

# Excluding black toddlers from the preschool-to-prison pipeline.

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## Abstract

**When compared to other racial groups, African American toddlers are more likely to be suspended from school. This work will use Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework to examine the “preschool to prison pipeline.” This phrase refers to the exclusion of black toddlers from classroom settings that can eventually lead to negative adults outcomes. Since African Americans are disproportionately more likely to be incarcerated than members of other racial and ethnic groups, this work will offer practical recommendations regarding how preschool teachers can help reverse the “preschool to prison pipeline” among black male toddlers whose families have inherent strengths yet are more economically, academically and socially disadvantaged than other racial groups.**

**Keywords:** African Americans, Blacks, Ecological systems theory, School-to-prison, Pipeline, Social-emotional development, Toddlers.

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## Introduction

### **Excluding black toddlers from the school-to-prison pipeline**

As a black families scholar that examines factors that contribute to the mass incarceration of black men, this manuscript will use an ecological systems framework to examine the “preschool to prison pipeline.” This phrase refers to the exclusion of black toddlers from classroom settings that can lead to negative adult outcomes. Essentially, the “pipeline” refers to the high numbers of incarcerated black men who did not complete high school [1].

There are four reasons why I focus on this segment of the black population. First, even though African Americans comprise 13.4% of the American population, they are more likely than other racial groups to be poor. To put this into context, this means that blacks are disproportionately more likely to live below the poverty line (8.9 million people or 20.8%) than hispanics (10.5 million people or 17.6%) and whites (15.7 million people or 8.1%). Second, suspension rates are disproportionately higher for black preschoolers than other races. According to a national study, “Black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschool children receiving more than one out-of school suspension; in comparison, White students represent 43% of preschool enrollment but 26% of preschool children receiving more than one out of school suspension. Boys represent 79% of preschool children suspended once and 82% of preschool children suspended multiple times, although boys represent 54% of preschool enrollment”. Third, African Americans are more likely to be incarcerated than members of other racial groups. National data has revealed blacks are incarcerated at a rate of 1,408 per 100,000 while whites are incarcerated at a rate of 275 per 100,000.

This means that blacks are incarcerated at a rate that is 5.1 times that of whites. Finally, even though the toddler age extends from 12 months to 36 months, this work will demonstrate why this period as well as the following 12 months, specifically the 36 to 48 month period, is especially important for the life trajectory of black toddlers, in particular, black male toddlers [2].

In the sections that follow, I place this focus on black toddlers within the empirical literature. First, I start by discussing ecological systems theory. Second, I discuss the ecological systems of black toddlers. Third, I highlight the social-emotional development of black toddlers. Fourth, I discuss the mass incarceration of African Americans and how this relates to the school-to-prison pipeline. Finally, I offer recommendations regarding how these educators can reverse the “preschool to prison” pipeline [3].

## Literature Review

### **Ecological systems theory**

Humans live in a world in which they are embedded within multiple, complex systems that are “interacting and mutually influential.” According to Uri Bronfenbrenner, the pioneer of ecological systems theory, humans are influenced by their immediate environment, which in turn is influenced by the larger contexts in which those environments exist. Hence, the ecological approach requires that the person, the environment and the relations between them be conceptualized in terms of systems and subsystems within systems. Another significant aspect of human ecology is the recognition that human interaction is a two-directional process through which individuals are impacted by their environments but also influence and restructure the environments in which they reside.









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