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OJJDP IN FOCUS

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How Is OJJDP Addressing Girls' Delinquency?

Rising trends in girls' delinquency in the 1990s led OJJDP to call for more gender-related research on delinquency prevention and intervention. To address this need and provide comprehensive information on female delinquency, the Office created its Girls Study Group in 2004. Several other OJJDP-sponsored programs also have undertaken efforts to enhance the juvenile justice system's response to girls' delinquency.

Learn more at ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html.

Girls' Delinquency

In 1980, females represented 11 percent of juvenile arrests for violent offenses. By 2000, that proportion had grown to 18 percent, and by 2004 it had risen to 30 percent. Even though arrest numbers remained higher for boys than girls during that period, arrest rates for girls increased while rates for boys decreased.

This increase in girls' arrest rates caused juvenile justice specialists to question why girls were becoming more involved in delinquency. Of particular interest was the question of whether girls were becoming more violent or if other factors contributed to their higher arrest rates. However, since most research on juveniles had been conducted on boys, the juvenile justice research community was unable to account for the increase in girls' arrest rates.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has long supported research on understanding girls' delinquency, particularly through its Girls Study Group, an OJJDP research project to investigate the roots of and solutions to girls' delinquency. The Office also provides programs, assessment tools, information, training and technical assistance,

publications, and other resources that address delinquency among girls.

Research

In 2004, OJJDP convened the Girls Study Group, a team of multidisciplinary experts consisting of sociologists, psychologists, criminologists, gender studies experts, researchers, and practitioners with legal and girls' program development experience to address the following questions:

- Which girls become delinquent?
- What factors protect girls from delinquency?
- What factors put girls at risk for delinquency?
- What pathways lead to girls' delinquency?
- What programs are most effective in preventing girls' delinquency?
- How should the juvenile justice system respond to girls' delinquency?



The Girls Study Group's initial findings suggest that girls are not more violent than before and confirm that girls engage in far less crime and delinquency than boys for nearly every offense. It was also observed that mandatory arrest policies and other changes in the juvenile justice system impacted higher arrest rates for girls.

Although a number of delinquency risk factors affect both boys and girls—such as family dynamics, school involvement, neighborhood environment, and the availability of community-based programs—other factors directly increase a girl's risk of delinquency. These risk factors include early onset of puberty, sexual abuse or maltreatment, and depression and anxiety.

Researchers also found that a number of protective factors exist to prevent girls from becoming juvenile offenders even when faced with risk factors. These protective factors include the involvement of a caring adult, school connectedness, school success, and religiosity.

OJJDP is committed to disseminating its research findings to promote better understanding of the factors related to girls' delinquency and inform effective strategies to reduce it, while improving outcomes for girls.

Programs

OJJDP funds a number of programs focused on girls' delinquency, including the following:

- **Girl Scouts Beyond Bars** helps girls and their incarcerated mothers maintain their relationships. This program was developed by OJJDP in collaboration with the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice.



Publications

OJJDP is publishing the findings of its Girls Study Group through a series of bulletins that address the research questions previously noted. These bulletins will be available online via OJJDP's publications page (ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/publications/index.html).

- **The Girls Study Group—Charting the Way to Delinquency Prevention for Girls** (October 2008) provides an overview of the Girls Study Group research project, initial findings of the Study Group, and outlines the forthcoming bulletins that will be published based on the research.
- **Violence by Teenage Girls: Trends and Context** (May 2008) describes recent trends in girls' offending and examines the settings in which girls commit crimes.
- **Resilient Girls—Factors That Protect Against Delinquency** (January 2009) examines whether four factors—a caring adult, school connectedness, school success, and religiosity—can protect girls from delinquency.

- A related program, **Girl Scouting in Detention Centers**, provides girls who have been adjudicated, are wards of the court, or are court-referred delinquents with opportunities to participate in activities that promote positive social development.
- **Friendly PEERsuasion**, cited in OJJDP's Model Programs Guide, is an interactive program that helps middle school girls gain knowledge, skills, and support systems to avoid substance abuse.
- **PACE Center for Girls** provides delinquency-prevention programs to teenage girls. The goals of Practical Academic Cultural Education (PACE) are to deter school withdrawal, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and welfare dependency.

In addition, many states have used funding under OJJDP's Formula Grant program to promote gender-specific programming.

To guide decisions within the juvenile justice system, judges, case managers, probation staff, and related professionals often rely on standardized instruments to assess the risks and needs of youth. With the increased prevalence of girls in the juvenile justice system, some have questioned whether the instruments currently in use are appropriate for girls. However, systematic research on the validity of these instruments is lacking. The Girls Study Group has reviewed more than 140 assessment instruments, and information about each instrument may be accessed by searching the Study Group's online database (girlsstudygroup.rti.org/instruments.cfm).

- **Suitability of Assessment Instruments for Delinquent Girls** determines whether current risk-assessment and treatment-focused instruments are appropriate for use with girls. It also provides guidance to practitioners on how to select instruments for use.
- **Causes and Correlates of Girls' Delinquency** examines the personal, family, peer, school, and community factors that can lead to delinquency among girls.
- **Developmental Sequences of Girls' Delinquent Behavior** investigates the different patterns of delinquent behaviors in which girls become involved and provides insight into the life pathways that lead to girls' delinquent behavior.
- **Girls' Delinquency Programs: An Evidence-Based Review** examines girls' delinquency programs and determines whether they effectively intervene in delinquency trajectories.



OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

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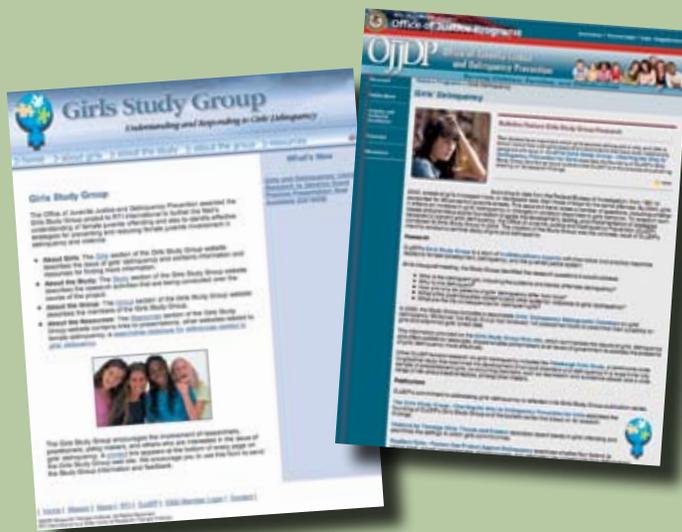
Training and Technical Assistance

OJJDP's National Training and Technical Assistance Center has developed a training course to specifically address girls' needs. Gender Responsive Programming for Girls focuses on girls' unique experiences as they relate to race, culture, gender, development, economic status, and physical appearance; and may be used to enhance services in a range of settings, from community-based prevention programs for at-risk girls to intensive residential programs and detention.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the Community Capacity Development Office; the National Institute of Justice; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART).

Online Resources

OJJDP's **Girls' Delinquency Web page** (ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html) offers an overview of female juvenile delinquency and the Girls Study Group's efforts to address it.



The **Girls Study Group Web site** (girlsstudygroup.rti.org) describes the Study Group's research and provides searchable databases on bibliographic references to girls' delinquency and instruments to assess it.

For information about other OJJDP programs, go to www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp.

