakof, G.A., Larrea, M.A., & Li, H. (2004). Characteristics of adolescent females in juvenile detention. *Law and Psychiatry*, 27, 321-337.

³ Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., and Kang, V. (2008). "Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985-2005." Online. Available: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcs/>

⁴ As high as 3 in 4 girls who are detained have a diagnosed mental health disorder (74%) compared to 66% for boys. Teplin et al., 2002. *Psychiatric disorders in youth in detention*.

⁵ National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Programs, Policy Research Associates, NY, www.ncmhjj.com/pdfs/Adol-girls.pdf

⁶ American Bar Association & National Bar Association (2001). *Justice by Gender: Lack of Appropriate Prevention, Diversion and Treatment Alternatives for Girls in the Juvenile Justice System*, Washington, D.C.