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Abstract: Use of an ecological framework to view embedded systems, and examines the intersection of gender and race in education to understand the plight of rural NC African American Males.

Keywords: rural African American males, Early College High Schools, intersectionality, ecological theory

The Problem

While more than a quarter of America’s public school students receive their education in rural settings, there is little empirical research about the counseling development and exploration activities of rural youth (Griffin, Hutchins & Meece, 2011). Research studies conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s suggested that when compared to urban students, rural students have lower educational and career aspirations (Griffin, Hutchins & Meece, 2011). African-American males in rural counties face a difficult journey to secondary and post-secondary education achievement (Irvin et al. 2011).

African American males continue to be in a dire situation. The rapidly increasing population of poorly educated African American men is becoming more disconnected from the mainstream society. National statistics and studies show that African American males are overrepresented in juvenile detention centers and prisons (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Wood (2011) writes that African American retention rates are dismal, and that the dropout rates of more than 45 percent are experienced by White and Hispanic Males. Statistics such as this signal a need for policies that may reduce the loss of African-American males as well as other male students.

Purpose of Research

This research will add to the empirical literature on rural education issues among African American males with a focus on completion of high school and the challenges they face along that educational journey. This research will raise awareness of the needs of this underrepresented population, and provide policy recommendations that can influence curriculum development, educational and retention policies and address equity gaps among rural students. It is imperative that educators develop a pedagogical practice where rural African American males gain education access and success. While both class and gender can and do intersect race, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between whites and students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Research Questions

There is little research about rural youth, especially rural African American males, who enroll in Early College High School (ECHS). The primary research questions are:

1. What are the experiences of rural African American males in early college high school programs in NC?
2. What are the biggest barriers to completing high school as a rural African American male?
3. What influence does the family and environment have on rural African American males regarding education completion?

**Findings and Conclusion**

Findings indicate that poverty encountered by rural African American youth substantially increase their chances for educational problems including low achievement (Irvin et al. 2010). Previous research on rural schools has rarely applied an ecological framework that views the multiple layers and embedded systems that influence learning activities (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Methods used by critical race theorists include stories and narratives as a means of building cohesion with minority groups and changing the mind-set created by stories of the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The use of intersectionality to examine the experiences of African American males supports the social justice aspects of educational research, and adds to the growing literature on the intersection of gender and race in higher education.

The ECHS model in NC appears to be reducing some gaps that occur between members of target populations or other students (Edmunds, 2010). A recent report indicates that 9th grade students show improved attendance, reduced suspensions, and increased numbers of students on track for college (Edmunds, 2010). However, examination of the ethnicity of these students indicates that African American males still have lower completion numbers when compared to other majority populations including white and Asian males.

**References**


