

An anti-racist approach to supporting child care through COVID-19 and beyond ^[1]

Author: Sethi, Shiva; Johnson-Staub, Christine & Gallagher Robbins, Katherine

Source: The Center for Law and Social Policy

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Jul 2020

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Excerpted from Introduction

Child care is a critical part of our country's economy that helps parents work and supports children's healthy development. However, decades of inadequate investment mean that most families struggle to find and afford high-quality care, despite child care workers receiving very low wages.

Due to racism and discrimination, communities of color experience even worse effects of this underinvestment, creating inequities in access, quality, and compensation. The systemic racial and gender inequities that have always shaped the child care field are exacerbated by the uneven impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on communities of color. Black and Latinx Americans are experiencing higher rates of serious illness or death from the virus across the country and are more likely to be exposed because they are overrepresented in essential fields like health care, food-related industries, and transit; more likely to live in high-density housing; more dependent on public transportation; and more likely to face inequities in access to and delivery of health care. Native communities are bearing the brunt of underfunded tribal health care systems and inequitable access to federal pandemic relief funds. Asian Americans are contending with both the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus, as well as the surge of racist anti-Asian rhetoric and hate crimes targeting their communities. Structural and historic racism related to health care access and practice means that Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities are less likely to get COVID-19 testing, diagnosis, and treatment and may be less likely to seek general medical care. Within this context—along with the historic barriers to child care for children and families of color and the undervaluing of child care educators of color—children, families, and providers are feeling these negative effects more profoundly. Child care cannot be an afterthought during this crisis—our relief and recovery efforts must be rooted in racial equity. Doing so requires policymakers and advocates to consider the immediate need for action to address inequities, as well as the historic and structural racism that harms families and the field. This brief explains the origins of long-standing racial inequities in child care and early education, examines how the COVID-19 crisis has exposed and exacerbated these inequities, and offers recommendations for how policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders can address them to rebuild a stronger, more equitable system.

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