Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

# A Multimodal Approach to Exploring the Adultification of Black Girls and Its Impact on Physical and Mental Health Outcomes

## Statement of Problem

Childhood is a time of opportunity—to learn, grow, and benefit from developmentally appropriate missteps. Yet this opportunity is not afforded to all youth.

Adultification is the process by which youth are perceived as less innocent and more adult-like. Research has shown that Black youth in particular are not provided the same understanding and leniency to make mistakes as their non-Black peers leading to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes.

The differences in treatment of Black youth are further compounded by sexism that creates a unique experience for Black girls and young Black women. Most existing literature on adultification comes from legal context and/or has consisted of largely survey data. It is important to better understand the lived experiences of adolescents who identify as Black and female and explore the ways in which adultification affects their interactions within institutions such as health care systems and schools and leads to their emotional and cognitive needs remaining unmet.

A better understanding of youth and caregiver perspectives on adultification will be critical to developing strategies for individual and family level support as well as policy change.

## Description

We aim to explore the experiences and impact of adultification on the health and well-being of Black girls and young Black women.

Our study team includes Dr. Tawanna Jones, executive director of we REIGN (Rooting, Empowering, Inspiring a Girls Nation), a community-based organization for Black girls in Philadelphia, and youth members of the organization (youth advisory board). Members of we REIGN's youth advisory board received education from the principal investigators about the conduct of research and co-led the study design.

To explore how Black girls and caregivers view themselves, we asked youth to share a photo of themselves that was shown to their caregiver in the photo-elicitation exercise where both the youth and caregiver were asked to reflect on the chosen photo and describe what they see to their interviewer.

Following this reflection, youth and their caregivers participated in a semi-structured interview to share their thoughts and experiences navigating the world and balancing challenges that result from the intersectionality of their racial and gender identity.

## Next Steps

Our team's next steps include utilizing the study results to inform policy changes, as recommended by the youth advisory group, to promote the well-being of young Black girls and their caregivers.

In review of study data, the youth advisory board met to inform the follow recommendations: (1) establishing inclusive learning environments, (2) expanding sex education programs tailored to Black girls, (3) offering accessible youth therapy and parenting classes, (4) creating a dedicated mental health center for Black girls, and (5) allocating funding for kid-friendly spaces in efforts to enhance individual and family-level support, mitigating the effects of adultification on their health and well-being, and reducing treatment disparities.

Currently, our team is creating a mural as an innovative strategy to disseminate findings to and with the community led by a local West Philadelphia muralist and the youth advisory board.

*This project page was last updated in December 2024.*

## Suggested Citation

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, PolicyLab. *A Multimodal Approach to Exploring the Adultification of Black Girls and Its Impact on Physical and Mental Health Outcomes* [Online]. Available at: **http://www.policylab.chop.edu** [Accessed: plug in date accessed here].

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## Funders

Funders
PolicyLab Community Partnerships in Research Program

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## Related Tools & Publications

Adultification of Young Black Females on Their Health and Well-being: A Qualitative Study
Article
Jun 2025