

Examining the Evidential Effects of Generational Trauma and Education

A Focus on Black Students, Families and Educators

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Abstract

Black families in the United States carry trauma that began with slavery and continued through Jim Crow, school segregation and present-day racism. That trauma is passed down through families, communities and, research suggests, biology. In schools it meets a second problem: Black students and educators remain underrepresented where opportunity is built and overrepresented in discipline. Building on the author's pilot study of Black and other mothers of color under traumatic stress during pregnancy, this study tests McGee's Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Stage Theory (TF-CBST) training and argues that education is the determinant that can either repeat generational trauma or interrupt it.

From Slavery to the Classroom

- 1619–1865

Slavery. Enslaved people were denied freedom, family stability and schooling.
- 1877–1954

Jim Crow. Separate, underfunded schools for Black children.
- 1954 on

Brown v. Board. About 100,000 Black teachers and principals were fired or demoted as schools desegregated (Fenwick, 2022).
- Today

The gap remains. Only 6% of public school teachers are Black (NCES, 2023).

Generational Trauma

Historical trauma and gendered racism shape Black youth's mental health across generations (Galán et al., 2022). It travels through three pathways:

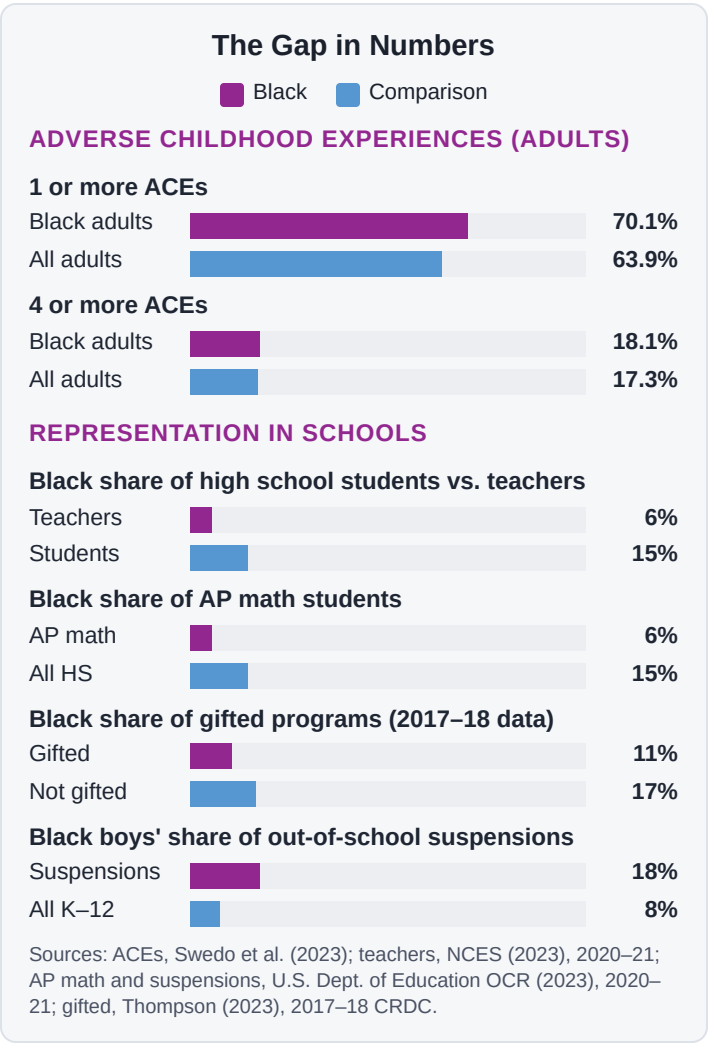
1. **Family:** parenting shaped by a caregiver's own unresolved stress.
2. **Structural:** segregation, redlining and unequal schools passed fewer resources to each generation.
3. **Biological:** trauma may also alter stress-response genes (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018); this is still being studied.

Racism is an ACE. The culturally informed ACE model (C-ACE) treats racism as a cause of other ACEs, an ACE itself, and a driver of worse mental health afterward (Bernard et al., 2021).

Thesis, Questions, Goals

Trauma rooted in slavery reaches Black children before school; underrepresentation compounds it. Equitable, trauma-informed education can interrupt the cycle.

1. How is trauma rooted in slavery and racism passed down in Black families?
2. How does underrepresentation of Black educators and students shape outcomes?
3. Does TF-CBST training lower distress among Black mothers?
4. How can educational leaders respond with equity?



Education Is a Determinant

Healthy People 2030, the U.S. government's health goals for 2020–2030, names education a social determinant of health (ODPHP, n.d.). ACEs predict dropout and lower achievement (Moore & Stoddard, 2025; Yeo et al., 2024). One Black teacher in K–3 made Black students 13% more likely to graduate (Gershenson et al., 2022).

Methodology

BUILDING ON THE PILOT STUDY

The pilot (McGee, Counseling Psychology, BSU) followed twenty mothers in marginalized communities of color from 20–25 weeks of pregnancy to birth. This study centers Black mothers, adds TF-CBST training, and follows children into school. Black women die from pregnancy-related causes at more than three times the rate of White women: 50.3 vs. 14.5 per 100,000 births (Hoyert, 2025).

Design: Quasi-experimental, pre-test / post-test with a control group.

Participants: Black expectant mothers at 20–25 weeks and mothers within 6 months of birth. Pilot: n = 20; full study: sample size to be set.

In person TF-CBST group	Virtual TF-CBST group	Control No training
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Procedure: Pre-test → eight-session TF-CBST training → post-test → follow-up as the child enters school.

Instruments:

1. Lifestyle Assessment; Psychological Distress Profile
2. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)
3. ACE Questionnaire plus racial discrimination items (C-ACE)
4. Internalized Racial Oppression Scale (Bailey et al., 2011)
5. Education indicators: parent education; child attendance, grades, discipline, and Black teachers in the child's school

Analysis:

1. Paired t-test: pre vs. post in each group
2. ANOVA: in-person vs. virtual vs. control
3. Regression: education and racial discrimination as predictors

McGee's Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Stage Theory (TF-CBST)

With an Adlerian focus, TF-CBST engages caregivers and children in ongoing, age-appropriate conversations, activities and practice around traumatic stress, including racial stress, to build coping and resistance.

+ Adequate: connection succeeds	– Inadequate: mother/child struggle
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- 1

Activation: 20–25 wks–birth
- 2

Developmental: birth–5
- 3

Learning: 5–13 (school)
- 4

Operating: 18+

Example: The Author's Dissertation

Toward Equity: Cultural Belonging and Racial Identity Among Non-White Students at HBCUs

Lens: Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and Cross's Nigrescence theory of Black identity (Cross, 1991).

Instruments: Culturally Engaging Campus Environments survey (Museus, 2014) and the Internalized Racial Oppression Scale (Bailey et al., 2011).

Link: the same lens follows the child from TF-CBST's Activation period to belonging in higher education.

Implications for Leaders

- Recruit and keep Black teachers and leaders.
- Audit who is suspended and who reaches AP and gifted courses.
- Train staff in trauma-informed, culturally relevant practice.
- Partner with Black families, churches, HBCUs and counselors.

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