



THE SEXUAL ABUSE TO PRISON PIPELINE

WHAT IS THE SEXUAL ABUSE TO PRISON PIPELINE?

For girls, one of the main predictors of entry into the juvenile justice system is sexual abuse.ⁱ [The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline](#) is a term used to describe the pathways of gendered violence that lead girls into the juvenile justice system as a direct result of their victimization.

GIRLS IN THE SYSTEM ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Rates of sexual abuse are more than 4 times higher for girls in the system than for boys.ⁱⁱ
- Girls in the juvenile justice system are nearly 2 times as likely as boys to report having experienced 5 or more forms of abuse and trauma.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In South Carolina, 81% of girls in the juvenile justice system reported past histories of sexual abuse.^{iv}
- In Oregon, 76% of girls in the juvenile justice system reported past sexual abuse.^v

HOW DOES SEXUAL ABUSE PUSH GIRLS INTO THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM?

Arrest for Status Offenses

- Status offenses are acts which are only unlawful when committed by youth, such as running away or truancy.
- Girls often engage in these behaviors in response to abuse or trauma; for example, running away to escape an abusive situation at home or in foster care.^{vi}
- Girls are overrepresented among status offenders. Whereas girls only account for 15% of the juvenile detention population, they are 36% of youth detained for status offenses.^{vii}

Dual-System/Crossover Youth

- “Dual-system” or “crossover youth” refer to youth who have had involvement in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
- Girls frequently cross over from the child welfare to the justice system because of their responses to abuse and trauma that has gone untreated.^{viii}
- Girls are overrepresented among crossover youth. Girls are between 20% to 25% of the juvenile justice population, but are 33% to 50% of all crossover youth.^{ix}

Arrest of Child Sex Trafficking Victims

- Girls are routinely arrested for prostitution, even though they are legally incapable of consenting to sex and even though federal law defines them as victims of human trafficking.^x
- Trafficked girls also become involved in the juvenile justice system for offenses other than prostitution that are committed as a direct result of their exploitation.^{xi}

GIRLS OF COLOR ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY THE SEXUAL ABUSE TO PRISON PIPELINE

- Native American girls are over 4 times more likely than white girls to be incarcerated.^{xii}
- Black girls are 3.5 times more likely than white girls to be incarcerated.^{xiii}
- Latina girls are 38% more likely than white girls to be incarcerated.^{xiv}
- Girls of color account for approximately 24% of the youth population but comprise approximately 62% of girls who are in residential placement.^{xvi}



ⁱ Rebecca Epstein, Lindsay Rosenthal, Malika Saada Saar, & Yasmin Vafa, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, Ms. Foundation for Women & Rights4Girls, [The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls' Story](#) (2015).

ⁱⁱ *Id.* at 8.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.* at 8-9.

^{iv} *Id.* at 7.

^v *Id.*

^{vi} *Id.*

^{vii} Melissa Sickmund, Anthony Sladky, Wei Kang & Charles Puzzanchera (2019), "[Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement](#)."

^{viii} Rebecca Epstein, Lindsay Rosenthal, Malika Saada Saar, & Yasmin Vafa, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, Ms. Foundation for Women & Rights4Girls, [The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls' Story](#) (2015), pp.26.

^{ix} *Id.* at 24.

^x *Id.* at 19.

^{xi} Department of State, [Trafficking in Persons Report 20th Edition](#) (2020), p.516.

^{xii} The Sentencing Project, [Fact Sheet: Incarcerated Women and Girls](#) (June 2019)

^{xiii} *Id.*

^{xiv} *Id.*

^{xv} Charles Puzzanchera, Anthony Sladky & Wei Kang, [Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2019](#) (2019); Melissa Sickmund, Anthony Sladky, Wei Kang & Charles Puzzanchera, "[Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement](#)." (2019)