

EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORY OF ETHNIC MINORITY YOUTH IN CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION

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This document is a summary of an exploratory literature review on youth from ethnocultural communities in youth protection. The investigation of factors that predict school completion or success is at the heart of the study, allowing us to better understand the elements that can influence the educational paths of these youths. The educational trajectory of youth who have been involved in the youth protection system can be fraught with problems and even disruption (Villegas, Rosenthal, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2014). Discrimination is an additional barrier, particularly for youth from ethnocultural communities, in education, the labour market, the social safety net, health and social services, community resources, etc. (Sow, Zorn, and Lamarre, 2020). These challenges can affect their ability to complete or succeed in school.

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT?

A large number of quantitative articles examining predictors of school completion or success for youth in the child and youth protection system have come to the same conclusion: race/ethnicity alone is not a strong predictor of educational outcomes. The addition of control variables (demographics, family history, and placement history) tending to obliterate ethnicity-related disparities (Dworsky et al., 2010; Harris, Jackson, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2019).

Other factors, more institutional in nature, may have an impact on school completion or success. To provide an example, Garcia and colleagues (2012) discovered that 1) circumstances of exit from the child and youth protection system would impact high school completion. Indeed, African Americans living with their families would be more likely to attend high school than those living independently. Conversely, among Latino youth, living independently would increase their chances of completing high school. 2) Access to mental health services would increase the likelihood of completing high school for African Americans (and Whites). Also, 3) feeling prepared for an independent transition to adulthood would increase the likelihood of completing high school among African Americans. Finally, 4) placement satisfaction, although it did not predict high school completion among all racial groups.

YET, CERTAIN ETHNIC GROUPS FARE BETTER THAN OTHERS

While neither ethnicity nor gender alone are significant predictors of school completion or success, an intersectionality analysis of ethnicity and gender, conducted by Cage, Corley, and Harris (2018), highlighted the educational vulnerabilities of African American boys involved in the youth protection system. According to the study, African American males had the lowest graduation rate of all youth in the study, being less likely to complete their education than white males, white females, and Latino females. Yet the differences between Latino males and their female peers were not significant. In other words, Latino men would show more favorable outcomes than African American men. Thus, not only would Latinos fare better than their African American peers, they would also show few disparities with their White peers (Villegas, Rosenthal, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2014; Watt & Kim, 2019). Moreover, even when

they are more likely to access higher education, African Americans would be less likely to access employment than their white peers (Dworsky et al., 2010; Watt & Kim, 2019)..

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE DISPARITIES

Dworsky and colleagues (2010), aiming to study the disparities between African Americans and their white peers after adding control variables, reach different conclusions by comparing two samples, with the second showing that African Americans had higher educational achievement than their white peers. However, it is worth remembering that factors other than ethnicity predicted educational outcomes, as noted in the study by Villegas and colleagues (2014) who did not find disparities between Latinos and Whites.

The findings of these studies are associated with the uniqueness of the groups studied: youth in the second sample of the Dworsky and colleagues (2010) study and those in the Villegas and colleagues (2014) study were cared for in a particular program (Casey Family Programs), providing youth with greater placement stability and much more intensive services (case management, counseling, independent transition to adult life, educational support) than most youth involved in the youth protection system. This program acted as a protective factor for positive educational outcomes for youth in care, particularly for African American and Latino youth.

WHAT ROLE DOES PLACEMENT STABILITY PLAY?

There appears to be a relationship between placement stability and academic achievement. Indeed, when the number of placements is controlled for, a longer length of stay in placement predicts high stability. Placement stability appears to be a «strong predictor of positive academic outcomes» (Villegas et al., 2014, p. 50). Garcia and colleagues' (2012) study, on the other hand, found that African American ex-placement students who experienced placement instability were less likely to complete high school. Conversely, it appears that educational support contributes to placement stability. In other words, the quality of school-youth interactions in the youth protection system may be a vehicle for reducing placement instability (Summersett-Ringgold, Jordan, Kisiel, Sax, & McClelland, 2018).

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF MOTIVATION FOR THESE YOUTH TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION?

Lane's (2017) qualitative study, which focused on African American youths' narratives and perspectives on their social, cultural, and familial conditions, revealed that African American youths' difficult personal experiences can be a determining source of motivation or inspiration to pursue college and succeed in life. Indeed, on the one hand, an awareness of their unfavorable social conditions and unpleasant experiences in foster care motivated African American youth to pursue college and a degree, particularly in order to break the «cycle of social and economic adversity.» On the other hand, degrading messages from their families (biological and foster) and from society at large stimulated their desire for academic success. In other words, they had to prove to all those people who did not believe in them, that they could succeed and achieve their goals.

In conclusion, the literature shows that ethnicity alone is not a strong predictor of completion or academic success. However, an intersectionality analysis of gender and ethnicity particularly reveals the vulnerability of African American men. Latinos, on the other hand, appear to have relatively more positive outcomes than their African American peers and have little disparity with whites. The implementation of specific programs for the most vulnerable youth significantly reduces disparities between groups, while placement stability is an important factor in positive educational outcomes. Finally, despite the adversities faced by youth from ethnic communities, they have demonstrated that adverse placement experiences may be motivating factors for academic success

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