Early Exclusionary School Discipline and Adolescent Wellbeing

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Exclusionary school discipline is a common experience among US children. In an earlier paper, we find high suspension or expulsion rates even in elementary school, particularly among racial minorities and the poor. Moreover, such discipline is associated with increased physical aggression by age nine. In the current analysis, we extend this work in two ways. First, we examine the association between early suspension or expulsion on externalizing behavior problems six years later, when children are in high school. Second, given that mental health problems are more common in adolescence than at younger ages, we examine the association between early school discipline and adolescent internalizing behavior problems. Because school discipline is most concentrated among racial minorities and the poor, our findings have important implications for the role of school discipline policy in educational inequality. Early suspension or expulsion may have unintended negative consequences for child wellbeing that persist into middle adolescence.