

Students' Risks for Out-of-school Suspensions: Indigenous heritage and child welfare system involvement

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 identifying factors that predicted the likelihood of and number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS), focusing on ethnicity/indigeneity and Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement. We investigated whether the association between CPS involvement and out-of-school suspension varied by ethnicity. We were especially interested in how Indigeneity and child protective services history were individually related to OSS, and how CPS involvement interacted with ethnicity to predict OSS.

Students who were Black, Indigenous, male, lower-SES, had disabilities, or were involved with CPS were at a higher risk for OSS. Being Indigenous moderated the relation between CPS involvement and OSS; OSS increased in relation to CPS involvement for white students but not for Indigenous students.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. Overall, we found that BIPOC students experienced out-of-school suspensions disproportionately more often compared to white students. Black students were 1.6 times, and Indigenous students were 1.8 times more likely to experience OSS compared to white students. What do you think leads to this inequity in discipline outcomes? What are some approaches you could use to help reduce the use of exclusionary discipline in schools, or inequity in school discipline?
2. We found that Indigenous children were proportionally more likely to be involved with Child Protective Services and placed out of their homes than white children (9% of Indigenous students vs. 0.8% of white students), yet previous findings indicate that Indigenous families do not maltreat their children at a higher rate than white families. Why might Indigenous children be more likely to be involved with CPS and placed out of their homes? What can you do in your practice to reduce this difference?
3. Children involved in CPS were more likely to experience OSS compared to those not involved with CPS. In addition, Indigenous children were more likely to have a greater number of OSS than white students if they had no or low rates of CPS involvement, however, Indigenous and white children who had high rates of CPS involvement looked similar in terms of OSS incidents. What policies or practices within the educational or child protection systems might contribute to this phenomenon? What impact might this have on Indigenous students?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Despite the ICWA, Indigenous children are still disproportionately placed outside of their homes. What does your state policy look like in terms of reducing disparities and bias in child protective services? What policy changes might be needed to reduce this disparity?
2. We found a significant interaction between being Indigenous, child maltreatment allegations, and out-of-school suspension outcomes. Overall, it was also found that child protective services involvement and out-of-school suspension were related. How might collaboration between the education system and the child protection system help address the disproportionate outcomes found in this study?
3. Are there alternative ways of handling behavioral problems besides using exclusionary discipline, and if so, what might those alternatives look like? How can we advocate for changes in policy that might better reflect the goals of non-exclusionary discipline?