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# How Research Can Help Address the Goals of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative

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This brief summarizes a longer Social Policy Report

Development of Boys and Young Men of Color: Implications of Developmental Science for My Brother's Keeper Initiative

READ THE FULL REPORT

## Why Does This Matter?

President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative in recognition of research showing that boys and men of color are at particular risk for poor outcomes. Research from developmental science is an important resource in addressing the initiative's goals of strengthening development.

As early as 2018, children of color will become the majority of youth ages 18 years and younger.

## Background

- In 2014, President Obama established a commission to gather information, propose policies, and implement programs to place more boys and men of color on a positive developmental trajectory.
- In the United States, as of 2010, there were more than 22 million boys and men
- of color under age 20, and by 2018, children of color will become the majority of youth under 19. By 2050, people of color will become the largest percentage of U.S. citizens. Boys and men of color include African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asians.
- Many youth of color live in impoverished households and communities with disproportionately high poverty. They attend disproportionately high-poverty, low- performing schools with more inexperienced teachers and fewer opportunities for advanced courses.
- Boys and men of color experience harsher penalties for rule infractions than Whites and are less likely to be given a second chance. They are more likely than Whites to live in communities with high crime and to have negative encounters with police. The involvement of law enforcement and the juvenile justice system in school disciplinary strategies raises concerns.

## Implications for Policy and Practice

Research provides guidance on specific approaches to address selected goals of the My Brother's Keeper initiative: school readiness, reading at grade level, completing high school and college, entering the workforce, and reducing violence.

- Put in place support programs for parents of young children that focus on building strong parent-child bonds, encourage higher-order thinking and learning, promote positive child- management strategies, and help parents foster literacy and numeracy, coordinating with the efforts of early childhood providers.
- Start school interventions for reading in the early grades. Concentrate efforts on competent reading by the end of first grade, an early benchmark that signals whether children will read proficiently by third grade.
- Strengthen teacher preparation and instructional quality to address the issue that many boys of color attend low-performing schools.
- Encourage school districts to rethink discipline policies. Strengthen awareness and reliance on practices that emphasize restitution and personal responsibility in school settings over approaches that emphasize punishment and juvenile justice procedures
- Review juvenile and criminal justice procedures and punishments for bias that might imperil youth of color. Train decision makers in the justice system and police officers on ways to address unconscious racial bias and mitigate its effects.
- Extend access to college by considering approaches like: expanding loan forgiveness policies and including the college years in public education.
- Provide incentives for young men of color to consider teaching as part of loan-forgiveness programs, increasing the number of positive role models for boys of color.

## What the Research Says

- Boys are more sensitive to environmental variations and their brains develop more slowly, affecting self- regulation and executive function. Boys of color are disproportionately affected by poverty, and poverty may exacerbate these issues.
- Cognitive development is comparable for boys of color and their peers in the early years. However, research suggests that boys of color are at greater risk for experiencing problems regulating attention, emotions, and behavior, which can impede school readiness and contribute to suspensions and expulsions.
- By third grade, boys of color are more likely to perform below grade level in reading. Approaches to building early language and literacy that can be implemented both at home and in school include: reading aloud and discussing books, engaging in conversations about interests, and creating games around learning letter names and sounds.
- African American and Latino males are more likely to receive detentions, suspensions, and expulsions, which makes completing school less likely. Boys of color report more discrimination and unfair

treatment by teachers.

- Boys and men of color are exposed to more violence, and are more likely to be victims of violence, perpetrators, and incarcerated. For example, the rate of African American and Latino male deaths by homicide is 16.4 and 5.1 times that of non-Hispanic White males, respectively. Incarceration rates for African American and Latino males are 5.5 and 2.9 times that of non-Hispanic White males, respectively.
- Exposure to violence affects behavior problems and mental health, including externalizing behavior problems (e.g., acting out and aggressive behavior), posttraumatic stress, and depression. Yet, access to mental health services is limited.

This brief summarizes a longer *Social Policy Report*, "Development of Boys and Young Men of Color: Implications of Developmental Science for My Brother's Keeper Initiative," by **Oscar A. Barbarin**, Elkins Distinguished Professor and Chair of African American Studies Department, University of Maryland; **Velma McBride Murry**, Lois Autrey Betts Chair, Education and Human Development, and Professor, Human and Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University; **Patrick Tolan**, Director, Youth-Nex, the UVA Center to Promote Effective Youth Development, and Professor, Curry School of Education and Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia; **Sandra Graham**, Distinguished Professor and UC Presidential Chair in Education and Diversity, Department of Education, University of California, Los Angeles; and **the Boys of Color Research Collaborative**.