

Juvenile Justice Fact Sheet Series: Girls

March 2015

Counsel

Girls

Crossover
Youth

African-
American
Youth

Latino Youth

LGBTI
Youth

Mental
Health/Substance
Abuse

Specialty
Courts

School to
Prison
Pipeline

Overview:

There are many similarities between girls and boys who are involved with the juvenile justice system. Both are likely to be poor and come from disrupted and violent families, and both female and male youth of color are overrepresented in the system, as are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and intersex (LGBTI) youth. Despite these shared experiences, girls in the juvenile justice system face unique challenges. Many have been victims of sexual and physical abuse and assault, they are more likely than their male counterparts to have mental health issues, and many have had to cope with unplanned pregnancies and early motherhood.

National Statistics:

In 2012, nearly 260,000 girls under the age of 18 were arrested in the US, representing 29% of arrests of youth under 18. In 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, there were over 8,000 girls in residential placement (14% of the total); 40% of these girls were White, 35% were Black, and 19% were Hispanic. It is important to note that these data do *not* include youth placed in drug treatment or mental health facilities, and court-involved girls have a higher rate of mental health diagnoses than boys. White and middle class girls are also more likely to be placed in mental health facilities, especially private ones, than girls from impoverished and minority backgrounds, allowing them to avoid court-involvement through private health care provision.

Research and Programming:

Knowledge, data, and stereotypes about juvenile crime, offenders, and the justice system rely mostly on the lives of boys, despite the large numbers of girls arrested and adjudicated every year. This emphasis on boys leads to a lack of understanding of girls' different pathways to offending and their gender-specific needs in developing effective programming. Girls also encounter the justice system in unique ways. For example, research illustrates that girls are less likely to exhibit violent behavior than boys, although arrest rates for girls for simple assault actually increased in the 2000s, while for boys arrest rates for simple assault fell. Girls also saw larger increases in detention rates than boys in the 2000s. Scholars suggest that these data indicate an increased policing of girls' behaviors and added emphasis on arrest as an outcome of that policing in time. Research also shows that girls are held to a different set of societal norms than boys for behaviors like assault, for sexual expression and practice, and for comportment. Girls who do not exhibit stereotypically feminine identities and who identify as lesbian or trans* tend to receive longer sentences, as do African-American girls.

Perhaps most importantly, a very large percentage of girls who encounter the juvenile justice system are victims of childhood sexual and physical abuse. Girls who are victims of abuse have higher rates of offending, and this link highlights how victimization might influence girls' pathways to offending. The link is also important when explaining the rise in arrests for girls for assault charges in the 2000s. For example, girls who encounter abuse at home and respond to parental or guardian abuse with physical force can be charged with assault. In previous decades, these were more likely to be considered status offenses, whereas now assault charges can result.

Ohio Data:

Ohio's juvenile justice data are very sparse and do not include the percentages of girls adjudicated or committed by race, and they do not report the number of girls identifying as LGBTI who are court-involved or committed. Available statewide numbers include:

- *Arrests:* In 2012, nearly 29,000 Ohio youth under 18 were arrested, and over 9,000 (32%) of these were girls.
- *Felony adjudications:* In Fiscal Year 2012 (FY12), 12.3% of state felony adjudications in Ohio were girls (over 600 girls and 4,400 boys). In FY13, the numbers of girls adjudicated delinquent fell to 578.
- *Department of Youth Services (DYS) commitments:* In FY12, girls made up 7.4% of the population of youth committed to DYS facilities (39 girls and 485 boys). When comparing felony adjudications to DYS commitments, girls adjudicated of felonies were committed to DYS at a rate of 6.3%, lower than the rate of commitment for boys (10.9%). In FY13, only 17 girls were committed to DYS facilities. Most girls in DYS facilities have mental health needs. In the second half of 2014, close to 90% of committed girls were on the mental health caseload; boys on the mental health caseload never rose over 53%.
- *Recidivism:* The recidivism rate one year after release for girls 2012 was 20.8%, compared to 26.4% for boys.
- *Parole:* A one-day count in FY13 showed that 21 girls (5%) were on parole. For those discharged from parole in CY 2013, the average length of parole was 9.4 months (boys was 11.3).

Ohio's Approach:

Despite consensus within policy and academic communities that gender-specific programming is crucial for the long term success of court-involved girls, an informal review of court programs throughout the state show a lack of consistent, local, community-based programming targeting girls in juvenile courts throughout Ohio.

At the statewide level, in May 2014, Ohio closed the Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility, which served as the correctional facility for girls. Currently, all girls who are committed to a DYS facility are sent to the Montgomery County Center for Adolescent Services (CAS); despite its low population of girls, DYS utilizes a gender-specific curriculum at CAS that could be a resource statewide. However, if a girl has mental health needs that require them to be placed a behavioral health facility, DYS has contracts with Applewood Centers in Cleveland and Pomegranate Health Systems in Columbus. Of the 12 Community Corrections Facilities (CCFs) in Ohio, only three have placement spaces for girls with felony adjudications: Montgomery County CAS, the Miami Valley Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, and the Lucas County Youth Treatment Center. This means that few girls adjudicated delinquent have access to CCFs close to home. For example, of the 17 girls committed to DYS facilities in FY13, three were adjudicated in Cuyahoga County and 3 in Licking County, neither of which has a DYS-approved CCF with beds for girls.

Conclusion:

Thousands of girls are arrested annually in Ohio, but few local court programs address their gender-specific needs. Girls, including those with children, may be committed to facilities far from home, especially given the few residential facilities with beds for females around the state. Developing local, effective, and targeted programming for girls is critical to ensure that girls can access the care and attention they need, particularly for experiences of abuse, trauma, and sexual victimization. Finally, there are alarmingly high percentages of committed girls on the mental health caseload in Ohio, which begs the question of whether girls are being funneled into mental health care programs due to a lack of specific programs and facilities for girls even before they come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Resources:

Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities Reported by Youth, 2012* (2012), available at <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/svjfy12.pdf>.

Chesney-Lind, M. and Pasko, L. *The Female Offender: Girls, Women, and Crime*. Sage. (2013)

Department of Youth Services, *Profile of Youth Adjudicated or Committed for Felony Offenses: Fiscal Year 2012* (2013) and Department of Youth Services, *Profile of Youth Adjudicated or Committed for Felony Offenses: Fiscal Year 2013* (2014), available at www.dys.ohio.gov/DNN/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1j9YEO1N8zA%3d&tabid=117&mid=879.

Puzzanchera, C. (2013). *Juvenile Arrests 2011*. Online. Available: <http://ojjdp.gov/pubs/244476.pdf>

Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W., and Puzzanchera, C. (2013) "Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement." Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcrp/>

Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., and Kang, W. (2014). "Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985-2011." Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajes/>

US Department of Justice, *Crime in the United States 2012*. Online. Available: <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2012/crime-in-the-u.s.-2012/tables/33tabledatadecoverviewpdf>.

This fact sheet is one of a fact sheet series about Ohio's juvenile justice system by the Ohio Juvenile Justice Association.

If you have any questions, please visit OJJA's website or contact Erin Davies with the Juvenile Justice Coalition at edavies@jjohio.org or 614-400-5548.