

THE GIRL PRISON PIPELINE:
SEXUAL VIOLENCE, GIRLS AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Sexual and Physical Violence Among Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

There are many risk factors associated with the involvement of girls in the juvenile justice (JJ) system. These risk factors include but are not limited to family fragmentation, physical and mental health disorders, and school failure.¹ However, violent victimization in the form of **sexual and physical abuse is the most salient risk factor among girls** involved in the JJ system² with **approximately 73% of girls in the JJ system reporting these forms of abuse.**³ These data are further collaborated in other studies:

- California based study⁴:
 - 92% of girls interviewed had suffered some form of abuse
 - ❖ 81% of the girls interviewed had been physically abused
 - ❖ 56% of the girls reported one or more forms of sexual abuse
- Oregon Social Learning Center study of chronically delinquent girls found⁵:
 - The average age of first sexual encounter among girl participants was 6.
 - 77.8% of girls had documented histories of physical abuse as compared to 3 percent of boys

Girl Victimization and Future Juvenile Justice Involvement

Untreated emotional, physical and sexual violence of young girls has been associated with a number of juvenile related behaviors and health disorders. Studies have found:

- Youth who were victims of sexual abuse coupled with physical abuse and neglect were more likely to run away from home than children who experienced other forms of maltreatment.⁶
 - 33 - 75 percent of girls who are in runaway homes or in the JJ system were victims of sexual violence.⁷
- Victims of childhood sexual violence experience more addiction issues.
 - 75 percent of girls involved with the JJ system report being regular users of alcohol and/or drugs.⁸
 - 34 percent of girls involved in the JJ system are diagnosed with a substance abuse disorder.⁹
- Girls hurt by sexual violence are 3 times more likely to develop psychiatric disorders or alcohol/drug abusing behaviors in adulthood, compared to girls who are not sexually abused.¹⁰
- A longitudinal study found that girls and women with histories of childhood abuse or neglect were 73% more likely than females without abuse histories to be arrested for property, alcohol, drug, and misdemeanor offenses such as disorderly conduct, curfew violations, or loitering.

- In 2002, it was estimated that girls comprised 67% of those arrested for activities related to survival sex or prostitution¹¹ – all of which place girls at increased risk of sexual and physical violence from pimps and johns.¹²

Girls, Sexual Violence, and Confinement

Once detained, many girls suffer further victimization. The 2006 National Report of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reported that there were 2,821 allegations of youth-on-youth (59 percent) and staff-on-youth (41 percent) acts of sexual violence in juvenile facilities in 2004. Within the youth-on-youth incidents, 2 of every 3 were nonconsensual sexual acts and within the staff-on-youth incidents, 3 of every 4 were staff sexual misconducts.¹³ Of these allegations:

- 33 percent occurred in state-operated facilities and 67 percent occurred in local or privately operated facilities.¹⁴
- 25 percent of the allegations in state-operated facilities and 32 percent of those in local or privately operated facilities were proven to be true.¹⁵
- Girls made up only 11 percent of the state-operated facilities population, but accounted for 34 percent of the victims of sexual violence in these facilities.¹⁶
- In local or privately owned facilities girls made up only 17 percent of the total population, but accounted for 37 percent of the victims of sexual violence were girls.¹⁷

Gender-Responsive Programming

Given these statistics, any comprehensive response to girl detention must be gender-responsive and must address the specific issues faced by girls in the JJ system. In a report published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a review of effective, gender-response programs found that several elements were necessary for successful girl programming. The evaluation found that programming should be:¹⁸

- **Comprehensive** - weaving family, community, and systems together for girls;
- **Safe** - promoting healing from trauma caused by physical and psychological abuse;
- **Empowering** - addressing needs while encouraging leadership and the development of each girls strengths;
- **Community and Family Focused** - based in the community, fostering healthy family relationships and sustainable community connections; and
- **Relational** - supporting continuous, positive relationships for girls with older women, family, and peers.

Unfortunately, few girls are given access to such programs because of the absence of such services and interventions for girls. Instead, most girls are lost to detention.

¹ American Bar Association and the National Bar Association. A Report - Justice by Gender: The Lack of Appropriate Prevention, Diversion and Treatment Alternatives for Girls in the Justice System. May 1, 2001.

² American Bar Association and the National Bar Association, 2001.

³ Riehmman KS. Adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system: issues for treatment. Website: www.womenandchildren.treatment.org/media/presentations/d-4/Riehmman.ppt.

⁴ Acoca L, Dedel K. No Place to hide: Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Girls in the California Juvenile Justice System. National Council on Crime and Delinquency, San Francisco, CA, 1998.

⁵ Chamberlain P. The Miltidimensional Treatment Foster Care Model: Research and Community-Based Services. Presented at the 2nd National Training Conference on Juvenile Detention Reform. Portland, Oregon: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Jan. 24-26, 2002.

⁶ Widom CS. Victims of childhood sexual abuse – later criminal consequences. NIJ Research in Brief. Mar. 1995:1-8.

⁷ Shelden RG. Female delinquency and the juvenile justice system: Part I – Delinquency among girls. University of Nevada – Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV. 2004; 1-28.

⁸Riehman KS. Adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system issues for treatment. <Web access: www.womenandchildren.treatment.org/media/presentations/d4/Riehman.ppt>

⁹Riehman KS.

¹⁰Day A, Thurlow K, Woolliscroft J. Working with childhood sexual abuse: A survey of mental health professions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 2003. 27: 191-198.

¹¹Sherman FT. 2005.

¹²Sherman FT. 13 Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform: Detention Reform and Girls – challenges and solutions. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD, 2005.

¹³Snyder HN, Sickmund M. Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report. US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, DC. 2006: 1-242.

¹⁴Snyder HN, Sickmund M. 2006.

¹⁵Snyder HN, Sickmund M. 2006.

¹⁶Snyder HN, Sickmund M. 2006.

¹⁷Snyder HN, Sickmund M. 2006.

¹⁸Sherman FT. 2005.