



THE
SAMUEL DUBOIS COOK
CENTER ON SOCIAL EQUITY

AT DUKE UNIVERSITY

Young Scholars Summer Research Institute

3rd Year Cohort

Research Papers

Summer 2017



Samuel DuBois Cook

The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity (Cook Center) was named after Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook, a distinguished political scientist, scholar, educator, author, administrator, civil and human rights activist and public servant. Dr. Cook, a professor in the Duke University political science department became the first African-American to hold a regular and/or tenured faculty appointment at a predominantly white southern college or university. He went on to serve 22-and-a-half years as president of Dillard University in New Orleans.

Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity

The Duke University Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity is an interdisciplinary research center within Trinity School of Arts and Sciences that is comprised of faculty and scholars from across Duke and a diverse international group of affiliated universities, research centers and non-governmental organizations. Its mission is to promote equity, across all domains of human interactions, through interdisciplinary research, teaching, partnerships, policy, and practice. The Cook Center seeks to employ the innovative use of new and existing data, develop human capital, incorporate stakeholder voices through civic engagement, create viable collaborations, and engender equity-driven policy and social transformation at the local, national and international levels.

Young Scholars Summer Research Institute

The Young Scholars Summer Research Institute is sponsored by the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University in partnership with Durham Public Schools (DPS) in Durham, North Carolina. It is a three-week program that provides middle and high-school students enrolled in DPS with training to enhance their writing, research and presentation skills. In keeping with the Samuel DuBois Cook Center's central mission as a community of scholars engaged in the study of the causes and consequences of inequality, program participants will be exposed to curriculum related to the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of inequality.

During the Young Scholars Summer Research Institute, students receive instruction from distinguished middle and high-school teachers, university professors, and leaders from community organizations. The program's main focus is on the development of the students' research, writing, presentation and critical-inquiry skills, culminating in a capstone presentation of the student's research topic and findings before institute peers, university scholars, and Durham community members.

Racial Bias in Disciplinary Policies in the Educational System

By: Amazende Adi

Abstract

This paper will identify and analyze the correlation between disciplinary infractions and race. It will also examine the factors that link the correlation to the school to prison pipeline and the likelihood of different races to end up in the school to prison pipeline.

Introduction

On September 17, 1999, a fight broke out at Illinois High School in Chicago between unarmed students, believed to be members of opposing gangs. On October 1, all seven students, who were all black, were expelled for two years. The punishment caused protest around the United States. After public outcry, the students' expulsion was dropped to one year of out-of-school expulsion but only six returned, the seventh opted to drop out. A couple months later, armed white students at a school in the same district got into a similar altercation and received a less severe punishment. These incidents and outcomes raised concerns on fairness of school policy and the disproportionate rate at which black students are punished.¹

Thesis Statement

School disciplinary policies, like the zero tolerance policy, disproportionately affect black students, who are more likely than white students to receive maximum punishments, like suspension and expulsion, for school infractions.

Research Questions

¹ Russell Skiba., Robert S. Michael, Abra Carroll Nardo, and Reece L. Peterson, "The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment," *The Urban Review* 34, no... 4 (December 2002): 317-342, accessed July 27, 2017, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1021320817372>.

The leading research questions were: how has racial profiling through disciplinary infractions by public schools affected black youth's dropout rates and disengagement in class? And how do zero tolerance policies target black students?

Methodology and Literature Review

Data for this research paper was collected through the following databases: The Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Bureau of National of Economic Research. These databases broadly analyzed the school to prison pipeline and its correlation with education and dropout rates. Other publications used include "Education, Work and Crime: A Human Capital Approach" by Lance Lochner and "High suspension Schools and Dropout Rates for Black and White students" by Talisha Lee, Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, Xitao Fan. These scholarly sources stated several specific inequalities in the public education system and disproportionalities in the discipline between different races and minority groups. The research was also highly concentrated on the effect disciplinary infractions had on disengagement and dropout rates.

Data Analysis

A study done by University of Indiana's Education Psychology Department revealed that teachers often are more likely to perceive and punish black high school students for offenses in school, such as threats and disruption of student environment, compared to white students.² The study also revealed that black males were usually victims of harsher punishments and were more likely to receive corporal punishments. This criminalization of black students is due in large part

² Johnson, Tammy, William J. Pittz, and Jennifer Emiko Boyden, *Racial Profiling and Punishment in U.S. Public Schools: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Subvert Academic Excellence and Racial Equity. Research Report Executive Summary*, ERASE Initiative, 2001.

to zero tolerance policies, which result in black students receiving higher rates of suspension and expulsion.³ Zero tolerance policies were implemented in the early 1990s by the government to prevent drug use and violence in schools.⁴ Zero tolerance policies require school authorities to give students mandatory maximum punishments for disciplinary infractions such as threats, aggression, and insubordination. In reality, however, these policies allow school officials to act on perceived racial notions in determining crime and punishment.

Zero tolerance policies create a barrier between students and teachers, sometimes causing the teacher to see his/her pupils as potential criminals rather than students. A study done by the Institute of Education Sciences asked teachers in 37 states to rate aggressive behaviors in different races from 1 to 4.⁵ When asked to describe aggressive behaviors, the teachers responded by describing “skipping class”, “not listening to teacher”, and “disobey school rules”. The study revealed that 47% of teachers associate these behaviors with black students. The study then reported black students were 4 times more likely than their white peers to be suspended for a minor offense. This study indicates that teachers and other school officials have racial notions regarding student behavior, which in conjunction with zero tolerance, play a role in punishment severity.

Maximum mandatory punishments such as suspension and expulsion increase the likelihood for disengagement in school. A study showed that students are twice as likely to drop out after their 3rd out of school suspension and 4 times more likely if the student is black.⁶ When

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Talisha Lee, Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, and Xitao Fan, "High Suspension Schools and Dropout Rates for Black and White Students," *Education and Treatment of Children* 34, no. 2 (2011): 167-192.

⁶ Ibid.

interviewing students, the study revealed that after an out of school suspension, 67% of students felt as if they were not as important as the other students. 36% of the study's participants were black.⁷ Also the study reported that 15% of students who received out of school suspension were retained and 34% had retake a class. Because students are taken out of the class environment as punishment, a lack of social skills can arise and present challenges for students such as aggressive attitudes, disengagement in school, and other behavioral issues. This results in students becoming repeated offenders and having an increased risk of experiencing another suspension or expulsion. The risk of becoming a repeated offender increases 49% with black students. Students who have received their second out of school suspension are more likely to drop out. Ultimately, zero tolerance policies foster student disengagement for black students, especially repeat offenders.

Due to its negative impact on minority students, experts have begun to question the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies in schools. A study done at the University of Texas concluded that the zero tolerance policy is not effective and “pushes” students out of school.⁸ Similarly, a report done by the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force discovered that although zero tolerance policies send a clear message to students on unacceptable behaviors, it has not improved the overall safety of schools and has led to an increase of racial profiling within the class environment.⁹ The report also suggested alternative methods to punish

⁷ Brown, Jacob K. "A generation later: What we know About Zero Tolerance in Schools." A Generation Later. December 2013. Accessed July 27, 2017. https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/a-generation-later-what-weve-learned-about-zero-tolerance-in-schools/legacy_downloads/zero-tolerance-in-schools-policy-brief.pdf.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?" *American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force*, December 2008. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>.

students. Secondary prevention programs target students at risk and help to stop them from becoming repeat offenders. These programs promote good behavior and allow students to get their preexisting offences off their school record.

Conclusion

After the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that the zero tolerance and similar policies target black students at a disproportionate rate compared to their white counterparts for disciplinary infractions. These policies have been proven ineffective and alternative reprimands can be implemented to correct behavior without taking students out of their school environment, like secondary prevention programs.

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