

Zero tolerance policies unfairly punish black girls

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'We cannot afford to have more black girls' identities snuffed out by disciplinary policies and ultimately the educational and criminal justice systems,' education scholars Dorinda Carter and Dorothy Hines-Datiri argue in a new paper. Credit: Michigan State University

Black girls are disproportionately punished in American schools - an

"overlooked crisis" that is populating the school-to-prison pipeline at rising rates, two education scholars argue in a new paper.

Dorinda Carter Andrews, associate professor at Michigan State University, and Dorothy Hines-Datiri, assistant professor at the University of Kansas and former doctoral student at MSU, cite various examples of black girls in elementary school being handcuffed and taken away in police cars for classroom disruptions such as temper tantrums.

These zero tolerance policies unfairly target students of color and should be abolished, Carter Andrews said. But while a wealth of research and public discussion has focused on black male students, little attention has been paid to the mistreatment of black girls in U.S. classrooms, she said.

"Zero tolerance constructs these young girls as criminals," Carter Andrews said. "It's a criminalization of their childhood, and it's a very prison-type mentality for schools to take."

The paper, which appears online in the journal *Urban Education*, notes that zero tolerance is defined as a form of school discipline that imposes removal from school for an array of violations, from violence to truancy to dress code violations. Black students are two to three times more likely to be suspended than white students and are overrepresented in office referrals, expulsions and corporal punishment, the paper says.

Black female students in the United States receive out-of-school suspensions at higher rates (12 percent) than female students across all other racial and ethnic categories, according to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Only black boys (20 percent) and American Indian/Alaska native boys (13 percent) have higher suspension rates than black girls.

Black girls are also more likely to receive harsher discipline than their

white peers for minor offenses, such as talking back to the teacher, Carter Andrews said.

"The research shows that teachers and other adults may give a pass to certain [students](#) for the ways in which they talk back," she said.

"Teachers may view some girls, particularly African-American girls, as attitudinal or aggressive, even though they may be using the same talk-back language as a white female student."

In addition to the abolishment of zero tolerance policies, the researchers call for the establishment of culturally responsive professional-development training for educators that would raise their awareness of the experiences of girls of color.

"We cannot afford to have more [black girls'](#) identities snuffed out by disciplinary policies and ultimately the educational and criminal justice systems," the study says.

Provided by Michigan State University

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