Bias Results Across Youth Serving Systems

Working with Cross-Over Youth

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Contemporary racism can occur when routine every day acts are applied differentially by race. It is hard to see bias on a case-by-case basis but when we look across youth-serving systems patterns of racial disparities become evident. Bias within one system towards any individual will set the stage for bias to occur in all others.

Disparate Treatment	**Education**	**Juvenile Justice**	**Child Welfare**
1. Attitude Subjective decision-making influences outcomes "He failed the attitude test"	In school "attitudes" are punishable. A "bad attitude" perceived as threatening, defensive or hostile can result in detention or suspension. "Criminalization" of kids occur within school policies.	Perception of "bad attitude" by officer's influence decisions to arrest and subsequent charges. Defiance and "lack of contrition" can influence decisions. Perceived attitude of parents can effect decision to detain.	"Bad attitude" of mother toward social worker, considered evidence of risk to child. (D. Roberts) Values regarding parenting styles can effect how parenting is judged.
2. Differential Application of Policies Policies seem neutral to race but when applied unevenly can result in disproportionate outcomes	Zero Tolerance 3-day suspensions influenced by race, class and gender. African American and Latino students more likely to be disciplined under Zero- Tolerance policies. Schools model prisons, e.g., lock-downs, detentions.	Sentencing disparities. 82% of youth cases filed in adult court, ½ are Blacks. 3-day suspensions for "penny candy offenses" result in "priors" that can influence sentencing. Use of School Resource Officers can result in formal criminal charges vs. academic in-school discipline.	Cases with identical risk factors-black children more likely removed, white families more likely to receive in-home services. In affidavits white parents described as "having no drug involvement" for black parents the phrasing is "*parents state* there is no drug involvement".
3. Stereotyping Stereotypes can unconsciously inform decision-making and effect perceptions of risk, guilt, and severity of offense.	"Adultified" Black children treated like adults and not given the benefit of "child-like" "kids will be kids" tolerance. (A. Ferguson) Offenses perceived as more harmful and subject to full punishment.	Early criminalization of children. Crimes are assumed to be caused by innate forces that are "inherent" to Blacks and can't be changed or corrected –this can influence decision to detain and sentencing.	Blacks assumed by some social workers to have "poor parenting skills". Such biases can construct a perception of risk. Parenting practices that are stern and not "indulgent" perceived to lack nurturing.

4. Labeling Labels passed from one decision-point to another can bias consequences in all systems Be aware of agency lexicon that can transmit bias in language.	Terms like "at risk", and "disadvantaged", can influence perceptions of ability and academic placement. Labels, e.g., "threatening" that are judgmental and passed from one decision point to another can influence disciplinary consequences. Using words like "truancy" to describe tardiness or absence can result in presumptions of delinquency.	Terms like "behavior defiant", "juvenile" (vs. youth) and "truancy" which in some cases is just a "tardy" are words associated with delinquency. Words can overstate the severity of the offender and the offense, e.g., using "volatile" instead of angry or "brandishing" when the word "had" (a knife)" is more accurate- distorts the facts.	"Broken families" promotes bias against single parent families. Expressions, e.g., *Apple doesn't fall too far from the tree; crack head mom* promote bias against families*." Dead beat Dad" could just mean (according to one agency) that the father doesn't pay for utilities.*
5. Ambiguous Charges	Blacks suspended because they appear defensive and threatening. Whites suspended for more severe and measurable offenses, e.g., drugs, guns.	Detained on "suspicion". "Poor and dangerous" neighborhoods promotes perception of risk and delinquency. Detained due to lack of services in community	More blacks removed for "neglect". Prediction of abuse vs. actual abuse.
6. Structured Decision-Making Tools Are only as racially unbiased as the person using them	Consequence Matrix- biases can trigger the need to employ the consequence matrix. Biases that influence "perceptions" of the severity of the offense can exist despite a reliable consequence matrix tool. The current application of Zero Tolerance policies expose students to suspensions for minor offenses which can constitute a "prior".	Just being a family that has one parent and poor can constitute a risk factor according to many SDM tools. Just being in a poor neighborhood can place you in contact with "know gang members".	Personal values of decision makers can increase perception of "risk" on SDM tools. Extended families are normal family systems in some communities. Children with single parents, living with non-biological families can constitute a risk factor according to some tools.