

Female juvenile delinquency

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Girls are stereotypically characterized as calm and passive and never as delinquent or uncontrollable. However, it's important to note that girls make up a quarter of the youth arrested in the United States but the popular conception of delinquency is so tied up in boys delinquency that girl delinquents are often overlooked. To my surprise, young people can be taken into custody for both criminal acts and a wide variety of what are often called "status offenses" which include running away from home, a minor in need of supervision, being incorrigible, or need of care and protection.

In fact, these offenses play a major role in female delinquency. For example, in 1995 well over half of girls' arrests were for either status offenses or larceny theft. ¹ Although most delinquent behavior theories primarily addressed males, Chesney-Lind highlights a theory that in fact accounts for gender. Girls and their problems have long been ignored. Thus, few theorists have considered the possibility that some, if not many, of the girls arrested have different sets of problems when compared to the boys.

For example, in terms of status offenses, for which girls are over represented: well over half of the youth referred for running away from home (two thirds of whom were girls) and 92 percent of the youth charged with ungovernability (over half of whom were girls) were referred by non-law-enforcement sources, compared to only 9 percent of youth charged with liquor offenses (72 percent were male). ² After reviewing the statistics I began to wonder why there was such a disparity. Meda Chesney-Lind argues that one of the primary reasons for such a disparity is the fact that parents are often committed to two standards of adolescent behavior.

Thus, gender specific socialization patterns have not changed much, and this is especially true for parents' relationships with their daughters. In other words, parents have separate standards for their sons and daughters. In addition to the double standard, many parents still adhere to the traditional sexual double standard. Parents often tighten control of girls when they become adolescents, and sexuality becomes a source conflict. Chesney-Lind also points out another reason for conflict between girls and their parents is physical and sexual abuse.

The author notes " it is increasingly clear that childhood sexual abuse is a particular problem for girls... girls sexual abuse tends to start earlier than boys and as a consequence, their abuse tends to last longer. ³ All these facts suggest why girls would tend to run away from home and eventually be incarcerated. Furthermore, this portrait suggests that many young women are running away from profound sexual victimization at home, and once on the streets they are forced further into crime like theft in order to survive. Girl's live and play just like boys but their lives are dramatically shaped by gender.

For me, looking at the pattern of arrests only raises more questions rather than answers for those theorizing about girls' defiance. Why is running away such a major part of girls' delinquency and such a relatively minor part of boys' misbehavior? The only logical explanation I can come up with is the parental double standard. Most parents assume they sons can survive by themselves if they run away because their masculine and strong whereas

parents assume their daughters are too weak to survive on the streets thus they need to call the police.

But, while on the streets many girls find ways to survive. One such way many girls survive on the street is by joining a gang. Understanding the life contexts of girls in gangs provide insight into those factors shaping their decision to join. These include poverty, neighborhood crime, racism, and limited opportunities, as well as such things as family problems, gang involved family members, and peers who provide incentives to join.

Furthermore, if a female ran away a gang may assist a young women in protecting themselves, by providing opportunities to learn such traditional male skills as fighting skills and taking care of themselves on the streets. Therefore gangs seem like an ideal outlet for women who are struggling to survive on the street. Also, research suggests that 62 percent of females involved in gangs reported sexual abuse in their families. Thus, I think it goes without saying that there are clear connections between women, sexual abuse, delinquent behavior and gang involvement.