

Bias Results Across Youth Serving Systems

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Contemporary racism can occur when routine every day acts are applied differentially by race. It is hard to see bias on a case-by-case basis, but when we look across youth-serving systems patterns of racial disparities become evident. Bias within one system towards any individual will set the stage for bias to occur in all others.

Disparate Treatment	Education	Juvenile Justice	Child Welfare
<p>1. Attitude</p> <p>Judging attitudes can be very subjective and misleading.</p> <p>A “bad attitude” is used to assess risk.</p> <p>“He failed the attitude test”.</p>	<p>Behavior judged as a bad attitude in one child might be judged as “upset” in another. In school “attitudes” are punishable. A “bad attitude” perceived as threatening, defensive or hostile can result in detention or suspension. “Criminalization” of kids occurs within school policies.</p>	<p>Perception of a “bad attitude” by law enforcement officers influences decisions to arrest and the type of placement. “Willful Defiance” and “lack of contrition” can influence decisions relating to placement and level of risk. Perceived attitude of parents can affect the decision to detain.</p>	<p>“Bad attitude” of mother toward social worker is considered evidence of risk to child. (Dorothy Roberts) Values regarding parenting styles can affect how parenting is judged.</p>
<p>2. Differential Application of Policies</p> <p>Policies seem neutral to race but when applied unevenly can result in disproportionate outcomes</p>	<p>Zero Tolerance 3-day suspensions can be influenced by race, class and gender. African American and Latino students more likely to be disciplined under Zero-Tolerance policies. Schools modeled after prisons, e.g., lock-downs, detentions treat children differently.</p>	<p>Sentencing disparities. 82% of youth cases filed in adult court- ½ are Blacks. 3-day suspensions for “penny candy offenses” result in “priors” that can influence sentencing. Use of School Resource Officers can result in formal criminal charges vs. academic in-school discipline.</p>	<p>Cases with identical risk factors-Black children more likely removed, White families more likely to receive in-home services. Court affidavits state White mothers “<i>have no drug involvement</i>” and Black mothers “<i>allege no drug involvement</i>”.</p>
<p>3. Stereotyping</p> <p>Stereotypes can unconsciously inform decision-making and affect perceptions of risk, guilt, and severity of offense.</p>	<p>“Adultified” Black children treated like adults and not given the benefit of “child-like” or “kids will be kids” tolerance. (A. Ferguson) Offenses perceived as more harmful and subject to harsher punishments.</p>	<p>Stereotypes “attribute” negative assumptions to Blacks and promote early criminalization of children. Crimes are assumed to be caused by innate forces that are “inherent” to Blacks and can’t be changed or corrected –this can influence decisions to detain or sentencing.</p>	<p>Blacks assumed by some social workers to have “poor parenting skills”. Such biases can construct a perception of risk. Parenting practices that are stern and not “indulgent” perceived to lack nurturing.</p>

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<p>4. Labeling</p> <p>Labels passed from one decision-point to another can bias consequences in all systems</p> <p>Be aware of agency lexicon that can transmit bias in language.</p>	<p>Terms like “at risk”, and “disadvantaged”, can influence perceptions of ability and academic placement. Labels, e.g., “threatening” that are judgmental and passed from one decision point to another can influence disciplinary consequences. Using words like “truancy” to describe tardiness or absence can result in presumptions of delinquency.</p>	<p>Terms like “<u>willful defiance</u>”, “<u>juvenile</u>” (vs. youth) and “<u>truancy</u>” (which in some cases just means “tardy”) are words associated with delinquency. Words can overstate the severity of the offender and the offense, e.g., using “volatile” instead of angry or “brandishing” when statements like “had a knife” are more accurate, distorts the facts.</p>	<p>“Broken families” promotes bias against single parent families. Expressions, e.g., “<i>The apple doesn’t fall too far from the tree</i>”; “<i>crackhead</i>” mom promote bias against families. “<i>Dead beat Dad</i>” could just mean (according to one agency) that the father doesn’t pay for utilities.</p>
<p>5. Ambiguous Charges</p>	<p>Blacks suspended for more subjective reasons, e.g., because they appear defensive and threatening. Whites suspended for more objective reasons which are severe and measurable offenses, e.g., drugs, guns.</p>	<p>Detained on “suspicion”. “Poor and dangerous” neighborhoods promotes perception of risk and delinquency. Detained due to lack of services in community.</p>	<p>More blacks removed for “neglect”. Removal can be based upon prediction of abuse vs. actual abuse or ambiguous charges of neglect.</p>
<p>6. Structured Decision-Making Tools (SDM)</p> <p>SDM tools are only as racially unbiased as the person using them</p>	<p>Biases can trigger the need to employ the consequence matrix in schools. Biases can distort the “perception” of the severity of the offense despite a reliable consequence matrix tool or SDM. The current application of Zero Tolerance policies expose students to suspensions for minor offenses. School suspensions when alternative discipline is available can constitute a “prior” and place children on the School-to-Prison Pipeline trajectory.</p>	<p>Families can rate higher for risk when there is one parent and they are poor regardless of family strengths. Just being in a poor neighborhood can place children in contact with “known gang members” and thus result in a higher risk assessment.</p>	<p>Personal values of decision makers can increase perception of “risk” on SDM tools. Extended families are normal family systems in some communities. Children with single parents or who live with non-biological families can constitute a risk factor according to some tools even though these living arrangements reflect viable cultural considerations.</p>