

# What Challenges Are Boys Facing, and What Opportunities Exist To Address Those Challenges?

## Fact Sheet

### Juvenile Delinquency

Even though Anthony lives in a neighborhood with a lot of crime and gang violence, he usually manages to stay out of trouble.

He plays football on his high school team and, with the guidance and support of his coach, has kept his grades up and his eye on the future. But then an argument at practice spilled over to the classroom, and Anthony was suspended for fighting. Forced to sit out the last two games of the season, Anthony retaliated by skipping school and hanging out with some guys in his neighborhood. Anthony's coach has called his parents to school for a meeting to talk about what they can do to make sure Anthony gets his life back on track.



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Office of the Assistant Secretary for  
Planning and Evaluation

This fact sheet is based on a comprehensive review of scientific literature, including computer searches of the major bibliographic databases (e.g., PsychINFO, MEDLINE/PubMed, EBSCOhost) looking, in particular for epidemiological studies that determine what factors make boys more or less prone to certain outcomes. The literature search was limited to scholarly journal articles and government documents published in 2000 and later unless an article was a seminal piece in the field or contributed to tracking trends over time. The statistics provided are from the most recent year for which data were available. Where possible, data related specifically to boys are included, but when these data were not available, data on youth, ages 10 to 18, are provided.

# Some Facts About Boys and Juvenile Delinquency

## Involvement with the Juvenile Justice System

- In 2006, arrests of boys represented more than 70% of all juvenile arrests.<sup>1</sup>
- Between 1995 and 2004, the juvenile delinquency caseload for boys decreased by 13% and the juvenile delinquency caseload for girls increased by 14%.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2002, African American boys made up only 16% of the juvenile population, but almost 30% of the juvenile delinquency caseload.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2004, almost three-quarters of young people prosecuted in juvenile courts were boys.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2003, boys represented 85% of juvenile offenders in custody in residential placement.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2003, boys tended to stay in custody in residential facilities longer than girls did, with a median of 71 days compared to 48 days.<sup>6</sup>
- From 1994 to 2004, there was a 21% increase in the number of youth who were held in adult jails.<sup>7</sup>
- Recidivism, or reoffense rates of young people range from 12% to 55%, given that States might measure rearrest, referral to court, reconviction, or reconfinement.<sup>8</sup>

## Violent Crimes

Violent crimes include murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

- In 2006, nearly 20% of people arrested for violent crimes

were under the age of 18 and boys represented 83% of juvenile arrests for these violent crimes.<sup>9,10</sup>

- The violent crime arrest rate increased by more than 60% from 1987 to 1994, but the 2006 rate for boys fell below the 1980 arrest rate.<sup>11</sup>
- In 2006, about one-quarter of boys reported they carried a handgun by the age of 17, while 11% reported they belonged to a gang.<sup>12</sup>
- Violent crimes committed by juveniles in 2006 occurred most often between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.—around the time the school day ended.<sup>13</sup>

## Property Crimes

Property crimes include burglary, larceny, theft, and arson.

- More than 25% of persons arrested for property crimes were under age 18 and boys made up 68% of juvenile arrests for property crimes, according to 2006 figures.<sup>14</sup>
- The juvenile arrest rate for property crimes in 2006 was less than half of what it was in 1980.<sup>15</sup>

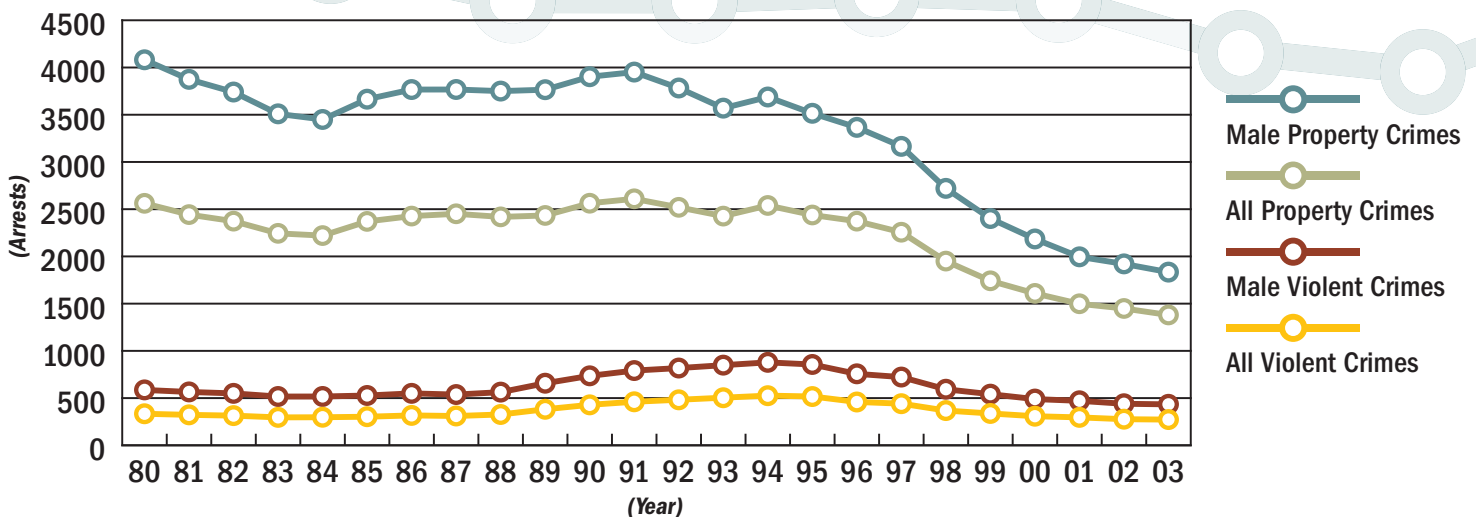
## Status Offenses

Status offenses are behaviors that are considered violations of the law only if committed by juveniles, such as truancy, running away from home, and underage drinking.

- Girls are more often arrested for status offenses than for criminal offenses. Boys are arrested for criminal offenses more than girls are.<sup>16</sup>

## Violent Crime and Property Crime Indices/Arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10-17

Source: *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*



# What Factors Increase or Decrease Boys' Risk of Juvenile Delinquency?

As juvenile arrest rates have declined over the past several decades, researchers have learned valuable lessons about boys' and girls' risk factors—those traits and life experiences that can jeopardize a person's healthy development—and protective factors—the characteristics and life experiences that can increase a boy's likelihood of positive outcomes.

## Individual risk factors for juvenile delinquency include:

- Early aggressive behavior<sup>17</sup>
- Restlessness and concentration problems<sup>18</sup>
- Substance abuse<sup>19</sup>
- Association with antisocial peers<sup>20</sup>
- Participation in unstructured leisure activities<sup>21</sup>

## Ways families, schools, and communities can aggravate the risk of juvenile delinquency:

- Childhood maltreatment<sup>22</sup>
- Ineffective or dysfunctional parenting<sup>23</sup>
- Parental criminality<sup>24</sup>
- Truancy and dropping out of school<sup>25</sup>
- Exposure to community violence<sup>26</sup>
- Poverty<sup>27</sup>

## Factors that help protect young people from the risk of juvenile delinquency include:

- Strong feelings of accountability or perceived risk of punishment for misbehavior<sup>28, 29</sup>
- Attachments to family or family support<sup>30, 31</sup>
- Parental monitoring<sup>32</sup>
- Positive social activities<sup>33</sup>
- High academic achievement or school connectedness<sup>34, 35</sup>
- Low neighborhood crime rate.<sup>36</sup>



# Conclusion

There is much to celebrate in the declining arrest rates for boys. But boys, and particularly African American boys, continue to account for the vast majority of arrests in the juvenile justice system. In response, researchers are working hard to identify the factors that push boys toward, or pull them away, from juvenile delinquency.

Boys may be more likely to become delinquent if they are mistreated in the home, have delinquent friends, drop out of school, use drugs, or face community violence. But research shows that young men like Anthony, with the support of their parents, coaches, teachers, and friends, can continue to develop good behaviors despite some setbacks.

Research into what works to build boys' strengths and reduce the challenges they face is still growing. While researchers have learned a lot about boys' risks for juvenile delinquency, efforts continue to pinpoint what strengths make some boys more likely to succeed and what risks, or challenges, increase the likelihood that they will struggle.

## Additional Resources

To download an electronic copy of this document visit:  
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/FactSheets>

For additional fact sheets in this series or for more information and resources on boys, including promising interventions and federal approaches to help boys, visit:

### Fact Sheets

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/FactSheets>

### Findings Brief

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/Findings1>

### Annotated Bibliography

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/Biblio>

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