

## Girls in the Juvenile Justice System A Profile of Ohio

Juvenile delinquency among girls is a unique research, practice and policy challenge that requires a comprehensive understanding of the problem, including scope, causes and risk factors, and opportunities for effective prevention and intervention. Various child-serving systems, including education, child welfare and mental health services are connected to the juvenile justice system and the young people in its care. The following information and data have been compiled to develop a common source of reference for the experiences and needs of girls in Ohio who have either entered or are at-risk of entering the juvenile justice system. Data collection, maintenance and reporting are not consistent across the state or across child-serving agencies, and ease of data accessibility varies considerably as well. Thus, while significant gaps in data exist, this summary serves as a starting point for background on vulnerable girls.



The incidence of girls arrested for serious violent crimes has remained steady over the last two decades (U.S. Department of Justice [USDOJ], 2008a)

The overall juvenile arrest rate has dropped for both girls and boys in the last decade nationwide; however, the decrease was greater for boys than girls (Puzzanchera, 2009) Figure 3 illustrates this sharp decline for arrests involving violent crimes.

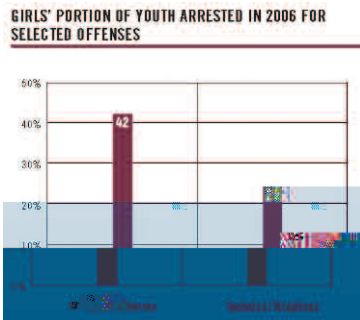
Researchers have examined the changing nature of assaults over the past decades to better understand the increasing arrest rates for girls and the context of girls' violence, despite the overall decline in juvenile arrests (USDOJ, 2008a) Rather than a growth of violent behavior among girls, their analysis attributes increases in assault arrests to changes in law enforcement policies, such as lowering the threshold for reporting an assault or classifying an assault as aggravated; reporting child-parent domestic disputes as assaults; and, increasing school zero-tolerance policies for police referrals (USDOJ, 2008a) For instance, behaviors once deemed "ungovernable" and thus status offenses, such as a domestic dispute between a girl and her sibling or parent, may now result instead in an arrest for simple assault. After peers, family members are the second most common target of assaults by girls and girls' violence is more likely than boys' violence to occur at home, as noted in Table 2.

Table 2. Juvenile arrests for violent crimes by gender, race, and ethnicity, 1996-2005

Although girls make up a much smaller overall portion of juvenile arrests than boys, the two groups' arrest patterns have diverged somewhat over the past decade. As the percentage changes in Table 1 indicate, juvenile arrests generally decreased between 1996 and 2005, but the decrease was greater for boys than for girls. The exception to the general trend was arrests for simple assault, which increased 24% for girls while decreasing for boys.

Upon arrest, youth may either be released under the supervision of their parent or guardian or held in detention prior to their adjudication and sentencing. Girls continue to be a minority in detention systems where they are disproportionately detained for less serious offenses. While girls made up 18% of the detained youth nationwide in 2006, they comprised 42% of those held for status offenses and 24% of those held for technical violations of probation and parole (Sherman & Irvine, 2009)

Figure 4



SOURCE: Sherman, F.T. & Irvine, A. (2009). Using JDAI Strategies to Reduce the Detention of Girls: A Practice Guide to Juvenile Detention Reform (5).

Girls make up 48.7% of the 1,317,063 total child population aged 10-17 years in Ohio. Nearly 82% of these girls are Caucasian, 13.8% are African American, and 2.4% are Latino/Hispanic (The Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Census Data Online, 2000). Compared to the general population of adolescent girls, females account for 2.7% of the adjudicated youth population in Ohio's juvenile courts (Ohio Department of Youth Services [ODYS], 2008). While Ohio does not maintain statewide data on total numbers of juvenile misdemeanors and status offenses, statewide roughly 1,100 girls are adjudicated delinquent of a felony crime annually (out of approximately 8600 total felony adjudications annually, approximately 49% of whom are Caucasian) (ODYS, 2008). The total number of delinquency offenses statewide is significantly higher than total felony adjudications. To put the felony number in context, in Cuyahoga County alone for instance, there were 11,254 delinquency and status offenses in 2008,

28% (3,136) of which were committed by girls (The Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas Juvenile Division, 2008). Compared to boys, girls appear more than twice as likely to be adjudicated for status offenses (30% versus 14% for boys) (2008). Of those juveniles who were arrested in Cuyahoga County, 55.6% were African American, 43.1% were Caucasian, and 1.2% were Latino/Hispanic. African American youth are twice as likely to be arrested in Cuyahoga County as Caucasian youth and accounted for 94.3% of all minority youth who were arrested (The Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Kent State University, 2008)

In Ohio, children age 4 and older can be transferred from the juvenile system to adult court for the commission of any felony including serious property offenses. In 2008, 319 youth were transferred to adult courts, 4.4% of whom were female. Of these 319 youth, 72.7% were African American, 22.3% were Caucasian, and 5% were Other (ODYS, 2009). Even without an increase in serious violent crimes, the number of girls transferred to adult court in Ohio has more than tripled since 2006 from four girls (making up 1.3% of the total juvenile transfer population) to fourteen girls (4.4% of the total transfer population) in 2008 (ODYS, 2008).

Adjudicated delinquent youth may be sentenced to a range of dispositions, from probation to more graduated sanctions, including residential placement, secure confinement in local facilities or placement in state correctional facilities in the custody of the Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS). Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility, located in Delaware county is the only juvenile prison for girls in Ohio (there are six ODYS facilities); however there are an additional twelve juvenile community correction facilities and approximately 41 locally operated juvenile detention centers across the state (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2006). Due to data constraints, this summary looks only at females committed to ODYS secure custody.

Girls make up a small proportion (7.7% in 2008) of the total number of youth committed to ODYS correctional facilities and that number has dropped significantly in recent years (ODYS, 2008). In July 2006,

129 girls were incarcerated compared to 45 girls in October, 2009 (a decrease of 65%, compared to an overall decrease in ODYS population of 33% during that same time period) (Hearing on "Girls in the Juvenile Justice System" Testimony of Thomas Stickrath [Stickrath], 2009). Of the 1,626 ODYS admissions in 2008, 125 were girls and 1,501 were boys. Figure 5 breaks down the 2008 ODYS admissions by type of offense and rate of admission by gender. While girls were committed to ODYS for generally less serious offenses than boys, as Figure 5 shows, both boys and girls were committed for property or person offenses at about the same rate (just under 30% for each). One marked gender difference in ODYS admissions exists in parole revocations; girls are more likely to be committed to correctional facilities for violating parole than boys (29% versus 19%).

The racial breakdown of the female incarcerated population in 2008 was 52% Black, 38% White, .6% Biracial, and .2% Hispanic and Other respectively (ODYS Female Admission Aggregate Data [ODYS Female Data], 2009). Table 3 illustrates annual trend data since 2005 for the types of offenses that resulted in girls being placed in an ODYS correctional facility.

The average length of stay for girls in an ODYS correctional facility is 6.8 months (ODYS Female Data, 2009).



There has been a notable drop in reported school-based violence overall. Both boys and girls reported decreases in physical fights and in carrying weapons to school (ODH YRBS, 2008a). While teenage pregnancy between 2000-2006 has also dropped overall in all teen age groups (10-19 years of age), the teenage pregnancy rate increased slightly for the first time from 2005 to 2006, with a total of

Educational success is a protective factor for girls; however, school disciplinary practices such as zero-tolerance policies can serve as a pathway to the





