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Investigating Disciplinary Risk in Urban High Schools as a Precursor for Suicide-Related Behaviors among Black Students

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ABSTRACT

While school discipline remains a well-chronicled conversation in PK-12 research, there is a limited amount of research that investigates how school discipline towards Black students generates trauma and creates adverse behaviors such as suicide consideration, planning, and attempts. Along this same junction, additional investigations are required to ascertain how school support personnel may play a role in exacerbating or extinguishing school-based trauma as it relates to school discipline (Scott & McIntosh, 2022). Drawing on recent data from the Office of Civil Rights, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Common Core Database, the purpose of this study aims to ascertain if school disciplinary risk influenced the suicide outcomes among 19,934 high school Black boys and girls in seven urban school districts in the United States and to determine if the presence of student support personnel in the district influenced suicide outcomes. Results indicated that the risk of receiving an out-of-school suspension was positively associated with suicide outcomes for Black girls and the increase in student support personnel in the district negatively influenced Black girls' suicide outcomes. For Black boys, school support offered positive and negative associations. From the findings, recommendations are provided to protect Black children from a potential school discipline-to-suicide pipeline. Ultimately, we hope to promote the social and emotional assets of Black children while protecting them from the harms of educational trauma.

Keywords: educational trauma; Black children; suicide; school discipline

An unfortunate reality for Black students in the U.S. is the misapplication of school discipline and the overuse of school punishment. There are a number of contributing school-level factors associated with Black students' overrepresentation in school discipline outcomes (suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, and arrests at school). These factors and outcomes operate to create a climate district-wide that reinforces experiences of educational trauma and increases the likelihood of Black students engaging in adverse behaviors. However, there exists a gap in the literature that examines the influence that school-level factors and school discipline outcomes have on Black students' suicide-related behaviors. More importantly, this gap in the literature has negatively impacted the implementation of recommendations, resources, and personnel that are highly needed on the ground in many urban schools that are serving Black students. It is important that the literature moves beyond just a confined conversation on student disciplinary outcomes. We must explore the next level of this conversation – suicidal rates of Black students as a result of these student disciplinary outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators have known for the past fifty years that out-of-school suspensions (OSS) are counterproductive to redirecting behaviors and improving the lives of students, particularly Black students (The Children's Defense Fund [CDF], 1975). Still, the use of exclusionary disciplinary sanctions such as OSSs towards Black students continues to occur. The overrepresentation of Black students in school discipline data is a common thread in rural, suburban, and urban schools. According to the most recent report from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Data collection [OCRD] Black children are the highest recipient of in-school suspensions, OSS, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement despite only being fourteen percent (14%) of the total K-12 population (OCRD, 2021). During the 2017-2018 school year, 1.5 million students received an OSS. School-aged boys accumulated approximately 1.1 million suspensions whereas girls accounted for nearly 490,000 suspensions. According to this same report, Black boys are 7.7% and Black girls are 7.4% of student enrollment. However, Black boys received 329,038 (31.5%) suspensions and Black girls received 194,854 (40.1%) for their respective gender group. This is of great concern, particularly in urban school districts which educate the largest number of Black students (3.3 million) by locale in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). The appalling reality of this national data is that for Black students, there have been few national efforts to address inequities in school discipline outcomes. Furthermore, the continuation of inequitable treatment towards Black students is the culmination of multiple factors inside and outside of schools that connect directly to race and gender (Gibbs Grey & Harrison, 2020; Girvan et al., 2017; Williams & Lewis, 2022; Williams et al., 2020).

The initial mistreatment of Black students typically occurs in the classroom, where routine interactions and misbehaviors far too often, these interactions or misbehaviors in the classroom escalate into office discipline referrals (Skiba et al. 2011). At the classroom level, teachers are poorly prepared by educator preparation programs to authentically engage Black students with culturally relevant pedagogy

which can result in teachers' misinterpreting student disengagement as a form of disrespect (Ladson-Billings, 2014). In conjunction with teachers limited pedagogical capabilities, schools across the U.S. have struggled to retain teachers, resulting in school districts in urban areas employing a sizable number of novice teachers who often struggle with applying culturally responsive classroom management approaches (Kwok, 2017; Williams et al., 2022). This fact isof particular importance. The majority of the teacher workforce (White, female, monolinguistic, and middle-class) and does not reflect the cultural and racial diversity that most Black students are accustomed to when interacting within their communities (Goldhaber et al., 2019). The combination of the aforementioned issues to higher disciplinary rates for Black students (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Also, studies have shown that when Black students are sent to the office, they are regularly engaging with school administrators who often choose to rely on their own racial biases and dispositions towards Black students than to investigate the context that preceded that student entering their office (Williams et al., 2020). While the relationship between educators and Black students comprises a significant portion of school discipline outcomes, another portion that is regularly overlooked is the role of school support personnel.

Richardson et al. (2019) asserts that to better support Black students, educators should incorporate support personnel into alternative approaches to redirect student behaviors. Support personnel who have a varying degree of influence on school discipline include school resource officers, school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists. Richardson et al. (2019) indicates that school social workers can be a pillar of support to bridge the distance between schools and communities by advocating for less punitive approaches. School social workers' ability to examine the ecological implications of removing a student from class is an asset when school administrators are weighing whether to suspend a student (National Association of School Social Workers, 2013). Another potential asset are school resource officers (SROs), who should not be directly involved in school discipline decisions but can serve as a mentor and community liaison to proactively engage with students (National Association of School Resource Officers, 2021). Unfortunately, two parallel realities exist in urban schools: 1) regularly there are more SROs employed than school social workers; and 2) many schools in urban districts lack the funding to offer students the protective services of a social worker, school counselor, or school psychologist (OCRD, 2018).

When examining school discipline and Black boys and girls, it is important to examine each support personnel group individually rather than assuming their responses to adverse experiences are the same. Parks and colleagues (2016) investigated the school discipline experiences of Black girls in an urban school. Their findings highlight the multiple negative interactions that Black girls encountered before and after being suspended. Parks et al (2016) denoted that for the girls in their study, future interactions with school officials and law enforcement were negative and caused these individuals to relive the original traumatic experience associated with the first suspension. This resulted in the girls dropping out of school and incurring traumatic stress symptoms. Dancy (2014) notes similar adverse reactions to previous traumatic events by Black boys who are routinely suspended from school. Finally, Cooper et al. (2022) in a study of the effects of discriminatory school

discipline practices on Black students found that students who were recipients of these practices showcased adverse effects such as depression and poor academic performance. Upon re-surveying the participants a year later, Cooper and colleagues (2022) found lingering adverse effects (both socially and emotionally) on Black children. What cannot be dismissed is the potential for discriminatory school discipline practices to further traumatize Black children beyond just disengaging from school and into disengaging from life itself. Given the relative limited research on the short- and long-term adverse effects on Black children by way of school discipline, more research is needed to critical examine how trauma from school discipline influences minor and more serious adverse reactions (i.e., suicidality) to school discipline.

Suicide and Black Youth

Historically, Prudhomme (1938) documented the importance of critically exploring and analyzing suicide among Black populations and noted at the time that suicide rates were lower for this population than for White populations. However, he hypothesized that as Black populations became more assimilated and disconnected from their cultural buffers (e.g., religious beliefs, collectivist values), then it would be expected that their risk for suicide would increase (Prudhomme, 1938). Reid and colleagues (1977) furthered this work in the 1970s when they began to note differences in suicide among Black populations based on gender. Through disaggregation of data, they found that Black males presented with suicide rates that were three times higher than for Black females. They also found that Black female suicide rates were half the rates of White females. They implore the importance of critically examining health statistics, including suicide outcomes, within Black populations to support improving overall health outcomes and decreasing disparities.

This work was the impetus for the disaggregation of suicide data within Black populations to gain a deeper understanding of trends and patterns. Although the narrative was well documented in suicide studies that rates for suicide were lower among Black populations (Prudhomme, 1938; Reid et al., 1977), over the next few decades researchers persisted in their commitment to exploring suicide and differences noted Black populations through the disaggregation of data. Researchers supported the finding that Black males had higher rates of suicide than Black females (Griffith & Bell, 1989; Joe, 2010; Lindsey et al., 2019). They also noted age-related differences among Black populations with noted suicide rates increasing for younger populations (Gibbs, 1997; Sheftall et al., 2016). Despite noticing and documenting differences in suicide among Black populations, it was not until the publishing of the Ring the Alarm report by the Congressional Black Caucus (2019) that suicide rates among Black youth garnered national attention and became recognized as a national crisis (Gordon, 2020).

This crisis is informed by findings of a 126% increase in suicide among 15-19 year-old Black adolescents from 1985 to 1996 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1998). A follow-up review of data from 1991 to 2017, found significant decreasing trends for suicide ideation and planning but significant positive trends for suicide attempts among Black boys and girls, which are highly correlated

with future death by suicide (Bostwick, 2016). Sheftall et al. (2021) examined data from the WISQARS and National Violent Death Reporting System (NVRDS) from 2003 to 2017 and found that Black youth had a significant linear increase in suicide and Black girls ages 15-17 had the largest change in annual percentage rates. In fact, based on 2017 data, Kahn et al. (2018) detail that Black girls had higher rates of suicide outcomes than Black boys with the variables of suicide ideation (22.4% vs. 6.6%), suicide planning (18.9% vs. 6.5%), and suicide attempts (12.5% vs. 6.7%). These alarming trends in combination with the lack of mental health services offered to Black adolescents (Lyon et al., 2013; Locke et al., 2017) establishes a dangerous precedent of untreated trauma lingering in Black adolescents. Trauma, regardless of its source, is detrimental. Yet, trauma's detrimental effects on Black adolescents is multiplicative when it is experienced in an environment that has been purported to deject producing or reproducing traumatic events. Regularly, the main discussion surrounding trauma for youth in urban schools is that their community, rather than their school environment, is the catalyst for adverse health and learning outcomes. Escaping this ideology requires that equity-focus researchers also investigate schools as sites which cultivate racialized trauma through functions (school discipline) which may be associated with Black children seeking unhealthy escapes through suicide (threats and attempts).

Trauma in Schools and Black Youth

Trauma is defined as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (Huang et al., 2014, p. 7). Unfortunately, much of the research on trauma is is centered on ensuring that teachers, schools, and administrators are trauma-informed and create schools that are trauma-sensitive (Chafouleas et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2013; National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008). This includes ensuring that educators have the knowledge and skills to work with children who have experienced trauma. Yet, this approach excludes traumatic experiences, specifically disparate disciplinary sanctions, and over-policing, that occur within the school setting, particularly for Black youth.

To respond to this gap in the literature Saleem et al. (2021) argue that youth of color are exposed to, witness, and are left to process racial stress and trauma that occurs in school settings. Racial trauma and stress are defined as "frightening, dangerous, or upsetting race-based events or discrimination that can cause stress, death or a threat to the physical or psychological integrity of self or others" (Saleem et al., 2021, p. 3). Henderson et al. (2019) developed the first framework for race-related trauma in educational contexts and acknowledged the increases in suicide, mental health problems, school discipline outcomes, and legal problems experienced by Black youth as driving the need for this model. They argue that in addition to individual experiences of racial trauma, it is also experienced at a macro or systems-level through the perpetuation of disparate school discipline outcomes or over-policing of Black youth (Henderson et al., 2019). It is documented that Black children

are being suspended, expelled, and dying at increasing rates; yet, Black youth are exposed to, witness, and left to process discriminatory and biased school discipline outcomes for themselves and their peers. It is argued that racial stress and trauma along with general stress experiences (e.g., disproportionate school discipline outcomes), increases risks for psychological problems among Black adolescents and influences adverse health outcomes such as suicide (Saleem et al., 2021). Yet, this association has not been demonstrated or proven in quantitative research.

Research must be conducted that investigates how being "at-risk" for being suspended influences Black students' suicide ideation and suicide attempt. This allows for additional insight regarding the potential effects of racism, gendered racism, and racial trauma. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are; how does the risk of being suspended connect to suicide outcomes (i.e., suicide consideration, plan, or attempt) for Black high school adolescents; and what is the relationship between the employing of school support personnel through a school district and Black students suicide ideation, planning, and attempts?

METHODOLOGY

The data used for this study was obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civils Rights Database (OCRD), the Youth Behavior Risk Survey (YRBS) which is provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Statistics Common Core Database (CCD). Data from the OCRD and CCD was reported at the end of the 2017-2018 academic year. The OCRD is a biennial data collection and includes school- and district-level data on student performance, gifted and talented education, access to advanced placement courses, student demographics, and school discipline outcomes. The YRBS is a nationally representative dataset that uses a three-stage cluster design to collect self-reported data from high schools in select school districts across the U.S (Kahn et al., 2018). The YRBS is typically offered to high school students in the spring semester, to which the most recent dataset is a reflection of the 2018-2019 academic year. When asked questions about suicide considerations, plans, and attempts in the spring of 2019, participants are asked to reflect on the last 12 months and this timeframe overlaps with school discipline data collected from the OCRD in the spring of 2018.

To arrive at the sample for the study, the YRBS was first analyzed to determine which school districts were represented and of those represented to what extent were those school districts classified as urban by the CCD. The CCD contains demographic information on all schools and school districts as well as geospatial information (urbanicity). Upon establishing the number of urban school districts in the YRBS, the school districts of Chicago, IL, Newark, NJ, New York City, NY, Philadelphia, PA, Duval County, FL, Oakland, and Los Angeles, CA were chosen based on the spatial density of the population and the percentage of Black residents per the U.S. Census Bureau report (2020). The researchers obtained the number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and data on the number of full-time employed (FTE) school support personnel (SROs, school nurses, social workers, and psychologists) in schools for each of the aforementioned districts. The CCD was used to gather demographic information regarding student enrollment by race and gender.

Due to the YRBS dataset only containing responses from high schoolers, data relating to schools that were not traditional high schools (9th - 12th grades) were removed from the sample. The survey asked three questions about suicide which were utilized as dependent variables for this study; during the past 12 months did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide; during the past 12 months did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide; and during the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide. Each of these variables was recoded and discussed in the following section. Averages for all the variables from OCRD and the CCD used in this study were calculated for each district and then merged with the YRBS data which contained the individual responses of students who self-identified as Black or Black on the survey. After removing respondents in the YRBS of students who did not respond to the dependent variables (suicide consideration, plan, or attempt), the researchers arrived at the current sample size (*N*= 19,934).

Predictor Variables

To understand school discipline risk as an indication of the type of climate (affirming or traumatic) Black students learn in, the risk index (RI) was calculated for OSSs for each school and then used to compile each school district. The RI gives an indication of the likelihood of a student group receiving a disciplinary sanction. RIs are calculated by dividing the number of students who received a disciplinary sanction by the total number of students in that group. A RI of one (1.0) would suggest that Black students have a relatively equal likelihood of receiving a disciplinary sanction. RIs that are higher than one (1.0) would indicate a higher probability of receiving a disciplinary sanction. The idea of discipline disproportionality comes from Black students comprising a small percentage of the student population, but their RI is higher than other racial/ethnic groups (i.e., White students) which comprise a larger percentage of the student population. In this study, the mean RI for each district was calculated for Black boys and girls individually. The RI of a school district offers a glimpse of the type of traumatic stress triggers (e.g., over-surveillance and over-penalization) that Black students endured throughout a school year; and due to the collection and reporting of school discipline data occurring at the end of a school year, the RI denotes the level of trauma that Black students can expect to experience throughout the upcoming school year.

Lastly, the second research question investigated whether the employment of school support personnel across a school district was associated with a decrease or increase in Black students' suicide consideration, planning, and attempts. The number of FTE school social workers, SROs (security guards and law enforcement officers), psychologists, nurses, and school counselors were calculated for each school. Research denotes that when students reported higher likelihoods of having suicide ideation or attempting suicide, it was in response to having few social supports from school personnel (Miller et al., 2015). These personnel serve as an alternative outlet for students who may not feel comfortable sharing about their adverse behaviors. Understanding that often these support personnel are shared throughout the district for various reasons (i.e., the lack of funding or lack of employed personnel), a mean was calculated for each of these positions across the districts.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables for this research study were suicide consideration, suicide planning, and suicide attempts. Respondents were offered a binary choice for both suicide consideration and suicide planning. Respondents that indicated "No" on the survey were coded as 0 and respondents who reported "Yes" were coded as 1 in the dataset. For the variable, suicide attempts, respondents who indicated that they had at least one attempted suicide in the past 12 months were coded as 1 with respondents who indicated they did not attempt suicide in the past 12 months coded as 0. Again, the responses were from the most recent YRBS 2019 dataset.

Data Analyses

All data were analyzed using STATA 16.0 software. The merged dataset was screened for outliers and missing values for the predictor and outcome variables. Additionally, it was established that a linear relationship existed between the predictor and dependent variables. A Pearson correlation was conducted, with the RI for Black boys and girls inserted as the predictor variables, followed by school support personnel. Finally, students' responses on suicide ideation, suicide plan, and suicide attempt were inserted as the dependent variables of this study.

RESULTS

This study sought to investigate two questions; is there a relationship between Black students' disciplinary risk within a district and Black students' reporting of suicide consideration, plan, or attempt; and does the presence of school personnel within a district influence Black students' consideration of suicide, creating a suicide plan, or attempting suicide within the last 12 months?

Descriptive Findings

On average, there is roughly the same number of Black boys and girls (97.86, 96.88), per school, across the districts in this sample. The percentage of Black boys who received an OSS was five percent, whereas four percent of Black girls received an OSS. In regard to support personnel, high schools in these districts had an average of 2.77 school counselors and security guards. Additionally, school districts employed more social workers (.66) per school than law enforcement officers (.26), nurses (.32), or psychologists (.33). With regard to responses on questions pertaining to suicide, Black girls had higher indications that they either considered (.21), planned (.20), or attempted suicide (.13) in the last twelve months than Black boys. See full results in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Findings of Predictor and Dependent Variables

Variable	M	SD
Black Boys	97.86	106.53

Black Girls	96.88	114.85
Boys Risk Index	0.05	0.08
Girls Risk Index	0.04	0.03
School Counselors	2.77	0.50
Law Enforcement Officers	0.26	0.32
Security Guards	2.77	1.71
Nurses	0.32	0.35
Psychologist	0.33	0.21
Social Workers	0.66	0.58
Respondent Variables		
Boys Suicide Consider	0.13	0.34
Girls Suicide Consider	0.21	0.41
Boys Suicide Plan	0.12	0.32
Girls Suicide Plan	0.20	0.40
Boys Suicide Attempt	0.11	0.31
Girls Suicide Attempt	0.13	0.33

Inferential Findings

For Black boys, the results in Table 2 indicate that a statistically significant association between the predictor variable (risk index for out-of-school suspensions) and the dependent variables regarding suicide was nonexistent. School counselors (r = .03, p < .001), law enforcement officers (r = .08, p < .001), nurses (r = .02, p < .001), school psychologists (r = .06, p < .05), and school social workers (r = .04, p < .001) had a positive correlation with Black boys consideration of suicide. Law enforcement officers (r = .05, p < .001) and school psychologists (r = .06, p < .001) had a positive correlation with Black boys creating a suicide plan. Finally, there was a statistically negative association between Black boys suicide attempts and the employment of school counselors (r = -.06, p < .001), law enforcement officers (r = -.05, p < .01), school psychologists (r = -.05, p < .001) and school social workers (r = -.03, p < .05) in the school district.

Table 2.
Pearson Correlations of Out-of-School Suspension Risk Index for Black Males, Suicide Ideations and Attempts, and School Support Personnel Across the District

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Black Male RI	-									
Suicide Consider	0.00	-								
Suicide Plan	0.02	0.57^	-							
Suicide Attempt	0.02	-0.35^	-0.33^	-						
School Counselors	-0.70^	0.03**	0.01	-0.06^	-					
Law Enforcement Officers	-0.23^	0.08^	0.05^	-0.05**	0.81^	-				

Security Guards	0.34^	0.00	-0.02	0.03*	0.31^	0.21^	-			
Nurses	0.26^	0.02*	0.03	0.03**	-0.20^	0.31^	0.11^	-		
Psychologist	0.27^	0.06^	0.06^	-0.05^	0.17^	0.51^	0.12^	0.73^	-	
Social Workers	0.03^	0.04^	0.03	-0.03*	0.58^	0.62^	0.67^	0.43^	0.74^	-

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, ^ $p<0.001$

The correlational results in Table 3 reveal that for Black girls, there was a weak positive association between the predictor variable of RI, suicide consider ($r = .05$, $p < .001$) and suicide attempt ($r = .07$, $p < .001$). With regard to school support personnel and their influence on the dependent variables, the correlational analysis found that school counselors ($r = -.06$, $p < .001$), law enforcement officers ($r = -.08$, $p < .001$), school psychologists ($r = -.07$, $p < .001$), and social workers ($r = -.04$, $p < .01$) all had a weak negative association on whether or not Black girls considered suicide. The results highlight a weak negative association between creating a suicide plan in the last 12 months, and having a law enforcement officer ($r = -.08$, $p < .001$), school nurse ($r = -.03$, $p <.05$), school psychologist ($r = -.07$, $p < .001$), or school social worker ($r = -.04$, $p < .01$) in the district. There were significant negative associations between Black girls' suicide attempt(s) and the presence of a school counselor ($r = -.07$, $p < .001$), law enforcement officer ($r = -.06$, $p < .001$), school psychologist ($r = -.08$, $p < .001$) or school social worker ($r = -.06$, $p < .001$). Essentially, for Black girls, an increased chance of receiving an OSS contributes, although small, to them considering suicide and attempting suicide. Conversely, the findings highlight that the more Black girls are surrounded by certain support personnel, the less likely they are to consider, plan, or attempt suicide.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations of Out-of-School Suspension Risk Index for Black Females, Suicide Ideations and Attempts, and School Support Personnel Across the District

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Black Females RI	-									
Suicide Consider	0.05^	-								
Suicide Plan	-0.01	0.61^	-							
Suicide Attempt	0.08^	0.49^	0.45^	-						
School Counselors	-0.54^	-0.06^	-0.02	-0.07^	-					
Law Enforcement Officers	-0.04^	-0.08^	-0.08^	-0.07^	0.82^	-				
Security Guards	0.62^	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.31^	0.21^	-			
Nurses	0.74^	0.01	-0.03*	0.01	-0.20^	0.31^	0.11^	-		
Psychologist	0.30^	-0.07^	-0.07^	-0.08^	0.16^	0.51^	0.12^	0.73^	-	
Social Workers	0.19^	-0.06^	-0.04**	-0.06^	0.58^	0.62^	0.67^	0.43^	0.74^	-

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand if there was a relation between disciplinary risk within a school district and reported suicide ideation, planning, or attempts for Black students. In addition, we explored whether the presence of school personnel within a district influences suicide ideation, planning, or suicide attempts among Black youth. Black boys had slightly higher rates of out-of-school suspensions than Black girls whereas Black girls had higher rates of ideation, planning, and attempts than Black boys. We did find that school discipline risk was positively associated with suicide ideation, planning, and attempts for Black girls. However, school discipline risk was only associated with suicide attempts for Black boys. Finally, for Black boys, the increase in certain school support personnel in the district was associated with a decrease in suicide attempt risk. The increase in school support personnel in the district was associated with certain suicide outcomes for Black girls. Based on these findings, recommendations are warranted to support and protect Black children in our schools.

Calling it What it Is - The Emergence of the School Discipline-to-Suicide Pipeline

This is the first study to disaggregate and critically examine school discipline risk and suicide outcomes at the district high school level based on race and gender and to examine the adverse effects of discipline inequities. As suicide outcomes are alarmingly increasing for Black youth and they are disproportionately impacted by school discipline, there is a need to refocus our attention. The fixation on school disciplinary outcomes and the increased risk for involvement with the criminal justice system has failed to take into account how these children may be burdened with thoughts of hopelessness and suicide. Thus, the more immediate and urgent focus should not be on whether they enter the criminal justice system, but on how we protect them and help them to maintain hope, wellness, and positive mental health. Sustaining their lives is the priority; helping them to maintain hope and thrive is our obligation.

Our research affirms that Black girls and boys are harmed by the adverse effects of school discipline (Cooper et al., 2022; Dancy, 2014; Parks et al., 2016). Consequently, our findings suggest that school discipline rates are found to influence suicide outcomes among Black youth. Although the analyses offered weak correlations, these findings - especially for Black girls - offers a glimpse of how schools and their functions (school discipline) potentially form a pipeline for Black youth to consider, plan or attempt suicide. Conceptualized as the school discipline-to-suicide pipeline, this phenomenon is defined as the systemic misuse of school discipline as punishment among vulnerable minoritized children, in conjunction with the lack of affirmative supportive structures, resulting in hopelessness and a desire to end one's life. Based on our exploration of the seven urban school districts, school discipline risk for Black girls influenced suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts. Although Black girls had slightly less risk for school discipline, the impact of disciplinary sanctioning influenced suicidal outcomes on this continuum ranging from suicidal thoughts to attempts. This aligned with findings from Parks et al. (2016) that Black girls endured adverse psychological effects from negative interactions during the school discipline process but our work affirms that these adverse effects can also influence suicide outcomes. Further, suicide attempts are highly correlated with future death by suicide (Bostwick, 2016). As suicide rates for Black youth are on the rise across the country and have been documented nationally as a public health crisis (Gordon, 2020), our findings are an immediate call to action to protect Black children in the educational system. To shift the focus to the school discipline-to-suicide pipeline, we must be willing to acknowledge the harms, trauma, and stress perpetrated in school settings and how these are linked to adverse health outcomes including suicide.

What Role Are You Playing? Student Support Personnel and the School Discipline-to-Suicide Pipeline

The role of student support personnel (SROs, school nurses, social workers, and psychologists) is to simply support students. However, the racial trauma and stress experienced by Black children in school settings in addition to general stressors they endure, increase their risk for adverse outcomes thereby requiring a different type of

support. Prior to recommending strategies to improve the type and level of support Black students may need, it is important to understand at the district level if the presence of student support personnel influences adverse outcomes such as suicide. We do know that Black children are less likely to receive needed services in educational settings (Locke et al., 2017; Lyon et al., 2013). As a result, it makes sense that the increased availability of personnel may serve as a buffer as more staff may increase the chance that Black youth receive necessary support and services. However, this was only the case for Black girls in our study.

Strategies as a District to Resist the School Discipline-to-Suicide Pipeline

We recommend several strategies for districts to resist the school discipline-to-suicide pipeline. It is imperative that knowledge is obtained regarding understanding, recognizing, and identifying racial trauma and stress experienced by Black children in school settings. This knowledge should also extend to understanding how racial discrimination and racism contribute to disproportionate outcomes such as school discipline and suicide outcomes for Black students. It is recommended that school districts disaggregate, analyze, and critique this data to identify where harm may be perpetrated against students. This assessment needs to include a review of data for their schools indicating discipline and suicide outcomes for children based on race and gender. Finally, an understanding of the interconnection of these outcomes, including discipline and suicide outcomes, would help provide further insight and could be more of a motivation for systems-level change. For example, if districts identify that individual student discipline outcomes in the district are influences of individual student suicide outcomes, then this necessitates an urgency to implement policy change to protect students.

Limitations

With any study there are a number of limitations. First, we were unable to account for the longer-term influences of school discipline on suicide risk. In this study, the suicide outcomes were guided by a question assessing a history of suicide ideation, planning, and attempts in the past year. As a result, our suicide outcomes variables are limited to a one-year timeframe. We are unable to provide additional insight into whether these suicide outcomes extend beyond the one-year period. We measured for suicide ideation, planning, and attempts and did not capture children who died by suicide during this time period. We also did not include data on reported mental health issues. As state and local agencies are able to modify the YRBS questions and add or delete questions (Kahn et al., 2018), we recommend that districts consider adding additional variables to the survey to account for individual-level experiences. Lastly, the masking of individual-level data by the CDC prevents researchers from linking students' responses to their respective schools. This hampered our ability to assess students' responses to school discipline risk at their respective schools. To maintain the privacy of students, future research should investigate through qualitative methods how chronically suspended Black students

contend with social and emotional wellness in relation to suicide ideation and suicide attempts.

CONCLUSION

Despite the proliferation of research and literature investigating school disciplinary outcomes for Black students, it has been relatively silent on exploring the impact of these outcomes on suicide rates of this population. Unfortunately, when exploring both of these phenomena together, the field of education still has not produced the kind of outcomes that each of the authors of this desire to see in our nation's urban schools for Black students. This research has documented that school disciplinary outcomes and suicidal rates of Black students should be at the forefront of the national conversation to implement preventative measures across the United States. This study provided several foundational cornerstones that can be utilized going forward. Given the importance of this issue, it is imperative that school stakeholders, families, and communities come together to ensure these students receive the services they need even if it is delivered from stakeholders external to the school district. This article offers a plethora of suggestions for moving forward to support this population of students in hopes to eliminate exclusionary discipline practices and suicide.

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