

# Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

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## Status of Females in the Juvenile Justice System

Young women in the juvenile justice system present with characteristics and experiences that differentiate them from their male counterparts. As such, the juvenile justice system in Iowa must consider these factors if it is to effectively and efficiently impact recidivism, rehabilitation and public safety.

Data in the "Status of Females in the Juvenile Justice System" report reveal the following trends:

- ~Young women commit primarily non-violent offenses. Shoplifting is the only top ten offense in which they exceed young men in sheer number and it is also an offense that is more than double any other single offense for young women.
- ~Young women are held in detention for a substantially higher percentage of misdemeanor versus felony offenses than young men.
- ~Young women of color, particularly African American females, come into contact with the juvenile justice system at a higher rate. Additionally, arrests of African American and Hispanic females have increased during the same time frame as arrests of Caucasian females have decreased.
- ~The general type of offense committed by young women is against public order (e.g. alcohol related violations, disorderly conduct) or property (e.g. shoplifting), though young women with subsequent charges of a violent nature are likely to have had violent offenses initially as well.

Historically, young women have been a smaller segment of the juvenile justice population. They remain so today; consequently, they are easy to overlook. But Iowa's response to them is no less important. Perhaps, because they are fewer in number, our system can have a true and meaningful positive influence. These young women are also the potential future mother's of the next generation of system-involved girls *and* boys, as such, successful intervention with them can have long-term benefits.

The Iowa Task Force on Young Women, on behalf of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, recommends the following measures to facilitate movement toward the goal of preventing further penetration by young women into both the juvenile and adult systems:

1. Facilities and programs striving to provide the most effective and efficient services to young women will opt for single gender environments with female responsive programming that includes components to address trauma.
2. All institutions and agencies that work with females involved in the juvenile justice system and which receive state funding should be required to provide annual female responsive training to their employees. Training should be research based, progressive, ongoing, and result in an implementation plan.

3. As detention reform proceeds, gender and the disproportionate number of females in detention for misdemeanor offenses must be an integral part of policy and decision making discussions including any recommendations for solutions to be implemented.
4. As research, data and planning progress related to disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile system, the needs of girls of color be given equal consideration. Specifically, assessment tools must be without race/ethnic bias and they must also be female responsive.

The full "Status of Females in the Juvenile Justice System" report is available on the Iowa Task Force for Young Women website:  
[www.women.iowa.gov/girls](http://www.women.iowa.gov/girls)

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### **The Girl Connection**

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