

The Girls Study Group



RTI International has conducted research on crime, violence, justice systems, and behavioral health for over 30 years. In 2004, RTI convened the Girls Study Group for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to explore trends, causes, and risk factors related to girls' delinquency. Findings will inform policy, improve communication and understanding, and support the development of more effective delinquency prevention and intervention programs designed specifically for girls.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, from 1991 to 2000, arrests of girls increased more (or decreased less) than arrests of boys for most types of offenses. By 2003, girls accounted for nearly a third of all juvenile arrests. However, questions remain about whether these trends reflect an actual increase in girls' delinquent behavior or changes in societal responses to girls' behavior.

Very little is known about the increase in arrests of girls, its effects, or effective responses to this trend. States and local jurisdictions have programs and interventions designed for males in the juvenile justice system, yet much is unknown about how girls respond to male-oriented interventions. In addition, communities are unprepared to address the needs of girls who are at risk of becoming involved or are already involved in the juvenile justice system.

RTI is working to provide critical information on female-specific risk and protective factors for delinquency, societal contributions to the increasing arrest rate for girls, and the effectiveness of existing intervention and prevention programs.

Approach

In 2004, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) awarded the Girls Study Group (GSG) project to RTI. The GSG is an interdisciplinary group of noted scholars and practitioners convened by RTI to

- Explore girls' patterns of delinquency and their pathways to and desistance from delinquency
- Review findings on gender differences in the causes and correlates of delinquency
- Identify risk and protective factors for effective intervention to prevent initiation or promote desistance from delinquency
- Identify gaps in existing research on girls and delinquency
- Communicate GSG project findings to policy makers, practitioners, and researchers
- Facilitate adoption of effective programs designed to meet the needs of girls in the juvenile justice system.



GSG activities include a comprehensive review of the literature, a review of programs targeting girls' delinquency, a review of risk-assessment and treatment-focused instruments, analysis of secondary data, and dissemination of GSG project findings to the public.

Findings and Products

The GSG has made significant progress in understanding girls' delinquency, including patterns of offending among adolescent girls, the protective factors associated with girls' delinquency, and the importance of considering these issues when developing effective prevention and intervention programs.

Findings thus far show that, in comparison to boys, there has been a greater increase in the number of girls being arrested for delinquent behaviors, although the increase does not seem to reflect actual changes in girls' behavior. Changes in social policy and the lack of non-justice system alternatives for girls seem to be implicated in this increase. A series of studies that are being published as OJJDP bulletins describe the ways in which the group worked to understand and respond to girls' delinquency.

- *Violence by Teenage Girls: Trends and Context:* Describes recent trends in girls' offending and examines the settings in which girls commit crimes
- *Causes and Correlates of Girls' Delinquency:* Examines the personal, family, peer, school, and community factors that can lead to delinquency
- *Resilient Girls—Factors that Protect Against Delinquency:* Examines whether four factors—a caring adult, school connectedness, school success, and religiosity—can protect girls from delinquency

- *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
- *Girls' Delinquency Programs—An Evidence-Based Review:* Reviews girls' delinquency programs and determines whether they effectively intervene in delinquency trajectories
- *Developmental Sequences of Girls' Delinquent Behavior:* Investigates the different patterns of delinquent behaviors that girls become involved in and provides insight into the life pathways that lead to girls' delinquent behavior.

Detailed information and links to multiple presentations given at conferences can be found at the GSG Web site: <http://girlsstudygroup.rti.org/>.

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More Information

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