

# Disproportionality & Disparities in Child Welfare: Facts, History & Challenge

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Changing Perceptions and Practices:  
Addressing Disproportionate Representation  
In Michigan's Child Welfare System  
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## Purpose

- Definition of key terms
- Scope of the problem
- Theories of causation
- Historical Precedents
- Our Challenge

## Child Welfare System Goals

- Safety
  - Minimum standards of care
  - Coercive power of state
- Permanency
  - Reunification
  - Adoption
  - Guardianship
- Wellbeing
  - Achieving developmental milestone
- Method: Decision making and service

### I. Definitions

- **Disproportionality**-the relationship between a group's presence in the general population and their presence in the child welfare system
- **Disparate outcomes** - the varied levels of resolution (reunification, adoption, guardianship) of child welfare cases by group

## Definitions

- **Culture**-Integrated way of thinking doing and believing that persists across at least three generations
- **Race** – an aggregation of physical characteristics that are used to categorize people and to distribute rights and resources

## Definition

- **Institutional Racism**- the way in which the policies and practices of organizations disadvantage certain populations on a consistent basis
  - Internalized superiority
  - Internalized oppression
  - Structures that hold the social arrangements in place

## WHAT THE DATA TELL US

### Race and Maltreatment

- ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL INCIDENCE STUDY OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT # 2 and # 3
  - There were **no significant race differences** in the **incidence** of maltreatment and maltreatment related **injuries**.

## Substantiation:

- According to Child Maltreatment 2007, rates of substantiated maltreatment vary by race and ethnicity.
  - American Indian or Alaskan Native and African American children have the highest rates of substantiated maltreatment when compared to white children
    - American Indian /Alaskan native = 14.2 per 1000
    - African American = 16.7 per 1000
    - White = 9.1 per 1,000 children
    - Hispanic= 10.3 per thousand
    - Asian= 2.4 per thousand
    - Multiple races= 14.0 per thousand

## Maltreatment types

According to Child Maltreatment 2007

- Neglect 59%
- Physical abuse 10.8%
- Sexual abuse 7.6%
- Psychological 4.2%
- Medical 0.9%
- Other 4.2%
- Multiple types 13%

## Baseline Child Population

- According to the U. S. Census Bureau the 2006 composition of the child population was:
  - 57.8% White Children, non-Hispanic
  - 20.3% Hispanic children
  - 14.6 % Black non- Hispanic
  - 0.9% American Indian children
  - 4% Asian Pacific Islander children
  - 2.5% two or more races

## Entry into Care:

- Based on the AFCARS data for 2006, of the 303,000 children entering care
  - 26% were Black as compared with 15% of the population (1.7x)
  - 2% were American Indian as compared with 1% of the child population (2x)
  - 19% were Hispanic as compared with 19% of the population (1x)
  - 45% were White as compared with 59% of the population (.79x)

## Foster Care Population

Of the national foster care population (510,000) on September 30, 2006:

- Black children comprised 32% as compared to 15% of the child population (2.1x).
- American Indian children comprised 2% as compared to 1% of the child population (2x).
- Hispanic children comprised 19% as compared to 20% of the child population (.95x).
- White non Hispanic children comprised 40% as compared to 59% of the child population (.67x).
- Asian children comprised 1% as compared with 4% of the child population (.25x)

## Exits from Care:

- Of the 289,000 children exiting care in 2006
  - 27% were Black although they comprise 32% of the foster care population (.84x)
  - 18% were Hispanic and they comprised 19% of the foster care population (.95x)
  - 46% were white although they comprised 40% of the population (1.15x)
  - 2% were American Indian and they comprise 2% of the foster care population (1x)

## Exits to Reunification

- The proportion of children being reunified has declined over the last two decades.
- In 2006, 49% were reunified with parents and 4% were reunified with other relatives.

## Waiting Children

- Of the 129,000 children waiting to be adopted on September 30, 2006
  - 32% (41,591) were Black non Hispanic
  - 20% (25,481) were Hispanic
  - 38% (49,637) were White non Hispanic
  - 2% ( 2,223) were Native America
  - 1% ( 651) were Asian
  - 300 were Hawaiian
- **Of the** waiting children 79,000 were legally free

## Exits to Adoption

- **Of the 51,000 children exiting to adoption**
  - Black 27% 13,783 of 41,591 (.33)
  - Hispanic 19% 9,569 of 25,481 (.38)
  - White 38% 22,979 of 49,637 (.46)
- **Exits to adoption have increased and the racial distribution was comparable in to the proportion of children in care, however.....**
- **Current adoption efforts do not meet the needs of waiting children.**

- **African American & American Indian Children**
  - Comparable incidence of maltreatment
  - Higher risk of being substantiated
  - Higher risk of placement
  - Longer length of stay in care
  - Less likely to exit care and more likely to age out
  - Comparable but inadequate adoption rates

- **Hispanic Children**

- Appear to be proportionately represented throughout the child welfare system
- The pattern varies based on jurisdiction

- **White children**

- Less likely to be substantiated
- Underrepresented at entry into care
- Underrepresented in placement
- Shorter time in care
- Slightly under-represented in adoptions

### III. Explanatory Theories

- Group have poor parenting capacities
  - Cultural predisposition
- Culture of poverty
- Personal inadequacy
- Lack of fit between needs and resources
- Visibility theory
  - Small populations
  - Public visibility

### Explanatory Theories

- Social disadvantage
- Structural disadvantage
  - Bad schools
  - Poor health care
  - Low paying jobs
  - Risk of incarceration
  - Health disparities
- Institutional / organizational racism

## IV. Child Welfare History and Themes

- Child welfare services and outsiders are linked
- Common themes
  - Cultural dominance
  - Religious continuity
  - Child rescue/resocialization

## Colonial Times

- Problem: unattached children, abandoned and orphaned children
  - Indenture
  - Apprenticeship
  - Bonding out
  - Slavery ....peculiar protection
  - Tribal children as enemies: war and removal

## The New Republic

- Almshouses
- Specialized philanthropic institutions
  - Orphanages
  - Houses of refuge
  - Schools for the deaf and blind
  - Tribal Boarding Schools

## Post Civil War Era

- Context
  - Disruption of the war
  - Immigration increases bring new ethnic and religious groups
  - Urbanization
  - Social Darwinism/fear of the intergenerational transmission of pauperism
  - Visibility of street children

## Post Civil War Era

- Child caring societies /child protection societies
- Free foster home movement in the west/children's aid societies
- Tribal boarding schools are initially established by religious organizations are federally funded
- African American children are cared for within the community and in segregated institutions

## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Juvenile court....recognizes the special status of children
- Mother's aid
- Private confidential infant adoption services develop
- New Deal Programs are not inclusive
- Theory and practice of child placement is developed
- African American and Native children are excluded from these program

## Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Child welfare legislation institutionalized child welfare
  - CAPTA-1974
  - ICWA-1978
  - 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Amendments
  - ASFA-1997
  - MEPA/IEP

## Racial Equity Study

- Qualitative Research
  - Why is it that African American children are more likely to enter foster care upon a report of neglect?

- Ethnographic approach to determine what organizational factors shape worker’s behavior and influence the outcomes for children
- Data collection;
  - Review of case record
  - Interview with all stake holders
  - Focus groups with parents and youth in care

## General Findings

1. African American families are not provided with supports that could prevent or divert their involvement with the child protective system. African Americans families and youth often experience the services offered to them by DHS as irrelevant, difficult to access, or inadequate to support and strengthen their families.
2. African American families experience child welfare systems as intrusive interventions that do not fairly assess and appreciate their unique strengths and weaknesses and fail to adequately explore the least restrictive placement options for children.

## General Findings

3. African American youth and families are negatively characterized or labeled by workers in the child welfare system. Some of these labels follow them through their interactions with various new workers and ultimately negatively affect the outcome of their case.

4. Advocacy on behalf of African American families and children is insufficient in helping them participate in, challenge, and negotiate the child protection system.

5. Inadequate mechanisms exist for African American parents and youth to hold DHS, providers, and advocates accountable for equitable treatment and quality services.

## Conclusion & Challenge

- Recognize that this is a complicated issues which is at the intersect of the individual and the institution
- Recognize that our institution reflect the values of the larger society
- Be willing to talk about race, social inequities, power and our agencies
- Be willing to look at ourselves

## Conclusion & Challenge

- Disparities and disproportionality documented
- From exclusion to over inclusion
- Historical focus on child rescue, re-socialization and cultural dominance
- Bias is incorporated into the policies and practice that shape the behaviors of workers every day
- There is an untold cost to children, families, communities and society

- Careful use of the authority of the state
- Need to partner with communities to deliver services in a manner that builds family and community capacity
- Make sure that partners are committed to fairness and cultural responsiveness
- Put family anger in context
- Resource that meet needs

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources are available from Casey Family Programs at no cost. Each publication can be ordered on line by going to [WWW.Casey.org](http://WWW.Casey.org) and clicking on the publications section and then navigating to the racial disparities section

### **An Analysis Of Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparity at the National, State, and County Levels**

This report was written by Senior Researcher Robert B. Hill, Race Matters Consortium, Westat. It was published in December 2007 by the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare.

### **Disproportionality: The Overrepresentation of Children of Color in the Foster Care System**

Children of color account for 42 percent of the US child population yet make up 57 percent of all children in foster care. This two-page policy brief presents the facts about disproportionality, and offers promising practices and recommendations to help reduce racial disparities in child welfare.

### **Engaging Communities in Taking a Stand for Children and Families**

This publication chronicles how the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services' Child Protective Services has worked with Casey to significantly shift its internal culture to one defined by family-focused practice.

### **Latino Children in Child Welfare**

This fact sheet provides data-based context about the growing population of Latino children who are served by the child welfare system.

### **Places to Watch**

Published in 2006, this report from the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare highlights the work of ten jurisdictions that are committed to reducing racial disproportionality and disparity in their child welfare systems.

### **Racial Disproportionality, Race Disparity, and Other Race-Related Findings in Published Works Derived from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being**

This paper was published in January 2008 by the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare. It draws on studies of data gathered during the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) to examine child welfare in the context of race and ethnicity.

### **Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare**

More than half of the 500,000 children in foster care on any day in America come from ethnic minority families even though children from minority communities make up less than half the children in this country. Why are so many children of color in the child welfare system? This paper is an extensive study of the research available on this topic.

### **Unsuccessful In-Home Child Welfare Service Plans Following a Maltreatment Investigation: Racial and Ethnic Differences**

Many child welfare professionals are familiar with racial disproportionality, the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system. Based on recent NSCAW data, this study examines disproportionality in children remaining in the home following a maltreatment investigation-an understudied but high-risk population.

### **Breakthrough Series Collaborative: Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families**

The breakthrough series collaborative methodology shows significant promise for bridging the gaps between best practices and actual practice. This 2005 report on recruitment and retention of foster families illustrates the use of the methodology and describes successful strategies and lessons learned.

### **Strategic Sharing**

A joint publication of Casey Family Programs and Foster Care Alumni of America, this 12-page strategic sharing booklet is for those who want to learn more about using their personal stories to effect change, while at the same time protecting their own well being.