

Research Brief

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MISSION of SDRG

To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among children, adolescents, and young adults by:

- ◆ conducting research on factors that influence development;
- ◆ testing the effectiveness of interventions;
- ◆ studying service systems and working to improve them;
- ◆ presenting science-based solutions to health and behavior problems; and
- ◆ disseminating knowledge produced by this research.

Racial Disparities in Early Criminal Justice Involvement

Original research presented in *Race and Social Problems* (2009)

Many researchers have found that not all of the observed racial differences in police contact, arrest, or incarceration can be explained by patterns of criminal behavior. Racial disparities in arrest have been observed in both adult and adolescent populations. Research recently reported in *Race and Social Problems* focused on race disparities in early contacts with the criminal justice system before a regular pattern of criminal behavior, arrest, and detention had developed.

The objective in this study was to consider social-environmental forces that may lead to more police contact or higher rates of arrest for African American juveniles—beyond what would be expected by differences in offending behavior. The research explored the impact of family, peers, school, and neighborhood environment on the probability of police contact and subsequent arrest by the 10th grade.

Sample

331 students in Seattle Public Schools were interviewed in the fall and spring of the 8th grade, spring of 9th grade, and spring of 10th grade; 168 students were European American and 163 were African American.

Of the 10th graders in the sample, 136 (45%) had some contact with the police in the past year; 54 (18%) had been arrested. In addition to contact and arrest information, teens were asked to report their involvement in criminal activity.

Key Findings

African American youth in this study had higher rates of both police contacts and arrest than European Americans, even after accounting for offending behavior. These differences were apparent by 8th grade and persisted into the 10th grade.

Any contact with police by 10th grade:

- 61% of African American youth
- 41% of European American youth

Arrest by 10th grade:

- 25% of African American youth
- 9% of European American youth

Teens with a police contact by the 8th grade were nearly 9 times more likely to be arrested than those without an early contact.

Criminal involvement and arrest history of close family members also significantly increased the chance of a police contact by 10th grade and accounted for some of the race differences.

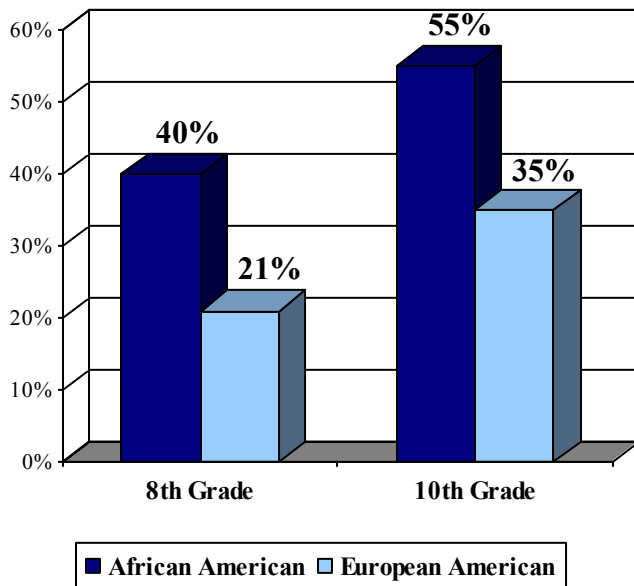
Results

Even after accounting for self-reported criminal involvement, African American students were still twice as likely to have a police contact as European American students.

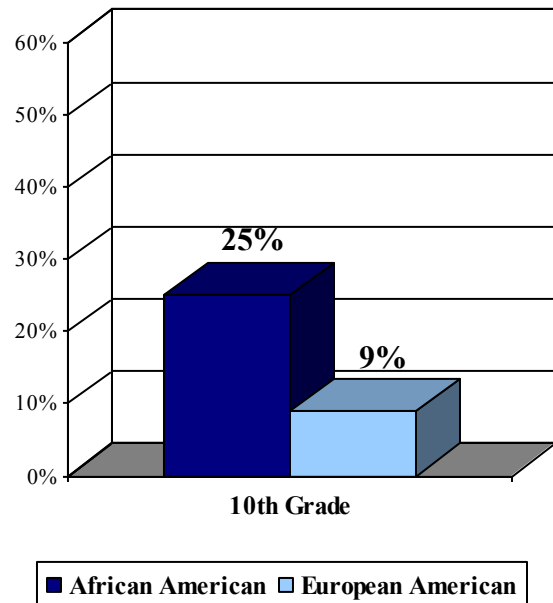
One of the strongest predictors of arrest by the 10th grade was a police contact by the 8th grade. Students who had a police contact by the 8th grade were 9 times more likely to be arrested by the 10th grade. Since African American youth are more likely to have an early police contact, they are therefore at greater risk for arrest in high school. In fact, by 10th grade, 25% of African American youth had been arrested compared to less than 10% of European American youth.

Family criminal involvement, particularly parent history of arrest, explains some of the racial discrepancy in police contacts. African American teens were more vulnerable to police contact because their parents were more likely to have a history of arrest. This supports the notion that police may target members of families who have a history of criminal justice system involvement.

Race and Police Contacts



Race and Arrest



For additional information on this topic, refer to the original article:

Crutchfield, Robert D., Skinner, Martie L., Haggerty, Kevin P., McGlynn, Anne, Catalano, Richard F. (2009). Racial disparities in early criminal justice involvement. [*Race and Social Problems*, 1\(3\), 218-230.](#)

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