



A longitudinal analysis of school discipline events among youth in foster care



Brianne H. Kothari^{a,*}, Bethany Godlewski^a, Bowen McBeath^b, Marjorie McGee^b, Jeff Waid^c, Shannon Lipscomb^a, Lew Bank^b

^a Oregon State University-Cascades, 1500 SW Chandler Avenue, Bend, OR 97702 United States

^b Portland State University School of Social Work, United States

^c University of Minnesota School of Social Work, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

School discipline
Foster Care
Child welfare

ABSTRACT

Youth in foster care experience major deficits on standardized measures of academic functioning, are at high risk of academic failure, and are more likely than their non-foster peers to be disciplined at school. School discipline-related problems increase risk of problematic educational and behavioral outcomes including dropping out of school, repeating a grade, and engagement in delinquent and criminal behavior. Identifying which youth are at greatest risk for experiencing school discipline is needed in order to improve the educational experiences of youth in foster care. The current investigation examined the effects of youth and contextual characteristics on school discipline events among 315 youth in foster care. Results revealed that being male, in a higher-grade, and a student of color, living apart from one's sibling, and school mobility significantly predicted discipline events. An additional statistical model divided youth into groups based on race, sex, and disability status taking into account the multiple identities youth have. These results suggest that gender, race, and disability status cumulatively inform school discipline experienced among youth in foster care.

1. Introduction

Schools are expected to provide the most appropriate and least restrictive learning environment for children (Jacob & Hartshorne, 2007). Providing this learning environment for children and youth involved in the formal child welfare system, however, may be particularly challenging due to the previous maltreatment, placement instability, and disruptions in school stability they experience (Berger et al., 2015; Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, & Epstein, 2008). Compared to their non-foster peers, youth in foster care show major deficits on standardized measures of academic functioning, are at high risk of school failure (Trout et al., 2008), and are less likely to move on to post-secondary education (Pecora et al., 2006). Foster youth are also more likely than their counterparts to experience grade retention and absenteeism (Stone, 2007). The cumulative risks foster youth face including maltreatment, poverty and parental mental health challenges predict the poorest educational outcomes (Crozier & Richard, 2005).

In addition, research suggests that foster youth are three times more likely than their peers to experience disciplinary events in school

settings (Kortenkamp and Erhle, 2002). A longitudinal study that tracked youth over a six year period demonstrated that youth in foster care reported more discipline problems in school compared to children raised in non-foster families (Blome, 1997). Exclusionary school discipline events such as suspensions and expulsions lead to lost class time and less exposure to academic subjects that subsequently help students pass state achievement tests and help prepare them for graduation (Marrus, 2015). Discipline-related problems also place youth in foster care at greater risk of negative educational outcomes including repeating a grade, dropping out of school, (Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011) and engaging in delinquent and criminal behavior (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Marrus, 2015).

School discipline events and their academic and social consequences may be particularly problematic for specific subgroups of youth. For example, the U.S. Department of Education reported that male and female black students were expelled three times more often than white students, and students with disabilities were twice as likely as their peers to receive out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Suspensions and expulsions may intensify academic deterioration; when students are provided with

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Brianne.Kothari@oregonstate.edu (B.H. Kothari), harmonb@oregonstate.edu (B. Godlewski), mcbeath@pdx.edu (B. McBeath), jdward@umn.edu (J. Waid), Shannon.Lipscomb@osucascades.edu (S. Lipscomb), bank@pdx.edu (L. Bank).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.07.017>

Received 22 April 2018; Received in revised form 16 July 2018; Accepted 17 July 2018

Available online 18 July 2018

0190-7409/© 2018 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

no immediate educational alternative, student alienation, distrust of teachers, and delinquency may also result (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005).

Child welfare legislation requires agencies to address the educational wellbeing of all youth in foster care (Gustavsson and Ann, 2012), and paying closer attention to school discipline events may be an important step towards this goal. Evidence indicates that many youth in foster care experience school discipline events which can have considerable consequences for their educational wellbeing. Youth in foster care are a heterogeneous group, however, and certain subgroups of youth in care might be more likely than others to experience school discipline events than others. Therefore, there is a pressing need to better understand factors associated with school discipline events among youth in foster care. By identifying which youth are at greatest risk for experiencing school discipline trajectories, it may be possible to improve the educational experiences of youth in foster care. The current study concerns the administration of discipline in public school settings for youth in foster care. The purpose of this research is to understand how youth and contextual characteristics are related to school discipline events and subsequently inform research and practice with the systems that serve youth in foster care.

2. Literature review

2.1. Understanding school discipline among youth in Foster Care

Research has established that exclusionary school discipline events hinder academic performance and contribute to racial disparities in achievement (Morris & Perry, 2016). However, there are few empirical peer-reviewed studies on school discipline among youth in foster care. School-related discipline events have significant consequences; they can lead to missed learning days, loss of educational opportunities, and even referrals to the juvenile justice systems (Marrus, 2015). For youth in foster care, the consequences of school discipline events can be exacerbated by the instability they experience in their home and family lives, and could potentially impact youth's permanency plans (American Bar Association, Education Law Center, and Juvenile Law Center, 2014).

Much of the prior research on school discipline utilize administrative educational data (e.g., Blome, 1997; Festinger, 1983; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994; Zima et al., 2000) and most do not go beyond descriptive reporting of discipline event prevalence rates. Scherr's (2007) international meta-analysis of disciplinary action only incorporated 10 studies that examined school discipline events. The majority were unpublished reports (i.e., 5 reports, 3 journal articles, 1 book, and 1 dissertation) and all were from the United States and Australia. In these studies discipline events were often examined as one of many ways to look at educational performance or wellbeing outcomes rather than the primary focus of the study. Results of the meta-analysis revealed that 24% of students in foster care had been suspended or expelled from school at least once (Scherr, 2007).

There is significant methodological heterogeneity among studies of school discipline for youth in care, particularly in how school discipline is operationalized, sampling, and timing of data collection (e.g., retrospective research design). Suspensions and expulsions are commonly included in the operationalization of school discipline, but some studies have included all disciplinary events. For example, Smithgall et al. (2005) included violations of CPS District's Uniform Discipline Code reported by schools to the CPS Bureau of Safety and Security. Some studies of school discipline have focused on self-reported data (Blome, 1997), and most of these self-reported studies rely on retrospective reports (Courtney et al., 2004; McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). Other studies have relied on different reporting agents such as foster parents (Zima et al., 2000), teachers (Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994), or administrative data (e.g., Castrechini, 2009; Smithgall et al., 2005).

In summary, the extant research is very limited and reflects methodological challenges relating to: a) variation in how discipline events have been operationalized; b) variation in the reporting agent/source of information used to gather information (i.e., self-report, foster parent report, administrative data, etc.); and c) the lack of prospective, longitudinal, and published studies.

2.2. Factors related to school discipline events and educational outcomes

Given the limited research focused on school discipline events among youth in foster care, this section reviews what is known about the factors related to school discipline and other educational outcomes more generally. Previous studies have more commonly examined educational outcomes such as test scores, grade retention and graduation rates (see O'Higgins et al., 2017), and two domains in both the general and child welfare literature include specific factors that have shown to be associated with school discipline events as well as other educational outcomes. These include (1) *youth characteristics*; and (2) *contextual characteristics*. The following subsections review the specific youth and contextual characteristics that have been associated with school discipline and/or educational outcomes among both the general population as well as youth in foster care.

2.2.1. Youth characteristics

National and state data indicate that males, students of color, and students with disabilities tend to be overrepresented among children and youth experiencing discipline events (Krezmien et al., 2006; Marrus, 2015; CRDC, 2014; Vincent et al., 2012). African American or Black male students are particularly overrepresented in regards to suspensions in school (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Krezmien et al., 2006; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). These racial and gender differences for school discipline remain even when controlling for socioeconomic status (Skiba et al., 2002). Students with disabilities also experience more discipline events than their peers, particularly those with learning disabilities (Shifrer et al., 2011). In addition, students of color, particularly black males, are more likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed (Osher et al., 2002; Parrish, 2002); and students of color with disabilities identified as having emotional and behavior difficulties are more likely to be suspended as compared to peers without disabilities (Krezmien et al., 2006).

Among youth in foster care, associations between youth characteristics and school discipline and educational outcomes have also been explored. O'Higgins, Sebba and Gardner (2017) conducted a recent systematic review across a 26-year period focused on factors that have been associated with educational outcomes generally for children in foster and kinship care. They concluded that male gender, ethnic minority status, and youth with special education needs consistently predicted poor educational outcomes (O'Higgins et al., 2017). It should also be noted that youth in foster care are overrepresented in special education, and the number of foster youth qualifying for special education services has steadily increased over the past couple of decades (Scherr, 2007). In addition, a study which focused on school discipline events among youth in foster care found that older age, being male, and receiving a positive screening for a clinical behavior problem significantly increased the odds of ever being suspended or expelled from school (Zima et al., 2000). These findings emphasize that key youth characteristics are related to school discipline events.

2.2.2. Contextual characteristics

Ecological features of youths' microsystem have also been studied in relation to youths' educational outcomes and school discipline events. In the general population, school mobility has shown to have negative effects on youth's educational outcomes (Grigg, 2012; Herbers et al., 2012; Mehana & Reynolds, 2004). Previous research has also shown that family (e.g., parental supervision), school (e.g., student-teacher trust), and neighborhood contextual factors (e.g., collective efficacy)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832789>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832789>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)