

ADDRESSING THE INTERSECTIONS OF JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: WORKING WITH GIRLS

All too often, girls' experiences with homelessness push them in to the juvenile justice system. Currently, nearly 30 percent of youth who are arrested are girls or young women and their share of arrests, detainment, and court cases has steadily increased over the past two decades.¹ Girls are more likely to be arrested and charged for status offenses than for other offenses.² Common examples including running away from home, a charge that girls are more likely to be arrested and detained for when compared to their male counterparts. Research shows that, girls make up 61 percent of all runaway cases, and spend twice as long in detention facilities for status offenses as boys.³ On any given night there are approximately 1.3 million homeless youth living on the streets, with studies showing that 75 percent of runaways are females.⁴

Juvenile justice agencies, youth homelessness service providers, and other related stakeholders play an important role in addressing the unique needs of girls. Stakeholders can improve the outcomes for girls experiencing trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder through gender-responsive practices, and by implementing policies that are specific to the needs of girls who have experienced abuse and homelessness.

For more information on how communities and stakeholders can work together to create and implement effective gender-responsive practices for girls facing possible homelessness and juvenile justice involvement, please see CJJ's Principles for change.

Gender-Responsive Practice⁵

While there have historically been fewer girls than boys involved in the juvenile justice system, arrest and incarceration rates for girls are rising relative to boys. Girls are more likely to be arrested and charged for status offenses than for other offenses. The services and supports that work best for girls are often different, so education, policy, and practice change may be needed to meet the needs of girls.

While evaluation of programs for girls is lagging behind the research on effective programming for boys, programs that are gender-responsive for girls rely on a theoretical framework that dictates research-based principles for effective female programming. Boys may also benefit from many of these program qualities. These include:

- Being culturally responsive, strength-based, developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and relational;
- Ensuring clients' physical, psychological, and emotional safety;
- Employing staff who are sensitive to trauma and understand girls' socialization; and
- Providing ongoing staff training and support.

The Principles for Change recommend that to support gender responsive practices, stakeholders should ensure that elements of gender-responsive practice are present throughout, from first contact with the system, through service and treatment provision. To the extent that gender-specific programming is offered, youth should participate according to their gender-identity rather than their biological gender, if they are not the same.

The Principles further recommend that law enforcement, courts, schools, and service providers employ gender-responsive and age- and culturally appropriate trauma-informed responses when working with youth. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's "[Girls and the Juvenile Justice System](#)," outlines what communities can do to improve responses to girls involved with the justice system.

"Youth should help lead and shape the identification and implementation of policy and practice solutions to address the connections between juvenile justice and youth homelessness."

Youth should help lead and shape the identification and implementation of policy and practice solutions to address the connections between juvenile justice and youth homelessness. The Link in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example, has a Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee made up of youth who have experience with the juvenile justice system. The committee designs and oversees programs and helps hire relevant staff. They also have a gender-specific juvenile justice advisory committee called VOICE which is made up of girls who have had involvement in the juvenile justice system. This group helps oversee their POWER Program (Positive Opportunities for Women of Every Race) and provides gender specific support for girls on probation within Hennepin County. Learn more at thelinkmn.org.

Trauma, Abuse, Violence, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

As defined by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "trauma occurs when a child experiences an intense event that threatens or causes harm to his or her emotional and physical well-being." In the Administration for Children, Youth and Families study, 56.7% of homeless youth had experienced physical abuse as a child, and at least 30% had been sexually abused.⁶ Other studies estimate that past traumatic experiences and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are twice as common among juvenile justice-involved youth.⁷ How past experiences translate into trauma varies from individual to individual, but traumatic stress can cause youth to be anxious, depressed, emotionally numb, impulsive and can lead to conduct problems and other issues.⁸ All of this can lead to school pushout, juvenile justice involvement, and other circumstances that can then bring additional trauma.

Although a large proportion of youth who have experienced homelessness and/or juvenile justice system involvement have also experienced neglect or physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, not all have. Nearly 50 percent of youth in shelters report physical harm by a family member as a major contributing factor to their homelessness.⁹ According to a YouthCare study, 60 percent of homeless girls have been sexually abused.¹⁰ These experiences impact each person differently. Some youth may experience lifelong traumatic stress symptoms (with or without a clinical diagnosis), while others may, on the surface, show little to no apparent impact. Because young people are incredibly resilient, a range of healing and therapeutic supports should be provided. As such, there are many elements of trauma-informed care that support youth in these systems, particularly those experiencing or healing from high levels of traumatic stress. (Homelessness and justice-system involvement, particularly secure confinement, can be extremely traumatic in and of themselves. The recommendations in this document can address past trauma, and minimize new system-induced trauma.)

Trauma and victimization are particular concerns for girls in the juvenile justice system. According to the National Crittenton Foundation's *Gender Injustice* report:

- 45% of justice-involved girls in one study reported experiencing five or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES);
- 31% reported experiencing sexual abuse in the home;
- 84% reported experiencing family violence; and
- Girls report abuse at 4.4 times the rate of boys.¹¹

The Human Rights Project for Girls similarly outlined extremely high rates of abuse histories among juvenile justice involved girls in studies in Oregon, South Carolina, and California.¹² According to the report: girls between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault and one in four American girls will experience some form of sexual violence by the age of 18. And, unfortunately, many girls who experience sexual abuse are placed into the juvenile justice system due to issues relating to their victimization. According to a study conducted by the US Department of Health and Human Services, 46 percent of runaway and homeless youth report being physically abused; 38 percent report being emotionally abused, and 17 percent report being forced into unwanted sexual activity by a family or household member.

Stakeholder can address these issues through collaboration and continued focus on change.

Service providers and other system professionals should acknowledge that girls accessing their services may have experienced sex and/or labor trafficking, and ensure that their services can meet the needs of young girls with those experiences. At the same time, however, youth-serving systems and programs should avoid requiring that girls be classified as "trafficking victims," "abuse survivors," or even "homeless," as this may prevent girls from accessing needed services if they do not share their personal history. Focusing on resilience, rather than victimization, is also more in line with the principles of positive youth development.¹³

State Advisory Groups, policymakers, schools, and federal, state and local government agencies should provide and/or fund training on Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma, and should change their systems, policies, and practices to be more trauma-informed.

Juvenile Justice and Homeless Youth-Serving Agencies have an important role to play. These agencies should:¹⁴

- Screen girls for traumatic stress symptoms using evidence-based screening tools, while ensuring that assessment information is never used to incriminate youth.
- Offer mandatory staff training on trauma and on how gender impacts services. Ensure that training is provided to allow staff to properly recognize and respond to "disruptive" behaviors that result from trauma.
- Ensure that attorneys and other legal or court professionals who work directly with girls receive training on trauma, including its unique impacts on girls, and how to interview clients using trauma-informed strategies in order to reduce further trauma.
- Provide evidence-based or empirically-supported interventions, such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET), as needed and appropriate.¹⁵

- Front-load or speed up service delivery so youth can receive any needed trauma-related treatment as soon as possible, noting that not all youth involved in these systems will require treatment for trauma.
- Avoid court involvement and secure confinement, and minimize out-of-home placement and placement changes. Therapeutic, rather than punitive, settings should be chosen if out-of-home placement is necessary. (All stakeholders should be familiar with the community-based residential therapeutic placement options in their community, and should require that if these placements are necessary, youth are only placed with high-quality providers who use evidence-informed practices.) These steps will help minimize system-induced trauma.
- Involve and educate caregivers and other family members about the impact of trauma. This is needed to help them be a resource for their children, and because they may have also been impacted by trauma.¹⁶

For more information or to read the full report “Addressing the Intersections of Juvenile Justice Involvement and Youth Homelessness: Principles for Change” visit www.juvjustice.org/homelessness.



¹ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *Girls and the Juvenile Justice System*. 24 Apr. 2017. www.ojjdp.gov/policyguidance/girls-juvenile-justice-system/.

² Coalition for Juvenile Justice. *Addressing the Intersection of Juvenile Justice Involvement and Youth Homelessness: Principles for Change*.

³ Coalition for Juvenile Justice. *Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders Facts and Resources*.

⁴ National Conference of State Legislatures. *Homeless and Runaway Youth*. 14 Apr. 2016. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>.

⁵ Selvaggi, Kimberly. *Ideas for Building a Female Responsive System for Girls*.

⁶ Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau. *Street Outreach Program Data Collection Project Final Report*. Available at www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/data_collection_study_final_report_street_outreach_program.pdf.

⁷ Ford, Steinberg, Hawke, Levine, & Zhang. *Randomized Trial Comparison of Emotion Regulation and Relational Psychotherapies for PTSD with Girls Involved in Delinquency*. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 41, 27-37; Ford, Hartman, Hawke, and Chapman. *Traumatic Victimization, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Suicidal Ideation, and Substance Abuse Risk Among Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth*. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 1(1).

⁸ National Child Traumatic Stress Network Child Welfare Committee. *Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit*. Available at www.nctsn.org/products/child-welfare-trauma-training-toolkit-2008.

⁹ Covenant House. *Statistics on Homeless Youth in America*. <https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-teen-issues/statistics>.

¹⁰ National Network for Youth. *Unaccompanied Youth Fast Facts*. https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/FactSheet_Unaccompanied_Youth.pdf.

¹¹ (Sherman, Balck and Foundation)

¹² Human Rights Project for Girls and Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality. *The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls Story*. Available at rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_report_final.pdf.

¹³ Coalition for Juvenile Justice. *Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*. Available at: bit.ly/2lQnrfu.

¹⁴ Lisa Pilnik & Jessie Kendall. *Victimization and Trauma Experienced by Children and Youth: Implications for Legal Advocates. Moving From Evidence to Action: The Safe Start Series on Children Exposed to Violence*. Issue Brief #7. Available at safestartcenter.wordpress.com/tag/toolkit/.

¹⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices*. nrepp.samhsa.gov.

¹⁶ National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Child Welfare Committee. *Birth Parents with Trauma Histories and the Child Welfare System: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys*. Available at nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/birth_parents_trauma_guide_judges_final.pdf.