

# ***Racial Disparities in the likelihood of high school dropouts***

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## **Abstract**

Previous studies have shown that racial disparities exist for many social and economic indicators in the U.S. The three most common races that are affected are African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians. This study will show the impacts of race and family structure on the likelihood of high school dropouts. Race plays an important part in understanding the education and achievement gap. However, differences in the likelihood of students dropping out of school cause most people to assume that all races do not have an equal chance of achieving an education. This study hopes to also answer questions related to race and accessibility to resources. This study will further discuss how to get the tools and resources that are needed for all races, in order to help reduce the prevalence of a high school dropout.

## **Introduction**

This study examines the racial disparities in the likelihood of high school dropout amongst teenagers in different groups of races such as African Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics. It will also examine how differences in family structure affect dropouts. The statistical program, STATA will be used to check the number of students from each race that are not enrolled in school, for drop out rates. For family structure, the study will examine the relationship between single parent family homes and drop out rates amongst different races and how this compare to the corresponding relationship among children in two parent family households.

## **Objective**

The study will attempt to show that high school students living in single parent households are at a disadvantage in terms of dropping out of high school compared to students in two parent households. This study expects to prove that single parent family homes are at a disadvantage in comparison to two parent family households. The study also tries to understand why people that are Caucasian seem to be more privileged than those that are Hispanic and African American with regard to their schooling outcomes. It will also try to understand why there is a gap between different races amongst high school drop out rates. The following questions are examined. What is the problem? What

has been said? Why is race important in understanding this situation? What has not been said that we are trying to find?

### **Literature Review**

The history of excessive drop out rates by many high school students has been a problem in society. Dropping out of school has been caused by high retention rates, failing classes, not attending classes and low scholastic achievement “(Garnier, Jacobs, Stein , 1997).” Some problems associated with increased rates in high school drop outs are single parent families, divorce, unstable family environments and income “(Garnier, Jacobs, Stein , 1997).” Other reasons people drop out are due to social background, race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure and inner-city residence, academic background, ability, test scores, grade-repeating histories, academically related behaviors as engagement with school, grades, course completion and failures, truancy and school disciplinary encounters “( Burkam, Lee, 2003).” Many researchers have pondered the significance of many students dropping out of school at an alarming rate. The dropout rates have influenced many students to not empower themselves but settle for less.

Other related factors that affect many youths today include many sociological factors as not liking school in general or the school they were attending, not getting along with teachers or students, having disciplinary problems such as being suspended or expelled, or not feeling safe in school, had a family to support, got pregnant or had a drug or alcohol problem “(Schwartz, 1998).” According to Schwartz (1998), students that live in cities are twice as likely to drop out of school than students that do not live in the city, while Hispanics are twice as likely to drop out of school than African Americans. Caucasians and Asians differ because they are least likely to drop out of school. Mostly students tend to drop out by the eighth grade.

Another factor that has a significant impact on students is the structure of their household (Parcell, Powell, 1997). Some students live in single parent homes while others live in a home where both parents are present. When it comes to single mothers, many do not have the support to work and to help their children (Powell, Parcell, 1997). According Powell and Parcell, one parent present in the household lowers a child’s capability in graduating from high school (Powell, Parcell,1997). They also noted that single parent households do not provide the proper “social and economic resources” for the child in high school in which can “negatively affect a child’s success” (Powell, Parcell,1997). Boys that grow up with two parents, have a better chance of receiving a job that pays well than boys that grow up with just women as the head of the household showing that boys with single parent mothers receive jobs of lower pay than what their own father had as a job (Powell, Parcel,1997).

According to Parcell and Powell, single parent households lack the resources to give their children a higher education which causes a student to drop out of school at an early age. Single parent households with a mother present that do not have male figures present tends to cause a daughter to have children early or get married early because they have no male role models in their lives. For a son to be raised by a single parent causes him to not have a male figure. When whites come from a household of two parents where one of their siblings is pregnant, the other siblings are more likely to drop out of high

school (Powell, Parcell, 1997). The women in the family become at risk for not finishing high school as compared to the sons in the family (Powell, Parcell, 1997).

According to the Census Bureau ten percent of black single parent mothers hold a bachelor's degree compared to seventeen percent of white single mothers (JBHE Foundation, 2003). Only eight percent of single black fathers have a bachelor's degree which is lower compared to white single fathers, twenty-three percent of whom hold a bachelor's degree ( JBHE Foundation, 2003). Those statistics are alarming for single parent homes, which shows that white single parent fathers are three times more likely to hold a bachelor's degree compared to a black single father (JBHE Foundation, 2003).

Parental income also affects a child because parents that did not go far in their education, have difficult times getting their child to develop (Corcoran, 1995). Single parent households where the female is in charge and with people who are not white are more than likely to experience living in poverty because they do not have the correct skills to provide for their children which causes economic deprivation "( Corcoran, 1995)." Many parents cannot help their children achieve a good education because of unmeasured parental values, health conditions and their own abilities "( Corcoran, 1995)."

Living in poverty not only causes a decrease in a child's IQ but also causes a decrease in educational attainment (Corcoran, 1995). This causes the child as they get older to not want to produce good work in high school (Corcoran, 1995). Many students drop out of high school because they do not have the correct resources supporting them in which causes the low wage rates and many hours worked when they leave school ( Lichter, 1997). However, not only living in poverty affects a child but also living on welfare. Many parents accumulate a self-defeating work attitude and poor work ethics that their child experiences and eventually develops because they model what they see from their parent "(Corcoran, 1995)." If a child always sees their parent being dependent on a check every month and not being motivated to work in order to survive, then the child is more than likely going to depend on welfare as they get older instead of wanting to be independent (Corcoran, 1995).

## **Data and Methods**

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the data used was from the 2000 U.S. census and the analysis uses a variety of analytical methods. In the data, Caucasians, Hispanics and African Americans were used. The individuals that were excluded individuals were from other races because there was not enough information provided. Students in the age group from age thirteen to age nineteen that dropped out of high school were examined. Students below the age of twelve were not studied because students that are under age thirteen are not in high school yet. The minimum age was thirteen to a maximum age of nineteen because most people tend to be out of high school at that age. Students that graduated from high school were not present in this study. The program, STATA, was used for data analysis. The variables that were used were race, school enrollment, sex whether male or female, age, parental income from single parent and two parent households, welfare, dropout, and educational attainment. The expected outcome will show that single parent households are at a disadvantage compared to two

parent households when it comes to students dropping out of high school and that the disadvantage of single parent households is greater for minorities.

The methods that were used were mixed methods. The quantitative part is from the program STATA. The program, STATA, helped to determine the statistics of drop out rates amongst Hispanics, Caucasians and African Americans. However, all other research is qualitative with me using various scholarly articles to prove my research.

### Definition of Dropout

Students between the ages of 13 and 19 who are not currently enrolled in school but at the same time, have not yet graduated from high school.

### Results

According to Table 1, “Characteristics of Teenagers”, the percentage of males is significantly higher than females. For blacks, the percentages of children that are living in single parent family households or live in poverty, are very high and nearly three times the respective percentages for whites. The percentage of children that live with parents that are on welfare are disturbing with 26% of white children, 61% of black, and 39% of Hispanics children. The average age is approximately fifteen for all the races.

Table 1 “Characteristics of Teenagers”

	Blacks	Hispanics	Whites
Females	49	48	48
Males	51	52	52
Age (mean)	15.4	15.7	15.4
Live in Single Par. HH (%)	59.5	35.68	25.16
Parents in Poverty (%)	28.99	25.65	9.57
Parents on welfare (%)	61.23	38.91	26.4
Sample Size	32,666	16,353	171,549

Table 2, “The Effects of Dropouts Amongst Race” presents estimates of schooling dropout amongst Hispanics, Blacks and Whites children in all the teenage ages. The way this table is shown is comparing the numbers of blacks and Hispanics in comparison to whites. The astericks show that the differences in the percentages are significant. Three asterisks means the numbers are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level while only one asterick next to a number would mean that the significance is lower, at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Table 2 also shows that white children whose parents live on welfare have a higher rate of dropout than black children whose parents are on welfare, while Hispanics have a higher percentage of teenagers who have dropped out than blacks and whites. Across the board, females from all three racial groups appear to have the lower numbers in dropouts in comparison to males. For children with parents that live on welfare in the Hispanic community, the percentages are double the percentages of blacks and whites. For children

with parents that live in poverty, whites and blacks have similar dropout rates with black males having 10.84% and females 11.64% in comparison to whites with 13.94% for males and females 13.83%. Female percentages on the table are relatively lower in all areas from welfare, to single parent family to parents in poverty.

Table 2- The Effects of dropouts amongst race

	Males			Females		
	blacks	Hispanics	whites	blacks	Hispanics	whites
Single Parent family	9.95***	28.02***	12.15	9.12**	17.34***	10.22
Parents on welfare	9.93***	27.37***	12.03	9.12**	16.78***	10.24
Parents in poverty	10.84***	20***	13.94	11.64***	16.98***	13.83
ALL	8.3***	20.03***	6.6	7.18***	14.34***	5.7

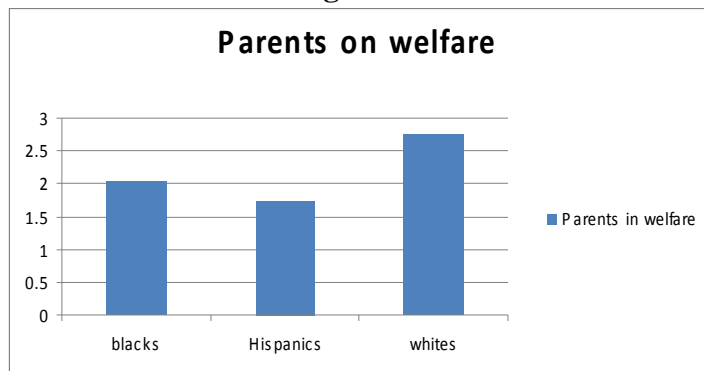
Table 3, “The Percentage of Students that dropped out” at age 15, there is a trend where Blacks, Whites and Hispanics start to drop out of school. At age 16, the percentage of Hispanics that drop out of school is 10.71% in comparison to whites and blacks which shows for Hispanics, the percentage of children dropping out at this age is nearly double that of the other races. At age 17, the Hispanics lead once again in percentages. At age 18, there tends to be a significant rise in percentages for all three races. At age 18, Blacks dropout at 28.1% with Hispanics at 48.33% and Whites at 18.64%. This gap shows that there must be a reason for these large numbers from age 16 to 18. At age 19, the numbers change in race with instead of blacks usually having the second highest dropout rates, the percentages show that at age 19, whites have the second highest drop out rates. The Hispanics lead once again with 80%, with whites second with 66% and blacks third with 61%. The graph that shows the percent of students that dropped out shows the difference in drop out rates at different ages.

Table3-The Percentage of Students that dropped out

Age	Blacks	Hispanics	Whites
13	1.38	2.23	0.95
14	1.54	2.94	1.16
15	2.13	4.8	1.58
16	3.66	10.71	3.49
17	8.28	19.21	6.62
18	28.1	48.33	18.64
19	61.43	80.56	66.27

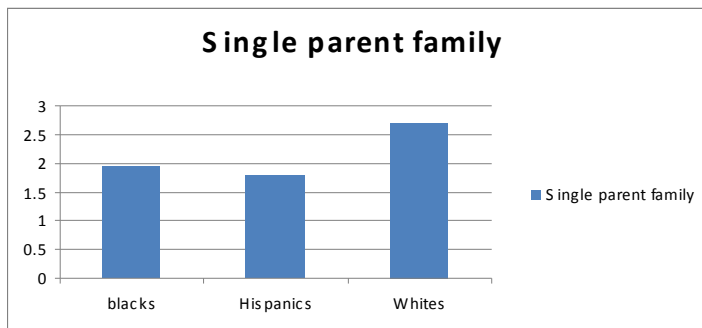
**The odds of dropout within each race for teenagers in single parent families**

**Figure 1**



**The odds of dropout within each race for teenagers whose parents are on welfare**

**Figure 2**



**The odds of dropout within each race for teenagers whose parents live in poverty**

**Figure 3**

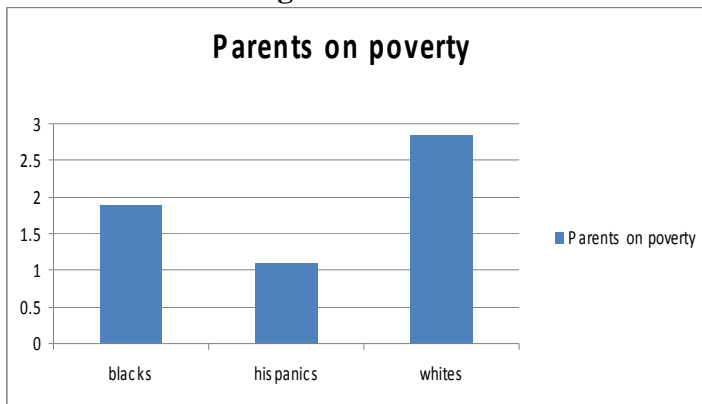


Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship between Blacks to Blacks, Hispanics to Hispanics and Whites to Whites. The three figures above also show that the odds of dropping out amongst children whose parents are on welfare, parents on poverty and single parent family households are higher in comparison to Blacks and Hispanics.

**Conclusion**

From the study of “Racial Disparities In the Likelihood of High School Dropouts”, the conclusion is that Caucasians have the lowest dropout rates compared to African Americans and Hispanics. However, out of all three races, Hispanics have the highest drop out rates. This study has also shown that when Caucasians are affected by living in a single parent family household, having parents in poverty and parents on welfare when they have dropped out, it turns out they are more likely to drop out of school compared to African Americans. When it comes to single parent households in comparison to two parent family households, a single parent family household is at a disadvantage because they do not have enough resources to provide for a child in comparison to a two parent household. In order to diminish the number of students dropping out of school, there

should be more programs available to help students that are struggling in various subjects such as English and Math. There also needs to be more resources as after school tutoring, more funding for schools, as well as funding for books that appear as though they will fall apart.

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