

# Inequities

Affecting Black Girls  
in Pittsburgh and  
Allegheny County

By Sara Goodkind, Ph.D., M.S.W.  
Photography by Vanessa German

Spot  
Data





# Introduction

## Why Black girls?

This report was developed in response to a body of data raising concerns about barriers to healthy development and educational opportunities for Black girls in the Pittsburgh region. While data point to numerous barriers that impede the well-being and academic success of girls, this snapshot focuses on the intersection of five target areas – poverty, education, juvenile justice, violence/abuse and child welfare. The report highlights these areas because of their profound long-term impact on the lives of girls and the potential to positively change girls’ trajectories if these issues are addressed through policy and practice.

Until very recently, little public attention has been focused on understanding the ways Black girls and women experience institutional racism and sexism. Over the last year, the national conversation about the experiences of Black girls has gained momentum. This report is an attempt to share some troubling local data in order to support additional conversation and draw public attention to these issues.

**About the author:** Sara Goodkind is Associate Professor of Social Work, Sociology, and Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Goodkind’s research focuses on programs and services for young people, particularly those in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. She is interested in how understandings of gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and age shape service design and delivery and how these, in turn, affect the mental health and well-being of young people, parents, and staff members. Much of her work has focused on programs for girls in the juvenile justice system, and she has been involved with efforts to improve the system and prevent and develop alternatives to girls’ involvement with it.

**About the photographer:** Vanessa German is an award-winning multidisciplinary art maker based in the Homewood community of Pittsburgh, PA. She was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and raised in Los Angeles, California. Vanessa is a poet, performer, photographer, sculptor and maker.

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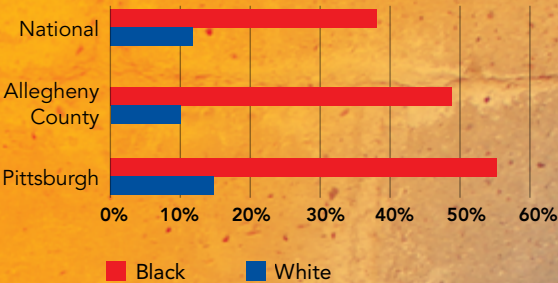


# Poverty

Black girls are much more likely than White girls to be living in poverty. While these disparities are true nationally and regionally, they are particularly pronounced in Pittsburgh. In the city of Pittsburgh, 55% of Black girls – and 68% of Black girls under age 5 – are living in poverty.

NOTE: Additional information about the sources of the data and methodology is provided in the Methodological Appendix at the end of the report

Percent of Girls Living in Poverty by Race



Sources: Allegheny County Department of Human Services (2016). *The state of girls in Allegheny County*. Pittsburgh, PA; Children’s Defense Fund (2015). *Child poverty in America 2014: National analysis*. New York, NY.





# School Discipline

Black girls comprise the largest group receiving Pittsburgh Promise college scholarships, and, of those scholars, many are successfully navigating higher education.<sup>1</sup> While some Black girls are progressing through the education system, many others encounter significant barriers that impact their success. Recent attention has been focused on what has been termed the school-to-prison pipeline.<sup>2</sup> School discipline and exclusion often lead to justice system involvement, and youth of color are much more likely than White youth to experience school discipline, despite evidence that their behaviors do not differ as much as these disproportionate rates would suggest.<sup>3</sup>

Black girls in Pittsburgh Public Schools are more than  
*3 times as likely*  
as White girls to be suspended from school.<sup>4</sup>

At times, Black girls are pushed out of school and caught up in the justice system for behaviors in which others girls engage but for which they do not experience this same exclusion and punishment.<sup>5,6</sup> There is evidence that differential treatment of Black girls in schools is often a result of implicit biases. Internalized racialized gender norms impact how authority figures react to Black girls, and stereotypes about Black girls may lead teachers to label them insubordinate or disrespectful.<sup>7</sup> Black girls are especially likely to be disciplined for behaviors which are subjective, such as defiance and disrespect.

Often when girls, especially Black girls, are disciplined at school for disruptive behavior or fighting it is because they are defending themselves from harassment or assault.<sup>8</sup> A national survey of 8th - 11th graders found that two-thirds of Black girls, and over half of White girls, had been “touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way” in their schools.<sup>9</sup> Some schools have resorted to protecting girls from harassment and assault by sending them home after marking them present, rather than sanctioning the perpetrators and creating a safe learning environment.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the ways we deal with Black girls’ behaviors in schools frequently punishes them for their own victimization and, at times, criminalizes their survival strategies.

<sup>1</sup> Pittsburgh Promise (9/20/16)

<sup>2</sup> Wald, J., & Losen, D. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 9-15.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace, J. M., Jr., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C., & Bachman, J. (2008). Racial/ethnic and gender differences in school discipline among American high school students: 1991-2005. *The Negro Educational Review*, 59, 47-62.

<sup>4</sup> Civil Rights Data Collection (2013-2014). Accessed online at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>.

<sup>5</sup> Crenshaw K., Ocen, P., & Nanda, J. (2015). *Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced and underprotected*. New York, NY: African American Policy Forum.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, M. W. (2016). *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. New York, NY: The New Press.

<sup>7</sup> Van den Bergh, L., Denessen, E., Hornstra, L., Voeten, M., & Holland, R. W. (2010). The implicit prejudiced attitudes of teachers: Relations to teacher expectations and the ethnic achievement gap. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 497-527.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, N. (2010). *Between good and ghetto: African American girls and inner-city violence*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

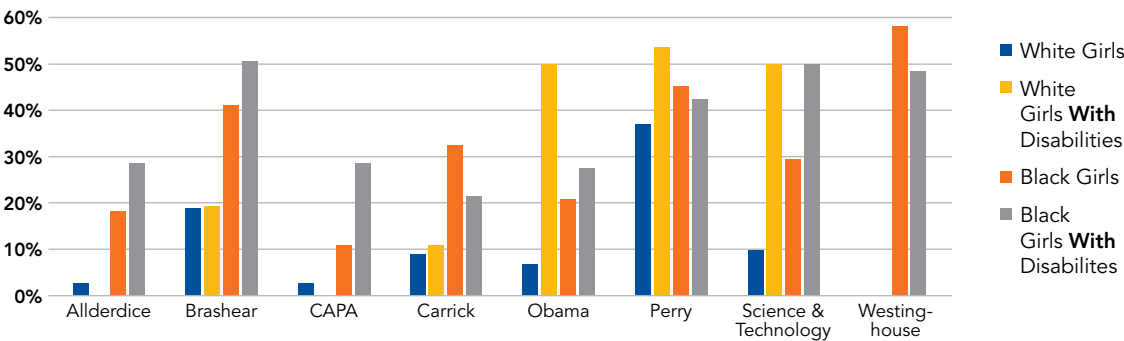
<sup>9</sup> American Association of University Women. (2001). *Hostile hallways: Bullying, teasing, and sexual harassment in school*. New York.

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication, Nancy Hubley Esq., Education Law Center.





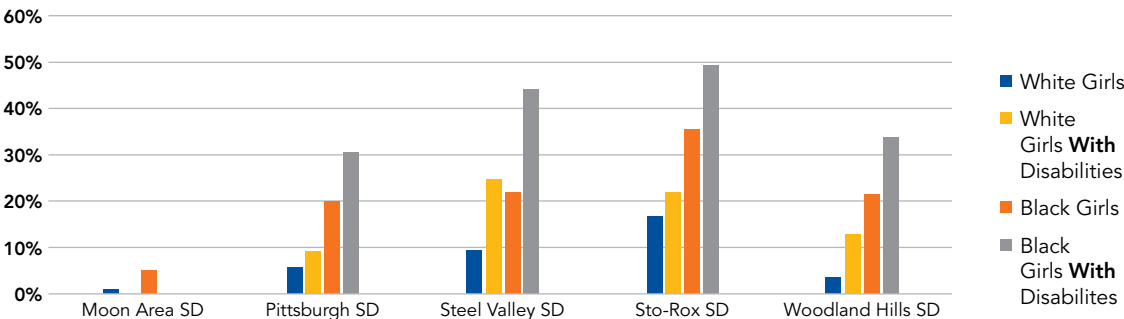
Out of School Suspension Rates for Girls in Select Pittsburgh Public Schools<sup>11,12</sup>



“Suspensions from school are consistently associated with lower academic performance. As a suspended child’s education is interrupted...

*she is more likely to fall behind, to become disengaged from school, and to drop out.”<sup>13</sup>*

Out of School Suspension Rates by Race and Disability for Girls in Allegheny County School Districts<sup>14,15</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Source: Civil Rights Data Collection (2013-2014 – most recent year available). Available at: <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>  
<sup>12</sup> Civil Rights Data Collection classifies “Disabilities” as students who have Individualized Education Programs and are eligible for special education because of a disability. Examples may include students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, autism, hearing loss, mental health, and learning disabilities.  
<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, *Dear Colleague letter*. August 1, 2016, p. 11.  
<sup>14</sup> Source: Civil Rights Data Collection (2013-2014 – most recent year available). Available at: <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>  
<sup>15</sup> Civil Rights Data Collection classifies “Disabilities” as students who have Individualized Education Programs and are eligible for special education because of a disability. Examples may include students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, autism, hearing loss, mental health, and learning disabilities.





# Athletic Opportunities

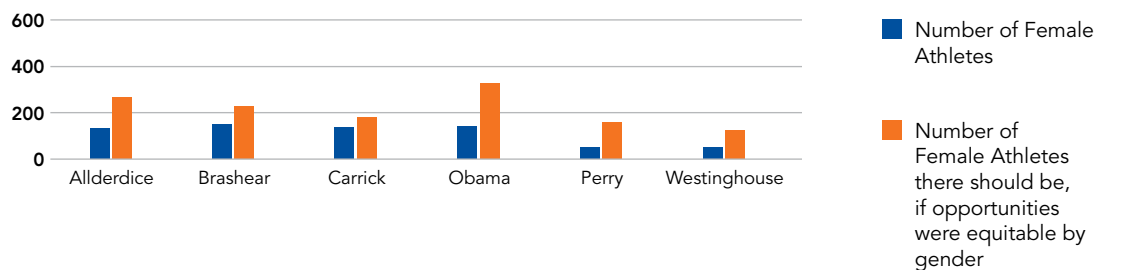
For many girls, athletics is a significant vehicle to school engagement, as well as to health, leadership development, and college. Despite gains made in girls’ sports participation as a result of Title IX legislation and lawsuits aimed at eliminating sex discrimination in educational settings, girls continue to have fewer opportunities than boys to participate in high school sports, and this opportunity gap is worse for girls of color, as they have fewer opportunities than White girls and boys of any race.<sup>13</sup>

Black girls in Pittsburgh have fewer school athletic opportunities than other students in the county. Pittsburgh Public School student body is 53% Black, and at each of the six public high schools that reported data on athletic opportunities to the PA Department of Education, the actual number of female athletes is less than there should be if girls and boys had equal athletic opportunities to participate in school-sponsored and school-funded sports.<sup>14</sup>

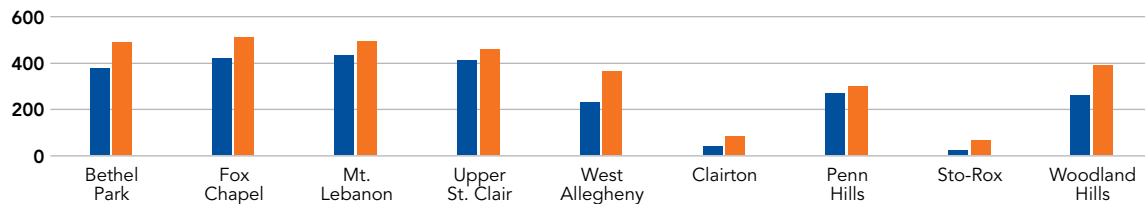
The chart below displays disparities for a range of high schools in Allegheny County.

Bethel Park, Fox Chapel, Mt. Lebanon, Upper St Clair and West Allegheny represent some of our region’s better resourced, mostly White districts (each has <5% Black students). This contrasts with districts that are more challenged for resources and serve a more diverse student body: Clairton (68% Black), Penn Hills (61% Black), Sto Rox (46% Black) and Woodland Hills (61% Black). While the gender disparity persists across all of these schools, girls (mostly White) attending the better resourced, suburban schools have 2-3 times the athletic opportunities as girls attending Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Pittsburgh Public High Schools, 2013-2014



Select Allegheny County High Schools, 2013-2014



<sup>13</sup> National Women’s Law Center and Poverty & Race Research Action Council. (2015). *Finishing last: Girls of color and school sports opportunities*. Washington, DC.

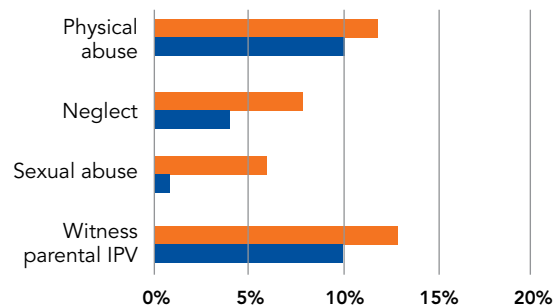
<sup>14</sup> “Disclosure of Interscholastic Athletic Opportunity, 2013-14 Submitted School Surveys,” available at <http://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/Interscholastic%20Athletic%20Opportunity/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1> (excel spreadsheet) (last visited Aug. 22, 2016).

# Violence and Abuse

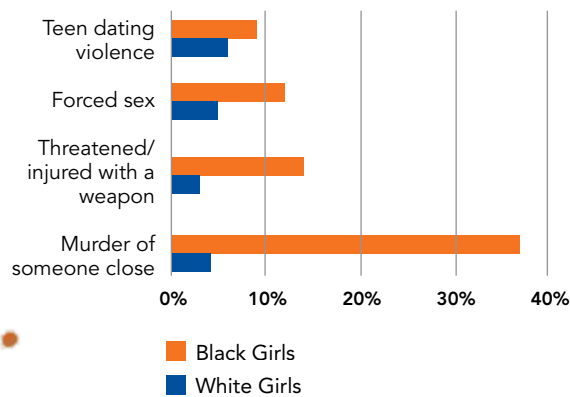
Poverty increases girls’ risk of abuse and exploitation.<sup>15</sup> Black girls in Allegheny County disproportionately experience many forms of victimization and trauma. These graphs are based on the Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey (HATS), a survey of a representative sample of over 1,600 teens in Allegheny County, and reflect teens’ self-reports of their experiences (see Methodological appendix for more details). As these graphs show, Black girls experience more physical and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, than White girls.

Black girls in our region are also more likely than White girls to experience other forms of violent victimization, including teen dating violence, rape, and other violent threats or injuries. As this chart reveals, Black girls are 50% more likely than White girls to experience teen dating violence, more than twice as likely to be raped, and over four times as likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon, and over nine times as likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon. Further, they are over nine times as likely as White girls to have someone close to them murdered.

Black girls report higher rates of child abuse and family violence



Black girls report more violence and victimization



Source: Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey



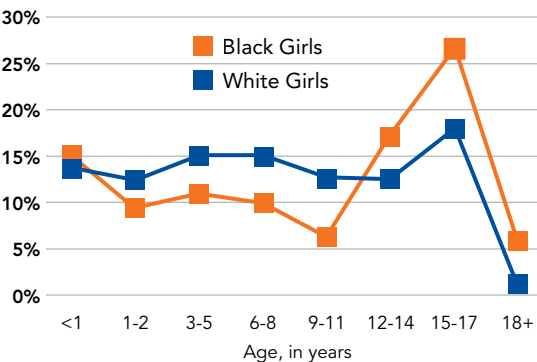
<sup>15</sup> Marcus, R. (2014). *Poverty and violations of children's right to protection in low- and middle-income countries: A review of the evidence.* Overseas Development Institute.



# Child Welfare System

Black girls in Allegheny County are somewhat more likely to report experiencing abuse, but much more likely than White girls to be involved with the child welfare system.<sup>16,17</sup>

A higher proportion of child welfare-involved Black girls enter as teens: 2015 Placement Entries by Race and Age



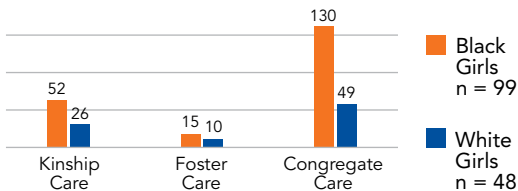
Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services (2016).

Black girls involved in child welfare as adolescents are often placed in congregate care facilities, such as group homes or other institutional facilities. Placement in congregate care is associated with worse outcomes for girls, including subsequent justice system involvement.<sup>19</sup> Allegheny County Department of Human Services has significantly reduced the number of youth in congregate care in recent years.

National research reveals that many youth in congregate care have experienced trauma in their lives and are in need of mental health services. This research also shows that girls are more likely to run from placement than are boys, in part because girls are at greater risk for sexual harassment and abuse in these settings and do not feel safe.<sup>21,22</sup> Unfortunately, running away and trying to survive on the streets puts girls at risk for sex trafficking and often leads to engagement in illegal behaviors (e.g., stealing, selling drugs) in order to survive.

The disproportional involvement<sup>18</sup> of Black girls is exacerbated in adolescence, as illustrated by the chart at left. Black girls who enter the child welfare system as teens often do so as a result of “parent-child conflict” (rather than reports of specific abuse or neglect). Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has recently embarked on efforts to provide services and supports for families experiencing such conflict that will not necessitate the opening of a child welfare or juvenile justice case and it is hoped that these changes in policy and practice will shift this pattern in the future.

A higher percentage of Black girls are in congregate care<sup>20</sup>: Placement Type by Race Girls 12-17 Years Old



Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services (2016).

<sup>16</sup> We are pleased to report that the leadership of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has self-initiated a focus on examining and proactively addressing issues of racial disproportionality in child welfare. In this process, DHS identified Black girls as facing particular challenges and systemic barriers and has taken active steps to better meet the needs of these girls and their families.

<sup>17</sup> Goodkind, S., Shook, J. J., Kim, K. H., Pohlig, R. T., & Herring, D. J. (2013). From child welfare to juvenile justice: Race, gender, and system experiences. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 11(3), 249-272.

<sup>18</sup> The population of youth under age 18 in Allegheny County is approximately 74% White and 21% Black, so while there are more White girls than Black girls entering the child welfare system at certain ages, Black girls are significantly overrepresented.

<sup>19</sup> Goodkind, S., Shook, J. J., Kim, K. H., Pohlig, R. T., & Herring, D. J. (2013). From child welfare to juvenile justice: Race, gender, and system experiences. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 11(3), 249-272.

<sup>20</sup> Some girls have more than one placement between age 12-17.

<sup>21</sup> Courtney, M. E., & Zinn, A. (2009). Predictors of running away from out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 1298-1306.

<sup>22</sup> Freundlich, M., Avery, R. J., & Padgett, D. (2007). Care or scare: The safety of youth in congregate care in New York City. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 173-186.





# Juvenile Justice

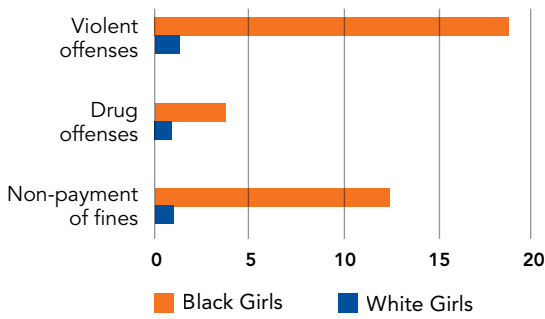
Nationally, Black girls are referred to the juvenile court 3 times more often than White girls, but **Black girls in Allegheny County are referred to the juvenile court at a rate 11 times that of White girls.**<sup>20,21,22</sup> At the same time, Black girls in Allegheny County are less likely than White girls to be diverted from formal processing in the juvenile justice system (40% vs. 47%).<sup>23</sup>

Overall, girls’ rates of involvement with the juvenile justice system have increased over the past 30 years, for girls of all racial/ethnic groups, with a modest decline since 2008. While this has been misunderstood to mean that girls are becoming more violent, there is an extensive body of research that has demonstrated that these overall increases have been the result of changing policies and practices, such as “zero tolerance” policies, the increased presence of police in schools, and the unintended consequences of domestic violence mandatory arrest policies, rather than of any real change in girls’ actual behaviors.<sup>24</sup>

Many “delinquent” behaviors are normal adolescent behaviors, but *racism, sexism, poverty, and living in a low-income neighborhood* make some young people more likely to come to the attention of police and system officials than others.

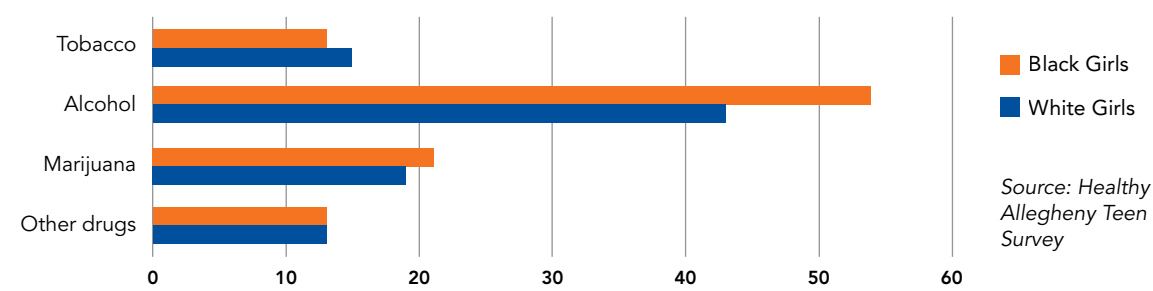
Approximately one-third of juvenile court referrals for Black girls in Allegheny County are for assault.<sup>25</sup> **Yet a deeper examination reveals that many of these fights are attempts to protect themselves.** Over two-thirds of girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced some type of abuse.<sup>26</sup> In the Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey, 18% of Black girls and 9% of White girls reported being involved in a physical fight in the past year, suggesting that Black girls are twice as likely as White girls to engage in fighting. *Yet Black girls are 13 times as likely as White girls to be referred to the juvenile court for simple assault and 14 times as likely for aggravated assault.*

Allegheny County juvenile court referral rates per 1000 girls ages 10-17



<sup>20</sup> Allegheny County Juvenile Probation. (2016). *2015 Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Annual Report*. Pittsburgh, PA.  
<sup>21</sup> Hockenberry, S., & Puzzanchera, C. (2015). *Juvenile Court Statistics 2013*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.  
<sup>22</sup> Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. & Kang, W. (2015). "Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2014."  
<sup>23</sup> Allegheny County Juvenile Probation. (2016). *Youth active in Allegheny County JPO*. Pittsburgh, PA.  
<sup>24</sup> E.g., Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Paramore, 2001; Goodkind, Wallace, et al., 2009; Luke, 2008; Steffensmeier, et al., 2005; Zahn, et al., 2008.  
<sup>25</sup> Allegheny County Juvenile Probation. (2016). *2015 Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Annual Report*. Pittsburgh, PA.  
<sup>26</sup> Chesney-Lind, M., & Shelden, R. G. (2014). *Girls, Delinquency, and Juvenile Justice* (4th edition). West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell.

Black and White girls have similar rates of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and other drug use



Rates of alcohol and drug use are similar among Black girls and White girls in Allegheny County, yet Black girls in Allegheny County are over three times as likely as White girls to be brought into the system for drug offenses.

Black girls are also 14 times as likely as White girls to be referred to the juvenile court for non-payment of fines, likely because they are disproportionately living in poverty and simply cannot afford to pay their fines.

Research shows that gender and racial inequality contribute to the disproportionate involvement of Black girls in the juvenile justice system.<sup>27</sup> Experiences of discrimination and poverty are associated with delinquency and crime in the general population, and girls’ delinquency and crime are often responses to their economic marginality and victimization and a result of criminalization of their survival strategies.<sup>28</sup> Combined with the increased surveillance and double standards to which Black girls are subject because of their race, gender, poverty, and neighborhoods, our failure to protect Black girls results in their disproportionate involvement in the juvenile justice system, as they attempt to provide for and protect themselves.



<sup>27</sup> Steffensmeier, D., & Allan, E. (1996). Gender and crime: Toward a gendered theory of female offending. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 459-488.  
<sup>28</sup> Richie, B. E. (1995). *Compelled to crime: The gendered entrapment of battered black women*. London: Routledge.



# The Next Steps toward Equity for Black Girls

- These disparities need to be more deeply understood by actively engaging Black girls (as well as service providers, teachers and advocates) in learning about their experiences. Additionally, during the preparation of this report, advocates shared troubling stories of biased treatment of Black girls who identify as LGBTQ, who are pregnant or parenting, and/or who have disabilities. These themes have also emerged in numerous national reports and thus these forms of discrimination warrant more local attention. This is an important first step in long-term efforts to make policy and practice more equitable.
- Advocates, school leaders and teachers, and justice system professionals should seek out best practices and promising models to close racial and gender disparities in discipline and justice system involvement. *Areas of focus should include: alternative approaches to school discipline; compliance with federal recommendations about special education for students with disabilities; compliance with federal guidance on reducing racial disparities in the administration of school discipline; availability of guidance and support for students experiencing personal difficulty; presence of law enforcement and probation staff in schools; training for teachers and administrators.*
- Schools should perform a self-audit to ensure compliance with federal requirements that require schools to provide equitable opportunities by gender (i.e. Title IX and its regulations and administrative guidance). Schools are responsible for:
  - ensuring gender equity in athletic opportunities;
  - creating an environment that is safe and free from harassment or abuse related to gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity;
  - equitably accommodating pregnant and parenting students.
- Staff of schools and youth serving agencies should work to create trauma-informed and trauma-responsive cultures, including providing training on recognizing signs of trauma and abuse, providing supportive responses, and effectively connecting victims of abuse or trauma with counseling, advocacy and medical care.
- Philanthropy and service providers should work together to identify best practices for youth serving agencies and systems to create environments where all Black girls, including survivors of abuse, those who identify as LGBTQ, those who are pregnant or parenting, and those who have disabilities can thrive.
- Systems that serve youth should make public data (such as discipline data, athletic opportunities, profiles of systems-involved youth) available by gender, race and disability. Lack of access to disaggregated data prevents full understanding of the nature of some of the inequities that Black girls experience.







# Conclusion

National attention, including recent books, articles, and reports have highlighted how Black girls are uniquely subject to problematic stereotypes, disproportionately disciplined at school, harassed without protection and recourse, and punished for attempting to defend themselves.

This report is a first step in presenting local data to begin to quantify disparities faced by Black girls in our region. Advocates and service providers are working together to increase coordination of services for Black girls and to change policies and practices that maintain disparities. Efforts are underway to amplify the voices of Black girls and to engage them as partners and leaders in advocating for systems reform.

We hope you will join us in learning about local disparities and in working to change these troubling inequities by challenging gender and racial biases and working to make our systems more just and fair.

# Methodological Appendix

Data for this report were compiled and analyzed through a collaborative effort led by the FISA Foundation and The Heinz Endowments. Throughout the report, the sources of data are indicated; this appendix provides additional detail on the data sources and methods used to produce the statistics contained in the report.

Poverty rates for Black girls were obtained from multiple sources, including the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the Children's Defense Fund.

Information on school discipline disparities was provided by the Education Law Center and their work on a Novo Foundation funded project titled *Unlocking Possibilities: Education Collaborative for Black Girls*, led by Nancy Hubley. They analyzed data available from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, available online at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education Safe Schools data, available online at [www.safeschools.state.pa.us](http://www.safeschools.state.pa.us).

Information on athletic opportunities was provided by the Women's Law Project. Sue Frietsche and Shalini Shah assisted with extracting and conducting analyses on data reported by Pennsylvania schools to the Pennsylvania Department of Education under the "Disclosure of Interscholastic Athletic Opportunity" reporting requirements. Additional analyses were done by the report's author. Data presented is extracted from 2014-15 Submitted School Surveys (most recent data available), available at: <http://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/Interscholastic%20Athletic%20Opportunity/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1>.

Throughout the report are statistics obtained from the Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey. This survey was conducted via collaboration among the Allegheny County Health Department, the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, and the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC. It can be accessed online at [www.achd.net/hats/](http://www.achd.net/hats/). This survey was led by principal investigator Dr. Elizabeth Miller. This survey was conducted by phone over a 10-month period between February and November 2014. It utilized a random sampling method to provide information that is representative of the youth population of Allegheny County as a whole. Over 1,600 young people ages 14-19 were surveyed on topics including physical activity, nutrition, injuries and violence, substance use, and sexual health behaviors.

Information on child welfare involvement was provided by Allegheny County Department of Human Services, with help from Erin Dalton, Ellen Kitzerow, Chereese Phillips, and Gregory Phillips.

Information on justice system involvement was provided by the Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Office, with help from Melanie King. Their annual report is available online at [https://www.alleghenycourts.us/annual\\_reports/default.aspx?show=jk1ESCr7p60PFtIFDv8bppeHmgcUjgHf](https://www.alleghenycourts.us/annual_reports/default.aspx?show=jk1ESCr7p60PFtIFDv8bppeHmgcUjgHf). Rates of racial disproportionality were calculated using numbers from this report and information on the youth population of Allegheny County available from the U.S. Census Bureau and from the National Center for Juvenile Justice's Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2014, available online at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>.





## *Learn about the national conversation promoting equity for Black girls:*

- Girls @ the Margin: <http://nationalcrittenton.org/join-the-movement/girls-the-margin-action-alliance/>
- Grantmakers for Girls of Color: <http://www.grantmakersforgirlsofcolor.org/>
- African American Policy Forum: <http://www.aapf.org/>
- Anna Julia Cooper Center: <http://ajccenter.wfu.edu>
- Collaborative to Advance Equity Through Research: <http://www.equitythroughresearch.com/#about>
- Read the research and support efforts where additional research is needed:
  - Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools by Monique Morris <http://thenewpress.com/books/pushout>
  - Black Girls Matter report [http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/app/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter\\_Report.pdf](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/app/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter_Report.pdf)
- The Safe Place to Learn resource package provides a range of materials to support school efforts to prevent and eliminate peer-to-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-place-to-learn-k12>

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