

## ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Achievement Differences in Court-Involved Youth

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Each year in the United States, over 200,000 children and adolescents receive services through residential treatment or juvenile corrections facilities. Existing research shows that African American adolescents are funneled into the juvenile justice system at disproportionate rates compared to Caucasians, and that when incarcerated, they also serve longer sentences than Caucasians accused of the same crimes. This study examines adolescents within the juvenile justice system. It seeks to identify any differences between African American and Caucasian adolescents concerning their degrees of educational skills upon entering the juvenile justice system and between their outcome and placement recommendations. Data were collected based on 277 existing records from a mental health residential treatment facility in the Midwestern United States. Data were analyzed within the categories of demographics, special education services, measures of cognitive abilities and academic achievement, as well as treatment and placement recommendations made for the youth through the juvenile court system. Propensity score matching procedures were utilized throughout the analyses to better control for covariates, including the construct of cognitive functioning. The results indicate that African American and Caucasian adolescents had similar overall educational skill levels in the low average range upon

entering the juvenile justice system, in which no notable differences were observed (MANOVA; Pillai's Trace,  $P = .920$ ). Also, there was no notable difference in the examiner recommendations concerning placement of the adolescents in the juvenile court system (Logistic Regression; Wald = .139,  $P = .709$ ). Future research is recommended to explore the intricacies surrounding intersectionality, disproportionality, and social justice and how these inequalities affect diverse adolescents, especially those who are at risk for court involvement.