

## Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)

The term Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) refers to rates of contact with the juvenile justice system among juveniles of a specific minority group that are significantly different from rates of contact for white non-Hispanic juveniles. Data has shown that youth of color are more likely than white youths to be arrested and subsequently go deeper into the juvenile justice system (e.g., Puzzanchera and Hockenberry 2013). For example, in examining placement in residential facilities for juvenile offenders in 2011, the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement showed a rate of 521 African American youths in custody per 100,000 in the population, compared with 112 white youths per 100,000—a ratio of approximately 4.7 to 1.0 (Sickmund et al. 2013). Although not as stark, similar patterns of disproportionate contact with the juvenile justice system exist for Hispanic youth, American Indian youth, and smaller ethnic groups (Sickmund et al. 2013; Bishop 2005). DMC has been shown to be a problem in jurisdictions across the United States (Bishop 2005; Feyerherm, Cohen, Spinney, Yeide, and Stephenson 2010).

### Definitions

Although racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system are not new, the terminology has changed over time. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) refers to racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system as *disproportionate minority contact*. DMC used to stand for *disproportionate minority confinement*. *Confinement* was changed to *contact* in 2002 because of disproportionality throughout all stages of the juvenile justice system (e.g., arrest, diversion, probation), and not only at confinement (OJJDP 2009b).

The term *minority overrepresentation* was used more often when OJJDP concentrated primarily on *disproportionate minority confinement* and when DMC was measured using proportions (today it is measured using rates). Today, *overrepresentation*, although still used by some organizations, has been replaced by the terms *disparity* or *disproportion* since minority youth are often *underrepresented* in receiving more lenient outcomes such as diversion from court and probation placement after a finding of delinquency. The terms disproportionality and disparity are often used interchangeably to refer to rates of contact with any point of the juvenile justice system that are different for different races or ethnicities, regardless of the cause.

*Race* and *ethnicity* are terms often used together (e.g., racial and ethnic disparities). *Race* tends to be associated with biology, whereas *ethnicity* is associated with culture (LiveScience 2012). OJJDP requires that states participating in the federal Formula Grant Program report racial and ethnic juvenile justice data using the following categories: White (Non-Hispanic), Black or African

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American (Non-Hispanic), Hispanic or Latino, Asian (Non-Hispanic), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (Non-Hispanic), American Indian and Alaska Native (Non-Hispanic), and Other/Mixed.<sup>1</sup>

OJJDP defines *minority* as youth who are American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (OJJDP, N.d.a.). Other commonly used terms are *non-white* (e.g., Cheesman and Waters 2010; Guevara, Herz, and Spohn 2006) and *youth of color* (e.g., NCCD 2007; Burns Institute N.d.b.; Malesky 2014; Mendel 2014).

*Juvenile justice stages, contact points, or decision points* are terms that are used to refer to different points where youth have contact with the juvenile justice system. OJJDP mandates that states receiving Title II Formula Grant funding report on disproportionality or racial disparities for at least nine juvenile justice stages: arrest (law enforcement referral); referral to court; diversion; secure detention; petition filed (charged); adjudication (delinquent, guilty finding); probation supervision; secure confinement; and transfer to adult court (waiver). These three terms are often used interchangeably, but referring to these stages as decision points shifts more focus on the juvenile justice system stakeholders who determine whether the youths will become involved in the system at that point.

*Discrimination* denotes between-group differences in outcomes based on the consideration of extralegal or illegitimate factors (Bishop 2005, 24–25). In other words, the terms *discrimination* and *bias* are used when the racial disparities appear to be caused by some intent on the part of the decision-maker (e.g., those who may be “racist” or who favor one racial or ethnic group over another), or when a system’s design puts minority youth at a disadvantage. Both individual and system bias can be intentional but are often unintentional or implicit (Goff et al. 2014; Gove 2011; Tomaskovic-Devey and Warren 2009; Hinton Hoytt et al. 2003).

## Federal Legislation

Amendments to the federal [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention \(JJDP\) Act of 1974](#), which established OJJDP to support local and state efforts to prevent delinquency and improve juvenile justice systems, provide direction on how states address DMC. The 1988 JJDP Act amendment contained a requirement that states address DMC (which at this point meant disproportionate minority *confinement*) in their state plans.

In the 1992 amendment, the identification of DMC became a core requirement, tying state compliance to future funding through the Formula Grants Program (OJJDP, N.d.b). The JJDP Act, as amended in 2002, modified the DMC requirement further to require that states participating in the Formula Grants Program “address juvenile delinquency prevention efforts and system improvement efforts designed to reduce, without establishing or requiring numerical standards or quotas, the disproportionate number of juvenile members of minority groups, who come into contact with the juvenile justice system” (Section 223(a)(22)).

States participating in the Title II Formula Grant Program are required to submit data to OJJDP on the numbers of youth by race who come into contact with nine juvenile justice system stages statewide (mentioned previously), and for at least three targeted counties in the state. By collecting data at these stages, states can measure levels of disparity at each stage for each race in selected jurisdictions. They are also required to assess the contributing mechanisms to DMC in their state and have a plan to address these disparities.

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<sup>1</sup> States are required to enter data into OJJDP’s DMC Web-based Data Entry System using these racial categories here: <https://www.ojjdp.dmcdata.org/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>

The OJJDP has outlined a five-stage process for states to follow to address DMC: 1) identify the extent to which DMC exists; 2) assess the reasons for DMC; 3) develop an intervention plan to address DMC; 4) evaluate the effectiveness of interventions; and 5) monitor DMC trends (OJJDP N.d.a).

## Contributing Factors to DMC

Often DMC is presented as being caused either by *differential offending* (i.e., youth of color commit more crimes or commit more serious crimes) or *differential treatment* (i.e., the juvenile justice system treats youth of color differently). Differential offending is also referred to as *differential involvement*, and differential treatment is also referred to as *differential selection* or *systems factors*. These two theoretical frameworks have largely helped frame the discussions and studies of DMC to date (Bishop 2005).

The differential offending framework centers on the individual juvenile. This perspective requires that causes of differential involvement be sought outside the court system by looking at individual, family, and neighborhood factors that are related to offending (e.g., Piquero, Moffitt, and Lawton 2005; Tracy 2005). For example, Fite, Wynn, and Pardini (2009) found that much of the difference in arrest rates between white and African American boys was because of higher levels of both individual and contextual risk factors for African American boys across multiple domains.

The differential offending framework perspective and the related consensus theory expect to find differences in treatment between minority youth and white youth explained by legal factors, such as prior record and severity of crime. In this framework, legal factors are often related to “minority centered contexts for risk” (National Research Council 2013, 224), such as:

- Economically disadvantaged and unstable communities and neighborhood social contexts (Fite, Wynn, and Pardini 2009; Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush 2005; Moak, Shaun, Walker, and Gann 2012)
- Low-performing institutions, especially public schools (Sharkey and Sampson 2010)
- Delinquent peers (Fite, Wynn, and Pardini 2009)
- Family risk factors such as unmarried or single parents, incarcerated parents, poor parent-child communication, and harsh, lax, or inconsistent discipline (Fite, Wynn, and Pardini 2009; Vespa, Lewis, and Kreider 2013; Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush 2005; Jarjoura, Roger, DuBois, Schlafer, and Haight 2013)
- Greater exposure to violence (Kilpatrick, Saunders, and Smith 2003)

The National Research Council concluded that the “totality of these risk factors is such that minority youth are born into and raised in severely compromised familial, community, and educational environments that set the stage for a range of adverse behaviors and outcomes, including problems in school, relationships, and engaging in prosocial behavior” (2009, 224).

The differential treatment framework perspective, by contrast, generally concentrates on the structure of justice decision-making acts that can disadvantage minority youth (e.g., Leiber 2003; Pope and Feyerherm 1990). This perspective, also known as *bias theory*, argues that minority youth are more likely than white youth to suffer harsher consequences at each stage of the juvenile justice decision-making process because the system treats minority youth differently (and more punitively). This theoretical orientation expects to find differential treatment of minority youth even after accounting for legal, and often extralegal (e.g., age, socioeconomic status, school status), factors (e.g., Mallett and Stoddard-Dare

2010). The differential treatment framework centers on the juvenile justice system to explain racial disparities and is the approach that frequently characterizes DMC empirical studies (e.g., Leiber 2003; Leiber, Brubaker, and Fox 2009; Richetelli, Hartstone, and Murphy 2009).

The racial or symbolic threat theory (Ousey and Lee 2008; Moak, Shaun, Walker, and Gann 2012) within the differential treatment framework focuses on the social-psychological processes behind decisions that disadvantage one or more racial/ethnic groups compared with others (Kurtz, Linnemann, and Spohn 2008). In this framework, decision-makers are influenced by emotions driven by the perception of minority youth as threatening to middle-class standards and public safety (Leiber and Fox 2005). Reference is often made to the work of scholars like Tittle and Curran (1988), who explored how negative perceptions of African American youth and stereotypes affect decision-makers, and Bridges and Steen (1998), who showed how decision-makers attributed the causes of delinquency to internal (e.g., individual) characteristics or external (e.g., neighborhood disadvantage) factors depending on a youth's race.

Other types of conflict theory include attribution theory, where decision-makers “rely on internal and external factors they perceive to be linked to criminal and delinquent behavior” (Rodriguez 2007, 633), and labeling theory, where dominant groups maintain their status by using labels to define deviant or criminal behavior and disenfranchise certain other groups (Tapia 2010).

Various scholars have identified shortcomings in both the differential offending framework and the differential treatment framework (e.g., Tracy, 2005; Pope and Feyerherm 1990; Bishop 2005). With a complex social problem such as DMC, numerous factors are likely at work, including both differential offending and differential treatment. A 2013 study by the National Research Council states the following:

We know that racial/ethnic disparities are not reducible to either differential offending or differential selection. Many other factors affect disproportionality of minority youth in the juvenile justice system, including the troubling entrenched patterns of poverty, segregation, gaps in educational achievement, and residential instability. DMC exists in the broader context of a “racialized society” in which many public policies, institutional practices, and cultural representations operate to produce and maintain racial inequities.  
[239]

OJJDP's DMC Technical Assistance Manual provides a detailed list of possible explanations for DMC, including some subcategories of the differential offenders--differential treatment dichotomy:

*Differential opportunity for prevention and treatment.* The allocation of prevention and treatment resources within communities is seldom uniform or universally accessible across an entire community. In some instances, those allocations create a disadvantage for minority youth (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm, 2009). For example, effective programs may be geographically inaccessible to minority youth in a jurisdiction, or existing programs may be designed for white, suburban youth. Thus, retention and outcomes for minority urban youth are poor.

*Differential behavior.* Differential behavior refers to differing rates at which youth from various racial and ethnic subgroups are involved in delinquent activity. Differential behavior results when minority youth are involved in more serious crime, participate more deeply in gang activity, begin delinquent activity at earlier ages, and are involved in other social service or justice-related systems such as the child welfare system (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm 2009).

*Mobility effects.* Youths may commit delinquent behavior and come into contact with the juvenile justice system in jurisdictions outside their own home areas. This often happens when a mall or movie theater is located in a community with more white youths than in neighboring communities (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm 2009).

*Indirect effects.* Indirect effects is a broad term reflecting the fact that economic status, education, location, and a host of risk factors associated with juvenile justice system involvement are also linked with race and ethnicity. For example, specific risk factors correlated with race or ethnicity, such as living in disorganized neighborhoods and having an unemployed father, may lead to differential offending issues. Indirect effects can also lead to differential treatment. For example, some courts, fearing lack of supervision, may be more likely to use secure detention if the child is from a single-parent home. If minority youths are more likely to live in single-parent homes (Vespa, Lewis, and Kreider 2013), these decisions will contribute to DMC (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm 2009).

*Differential processing or inappropriate decision-making.* Differential processing or inappropriate decision-making results when the criteria used to make decisions in the system are either not applied consistently across all groups of youth or when the criteria are structured in a manner that disadvantages some groups. An example of differential processing or inappropriate decision-making includes the use of the term *gang-related*, which is frequently cited as a factor in decisions about how to handle juveniles. To assess gang-related impact, it is important to know how a jurisdiction defines the term, and whether the “gang-related” question is asked only of youth from certain community areas. If so, then use of this criterion likely will place minority youth at some disadvantage relative to white youth – especially white youth from community areas not believed to be gang-affiliated (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm 2009).

*Justice by geography.* Minority youth may live in jurisdictions that have stricter law enforcement or harsher judges, compared with jurisdictions where white youth live (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm 2009). For example, a Massachusetts DMC assessment study found that police tend to patrol urban minority neighborhoods more aggressively than suburban areas where fewer minorities reside. Thus, the likelihood of arrest is much higher for minority youth than white youth in this state (Kauffman, 1997). School zero-tolerance policies also adversely affect students of color in urban school districts (Dunbar and Villarruel 2004).

*Legislation, policies, and legal factors.* Policies enacted through legislation or administrative action may sometimes contain elements that create a disadvantage for minority youth. For example, statutes that define drug offenses tend to treat crack cocaine more seriously than powdered cocaine, which, given the usage patterns for the two forms of cocaine, creates a disadvantage for minority youth (Leiber, Richetelli, and Feyerherm 2009). Anti-loitering laws also tend to disadvantage minority youth (e.g., Minnesota Council on Crime and Justice, N.d.).

## Measuring DMC

DMC can be measured in various ways, such as comparing proportions or using rates. When using proportions, the racial breakdown of youths in the general population is compared to the racial breakdown of youths at a certain stage in the juvenile justice system. For example, in one state, the youth population is 58 percent white, 21 percent African American, 10 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent Asian, whereas the youth in the secure, residential population is 25 percent white, 68 percent African American, 5 percent Hispanic, and zero percent Asian. This data clearly demonstrates that

African American youths are overrepresented at the secure residential placement stage whereas white, Hispanic, and Asian youths appear to be underrepresented.

Although comparing proportions can be a useful method, it is not as useful for seeing trends, measuring changes over time (especially when the youth population changes), or comparing disparity levels from one jurisdiction to another. Also, when minority groups are in the majority, disparities may appear less evident. Given the shortcoming of using proportions to measure DMC, OJJDP mandates that states participating in the federal Formula Grant Program measure DMC using the relative rate index (RRI). The RRI compares the rates of processing for minority youth to the rates of processing for white youth. The RRI method describes the volume of activity from one contact point to the next and how it differs between white and minority youth.

An RRI directs policymakers and practitioners to the juvenile justice stages that need more examination (Hsia et al. 2006). Using the same data from the state mentioned above, the RRI at secure confinement for African American youths is 2.0, which means that after adjudication, the flow of African American youths into secure confinement is twice as high as the flow of white youths. While one advantage of using the RRI is to reveal disparity at each contact point in the system (in this case, from adjudication to secure confinement), it can be also used to calculate population-based rates. For example, the population-based RRI for African Americans at secure confinement is 7.6, meaning that the flow of juveniles from the general population into secure confinement is over seven times higher than for white youths. These RRI values can easily be compared over time and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

## Empirical Studies of DMC

Numerous national and jurisdiction-specific articles and reports on DMC have been published. Many of these publications are empirical studies evaluating whether race had an effect on a specific juvenile justice decision-making point after controlling for other variables (e.g., offense severity, prior record, age). Although many of these studies are written by researchers and published in scholarly journals (e.g., Rodriguez 2007; Leiber, Brubaker, and Fox 2009; Freiburger and Burke 2010), state DMC assessment studies have also added to this body of work (e.g., Richetelli, Hartstone, and Murphy, 2009; Leiber, Johnson, and Fox 2006; Stone, Motes, et al. 2004).

Four large-scale efforts have been published that analyze this body of research literature on DMC (Pope and Feyerherm 1990; Pope, Lovell, and Hsia 2002; Engen, Steen, and Bridges 2002; Bishop 2005). They all find that race does affect decision-making but also that variables other than race play a key role.

More recently, OJJDP funded a new DMC review of articles from 2002 to 2010. This review, conducted by the Development Services Group, Inc. (DSG), evaluated the percentage of studies that found racial disparities, as well as each individual decision within those studies (e.g., if a study examined African American and Hispanic DMC at arrest, secure detention, and transfer to adult court, six decisions were examined). Similar to the previous reviews, this review found that while the picture that emerges collectively is complex, race effects that disadvantage minority youths were found to exist across the country at all decision points (Cohen, Feyerherm, Spinney, Stephenson, and Yeide, in press).

However, the degree of these disparities, and which groups are affected and how can vary considerably. For example, studies that included analysis of *earlier* decision points in the juvenile justice system (including arrest, secure detention, and referral to court) overwhelmingly found that there was some racial disadvantage to minority youths. However, fewer studies of *later* decision points

(adjudication, probation, secure confinement, and disposition in adult court for transferred youths) found racial disadvantage to minority youths.

## Efforts to Address DMC

According to the JJDP Act, all states participating in the federal Title II Formula Grant Program must address DMC in their systems (OJJDP, N.d.a.). As explained above, OJJDP has identified a five-phase process to address DMC, which includes developing an intervention plan. Outside the federal mandate, states, counties, local jurisdictions, private foundations, and individual programs have also made efforts to reduce DMC.

Some policymakers and practitioners want to jump right into programs to reduce DMC. However, according to OJJDP's [DMC Technical Assistance Manual \(TA Manual\)](#), interventions to reduce DMC should only be implemented once DMC is identified, the contributing mechanisms are assessed through a methodologically sound DMC assessment study, and readiness events are organized to prepare local stakeholders. At this point, an intervention to address DMC can be implemented. The TA Manual provides five guidelines for developing a DMC intervention plan: 1) design a comprehensive, multimodal approach, when feasible; 2) prioritize strategies to focus on critical decision points; 3) choose interventions that the community is ready to implement; 4) use evidence-based strategies and draw on the successful experiences of current DMC initiatives, as applicable; and 5) evaluate the strategy's effectiveness.

Strategies for reducing DMC can be organized into three categories: 1) direct services, which address the risks and needs of the youth, 2) training and technical assistance, which focus primarily on the needs of juvenile justice personnel and law enforcement, and 3) system change, which involves altering aspects of the juvenile justice system that may contribute to DMC (OJJDP, 2009a).

*Direct services* tend to address differential offending (i.e., differential involvement in crime) by youth as well as differential opportunities for prevention and intervention, indirect effects, and accumulated disadvantage. Direct services include a wide range of programming such as prevention and early intervention programs, advocacy for systems-involved youth, diversion programs, and alternatives to secure detention and confinement. But because differential offending may not be the only factor contributing to DMC or might not be a factor at all, addressing systems factors is vital. Two ways to address systems factors are to provide training and technical assistance to juvenile justice personnel and law enforcement, and to change the system.

*Training and technical assistance* can address various DMC contributing mechanisms by addressing unintentional racial bias, building cultural competency, and improving interactions between youths and juvenile justice personnel. Training and technical assistance on strategies such as using risk assessment instruments is also important.

*System change strategies* seek to alter the basic procedures, policies, and rules that define how a juvenile justice system operates to address DMC. Because these strategies aim to transform the system itself, they have the potential to produce widespread lasting change. However, they can be challenging to implement, given the extensive cross-agency coordination they often require and the resistance from leadership and front-line staff that may result.

When implemented properly, system change strategies can address DMC-contributing mechanisms such as differential opportunities for prevention and intervention; differential handling; legislative,

policy and legal factors; indirect effects; and accumulated disadvantage. System changes can include small changes in policies and procedures as well as comprehensive, far-reaching reforms.

National foundations, nonprofit organizations, and advocacy groups also help states and local jurisdictions with implementing DMC-reduction strategies, often in collaboration with OJJDP. Some examples include the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change/DMC Action Network, the W. Haywood Burns Institute for Juvenile Justice Fairness & Equity (Burns Institute), and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI).

The Models for Change/DMC Action Network assembles teams from select local jurisdictions, presents the latest thinking of national experts, and facilitates interactive learning. The Burns Institute is a national organization working to reduce overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system by promoting and ensuring fairness and equity in youth-serving systems across the nation. JDAI is a nationwide effort to help local and state juvenile justice systems eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure detention for juveniles. Although JDAI is not exclusively dedicated to DMC reduction, reducing racial and ethnic disparities is one of its eight core strategies. Today, JDAI is the most widely replicated juvenile justice initiative in the United States (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2014). Numerous other local and national juvenile justice organizations also focus on DMC reduction.

## Outcome Evidence

The literature on what works to reduce DMC is not as extensive as the literature on what works in delinquency prevention or other areas of juvenile justice. OJJDP's DMC TA Manual states, "Identifying high-quality programs that can address specific DMC factors in a given community has been one of the most difficult obstacles in developing effective DMC initiatives" (Gies, Cohen, and Villarruel, 2009, 4-4).

Nevertheless, a few evaluated programs could address differential offending, some of which are designed specifically for youth of color. For example, Strong African American Families (SAAF) is a parental training and family therapy program grounded in social bonding and control theories. The program works to strengthen the attachment between parent and child to reduce the likelihood of youth involvement in various problem behaviors, particularly alcohol and substance abuse. A 2006 study by Brody and colleagues found the program was effective in reducing alcohol use and enhancing resistance skills and future-oriented goals among African American youths ages 10 to 14.

Familias Unidas targets Hispanic families with adolescents ages 12 to 17. The program aims to increase parental involvement with their children's peers and school and to improve family bonding and cohesion. It also works on building supportive relationships among Hispanic immigrant parents to integrate them into the greater community and reduce feelings of social isolation. By providing parents with additional knowledge and tools to raise healthy children, the intervention aims to prevent or reduce illicit drug use, antisocial behavior, and risky sexual behavior. A 2003 study by Pantin and colleagues showed the program had a significant impact on family functioning (although there was no effect on adolescent behavior programs, antisocial behavior, or risky sexual behavior). A 2009 study by Pantin and colleagues did show a significant effect on the substance use of program participants over time. The proportion of youth in the comparison group who reported substance use increased 21 percentage points, from 13 percent at the baseline to 34 percent at the 30-month follow-up. The proportion of youth in the treatment group reporting substance use increased 10 percentage points, from 15 percent at the baseline to 25 percent at the follow-up.



Project BUILD (Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development, now the BUILD Violence Intervention Curriculum), is a violence prevention curriculum designed to help youths in detention overcome problems they may face in their communities, such as gangs, drugs, and crime. The program is designed to intervene in the lives of youths who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system to reduce recidivism and diminish the prospects that they will become adult offenders. A 2000 study by Lurigio and colleagues found that youths who participated in Project BUILD had significantly lower rates of recidivism as compared with nonparticipants.

For more information on the programs, please click the links below.

[Strong African American Families](#)  
[Familias Unidas](#)  
[Project BUILD](#)

In addition, significant knowledge can be gained from the experiences of emerging programs in jurisdictions. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's JDAI has had some positive effect on DMC at certain sites through detention reform (e.g., Santa Cruz, California; Multnomah County, Oregon). Positive effects on DMC resulted when site detention efforts emphasized reducing disparity and when sites used strategies such as objective admission-screening instruments, new or enhanced alternatives-to-detention programs, expedited case processing to reduce length of stay in detention, and new policies and practices (Hinton Hoytt et al. 2003).

Bernalillo County, New Mexico was able to reduce racial disparities among arrests and diversions after focusing on multiple DMC reduction strategies designed primarily for system reform involving multiple partners over periods of time. These included increased attention to data, enhanced community-based services for court-involved youths, a freestanding community mental health clinic, JDAI involvement, and increased access to diversion (Spinney et al. 2014).

The State of Connecticut was able to reduce DMC at referral to court after a sustained focus on data collection and analysis, development and implementation of a police training curriculum, model memoranda of understanding between police and schools to reduce school-based arrests and referrals to court, and two informational campaigns addressing DMC and school discipline (2014). Finally, a recent study funded by OJJDP found that jurisdictions that successfully reduced disparities in their systems used the following eight strategies (Spinney et al. 2014):

1. Focus on data collection and utilization.
2. Increase collaboration with other state and local agencies, police, judges, and the community.
3. Shift the institutional culture from a punitive or procedural focus toward a focus on what was best for the youths and the community.
4. Affiliate with national juvenile justice reform initiatives.
5. Create alternatives to secure detention, secure confinement, and formal system involvement.
6. Focus intentionally on DMC reduction (and not just on general system improvement) while using a non-accusatory tone.
7. Maintain leadership at the local level, the state level, or both
8. Make DMC reduction a long-term priority.

Other strategies identified in the study included the use of risk assessment instruments to determine placement in secure detention; directing DMC-reduction interventions at the system (and not at the youths); and changing policies, procedures, and laws.

## Conclusion

The existence of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system is a complicated social problem in the United States today. Its causes are multifaceted and unclear, and methodologically rigorous studies linking interventions to system-wide decreases in these disparities are not available (National Research Council 2013, 234–235). Exacerbating the difficulty of addressing this issue is the fact that racial and ethnic disparities exist well before contact with the juvenile justice system has occurred—in child welfare, the foster care system, school readiness, school performance, and school suspensions and expulsions. Youth of color are more likely to live in single-parent families, in poverty, in disadvantaged communities, and in high crime areas. Given the problem’s extent and complexity, this issue is difficult to address.

The 2013 National Research Council report on reforming juvenile justice summarizes the continued need to address this complex issue: 1) the existence of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system raises questions of bias, fairness, and legitimacy regarding its functioning; and 2) these disparities raise questions about the larger life-course trajectories of many youths in minority communities who may become marked by criminal records early in life (211).

Since 1988, OJJDP has mandated that states participating in the federal Title II Formula Grant Program address racial and ethnic disparities. In 2014, OJJDP Administrator Robert L. Listenbee testified before a field [hearing](#) of the Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on the reauthorization of the JJDP Act, emphasizing the reduction in DMC as one of his top five priorities.

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