

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/gender-and-justice-in-america/sexual-assault-awareness-key-keeping-girls-out-juvenile-justice-system>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Every April, tribute is paid to survivors of sexual violence through educational and awareness-raising events across the country.

To that end, the National Sexual Violence Resource Centers [Sexual Assault Awareness Month \(SAAM\) campaign](#) for 2017 seeks to shine a spotlight on leaders who can influence the cultural change needed to end sexual violence and foster healthy [communities](#). Stakeholders in the juvenile justice system, particularly those working closely on behalf of girls and young women, are well-positioned to be such leaders in this movement.

Recent research shows an alarmingly [high rate of histories of abuse](#), particularly sexual violence, among young women and girls involved in the juvenile justice system, especially women and girls of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming (LGBT/GNC) youth; and those with disabilities. Indeed, research reveals that girls who are arrested and charged for common offenses, such as running away, substance abuse, truancy, and other issues, may actually be [coping with or escaping abuse](#).

Given the factors that may be driving young women to the system, and the traumas they continue to experience once there, leaders in the juvenile justice system have an opportunity to create meaningful change, through advocacy and reforming a system that has been traditionally [ill-equipped to support girls needs](#). In particular, rather than punitive responses such as arrest and incarceration, schools, courts, and juvenile justice professionals should create tailored, trauma-informed approaches that are responsive to individuals. This may mean screening for experiences of trauma in a noninvasive way, providing access to resources such as counseling, and, in many instances, advocating for community-based support rather than detention.

Vera has partnered with New York City leaders to disrupt the routes that most often lead to girls arrests and incarceration, and to implement reforms designed to meet these young women's needs. Through a multi-agency taskforce and direct input from girls and young women, Vera aims to ultimately end girls incarceration in the city and prevent the detrimental effects that justice-system involvement can have [on young people's mental, emotional, and physical well-being](#).

The rallying cry in the movement to end sexual assault and sexual violence rings its on usespecially advocates for those of us who are most vulnerable. In our work, we strive to recognize the important nexus of juvenile justice-system involvement and sexual violence. By acknowledging how these issues intersect, all advocates will be better able to reach and support those who need to heal. As a society, we owe it to young women and girls who have experienced both sexual assault and the justice system to discover how professionals, policymakers, and the community at large can support their needs and encourage their health and well-being.

Through the [Gender & Justice in America](#) blog series, Vera will explore issues facing justice-involved women and girls in the fields of adult corrections, youth justice, immigration, victimization, substance use, and mental health.

PUBLICATION

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