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

#TeenDVMonth
Thursday, February 22nd
9:30am-10:30am
1-2pm Training

Welcome to today’s webinar!

Join us this #TeenDVMonth!

More from NRCV:
• #BreakTheCycle: Social Media Campaign
• Stories of Transformation Podcast Series
• Awareness Blog: Healthy Me, Healthy We
• WAHM TA Question: Youth Activism
Learn more at: nrcv.org/training

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
What is the Abuse to Prison Pipeline?

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

Teen Dating Violence

- 21% of high school girls have experienced physical and/or sexual dating violence
- 1 in 5 tweens 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
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...

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

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.
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

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)

What Girls Enter the System With:
A Snapshot
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.

Pathways for Girls into the System after Abuse

• Status Offenses
  – Running away, truancy, alcohol/tobacco use, curfew violations

• Dual System/Dependency
  – 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

Examples of the Abuse to Prison Pipeline: Bresha Meadows
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.

Examples of the Abuse to Prison Pipeline: Cyntoia Brown

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.
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)

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.

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.
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

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

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
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 Reforms
  - Human Rights
  - Economic and Social Opportunities
- **Pervasive Rape Culture** that glamorizes exploitation and accepts that people can be commodified

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

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
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

Contact Information

Cherice Hopkins
cherice@rights4girls.org

Rebecca Burney
rebecca@rights4girls.org

1220 L Street NW, Suite 605
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 821-1630
www.rights4girls.org

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (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).

Contact us:
1-800-537-2238
nrcdvta@nrcdv.org