



Punishment in Florida School's: Variations in Incidents

Reported to Law Enforcement

By: Camila Maldonado; Supervised by Dr. Katrinell Davis
Florida State University, Department of Sociology



Status of Police Officers in Schools

- In the past two decades, there has been a surge in disciplinary measures within schools, including increased use of suspensions, expulsions, zero tolerance policies, heightened presence of law enforcement, and the application of criminal procedures to incidents that were traditionally handled as school disciplinary issues.
- These policy choices have contributed to an ongoing trend known as the school-to-prison pipeline. While multiple factors contribute to this phenomenon, a significant aspect revolves around the unclear role of police officers in schools, especially School Resource Officers (SROs). Although SROs aim to create a safe environment, in practice, they often inadvertently contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, serving at the expense of the students.
- This case study examines the impact of Florida's SRO program by comparing the percentage of infractions reported to law enforcement as well as punishment disparities between low- and high-poverty schools within the Leon County District in the State of Florida. By analyzing the relationship between financial inequities and institutional actions, findings are highlighting the urgent need for systemic reform in school safety and punishment.



Figure 1: A Third Grader with ADHD and PTSD with Biceps Restrained by Handcuffs

Methods

- Examined how punishment incidence varied by poverty level in Leon County Schools within the State of Florida.
- Utilized data from the School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) System. Database gathers data on 26 incidences of crime, violence, and disruptive behaviors that take place on school property, during school-sponsored events off campus, and on school transportation.
- Several inquiries under the Public Information Act were made to obtain information for this analysis. Findings were shared with Leon County Schools and the Leon County Sheriff's Department, detailing audits and annual reports related to their School Resource Officer Program from 2015 to 2021. (e.g., cost of program; number of officers per school; aims of programs, results, etc.)

Preliminary Results

Low Poverty	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
2011	27	26.038	7.517
2012	15.6	23.488	6.065
2013	25.84	31.53	7.233
2014	26.84	32.872	7.541
2015	18.26	20.824	4.777
2016	17	21.317	5.329
2017	23.5	30.14	7.535
2018	16.83	23.697	5.585
2019	18.5	20.714	5.178
2020	11.73	17.87	4.614
2021	16.11	22.171	5.086
High Poverty			
2011	44.68	53.85	12.354
2012	41.56	55.006	12.965
2013	50.91	43.594	9.09
2014	48.74	40.033	8.347
2015	39.67	38.014	7.76
2016	26.95	27.659	6.036
2017	24.73	34.232	7.298
2018	21.47	25.78	5.914
2019	14.36	18.902	4.03
2020	9.15	8.774	1.962
2021	24.95	32.222	7.20513

Figure 2: Discipline Incidence by Level of Poverty and Year (2011-2021)

Low Poverty	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
2015	11.38156	19.24812	4.415822
2016	24.5252	36.55857	9.139643
2017	12.79507	25.57649	6.394121
2018	39.81002	31.1857	7.35054
2019	24.7496	32.08767	8.021918
2020	29.89707	25.64302	6.620999
2021	37.36658	36.12478	8.287593
High Poverty			
2015	15.799988	19.77493	4.0365407
2016	32.959435	38.434398	8.3870733
2017	31.179896	33.645819	7.3421195
2018	53.035097	33.517372	7.6894125
2019	37.160484	29.444159	6.2775157
2020	17.290171	25.501626	5.702337
2021	23.000308	24.640908	5.5098745

Figure 3: Percent School Discipline Incidents Reported to Law Enforcement by Year and Level of Poverty

Conclusions

Low Poverty Category (Figure 2)

- Fluctuating and decreasing trend in mean disciplinary incidence
 - Indicates ongoing disciplinary challenges despite lower poverty rates
- Oscillations suggest factors beyond poverty influence disciplinary incidents such as school policies/climate/culture
- No clear linear trend from 2011 to 2021, requiring ongoing attention

High Poverty Category (Figure 2)

- Show fluctuations but overall decreasing trend from 2011 to 2021
 - Reflects efforts to address challenges in disadvantaged communities
- Persistence of fluctuations indicated ongoing complexity in addressing issues
 - Subsequently dropped by an average of 6 points per year until 2021
- Mean decreased from 44.68 in 2011-2012 to 41.56, then increased to 50.91 in 2013
- 2020 and 2021 means are lower compared to earlier years

Reported to Law Enforcement (Figure 3)

- **Low Poverty Schools:** Variability in the frequency of disciplinary incidents over time, overall trend shows an increase from 2015 to 2018, followed by fluctuations.
- **High Poverty Schools:** Consistently report a higher mean discipline incidence throughout the period, with a notable peak in 2018.

Recommendations

" 1.7 million children attend public schools that have cops but no counselors. 3 million students attend schools with law enforcement officers, but no nurses. 6 million students attend schools with law enforcement officers, but no school psychologists." ACLU, 2018

Recommendation for Policy Makers:

1. Prioritize investments in mental health supports for students, aligning with recommendations from the U.S. Secret Service for enhancing school safety.
2. Legislate a defined role for School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools
3. Increase required training for SROs to ensure they are proficient in child development and de-escalation techniques.

Recommendations for Administrators:

1. Prohibit the involvement of SROs in disciplinary matters within schools.
2. Ensure sufficient staffing of school-based mental health professionals to adequately meet student needs.
3. Advocate for the widespread adoption of civil citations, a pre-arrest diversion program, within the district.

Recommendations for Educators:

1. Collaborate with school-based mental health professionals (counselors, social workers, psychologists) for consultation on student behavioral concerns.

Acknowledgments & References

Thank you, Dr. Davis, for your unwavering support and guidance throughout this mentorship, and for facilitating the resources necessary for the successful completion of this research project.

