

A Mixed Methods Study of Black Girls' Vulnerability to Out-Of-School Suspensions

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-Link Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we were interested in (a) understanding the out-of-school suspension (OSS) of Black girls, and (b) considering implications for reducing OSS building on girls' own attempts to resist micro-aggressions and self-advocate at school. The interview participants were Black girls, their caregivers and educators. They described that Black girls received more frequent and harsher sanctions than white girls for the same behaviors. Similarly, the cross-system, administrative data of 7th grade students in Minnesota revealed that Black girls were substantially overrepresented in OSS. The number of OSS and the mean days in OSS for Black girls were higher than white students for disruptive or disorderly behavior/insubordination and violent behaviors.

We suggested strategies to reduce disproportionality in the frequency and severity of OSS for Black girls.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. In this study, interview participants including Black girls, their caregivers, and educators described that Black girls were sanctioned more frequently and more harshly than were whites for the same behaviors. They viewed suspensions as unfair, or involving "favoritism" of other students. To what extent do you think it is important to understand racial disproportionality in out-of-school suspensions? How do you understand racial disproportionality in out-of-school suspensions? Do you see this phenomenon in your own workplace? If so, how do you explain it?
2. Using cross-system, administrative data of 7th graders in Minnesota public schools, this study found that Black girls were overrepresented in out-of-school suspension relative to white, Asian, and Hispanic boys and girls, and Native girls. In particular, Black girls were sanctioned more harshly than were white students for disruptive, disorderly and violent behaviors. What factors do you believe lead to disproportionality of out-of-school suspension by race and gender? Why do you think it is important to reduce disproportionality in out-of-school suspension by race and gender? Do you see this issue in your own workplace?
3. In this study, Black girls expressed distress and frustration with bullying and sexual harassment yet some educators trivialized their complaints. When Black girls experienced these issues, they asked their parents and trusted adults to intervene for them. They also reported physical and psychological protection from their friends. What are some ways we can help eliminate sexual harassment and bullying experienced by Black girls? How can we help them to build supportive communities? What are some ways to protect and advocate for Black girls at school? How can you support Black girls in your practice context?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Policies regarding out-of-school suspension may need improvement to help reduce disproportionality in out-of-school suspension by race and gender. What policies guide your state and school district regarding out of school suspensions? What barriers exist? What community and systemic supports can better support the school functioning of Black girls and protect them from frequent and harsh school discipline? How can we advocate for Black girls in response to racial disparities in out-of-school suspension?
2. What alternatives are available to school discipline other than out-of-school suspension? What other alternative school disciplines are being used in your workplace? What changes or new practices are needed to reduce disproportionality in out-of-school suspension by race and gender?
3. The policies about Black girls' experience of bullying and sexual harassment may need improvement to more effectively protect and advocate them so that this does not followed by out-of-school suspension. What does your state or local policy look like in terms of dealing with these Black girls' challenges in school? What barriers exist? What available practice/resources/policies can address this issue? What community and systemic supports can help Black girls from dealing with their bullying and sexual harassment in school? How can we advocate for Black girls in response to these challenges?