

Systemic Racism and The Children of America

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Systematic racism is a discriminatory system that the United States was built upon. It traces back to the country's founding and despite many societal and socioeconomic advancements, it is a system that still exists to this day. The racism ingrained into America is most discriminatory against non-white Americans. Studies have shown that the development of children has been heavily impacted by systemic racism, predominantly through avenues such as healthcare, education, and wealth disparities. The inequalities shown in these fields towards children of color limit the opportunities given to them to excel and give them the structure needed for a decent upbringing.

To identify how systemic racism affects the three main aspects of child development, the definition of the term and relating terms are required. Systemic racism can be defined as a type of discrimination that uses practices or policies to create an unfair disadvantage to specific groups based on race (Dawson, 2022). Systemic racism is most commonly seen throughout societal structures and practices, not to be confused with individual and targeted acts of prejudice on a personal level. The development of children, or child development, can be defined as the growth from infancy to adulthood that is physical, social, cognitive, and emotional in nature. The word child will refer to any individual who falls under the age of eighteen.

One aspect of child development that has been proven to be most affected by systemic racism is education. Children of color in America statistically face more disparities than white children, and have historically been segregated by race in school settings. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) had revealed in 2020 that both hispanic and black students were significantly less likely to graduate high school as opposed to their white counterparts,

graduation rates being down to about 82 to 79% compared to 89% of white students (Jzaracho, 2019). Another important factor to the disparities shown in education is funding. A study done by EdBuild in 2019 showed that annually schools that are populated by predominantly black and hispanic students received over 20 million dollars less in funding as compared to schools populated by mostly white students (Trent, Dooley, et al, 2019). The reason why this is detrimental to the quality of education is because the gap in funding also translates into lower quality of education such as larger class sizes, books, furniture, and other learning tools lacking in quality, including the inability to afford other necessities. Funding also plays a part in more than just classrooms; without proper funding issued to these schools extracurricular activities are also severely limited. The disparities highlighted by these examples contribute to the idea that systemic racism affects the development of children because education is the most important aspect of child development. It contributes to necessary skills that are essential to all children such as critical thinking, communication, mental strength, and overall career success.

Disparities in healthcare settings are another major factor that affects child development. It is important because systemic racism directly affects the health outcomes of children of color nationally. From the moment of birth, children of color face significantly less quality of healthcare. A study done in 2017 by the Center of Disease Control (CDC) concluded that the infant mortality rate of black infants was 10 for every 1000, as opposed to 5 for white newborns (Ely & Driscoll, 2024). This can be attributed to inadequate medical care and prenatal care for both the mother and the child. Chronic illnesses like asthma, heart disease, and heart disease are another illness that affects children of color disproportionately. The American Academy of

Pediatrics study found that air pollution has affected hispanic and black children significantly more than white children (Hoffmann et al., 2022). This is likely caused by predominantly black neighborhoods having higher rates of air pollutants, which leads to these children being affected by ailments like pneumonia and asthma. The disparities children face in healthcare are not exclusively physical ailments. Mental health resources for children of color has been a growing issue as of recently. Mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, ADHD, and autism have been long overlooked in children of color. The National Institute of Mental Health stated that black and hispanic children are less likely to receive mental health services as compared to white children, despite showing the exact same symptoms equally as often. (Hoffmann et al., 2022) This can lead to larger issues like impacted school performances, lack of proper treatment, and even social skills. These examples are relevant because it further proves that systemic racism affects child development heavily through the healthcare system because there is statistical evidence to highlight the difference in treatment children of color receive as compared to white children. Through this, children of color continue to face worse health outcomes.

Another important factor that systemic racism affects for children are wealth disparities. This could be considered one of the most important factors in how the development of children is influenced. The wealth of non-white families determines a significant amount as it relates to children of color. Healthcare, education, and quality of housing are all things that are affected by the wealth gap and in turn affect children and their upbringing. The Federal Reserve concluded in 2019 that the average yearly income for white families nationally was 190,000 dollars as compared to black and hispanic families who averaged 30,000 dollars (Bhutta et al., 2020). The

gap in wealth can not be solely attributed to individual choice but rather years of discriminatory policies aimed at families of color. Without decent income many children have access to less opportunities and less avenues of success. In 1976 only 44 percent of black families owned homes compared to 69 percent of white families (Duarte & Mimbela, 2023). While some improvements have been made since then, over 20 percent of black and hispanic households have reported to be food-insecure and only 8 percent of white families have reported the same thing (Duarte & Mimbela, 2023). This is relevant to how systemic racism affects child development because with poverty rates for families of color continuing to grow, households have less stability to offer their children. Quality housing, decent medical care, and good means of education are all dependent on how financially stable their homes are, which is why the wealth gap in America is such a crucial issue.

A common argument against the ideas previously stated is that there is not a substantial amount of evidence to prove that systemic racism still affects the development of children. Rather than institutionalized racism being the cause of the disparities that affect children of color, socioeconomic factors play a larger role in the separation. In 2021, the Pew Research Center stated that from 1990 to 2021 the amount of black Americans to receive a bachelor's degree has increased to 26 percent all the way from 11 percent (Schaeffer, 2022). This is one of many examples used to point to the idea that racial discrimination of the government has been slowly deconstructing, giving more opportunity and equality among children of color.

While the example given does highlight the progress made, the presence of systemic racism is still pertinent in our society today. The ability for some to prosper does not negate the struggle for most others. Despite the rate of graduation for children of color, on average they will

still make less than white people down the line and be shown less success. Systemic racism is still very rooted in socioeconomic disparities as well.

Systemic racism is still a large barrier to children being raised properly and with equal and equitable opportunity. Healthcare, education, and wealth being the three main issues that need fixing. Even with much progress made, the social, cognitive, and emotional growth of children of color is still at risk. In recognizing these issues, society can continue to make an effort to reverse these disparities and foster a better environment for children. By addressing racial bias, protesting against morally wrong laws and regulations, and calling for policymakers to advocate for change as well, the future of children in America can grow to be more equitable.

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