Students of Color and Perceived School Climate

Brittany Castellanos, MSW Student
Department of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
FULLERTON™

ABSTRACT

- The school-to-prison pipeline describes the trend of an increasing number of students becoming part of the juvenile and adult criminal justice system as a result of punitive school policies and practices. Youth of color are overrepresented in both the justice system and school disciplinary practices.
- While there is no single policy or explanation of what drives inequality in school discipline, it has been proposed that school climate plays a significant role.
- This research focused on adolescent students' perceptions of their school climate.
- This study uses secondary data analysis from the 2017 California Health Interview Survey.
- The sample consisted of of 448 adolescents (12-17 years) in California.
- A series of chi-square test analyses were conducted.
- Overall, the findings revealed slight racial differences in perceived climate among adolescent students.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study
- At any given time there are over 48,000 youth confined as a result of the juvenile justice or criminal justice system.
- Referral to law enforcement and corresponding punitive school discipline has been disproportionately exercised on students of color.
- During the 2015-2016 school year, Black students represented 15 percent of the total enrollment but made up 31 percent of students who were referred to law enforcement or arrested-- a 16 point disparity
- In the 2013-2014 school year, black K-12 students were 3.8 times as likely to receive an out of school suspension than white students and 2.2 times as likely to be referred to law enforcement or have a school-related arrests.

Purpose
- Examine students of color perception of school climate especially related to relationships to school staff.

Research Question
- What is the correlation between students of color and perceived school climate?

Hypothesis
- Youth of color will perceive their school climate more negatively than their white counterparts

LITERATURE REVIEW

- School climate has been defined as multidimensional and made up of warm relationships with adults, safety, connection to the school, and participation.
- Many research studies have revealed that school climate to be a powerful mitigating factor in academic achievement, mental health, engagement in substance use, and experience of school-based violence.
- School climate has been shown to influence student behaviors that are related to common reasons why students are referred to legal institutions, for example, aggressive behavior, the perpetuation of school violence, substance use, and poor attendance
- However, very little research has been done investigating the relationships between race and school climate.
- The results of the research that does exists suggests that school climate is more likely to be perceived as negative by students of color as a result of out-of-school disciplinary practices e.g. suspension and expulsion.

- The research also suggests that black students are three times as likely to perceive a negative school climate as defined as few caring relationships, feeling disconnected to school, and low meaningful participation in school.
- There is evidence that if schools aim to improve school climate by reducing the implementation of punitive discipline for all students the most profound effect was for students of color.
- For students of color, lower socioeconomic Black and Latino students often attend financially strained public schools and districts with limited school staff that hinder schools from and implementing positive school climate programs.
- There is a gap in the current literature regarding how students of color interpret the facets of school climate.

METHODS

Research Design
- This study uses secondary data analysis of the data collected by the 2017 California Health Interview Survey.
- It used a cross-sectional study design utilizing the data collected by from the California Health Interview Survey.
- Data was collected from June 2017-December 2017 using a telephone-based survey questionnaire.
- The current study utilized self-reported data from the questionnaires to determine which participants were adolescents (ages 12-17).
- The self-report surveys were also used to gather information in relation to demographic information, school safety, and school environment.

Sample
- The initial sampling frame was from was gathered using the the 2017 CHIS stratified two-stage-dual-frame design of 58 California counties that were group into 44 geographic stratum.
- Within each geographic stratum, residential and cell telephone numbers were selected, and within one adult respondent was randomly and their adolescent child were selected.
- The core sample created a sample size of 20,000 participants, for the purposes of this study only the adolescent population was selected totaling at 448.
- 48.2% female, 51.8% male, Mean age=14.49 years, 33.9% Latino, Asian 6.7%, White 47.1%, Other Race 5.8%, Two or More Races 6.5% live in California.

Measures
Independent Variable: *Adolescent students of color*
- Self-reported age being 12 or older
- Self-reported Latino/Hispanic, Asian, other race than white, or two or more races

Dependent Variable: *Students of color perception of school climate*
- Self-report feel adults listen to them at school, 5-point Likert scale
- Self-report feel adults praise good work at school, 5-point Likert scale
- Self-report feel adults want them to do their best at school, 5-point Likert scale
- Self-report feel adults care about them at school, 5-point Likert scale
- Self-report feel safe at school, 5-point Likert scale

RESULTS

Demographic Information (n = 448)

Characteristic	n (%)
Age	
12	75 (16.7)
13	70 (15.6)
14	76 (17.0)
15	81 (18.1)
16	81 (18.1)
17	65 (14.5)
Gender	
Male	232 (51.8)
Female	216 (48.2)
Ethnicity	
Latino	152 (33.9)
Non-Latino Asian	30 (6.7)
Non-Latino White	211 (47.1)
Non-Latino Other One Race	26 (5.8)
Non-Latino Two + Races	29 (6.5)

Race and Perceived School Climate (n = 448)

Variable	Ethnicity	White %	Latino %	Asian %	2+Races %	Other Race %	X^2	p
Adult(s) Praise Good Work At School							25.57	0.06
Not At All True		1.4	3.3	3.3	0	11.5		
Very Much True		57.8	58.6	66.7	37.9	50.0		
Adult(s) Care About Me At School							19.51	0.24
Not At All True		2.4	3.3	6.7	0	3.8		
Very Much True		54.5	42.8	63.3	58.6	46.2		
Adult(s) Notice When Absent From School							18.99	0.27
Not At All True		3.8	5.9	0	10.3	11.5		
Very Much True		53.6	48.7	43.3	37.9	38.5		

Students of Color Perception of School Climate

- A series of chi-square tests were calculated to examine whether there is an association between race and students' perceived school climate.

- There results of the chi-square indicated that a near statistically significant association between race and student's perception of their school climate as noted "Adult(s) Praise Good Work At School" X^2 (16) = 25.57, p = 0.06.

- There was not a statistical significant relationship between race and the following student reported factors of school climate: "Feel Safe at School" X^2 (16) = 16.54, p = 0.42, "Adult(s) Listen to Me At School" X^2 (16) = 18.27, p = 0.31, "Adult(s) Want Me To Do My Best At School" X^2 (16) = 18.53, p = 0.29, "Adult(s) Care About Me At School" X^2 (16) = 19.51, p =0.24, and "Adult(s) Notice When Absent From School" X^2 (16) = 18.99, p = 0.27.

DISCUSSION

Strengths & Limitations
- The current study's limitations include: institutionalized adolescents were not included in the sample, students living in poverty and unhoused adolescents may not have been accurately captured, the demographic racial variables were not as clear as they could have been, mixed-immigration status families may not have been represented in the sample, California's long standing diverse population, and response bias.
- The current study's strengths include: examining the relationship between race and school climate and raises important questions for school personnel and advocates for racial equity in schools.

Implications for Future Research
- Future research may yield different results if the sample was diversified to include more adolescent students and explore areas of the United States besides California.
- Studies could examine the association of school climate, socioeconomic status, and institutionalization status.
- Studies could also incorporate the exclusionary disciplinary practices in their research and compare findings to student responses related to school climate.
- Studies could investigate the findings of including questions in their data related to students' feelings about school discipline policies and perceived racial disparities in discipline policies.

Implication for Social Work
- Social workers can address these racial disparities by providing support to these students who are experiencing ineffective disciplinary practices that frequently turn into law enforcement referrals.
- Provide training for school personnel, build partnerships with community social service agencies, and build more trauma-informed schools as an alternative to law enforcement or juvenile justice referrals.
- Offer several training opportunities to school personnel such as racial equity training, effects of domestic violence on youth, recognizing mental health crises in youth, restorative justice, or de-escalation techniques.
- Foster relationships with community agencies to refer students and their families to food resources, housing resources, parenting classes, and mental health resources in order to increase student's well-being instead of referring students to law enforcement or child protective services.
- Incorporating more school-based counseling services for students, advocating for Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices, and incorporating evidence-based intervention programs.