



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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## What About Girls?

by Kimberly J. Budnick and Ellen Shields-Fletcher

State juvenile justice systems across the country are challenged by the question: What about girls? This question cannot be ignored because female involvement in the juvenile justice system continues on a steady course upward—even as juvenile male involvement in delinquency declines. Between 1992 and 1996 the number of juvenile females arrested for Violent Crime Index offenses increased 25 percent, with no increase in arrests of male juveniles for the same offenses. Juvenile female arrests for Property Crime Index offenses increased 21 percent, while juvenile male arrests in this category decreased 4 percent. Law enforcement agencies made 723,000 arrests of juvenile females in 1996 (Snyder, 1997). Female involvement in the juvenile justice system, once seen as an anomaly, has evolved into a significant trend.

State and local juvenile justice systems are increasingly called upon to address the needs of juvenile female offenders and at-risk girls. Recognizing that these needs require national attention, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has launched a multilevel approach. It includes reviewing how States are dealing with female juvenile offenders, developing an inventory of best practices, producing a prototype training curriculum, and implementing a variety of program development activities.

### Status of the States

In the fall of 1998, the OJJDP publication *Juvenile Female Offenders: A Status of the States Report* will be available from OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC). This Report will provide a historical overview and an inventory of State efforts to address the needs of at-risk girls and juvenile female offenders and a mechanism for sharing information across State boundaries. In addition to offering a discussion of female child and adolescent development, the Report will describe efforts under way in 24 States and the District of Columbia to develop and implement programs and policies to address at-risk girls and juvenile female offenders. A number of States have completed statewide assessments of the needs of at-risk girls and have developed a variety of programmatic approaches, including

public education, training, pilot projects, gender research, and program evaluation. The Report will include recommendations for future action at the Federal, State, and local levels.

### Training and Technical Assistance

OJJDP is in the final stage of completing two training tools through a 3-year cooperative agreement with Greene, Peters and Associates (GPA). The first document, *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming: An Inventory of Best Practices*, will highlight exemplary and effective female-specific program practices that States and local jurisdictions can use immediately. To identify such programs, GPA solicited nominations and input from juvenile justice professionals at the national, State, and local levels and from organizations that serve adolescents across the Nation. A 2-tiered review process identified 16 model programs that had gender-specific components for serving adolescent female populations.

A companion piece, *Paving a Way for Female Development: Gender-Specific Programming*, is a 2- to 3-day training curriculum designed for decisionmakers in juvenile corrections and detention agencies, national advocacy organizations, and community-based, youth-serving agencies and organizations. The curriculum conveys the need for effective gender-specific programming for juvenile females and describes key elements of such programs.

### Program Development

In conjunction with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, OJJDP has initiated a unique collaborative effort between Connecticut and Illinois. OJJDP will use lessons learned from the Girls Link Juvenile Female Offender Project in Cook County, IL, to develop specialized delinquency prevention and detention programs for Connecticut girls. The project will target females up to age 18 and will include development of a plan for statewide change in the handling of female juvenile offenders, a hierarchy of sanctions with specific provisions for pregnant girls and girls who are mothers, development of a range of sanctions in Connecticut's juvenile justice system, and effective use of Medicaid/Medicare reimbursements.

In addition, the SafeFutures 5-year demonstration initiative has a program component for at-risk girls and female offenders. Each of the six sites has developed different program strategies for this component, ranging from prevention-oriented girls "talking circles" in the tribal site to a girls treatment center and day treatment facility for female offenders in an urban site.

While each State must answer the question: What about girls? in its own way, there are often common challenges:

- ◆ A growing number of female offenders.
- ◆ Demand for comprehensive needs assessments that identify gaps in the provision of services for girls.
- ◆ The necessity of developing and implementing gender-specific services and programs designed to meet the unique needs of girls.
- ◆ Competition for scarce resources and a limited understanding of what works for girls.

The research, training, technical assistance, and gender-specific program development initiatives outlined in this Fact Sheet represent OJJDP's continuing commitment to address the needs of juvenile female offenders and at-risk girls.

## For Further Information

*Juvenile Female Offenders: A Status of the States Report* will be available on OJJDP's home page at [www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm](http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm). A Bulletin on this Report is being prepared; it will be available from JJC, 800-638-8736. Printed copies of *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming: An Inventory of Best Practices* will be available from JJC in the fall of 1998. Questions about *Paving a Way for Female Development: Gender-Specific Programming* can be directed to OJJDP's Training and Technical Assistance Division, 202-307-5940. Inquiries regarding the replication of the Cook County Girls Link Juvenile Female Offender Project should be directed to Travis Cain, Program Specialist, Special Emphasis Division, 202-307-5914.

## Reference

Snyder, H.N. 1997 (November). *Juvenile Arrests 1996*. Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

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