

Family problems affect African-American children more than other races

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It is a common belief that girls tend to internalize their problems, becoming depressed or anxious, while boys externalize their problems, turning to violence against people or property. A new study in the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* found that this idea did not hold for African-American youth who were in the juvenile justice system. For them, whether they internalized or externalized depended not on gender but on what was happening within their families.

Results showed that family dynamics mediated the relationship between gender and mental health issues for African-American court-involved youth. Both girls and boys showed similar levels of externalizing and internalizing behavior, once family dysfunction was taken into account. Such a relationship was not found in White families.

In addition, African-American girls report more externalizing, "acting out" behaviors, than other groups including African-American males, White males and females.

"Families may matter in a different way for African-American youth than what we're finding for White youth," the authors conclude. "We are now trying to identify exactly what is different in African-American families that affects whether youth internalize or externalize problems, and how best to help them. This means identifying those family strengths that buffer against these problem behaviors as well as focusing on family risk factors that increase the likelihood of these difficulties."

Stephen M. Gavazzi of The Ohio State University, Jennifer M. Bostic and Courtney M. Yarcheck of the OSU Center for Family Research, and Ji-Young Lim of Miami University of Ohio examined factors related to gender, race/ethnicity, family factors, and mental health issues in a sample of 2,549 Caucasian and African American youth coming to the attention of juvenile courts.

Source: Wiley

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