

**Rights4Girls: Cyntoia Brown, Bresha Meadows and the Abuse to Prison Pipeline**

#TeenDVMonth  
Thursday, February 22nd  
2-3pm Eastern/1-2pm Central/11-12pm Pacific



Welcome to today's webinar!







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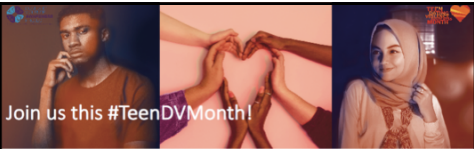
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More from NRCOV:

- #ImAnActivist Social Media Campaign
- Stories of Transformation Podcast Series
- Awareness Blog: Healthy Me, Healthy We
- VAWnet TA Question: Youth Activism

Learn more at: [nrcdv.org/training](http://nrcdv.org/training)




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**Cyntoia Brown, Bresha Meadows and the Abuse to Prison Pipeline**

February 22, 2018

Cherice Hopkins, Staff Attorney  
&  
Rebecca Burney, Equal Justice Works Fellow

[www.rights4girls.org](http://www.rights4girls.org)


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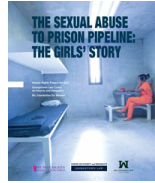
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### What is the Abuse to Prison Pipeline?

The **Abuse to Prison Pipeline** is a term to describe the pathways of gendered violence that lead girls – and particularly **girls of color** – into the juvenile justice system.



Download the report at  
<http://rights4girls.org>




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### Gender-Based Violence in the U.S.

- Types of Gendered Violence:
  - Sexual abuse in the home and community
  - Sexual violence and harassment in school
  - Experiencing or witnessing domestic violence
  - Teen dating violence
  - Domestic Child Sex Trafficking




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### Teen Dating Violence

- **21%** of high school girls have experienced physical and/or sexual dating violence
- **1 in 5** teens knows a survivor of dating violence
- **22%** of women who experience domestic violence as adults first experienced some form of partner violence between the ages of 11 and 17
- **7%** of women who experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner first experienced violence by that same partner prior to the age of 18




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### Gender-Based Violence in the U.S.

- When girls with economic and family stability experience abuse, they can more readily access the services and support needed to heal.
- For girls at the margin, the experience of sexual victimization can actually land them behind bars...




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### Share of Girls in the Juvenile Justice System is Rising

Share of girls in juvenile justice is rising at **every** point of contact:

- Arrest **45% increase**
- Detention **40% increase**
- Post-Adjudication Probation **44% increase**
- Post-Adjudication Placement **42% increase**




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### Girls of Color Overrepresented Among Justice Involved Girls

- Girls of color account for approximately **22%** of the general youth population but comprise approximately **66%** of girls who are incarcerated
- Black girls are **3x** as likely to be referred to court than their white peers
- Black and Native American girls are **20%** more likely than white girls to be formally petitioned
- Native American girls have the highest rates of incarceration of any ethnic group. They're **5x** more likely than white girls to be confined to a detention facility




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### What's Fueling This Increase?

- Girls are **NOT** becoming increasingly violent  
– Girls account for only 10% of violent felonies
- Sexual abuse is **primary predictor** of justice involvement in girls
- Girls are being **criminalized** for their experiences and responses to trauma




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### What We Know About Girls in the System

- High rates of depression and PTSD
- Disproportionately victims of sexual violence, specifically childhood sexual abuse
- Negative and disparate health outcomes
- Experience more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)




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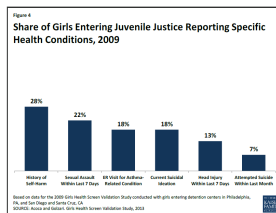
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### What Girls Enter the System With: A Snapshot




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### Justice-Involved Girls & Adverse Childhood Experiences

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES):** emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, violent treatment towards mother, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, having an incarcerated household member.
- Girls in Juvenile Justice
  - Nearly **2x** as likely as boys to report **5 or more ACES**
  - Rates of **sexual abuse** are more than **4x** higher for girls than for boys
  - Nationally, **73%** of girls behind bars have experienced some form of abuse before entering the juvenile justice system




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### Pathways for Girls into the System after Abuse

- **Status Offenses**
  - Running away, truancy, alcohol/tobacco use, curfew violations
- **Dual System/Crossover**
  - Children typically cross over from dependency to delinquency
  - The underlying reason for crossover is ABUSE
- **Family Violence**
  - Mandatory domestic violence arrests
- **Domestic Child Sex Trafficking**
  - Federal law defines anyone under age 18 engaged in commercial sex as a victim of child sex trafficking
  - Girls are routinely arrested for prostitution or offenses committed while being sexually exploited




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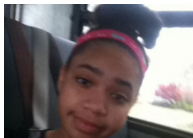
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### Examples of the Abuse to Prison Pipeline: Bresha Meadows




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### Who is Bresha Meadows?

- Bresha grew up in an **abusive household** in which her father physically injured her mother. He regularly **threatened** to kill Bresha and her entire family.
- She **ran away** from home twice and law enforcement brought her back home.
- At **14**, Bresha shot her abusive father and was **charged with aggravated murder**.
- Bresha spent **1 year in a detention center**. After making a plea deal, the charges were reduced to **involuntary manslaughter** and Bresha was moved to a **residential treatment center** where she remained for **6 months**.




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### Examples of the Abuse to Prison Pipeline: Cyntoia Brown




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### Who is Cyntoia Brown?

- As a young teenager, Cyntoia left an **abusive home** environment and lived with an older male who she perceived to be her boyfriend.
- The man repeatedly **sexually and physically abused** Cyntoia, drugged her, and forced her to sell her body to strangers for "sex".
- A **43-year-old man** paid to rape Cyntoia when she was **16-years-old**. She shot him in self defense.
- In 2004, Cyntoia was **charged as an adult** and convicted of first degree murder. She is currently serving a life sentence and will not be eligible for parole until she is **69 years old**.




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### What is Domestic Child Sex Trafficking (DCST)?

- Any person under age 18 that exchanges sex for "anything of value" is a victim of child sex trafficking
  - There doesn't need to be a trafficker
  - Includes youth who trade sex for basic needs
  - No force, fraud or coercion necessary
- Sometimes referred to as:
  - "child", "underage" or "juvenile prostitution" or "sex work"
  - "survival sex"
  - commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)
  - domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST)




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### Profiles: Who Are the Victims?

- 83%** of confirmed sex trafficking victims are **U.S. citizens**
- 53%** of confirmed victims were **under age 18**
- Youth with learning and **developmental disabilities**
- Runaway & Homeless Youth** exceptionally at risk
  - LGBT/GNC youth
  - Youth experiencing abuse within the home
- 50-70%** come from the **Child Welfare System**




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### DCST Racial & Gender Disparities

- 76%** of all juvenile prostitution arrests in the U.S. are **females**
- African-American children are **57%** of all juvenile prostitution arrests—more than any other racial group




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### DCST Racial & Gender Disparities

- 52% of identified child sex trafficking victims in King County, WA were Black children, even though Black people less than 7% of the general population
- In Portland, OR Black people are 5.8% of the population but 27% of child sex trafficking victims

*Compare with data on sex buyers:*

- In King County, WA 80% of the buyers were **white men**
- In GA, 65% of buyers live in suburban metro area




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### When We Fail to Recognize Girls' Trauma

When survivors are not met with a trauma-informed response, they:

- Engage in self-harm
- Engage in substance abuse as a form of self-medication
- Have difficulty identifying safe and positive adults
- Engage in avoidance or self-protection behavior such as running away
- Engage in other risky behaviors
- Perpetrate harm against others as a form of protection

*All of which fuel a cycle of criminalization and victimization*




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### Once Girls Enter Detention...

- Forced to navigate system designed for men
- Conditions of confinement exacerbate girls' trauma
- Lack of gender-responsive or trauma-informed interventions or re-entry services
- Stigma of arrest and long-term impact of records
- Difficulty accessing housing, jobs, education




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### Why Does the Abuse to Prison Pipeline Exist?

- **Mythologies** about Girls of Color
  - "hyper-sexual", "fast", "hostile", "grown"
  - Attitudes towards family
- **Lack of Data**
  - No accessible data on girls of color in the system
  - No screening for sexual abuse or trafficking
- **Refusal to Prioritize the Lives of Marginalized Girls**
  - Civil Rights/Justice Reform
  - Human Rights
  - Economic and Social Opportunities
- **Pervasive Rape Culture** that **glamorizes exploitation** and accepts that people can be commodified




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### Ways to Dismantle the Pipeline

- **Identify** when girls are experiencing sexual violence, abuse and trafficking
- Create and implement **prevention and intervention programming** in schools and in the community
- Develop **alternatives to detention and criminalization** that are gender-responsive and trauma-informed
- Use the resources in the community to develop a **multi-disciplinary** response to address the needs of victims of child sex trafficking
- Change the **conversation** with our children and with our community about who our girls are




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### Closing Thoughts

- National conversations around racial justice, mass incarceration, and need for criminal justice reform all **focus on men and boys**
- The reality of the Abuse to Prison Pipeline **urges that girls of color be contemplated** as part of these much needed reform efforts




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### Resources

- Rights4Girls
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, National Girls Initiative




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### Contact Information

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The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence ([www.nrcdv.org](http://www.nrcdv.org)) provides a wide range of free, comprehensive, and individualized technical assistance, training, and specialized resource materials. You can access our publications online from the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women ([VAWnet](http://VAWnet)).

**Contact us:**  
 1-800-537-2238  
[nrcdvta@nrcdv.org](mailto:nrcdvta@nrcdv.org)

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