

School suspension, expulsion more likely to predict youth drug use than police arrest

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Research has told us that school disciplinary practices lead to juvenile

justice interventions, and that both school exclusion and juvenile justice intervention lead to adversities like drug use in adolescence and adulthood. Yet it's unclear which form of intervention—being suspended and expelled from school or being arrested by police—is more likely to lead youth to use drugs. A new longitudinal study found that practices that exclude youth from school appear to predict drug use more than arrests by police, especially among minority youth.

The study, by researchers at George Mason University and the University of Florida, appears in *Justice Quarterly*, a publication of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

"Our findings add to growing concerns about [school](#) disciplinary practices that exclude [youth](#)," according to Beidi Dong, assistant professor in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society at George Mason University, who led the study. "Amid alarm about the school-to-prison pipeline, the conclusion that school exclusion is even more problematic for students' well-being than police arrest highlights the need to find alternative methods to discipline students so exclusion is used only as a last resort."

The study used data from the longitudinal Rochester Youth Developmental Study (RYDS) to examine both the immediate, concurrent influence of school and police interventions on drug use during adolescence and the long-term, cumulative effect of these interventions during adolescence on subsequent drug use in young adulthood. The RYDS began in 1988 with 1,000 seventh- and eighth-grade students in Rochester, NY. It included students from a range of races and ethnicities, and featured more males and more youth from high-crime neighborhoods to over-represent high-risk youth.

This study used data covering ages 14 to 31 of the RYDS sample. Researchers collected information on students' drug use, [self-esteem](#),

and parents' supervision, as well as whether students had been disciplined at school and been arrested.

School exclusionary practices appeared to predict drug use more than police arrests during both adolescence and young adulthood, the study found. The negative effects were especially pronounced among minority youth. The results differed for males and females, with school exclusion predictive of concurrent drug use for females but not for males, and predictive of subsequent adult [drug](#) use for males but not for females.

"Removing adolescents from school provides unstructured and unsupervised time that can facilitate [drug use](#), while being arrested does not necessarily do so," notes Marvin D. Krohn, professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology and Law at the University of Florida, who coauthored the study. "This should be kept in mind as educators and others consider other ways to discipline students."

Provided by Crime and Justice Research Alliance

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