

## **SEXUAL VIOLENCE, GIRLS AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

### **EXPERIENCING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS MOST COMMON FACTOR LEADING TO JJ PLACEMENT FOR GIRLS**

There are various risk factors associated with girls in the juvenile justice (JJ) system, and most girls in the system are victims of at least one of these factors. The prevalent risk factor leading a girl to be placed in the JJ system is experiencing sexual abuse,<sup>1</sup> with 73% of girls in the JJ system reporting being victims of this type of abuse.<sup>2</sup>

Girls are more likely than boys to be arrested for committing status offenses such as running away from home. Girls make up 60% of young people arrested for running away and many girls choose to do so because of experiencing sexual violence at home.<sup>3</sup>

- Children who were victims of sexual abuse coupled with physical abuse or neglect were more likely to run away from home than children who experience other forms of maltreatment.<sup>4</sup>
- Two-thirds to three-quarters of girls who are in runaway homes or in the JJ system are victims of sexual violence.<sup>5</sup>

### **GIRLS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY THAN NONVICTIMS TO COMMIT DRUG OFFENSES**

Some researchers have also theorized that these victims become substance abusers because they feel they need some way to distance themselves from the pain they felt as victims.<sup>6</sup> Of girls involved with the JJ system for drug offenses and have been sexually abused:

- 75% report being regular users of alcohol and/or drugs.<sup>7</sup>
- 34% are diagnosed with a substance abuse disorder.<sup>8</sup>

### **EXPERIENCING SEXUAL VIOLENCE INCREASES GIRLS' CHANCES OF COMMITTING VIOLENT OFFENSES**

- A study conducted in 2004 found that girls who were sexually abused were 2.1 times greater to be arrested for a violent offense than girls who were not, with race and drug dependency being controlled for.<sup>9</sup>
- Boys are more likely than girls to commit violent and drug offenses, but if a girl has been sexually abused she is more likely to commit a violent offense.<sup>10</sup>

### **GIRLS EXPERIENCE SEXUAL VIOLENCE WHILE THEY ARE CONFINED IN JUVENILE FACILITIES**

The 2006 National Report of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reported that there were 2,881 allegations of youth-on-youth (59%) and staff-on-youth (41%) acts of sexual violence in juvenile facilities in 2004. Of these allegations:

- 33% occurred in state-operated facilities and 67% occurred in local or privately operated facilities.<sup>11</sup>
- 25% of the allegations in state-operated facilities and 32% of those in local or privately operated facilities were proven to be true.<sup>12</sup>
- Girls made up only 11% of the state-operated facilities population; however they accounted for 34% of the victims of sexual violence in these facilities.<sup>13</sup>
- In local or privately owned facilities girls made up only 17% of the total population, but 37% of the victims of sexual violence were girls.<sup>14</sup>
- Girls accounted for 32% of the victims of substantiated incidents of staff sexual misconduct.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Castro, G., & Posadas, J., "Girls on the edge: a report on girls in the juvenile justice system," United Way of the Bay Area and San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department, San Francisco, CA, 2003: 1-19.

<sup>2</sup> Riehman, K.S., "Adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system: issues for treatment," <womenandchildren.treatment.org/media/presentations/d4/Riehman.ppt>.



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<sup>3</sup> Sheldon, R. G., Female delinquency and the juvenile justice system: part I - delinquency among girls (Las Vegas, NV: University of Nevada - Las Vegas, 2004) 1-28.

<sup>4</sup> Widom, C. S., "Victims of childhood sexual abuse - later criminal consequences," NIJ Research in Brief Mar. 1995: 1-8.

<sup>5</sup> Sheldon, R. G.

<sup>6</sup> Siegel, J. A., & Williams, L. A.

<sup>7</sup> Riehman, K.S., "Adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system: issues for treatment,"

<womenandchildren.treatment.org/media/presentations/d-4/Riehman.ppt>.

<sup>8</sup> Riehman, K.S.

<sup>9</sup> Siegel, J. A., & Williams, L. A., "The relationship between child sexual abuse and female delinquency and crime: a prospective study," Journal of research in crime and delinquency, Feb. 2003: 71-94.

<sup>10</sup> Sheldon, R. G.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M. "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, DC, 2006: 1-242.

<sup>12</sup> Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M.

<sup>13</sup> Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M.

<sup>14</sup> Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M.

<sup>15</sup> Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M.



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