

Color of Justice Fact Sheet: Mental Health

Untreated mental health conditions are a common risk factor for involvement in the juvenile justice system. An estimated 70 percent of young people in juvenile detention have a diagnosable mental health condition, according to a number of national studies. The experience of childhood trauma is linked to the onset of over a quarter of all adolescent psychiatric disorders. The prevalence of both mental health disorders and trauma of youth in the juvenile justice system is stark, where approximately 90 percent of youth have been exposed to trauma. (Impact Report, Advancing Trauma-Informed Systems for Children, Sept. 2015, Child Health and Development Institute)

Children of color are less likely to receive treatment

Only 15 to 20 percent of the children and adolescents who need mental health care receive it. In Connecticut, this leaves 125,000 children struggling with unmet mental health needs.

Caucasian youth are over-represented in their use of behavioral health services while African-American, Hispanic, and Asian youth are under-represented in the use of behavioral services in Connecticut (source: Pediatric Emergency Department Utilization, CT BHP, Value Options 2016). African-American and Latino adolescent males comprise less than 10 percent of youth accessing outpatient mental health services, largely due to a lack of access to culturally responsive providers (source: Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers).

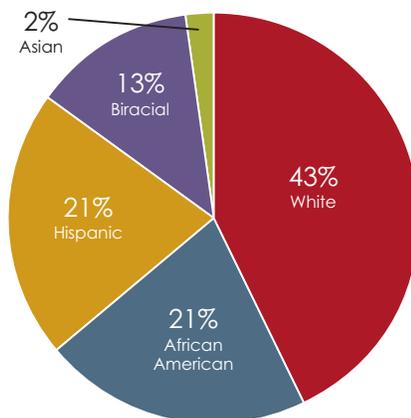
White children get psychiatric care; children of color are incarcerated

National studies show that children of all races engage in strikingly similar behaviors (source: The Centers For Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveys). We are interpreting troubling behaviors in whites as signs of an illness; and in children of color as signs of delinquency.

The effects of trauma are often misdiagnosed as learning disabilities, depression, conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder.

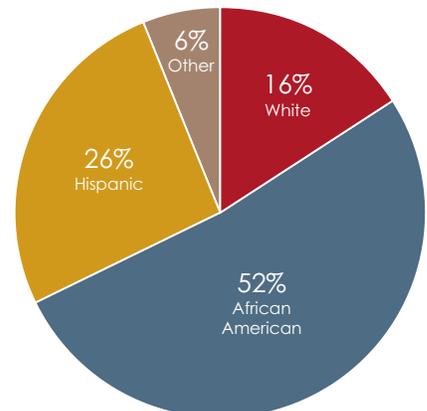
Kids of color are more apt to live in communities where they experience chronic stress and multiple traumas (community violence, food insecurity, etc.). That trauma can cause chronic changes in their emotions and behaviors that can lead to serious mental health issues. We need to treat those issues like the behavioral health issues they are and treat those children like the victims they are, not like criminals.

Youth admitted to Riverview Hospital for Children And Families



Source: Connecticut Court Support Services Division

Youth admitted to Connecticut Juvenile Training School



Source: Connecticut Department of Children and Families

