



NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women

November 2008

A Call for Gender Equity for Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

The NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women is guided by the courageous life experiences of girls and young women in the juvenile and child welfare systems. The Center is the passionate voice for activism to ensure equitable, humane, and gender-appropriate responses to improve outcomes for girls and young women.

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Why should girls in juvenile justice be a priority?

Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population.

The national picture shows that crime rates are decreasing for both girls and boys, but the rate of decrease has been slower for girls. Nationally, since 1997, incarceration for boys has decreased 18% compared to only 8% for girls. However, in 14 states the female juvenile rate of incarceration has increased more than 30% since 1997. Nationally, girls make up 15% of the incarcerated youth population and as much as 34% in some states. **States and local jurisdictions are in need of gender-responsive interventions to reverse the escalating trends of girls entering into the system.**

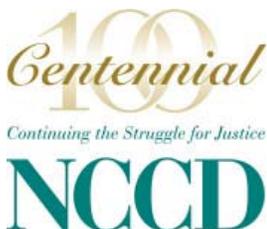
Girls are young.

In 2007, there were 2.5 million arrests for females of all ages, 25% of which were for girls under the age of 18. Of all youth incarcerations, 42% of girls are age 15 and younger, compared to 31% of boys age 15 and younger. **Gender-responsive and age-appropriate services are urgently needed.**



About the NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women

In 2006, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) celebrated its 100 year history in promoting effective, humane, fair, and economically sound solutions to criminal justice problems. The Center for Girls and Young Women is an expansion of current NCCD programs to address juvenile justice and child welfare systems that are designed for boys and ill equipped to meet the gender-specific needs of girls. The Center focuses on research, assessment services, staff training, and evaluation that are grounded in the life experiences of girls and young women.



The types of offenses for which girls are arrested and incarcerated are less serious than those for boys.

Contrary to the popular belief that girls are becoming more violent, the highest percentage of girls is incarcerated for status offenses (18%), technical violations (15%), and simple assault (15%). In the last 5 years, the arrest rate for violent crimes has increased 6% for boys and decreased 1% for girls. **Because most detained girls do not pose a public safety risk, less expensive community-based services would be a better investment of resources than more costly residential commitment programs.**

The pathways into the system are different for girls.

Like women, girls have different motivations for drug use, property theft, and violence. They are more likely to use drugs to self-medicate for depression and other mental health issues and have patterns of victimization and trauma that are different than those of boys. Girls demonstrate higher rates of serious mental health conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder, psychiatric disorders, attempts of self-harm, and suicide. It is estimated that 10% of incarcerated girls are pregnant and that 30% have children. **Unaddressed trauma and victimization drive behaviors and can contribute to fast-tracking girls deeper into a system that is not equipped to appropriately respond to their needs, thus furthering victimization.**

Recommendations from the NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women

State and local juvenile justice systems are increasingly called upon to address the needs of juvenile female offenders and at-risk girls. Based on our research and expertise in the field, NCCD's Center for Girls and Young Women recommends an overhaul of current legislation, policies, and practices in order to improve outcomes for girls and young women.

Convene a Congressional hearing that identifies solutions to the following critical issues facing girls in juvenile justice:

Escalating Trends: The escalating rates of arrest and incarceration for girls in the juvenile justice system continues.

Criminalization of Girls' Behavior: Criminalization of girls' behavior that does not pose a public safety threat results in incarceration or institutionalization (i.e., status offenses, domestic violence, violation of probation, violation of court orders).

Institutional Abuse: While the rates of abuse for girls outside facilities are higher than 50%, the rates of abuse for girls inside facilities are even more unacceptable and demand 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.

Examination of Legislation, Policies, and Practices that Negatively Impact Girls: Identify and scrutinize policies and practices for undue burden on girls. Ensure equity by evaluating the law's impact on girls.

Review Resource Allocation: Although the JJDPA Act of 1992 requires gender-specific services for girls, funding for these services has been woefully inadequate at the state and national levels. **Allocate adequate funds to improve outcomes for girls involved in the juvenile justice system.**