

A Case Study of the Prevalence of the School-to-Prison Pipeline within Suffolk County Jails: an Exploration of Male Inmates Aged 18–25 Years

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ABSTRACT: *The escalation of school violence within the United States during the 1980s and 1990s inadvertently prompted the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) emergence. Heightened efforts were implemented to abate this surge in school violence and keep American youth safe in the academic environment. With the imposition of zero-tolerance policies and the enactment of the Gun Free Schools Act 1994 (Pub L No. 103-882), American students, disproportionately those of color, are subject to stringent disciplinary actions regardless of behavioral circumstances or mitigating factors (Kang-Brown et al., 2013). These harsh punitive measures fuel the pipeline resulting in the growth of uneducated, stigmatized “delinquent” youth populating our juvenile and criminal justice systems.*

The following case study exemplified the interrelationship between the STPP and exclusionary punishments. Through the distribution, collection, and evaluation of survey data completed by 55 incarcerated male inmates, housed within one of two New York jails, the subsequent study validates the prevalence of the STPP. The findings suggest a correlation between the participants’ current incarceration and a history of suspensions and expulsions during their educational years. In conjunction with existing literature, this study identified an overrepresentation of Black and brown participants affected by exclusionary punishments. Black and brown participants were disproportionately funneled through the pipeline accelerating juvenile and criminal justice contact.

KEYWORDS -education, exclusionary punishment, juveniles, school-to-prison-pipeline

I. Introduction

With the unprecedented growth of school violence erupting in the 1990s, schools across the country fought back through a zero-tolerance approach to school safety (Schept et al., 2014). These “no-nonsense” policies represented the automatic implementation of harsh school punishments for specified infractions to deter student misconduct and maintain school security.

In 1994, the Federal government passed the Guns Free Schools Act, which mandated that each state receiving federal funding require local school agencies to execute the expulsion of any student for a period of no less than one year when determined to have brought a weapon onto school property. The signing of this act escalated the adoption of zero-tolerance policies in school districts across the country; students became subject to punitive disciplinary actions for non-violent behaviors. A substantial portion of students intertwined within the STPP is nonviolent first-time offenders. As a result, their risk of future disciplinary actions and contact with the justice system is heightened (Fabelo et al., 2011).

The school-to-prison pipeline represents a national trend in which the above-mentioned school policies, directly and indirectly, channel the trajectory of a youth's path out of the academic environment and into the criminal justice system. Although the goal of these school practices was positively intended, the consequences have demonstrated otherwise. Zero tolerance policies (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008), a term stemming from the "get tough on crime" climate of the 1980s, fail to recognize the subjectivity in one's behavior, eliminating the consideration for student motivation and mitigating history (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Mallet, 2015). This so-called system of discipline criminalizes youth through the overwhelming use of exclusionary punishments and indirectly limits student educational accessibility and achievement as well as the development of interpersonal social skills (DeWitt, 2017; Dutil, 2020). The result is lower academic achievement and higher school dropout rates (Welsh & Little, 2018).

Studies indicate that students of color are disproportionately targeted by the STPP (school to prison pipeline). Black and brown youth are more likely to receive harsh punishments than their white counterparts. Students of color are at a greater risk of school suspensions at a rate of three to one. This escalated to Black and brown students being subject to punitive disciplinary actions for non-violent behaviors such as "disrespect," "defiance," or "acting out" (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011; Smith & Harper, 2015).

In 2015, of the 984,500 youths enrolled in the New York City public school system, 11,434 received an out-of-school suspension as a means of disciplinary action, and 214 received expulsion (New York Alliance for Quality Education, 2019). In the 2016 – 2017 school year, New York State school districts suspended at least one student every minute (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). In the 2015-2016 academic year, 2.7 million public school students received an out-of-school suspension (United State Education Department, 2021). The correlation between exclusionary punishments and student drop-out rates is alarming (Welsh & Little, 2018). A plethora of research documents a correlation between school exclusionary punishments, student drop-out rates, and justice system contact (Brent, 2016; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). According to a 2015 published report by the New York State Alliance for Quality Education (2019), a startling 65% of all students who drop out of high school are at a greater likelihood of incarceration than their peers who complete their high school education. A recent study by Bacher-Hicks, Billings, and Deming (2021) suggested that students who attend schools with high suspension rates are at a greater risk of experiencing incarceration in adulthood.

The following exploratory study examined the interrelationship between exclusionary punishments and future criminal justice contact. Through the distribution, collection, and evaluation of survey data collected from 55 currently incarcerated males, the subsequent study exemplifies a causal link between the two variables supporting the subsistence of the STPP. Although a substantial portion of the research sample had experienced some form of exclusionary punishment throughout their academic years, it must be noted that these disciplinary actions have not been determined as risk predictors of future criminal justice contact.

II. Literature Review

The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law on January 8, 2002, by President George Bush. This act protected the educational right of American elementary and secondary students to successfully maintain a quality education in an academic environment geared toward pedagogic learning and success. With the ratification of the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994) and the emergence of zero-tolerance policies, the intended educational climate of the No Child Left Behind Act has been eradicated. Academic environments became punitive forums, tunneling American youth into our correctional institutions (Swain & Noblit, 2011). Zero-tolerance practices invoke stringent academic disciplinary strategies that have led to the expansion of the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Educational venues governed by harsh exclusionary punishments and inflexible zero-tolerance policies made successful academic achievement inefficacious (DeWitt, 2017; Dutil, 2020; Hirschfield, 2010; Kupchik, 2010). Research indicated that students subjected to school exclusionary disciplinary actions are

at a greater risk of academic disengagement, educational failure, and school drop-out (Welch & Payne, 2012; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

The intended deterrent effect of implementing zero-tolerance policies within the school setting proved to be antithetical. The subjection of students to intensified disciplinary measures increases the likelihood of adverse life outcomes (Welsh & Little, 2018). Research showed that these negative consequences affect students through their academic years and into adulthood (Keyes, 2022). Students exposed to exclusionary sanctions face a greater likelihood of juvenile legal system contact, enhancing their risk of adult incarceration (Heitzeg, 2016). Previous scholarship supported the conclusion that experiencing at least one out-of-school suspension directly increases a youth's odds of later justice system involvement (Fabelo et al., 2011; Heitzeg, 2016; Schiff, 2018).

As the interrelationship between school environments and criminal justice contact strengthened, more and more students experienced criminal justice involvement as youth and into maturity (Heise & Nance, 2021). Through an examination of the correlativity between school suspension rates and the risk of adult criminal activity within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, researchers concluded that academic environments defined by harsh disciplinary methods markedly increased the incarceration risk for adolescent youth into adulthood (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Hemez, Brent, & Mowen, 2020). Research has demonstrated that the involuntary removal of a youth from the academic setting correlated with anti-social behavior, dropping out of school, and criminal activity (Monahan et al., 2014).

An empirical study examining a causal link between school exclusionary punishments and subsequent criminal justice contact, Hemez, Brent, and Mowan (2020), through a Life-Course Perspective lens, paralleled previous research confirming a nexus between school suspensions and adult imprisonment (Mowen & Brent, 2016). Through their analysis of longitudinal data, researchers contended that school suspensions are the impetus toward future criminal victimization, criminal justice involvement, and adult incarceration (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

Following the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994) passing, schools nationwide adopted some variants of zero-tolerance disciplinary mechanisms. The initial intent of these policies was to combat serious academic infractions such as the importation of a weapon onto school terrain. Gradually, schools began to escalate their range of school-based infractions criminalizing behaviors unrelated to weapon possession. Zero-tolerance policies expanded to include serious student misconduct and minor, noncriminal behaviors as well (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Losen & Skiba, 2010). Exclusionary academic penalties, typically reserved for severe school incidents, became common in responding to less-serious student transgressions (Cramer, Gonzalez, & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). The expansion of zero-tolerance policies has led to the application of harsh disciplinary measures for nonviolent subjective school misconduct such as verbal harassment, disobedience, and truancy (Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Mallet, 2015; Marsh, 2014).

During the 2016 - 2017 school year, Minnesota educational data noted that almost half of all school exclusionary punishments resulted from disorderly, non-dangerous behaviors (Jones et al., 2018; Mallet, 2015). Data gathered by the Children's Agenda (2022) from fifteen New York State school districts concluded that within the 2021- 2022 school year, 15,306 students had received at least one school suspension. Of these, approximately one-half were for "disruptive" behaviors, nonviolent behaviors which substantially impede upon the educational process or restrict the teacher's ability to instruct (New York State Consolidated Laws – Education section 3214). The application of harsh disciplinary actions for normative adolescent indiscretions broadened the web of the school-to-prison pipeline funneling both "violent" and "nonviolent" youth toward future justice system contact.

Black students are overrepresented by those harshly sanctioned for minor school infractions (Heitzeg, 2016; Losen & Whitaker, 2017). Through the overuse of zero-tolerance policies, Black youth became subjected to

harsh disciplinary punishments for adolescent-ordinary, non-criminal behaviors such as skipping class, chewing gum, and burping (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011; Losen & Whitaker, 2017; Smith & Harper, 2015). Criminalizing these more benign behaviors proliferated the school-to-prison pipeline (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Substantial research confirms the disproportionality of exclusionary disciplinary actions toward youths of color (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Mallet, 2015). Racial inequalities in reference to the implementation of exclusionary discipline (the discipline gap) have been long-established (McIntosh et al., 2018; Mittleman, 2018; Mowen & Brent, 2016). The National Institute of Educational Statistics (2013 – 2014) concluded that approximately 2.6 million public school students received one or more out-of-school suspensions, with Black youth receiving the highest percentage (17.6) compared to any other racial or ethnic group. Within the 2014 – 2015 academic school year, the U.S. Department of Education provided data indicating that Black students were 3.8 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white counterparts. Black students in New York City are the most prevalent youth group facing exclusionary punishments triggered by racial disproportionality (Rodriguez & Welsch, 2022). In 2016, New York State Black students accounted for 27.1 percent of the overall student population but approximately half of all suspensions (New York Alliance for Quality Education, 2019).

School use of exclusionary punishments deprives American youth of the right to a free, quality education (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2013). Data provided by the United States Department of Education, during the 2015 – 2016 academic school year, an estimated 11,392,474 days of school instruction were lost due to exclusionary punishments. This number equated to 62,596 years of lost education. Loss of educational opportunities results in negative consequences (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Hemez, Brent, & Mowen, 2020; Welsh & Little, 2018). “In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education” *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483, 493, 74 S.Ct. 686, 98 L.Ed. 873 (1954).

Nationally, across all age spans, exclusionary punishments have been on the decline. According to Leung-Gagné, McCombs, & Losen (2022), since the 1990’s, school suspension rates have steadily decreased reaching a mere 5% in 2017-18. Suspensions and expulsions plummeted in the 2020-21 school year as a result of mandatory COVID-related closures and the temporary elimination of in-school instruction (Bytrymowicz, 2023; Welsh, 2022). In the past two years, post-pandemic studies have demonstrated a reversion in this trend. Research has shown that the number of school suspensions is rebounding toward pre-pandemic levels as students have resumed in-person learning (The Children’s Agenda, 2022). The North Carolina Department for Public Instruction has reported that during the 2021-22 school year, school suspensions are up 31% since 2018-19, disproportionately targeting black youth (Bytrymowicz, 2023). A 2022 report, issued by The Children’s Agenda, found that 15,306 New York State students were suspended at least once within the 2020-21 school year. In addition, the report found that Black youth were 1.8 to 5.8 times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts (The Children’s Agenda, 2022). Within the following school year, that number escalated to 31,738 suspensions (New York City Public Schools, 2023). This upward trend in exclusionary discipline, as well as the racial disparity in its implementation, confirms the existence of the STPP and the critical need for reform.

With the acknowledgment of the existence of the STPP, the following case study examined the interrelationship between exclusionary punishments and future criminal justice contact. Through the distribution, collection, and evaluation of survey data collected from 55 currently incarcerated males, the subsequent study exemplifies a causal link between the two variables supporting the subsistence of the STPP.

The following study examined what percentage of the 55 New York inmate participants had experienced some form of exclusionary punishment during their educational years. In contrast to a plethora of existing STPP research, data retrieval for this exploratory case study rested solely on the words and experiences of the

individual inmates. Through an analysis of participant responses, this study aimed to provide validation to the existence of the STPP within Suffolk County, NY.

III. Research Design and Methods

An exploratory case study was a method utilized to exemplify the interrelationship between the STPP and exclusionary punishments. According to Wellner and Pierce-Friedman (2019), “the exploratory study is designed to bring the researcher to a deeper understanding through either initial investigation or ongoing research, which adds depth to what is already known about a phenomenon to be examined” (p. 84). This qualitative exploratory study attempts to identify variables that may contribute to the posited school-to-prison pipeline. The research objective is to evaluate the percentage of research participants who have experienced any means of exclusionary discipline during their academic years. Based on the provided data, the research intent was to further establish the validity of both the existence and prevalence of the school-to-prison pipeline.

The theoretical framework for this study stems from the labeling perspective in criminology. “Labeling theory explains the push that adolescents feel to commit a crime; it pushes adolescents into the school-to-prison pipeline” (Heitzeg, 2016, p. 2). Labeling theory assumes that the stigma associated with an adverse label promotes a deviant self-identity within the individual (Noelle, 2019). According to Becker (1963), once a youth is socially defined by a negative label (primary deviance), future deviance (secondary deviance), is likely to occur. This is the result of both the youth’s personal internalization of the negative label and societal reactions associated with that label. Young people labeled as deviant are often subjected to social interactions whereby, they are given the stereotypical expectation of deviance. This can shape that youth’s self-concept. As a result, he/she may identify themselves as a deviant by internalizing and adopting the label (Becker, 1963).

Students who are formally punished at school are labeled “bad”, alienated from their peers, and confronted by the stigmatizing reactions of school authorities and fellow classmates, provoking secondary deviance and future justice system contact (Gerlinger et al, 2021). These external judgments, or labels, can modify the individual’s self-concept and often overtake their own identity. A number of these labeled youths are subsequently exposed to the criminal justice system as a result of the deviant label and the stigma of exclusion (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Heitzeg, 2016).

In their 2021 study, Gerlinger et al. found that suspended youth experience both immediate and long-term decreases in their associations with both prosocial peers and activities; these decreases lead to a greater likelihood of future delinquent behavior and arrest. Novak and Krohn (2020) contend that “the labeling perspective suggests youth who experience suspension may be more likely to associate with deviant peers and will ultimately be more likely to engage in delinquent behavior and experience justice system contact”(p. 46).

The following research design allowed the researchers to identify various contributing factors underlying a youth’s passage from the classroom and into the justice system. As a result, the researchers were able to provide further confirmation validating the existence of the pipeline. The research questions posed include:

- Were you ever suspended or expelled from school, and at what age?
- At what age was your first interaction with the criminal justice system?
- How many times were you arrested and/or incarcerated?

This study surveyed 55 inmates housed within one of two Suffolk County correctional facilities located in New York. The eligibility for research participation required that participants be male; English speaking (to avoid confusion over the questions or possible response interpretations); and currently between the ages of 18 and 25, with a guarantee to be housed on the date of survey distribution.

First, the researchers examined if the participants were ever suspended or expelled from school and at what age this occurred. Second, at what age were the participants' first interactions with the criminal justice system? And lastly, the number of arrests and incarcerations experienced by the participants. New York State was selected as the research locale due to the researchers' location.

Participants from one of two jails (N=100) located in Suffolk County, New York were invited to partake in the survey. The participants were currently incarcerated young males. The researchers intended to gain insight into how many of these men had experienced some form of exclusionary punishment during their educational years. The researchers contacted Captain X, an overseer of incarcerated males, for a list of current inmates who met participation eligibility. At the convenience of the jail, a date was scheduled for the researchers to enter the facility(s) and begin data collection. After meeting the above criterion, prospective participants joined together in the facility recreational room under the supervision of Captain X. The researchers were already in the room awaiting inmate arrival. The researchers briefed the prospective participants on the basics of the study, including the research intent and procedures.

As a means of consent affirmation, the researchers distributed a consent form along with the survey (Appendix A), an unsealed envelope, and a mini pencil. This allowed each inmate to independently read the intent and the basics of the proposed study. Time was allotted for questions and clarifications by potential participants regarding the research instrument. At this point, the process of informed consent was met. To protect inmate confidentiality and anonymity, documentation of signed informed consent was waived as the only direct identifier that could be linked back to the inmates would be their individual signatures of consent. Those inmates who chose to partake in the study voluntarily remained in the recreational room.

Survey completion time was unlimited taking into account the individual participant reading levels. At the completion of the survey, participants placed the instrument into the envelope along with the pencil, sealed it, and placed it in a bin provided by the researchers before their exit. Those who opted out placed the uncompleted survey into the envelope, sealed it, and placed it in the bin provided. This data collection process reduced the probability of participant identifiers and decreased the potential for perceived coercion and/or liability in responses.

Fifty-five (out of 100) completed the survey, resulting in a 55% response rate. The survey instrument was comprised of multiple-choice and open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The research questions were designed to accurately determine whether participants were ever suspended or expelled from school; when their first interaction with the criminal justice system occurred; and how many times they were arrested and incarcerated.

The researchers used NVivo to code and identify themes and trends demonstrated within the collected data (Dollah, Abduh, & Rosmaladewi, 2017). Themes were identified based on participant responses. Coding data involved analyzing the themes. Codes were examined, analyzed, and re-examined for accuracy.

IV. Results

Survey responses were entered into NVivo, and themes were established for every survey question. Commonalities between themes and outliers were examined. The questions focused on school suspensions, expulsions, entry into the criminal justice system, arrests, and incarcerations. Questions regarding demographics were also asked in the survey.

As illustrated in Table 1, all of the 55 male participants were aged between 18-25 years. The ages of the participants were as follows: 18% were 25; 16% were 19; 14% were 21; 14% were 23; 14% were 24; 9% were 18; 9% were 20; and 3% were 22 years of age.

Participants were asked to describe their race. As seen in Table 2, the breakdown was as follows: 45% described themselves as Black or African American; 29% were White or Caucasian; 13% were Latino or Hispanic; 5% declined to answer; 1% were American Indian; 1% were West Indian; 1% were Asian; and 1% responded "other".

Participants were asked if they were ever suspended from school. Eighty-four percent responded that they had received a suspension at some point during their educational years. Fifteen percent said they never experienced a school suspension. One percent of the participants declined to answer.

Additionally, participants were asked if they were ever expelled from school. Fifty-three percent of the participants reported having received a school expulsion. Forty-four percent were never expelled. Three percent declined to answer.

Findings indicated that the majority of participants had received a school suspension and were disciplined for either violent or disorderly misconduct. Reasonings for expulsions paralleled the findings for suspensions. The research data disclosed that most of the Suffolk County inmate participants did experience some form of exclusionary discipline during their academic years.

The research objective was to demonstrate an interrelationship between exclusionary punishments and subsequent criminal justice contact. Participants were asked to identify the age in which they first encountered the justice system. As illustrated in Fig. 1, zero youths aged six to ten had experienced any justice system involvement. Of those who did report contact, 62% were between the ages of 16 and 20; 27% were aged between 11 and 15; 5% were between the ages of 21 and 25; 5% declined to answer. Findings indicate that youth, aged between 16 and 20, are at the greatest risk of criminal justice contact. The data suggests that young males within this age frame need intensified supervision. In accordance with labeling theory, these young men need to be channeled toward pro-social peers, as well as conventional activities, to reduce the risk of justice system involvement and stigmatization.

The remaining two survey questions aimed to identify the number of incarcerations and arrests experienced by each of the 55 participants. As noted in Fig. 2, 33% of participants indicated that they had been arrested between one and three times; 25% had been arrested over seven times; 24% were arrested between four and six times; 14% indicated that their first incarceration was currently at the time of the survey distribution; 3% declined to answer.

The researchers' final inquiry was to determine the number of prior incarcerations experienced by the participants. As shown in Fig. 3, 44% were incarcerated between one and three times; 30% were currently experiencing their first incarceration; 14% were incarcerated seven or more times; 9% were incarcerated between four and six times; 2% declined to answer.

The findings indicated that the number of arrests directly correlated to the number of incarcerations. As the number of arrests increased, so did the number of incarcerations. The data conclusively indicated a correlation between school exclusionary disciplines and subsequent justice system contact.

1. Figures and Tables

Table 1

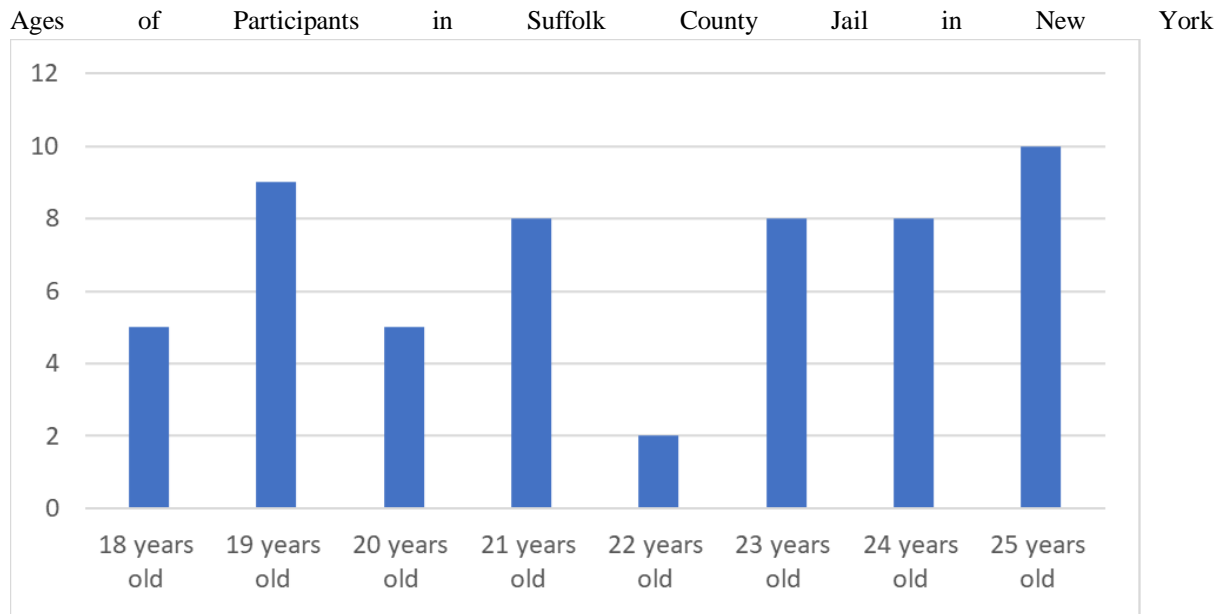


Table 2

Racial Breakdown of Participants in Suffolk County Jail in New York

Race	Number of Participants
American Indian	1
Asian	1
Black (African American)	25
West Indian	1
Latino	7
White (Caucasian)	16
Other	1
Decline	3

Fig.1

Age of First Contact with the Criminal Justice System

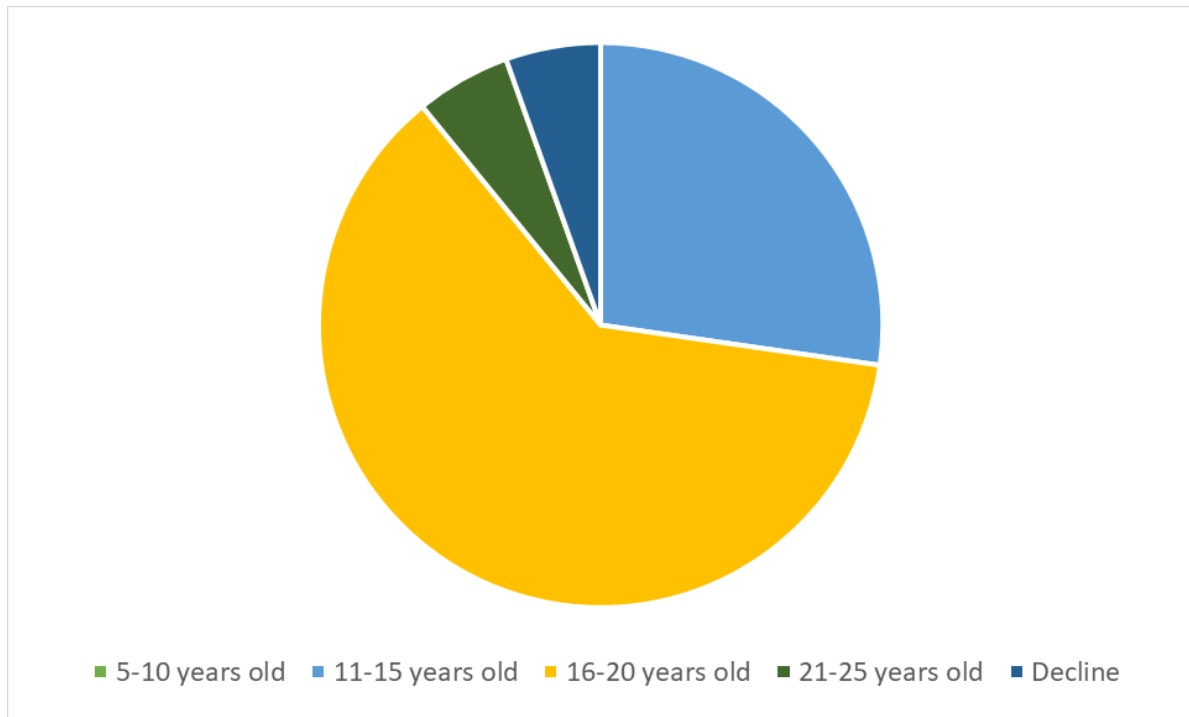


Fig.2

Number of Times Participants Have been Arrested

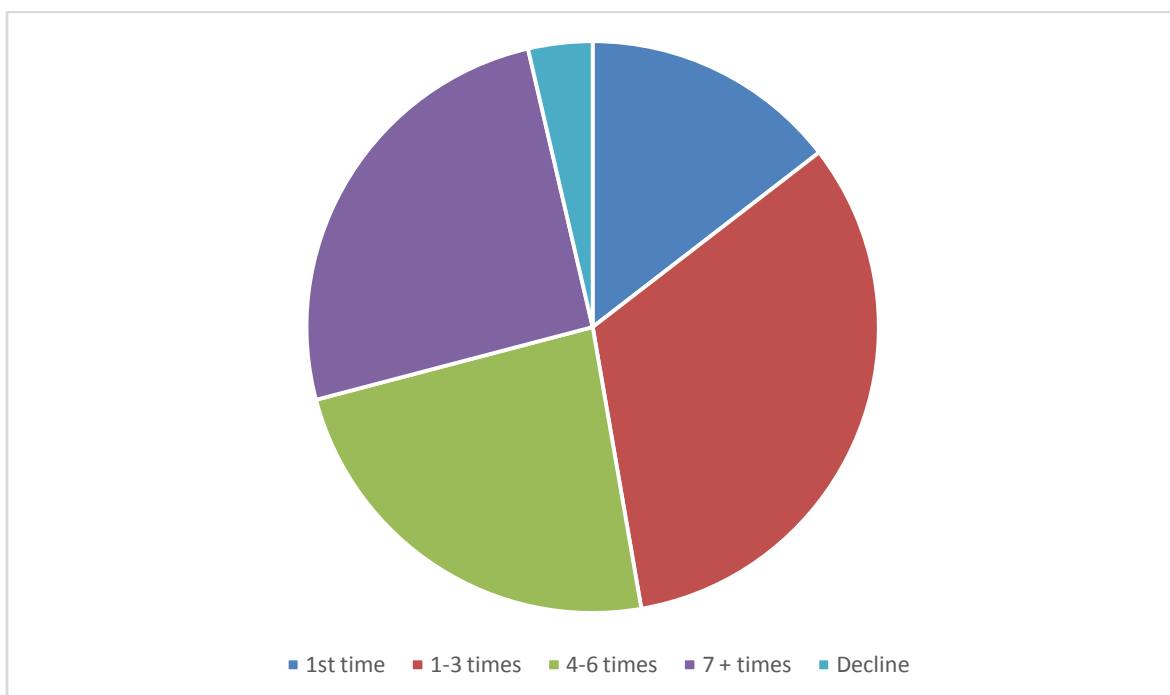
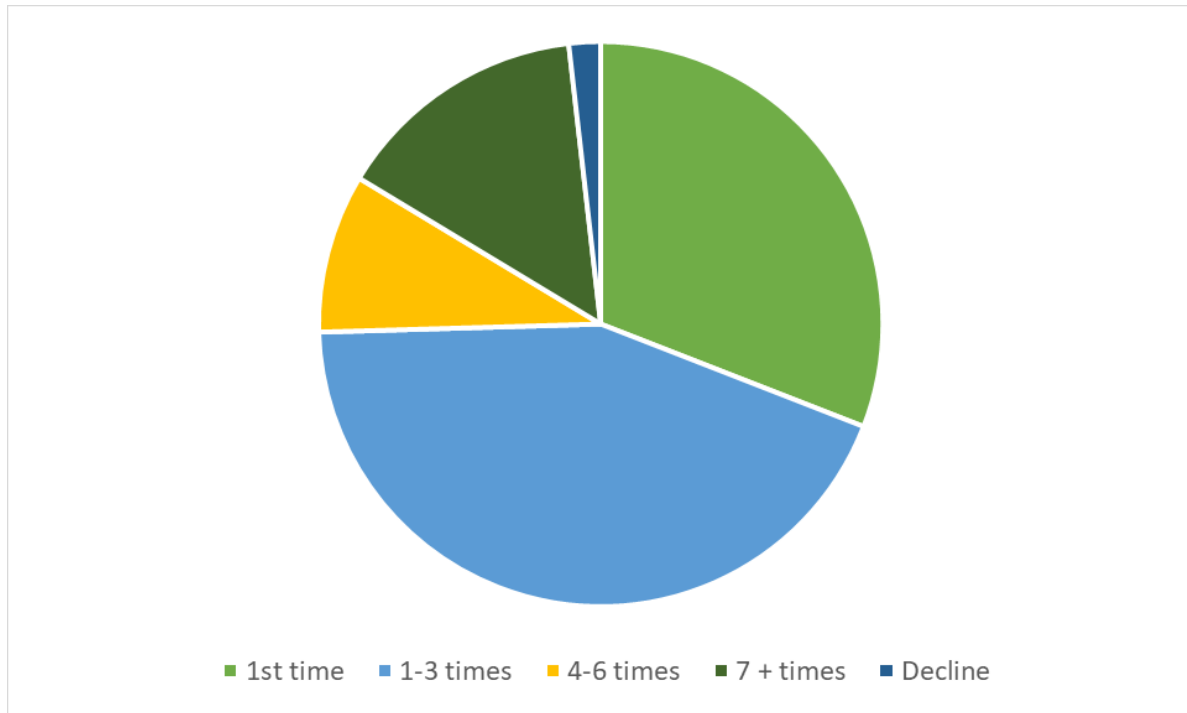


Fig. 3

Number of Times Participants Have been Incarcerated



V. Discussion

Fifty-five Suffolk County inmate participants, aged 18 to 25, voluntarily responded to the research survey. Analysis of the surveys found that the highest number of participants were 25 years of age, while the lowest percentage was 22. This age range was selected to secure participant clarity in recollection of their school experiences regarding exclusionary punishments and justice system contact.

The racial breakdown of the participants was: 45% described themselves as Black or African American; 13% were Latino or Hispanic; 1% were American Indian; and 1% were West Indian. The other 33% were divided into these categories: 29% were White or Caucasian; 5% declined to answer; 1% were Asian; and 1% were other. The data demonstrates that Black and brown participants were more prevalent than any other racial identifier.

Analysis of participant responses indicated that 84% had reported receiving a school suspension at some point during their academic years; fifty three percent reported having received a school expulsion. Disorderly contact was identified as the most common cause for participant suspensions. These findings support scholarship suggesting that the expansion of zero-tolerance policies has led to the application of harsh disciplinary measures for nonviolent subjective school misconduct such as verbal harassment, disobedience, and truancy (Cardichon& Darling-Hammond, 2019; Mallet, 2016; Marsh, 2014).

Racial inequalities in reference to the implementation of exclusionary discipline have been long-established (McIntosh et al., 2018; Mittleman, 2018; Mowen& Brent, 2016). Substantial research confirms the

disproportionality of exclusionary disciplinary actions toward youth of color (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Mallet, 2016). Of the sample population studied, researchers concluded that 67% of the participants were racially identified as Black or brown. Of these participants, 84% accounted for all reported school suspensions and over half of all school expulsions. These findings suggest a racial disparity in the ways in which school exclusionary punishments are administered. Black and brown students are subject to more punitive disciplinary measures than their peers (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011).

Of the 55 participants who completed the survey, 62% were aged between 16 and 20 when they first experienced contact with the justice system; twenty-seven percent were between the ages of 11 and 15. Removing youth from the classroom disrupts their educational path. Loss of educational opportunities results in negative consequences (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Hemez, Brent, & Mowen, 2020; Welsh & Little, 2018). Exclusionary punishments indirectly limit access to education, achievement, and social skills (Dewitt, 2017; Dutil, 2020). Exclusionary punishments could lead to lower academic achievement and higher school dropout rates (Welsh & Little, 2019).

Researchers examined participant arrest and incarceration histories. Ninety-seven percent of the participants had been arrested; 3% declined to answer. Ninety-eight percent of the participants had been incarcerated; 2% declined to answer. Data suggest that participants with high suspension rates also encountered higher arrest and incarceration rates demonstrating a direct correlation between school suspensions and future criminal justice involvement. Research has demonstrated that the involuntary removal of a youth from the academic setting correlated with anti-social behavior, dropping out of school, and criminal activity (Monahan et al., 2014). Students exposed to exclusionary sanctions face a greater likelihood of juvenile legal system contact, enhancing their risk of adult incarceration (Heitzeg, 2016).

Based on their findings, the researchers have provided a supportive contribution to the bounty of school-to-prison pipeline literature. Data analysis has demonstrated a correlation between the participants' current incarceration and a history of suspensions and expulsions during their educational years. The data exemplifies a causal link between the two variables supporting the subsistence of the STPP.

VI. Conclusion

As a result of the overwhelming concern for American students, states nationwide have passed legislation to modify their school discipline policies and incorporate more productive measures. As of 2021, at least 37 states and the District of Columbia have outlined alternatives to suspensions/expulsions which include greater use of conflict resolution, peer mediation, counseling, and restorative methods of justice (Education Commission of the States, 2021). Evans and Vaandering (2016), in lieu of exclusionary punishments, support restorative measures as they "create a just and equitable learning environment, nurture healthy relationships, and repair harm and transform conflict" (p. 1).

Research has demonstrated that restorative practices are not only associated with improvement in student behavior, but also with a decrease in classroom removals, suspensions, and expulsions (Armour, 2013; Klevan, 2021). The implementation of restorative measures within the academic setting can produce a positive impact on student behavior, disciplinary outcomes and disparities, and school climate (Klevan, 2021). Restorative justice allows students to take responsibility for their misconduct without the stigmatization of a negative label. Many states have also placed limitations on the use of suspensions and expulsions.

The state of Arkansas limits suspensions to a maximum of 10 school days and eliminates suspensions for truancy. Floridian students shall not be suspended for unexcused tardiness, lateness, absence, and truancy. In the state of Tennessee, suspensions may not last more than 10 days. And, if a student is determined to have acted in self-defense, they may not face disciplinary action. In lieu of exclusionary punishments, the state of Indiana has

enacted alternatives to discipline including peer counseling, parent conferences, assigning additional coursework, and rearranging class schedules (Education Commission of the States, 2021).

California Senator, Nancy Skinner has initiated a bill, SB 3274, aimed at eliminating school exclusionary measures for minor school infractions including disruptive behaviors, belligerence, truancy, tardiness, and absenteeism from school activities. New York State is currently pushing for the enactment of the “Judith Kaye School Solutions Not Suspensions Act”. Ratification of this Act will eliminate the reliance on suspensions for inconsequential school violations.

If restorative measures could prevent the overuse of exclusionary punishments within the educational school structure, the financial burden on our correctional system could potentially be abated. In 2019, a typical New York County outside of New York City spent more than \$225 to keep a single person in jail for one night, or more than \$82,000 per year. In state prisons, New York spends an average of over \$315 a day or nearly \$115,000 per year to incarcerate one person (Harris-Calvin, et. al, 2022). As of 2023, it costs an average of \$52.61 per day (\$19,202.65 per year) to keep an adult (under the age of 18) inmate incarcerated in the State of Indiana (Indiana State Government, 2023).

This research has successfully demonstrated a correlation between the STPP and future criminal justice contact. These findings contend that, for the protection of our educational system as a pedagogic environment geared toward learning and success, as well as the safety and promise of American youth, it is critical that reforms continue to be a focal concern for both educational leaders and legislative bodies.

Research limitations have been recognized. First, the study surveyed 55 inmates in a Suffolk County, New York jail. This is a minimal sample representation of inmates when considering the overall number of currently incarcerated males housed within New York state correctional facilities. The limited number of research participants substantially weakens the ability to generate valid generalizations. Secondly, the results may have differed if the research was more inclusive of other state or county correctional facilities. Finally, researchers have recognized the existing flaws within all survey data: lack of memory, response exaggerations, boredom, and contrived responses to please the researchers and to satisfy the intentions of the study. Acknowledging these limitations, the research findings further provide insight into the correlation between exclusionary punishment and STPP.

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