

## How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses

### Fact Sheet: Youth

#### Trauma and Youth

- While youth may feel the effects of childhood trauma, they may also experience traumatic events during adolescence.
  - Youth exposure to sexual abuse is estimated to be as high as 43%
  - Youth exposure to witnessing violence is estimated to range between 39% and 85%
  - Youth rates of victimization are estimated to be as high as 66%
- Youth of color are more likely to be subjected to traumatic events than their peers.
  - Disproportionate poverty and discrimination contribute to this
  - Immigrant youth are at higher risk than their peers
- Gender also contributes to traumatic experiences.
  - Young men are more likely to be exposed to community violence
  - Young men are more likely to experience serious injury

(Presidential Task Force on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma in Children and Adolescents, 2008)

#### Youth in the Justice System

Youth account for 17% of all arrests made by law enforcement officers each year, which equates to a staggering 2.4 million youth who are arrested annually.

- Approximately 125,000 youth offenders are served in youth court programs each year
- The majority of youth in the justice system have one or more psychiatric disorder (66% of males; 75% of females)



(Abram et al., 2004; Pearson & Jurich, 2005)

#### Juvenile Offenders, Traumatic Experiences and PTSD

There are increasing numbers of juvenile offenders diagnosed with trauma-related disorders, including Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

- PTSD is becoming increasingly prevalent among juvenile offenders

- Traumatic experiences and PTSD have a negative impact on “adolescent psychological functioning”, putting youth at higher risk for the development of other psychological disorders.
- Some studies suggest that a link may exist between traumatic experience and the development of delinquent behaviors. For example, Steiner, et al. (1997) found that a group of incarcerated male juveniles had a higher rate of PTSD than their non-incarcerated counterparts.
- Youth may experience symptoms of PTSD, with females reporting a higher incidence of PTSD symptoms than males.
  - For example, a study of 152 male and female juvenile offenders by Brosky & Lally (2004) found that some “re-experience” trauma (21.1% of females and 7.9% of males) and some report increased arousal (34.2% of females and 17.1% of males), both of which are symptoms of PTSD.

## Further Reading and References

Abram, K.; Teplin, L.; Charles, D.; Longworth, S.; McClelland, G.; & Dulcan, M. (2004). Posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma in youth in juvenile detention. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 61, 403-410.

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Pearson, S. & Jurich, S. (2005). *Youth court: A community solution for embracing at-risk youth*. Retrieved from <http://www.aypf.org/publications/Youth%20Court%20-%20A%20Community%20Solution.pdf>

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Steiner, H.; Garcia, I.G.; & Matthews, Z. (1997). Posttraumatic stress disorder in incarcerated juvenile delinquents. *Journal of American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 36(3), 357-365.