casey family programs

Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System[i]

The Disproportionate Representation of Children of Color in Foster Care

The Color of Foster Care

On September 30, 2005, approximately three in five (58% or 292,692) of the 513,000[ii] children living in foster care placements were children of color, although children of color represented only 42% of the child population in the United States.[iii]

- 33 percent (166,482) of the children in foster care[ii] were **African American** although African American children make up only 15 percent of the U.S. child population.[iv] African Americans were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system at a rate of 2.21:1 (33.21/15).

- 2 percent (10,617) of the children in foster care[ii] were American Indian or Alaskan Native, but American Indian and Alaska Native children make up only 1 percent of the U.S. child population.[v] American Indians and Alaska Natives were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system at a rate of 2.12:1 (2.12/1).

- 19 percent (93,996) of the children in foster care[ii] were **Hispanic/Latino**, but Latinos make up 20 percent of the U.S. child population.[vi] Latinos were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system at a rate of 0.94:1 (18.75/20). Note, however, that in some states and communities, the proportion of Hispanic/Latino children in care is much higher than their proportion in the general population in that community.

- 42 percent (208,537) of the children in foster care[ii] were **non-Hispanic white**, while white children make up 58 percent of the U.S. child population.[vii] Whites were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system at a rate of 0.72:1 (41.61/58).

- 1 percent (2,973) of the children in foster care[ii] were **non-Hispanic Asian,** while Asian children represented 4 percent of the U.S. child population.[viii] Asians were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system at a rate of 0.15:1 (0.59/4).

The Relative Disparity Rate—Comparing Children of One Race or Ethnicity to Those of Another[ix]

- The relative proportion of **African American** children in the child welfare system compared to non-Hispanic white children in the child welfare system was 3.09:1 (2.21/0.72).
- The relative proportion of **Native American** children in the child welfare system compared to non-Hispanic white children in the child welfare system was 2.95:1 (2.12/0.72).
- The relative proportion of **Hispanic/Latino** children in the child welfare system compared to non-Hispanic white children in the child welfare system was 1.31 (0.94/0.72).
- The relative proportion of **Asian** children in the child welfare system compared to non-Hispanic white children in the child welfare system was 0.21:1 (0.15/0.72).

Representation at State and Local levels

Throughout the United States today, African American children are overrepresented in the child welfare system in every state. American Indian and Alaska Native children are all overrepresented in the jurisdictions in which they reside. Latino children are overrepresented in over 10 states. But this information does not fully describe the disproportionately of minority children in the child welfare system. Asians tend to be underrepresented in the child welfare system. In addition, if we look more closely at

Latino representation throughout the country we see that Latinos are overrepresented in some jurisdictions and underrepresented in others.[x]

Maltreatment Rates: Reporting, Screening and Investigation
There are no statistically significant differences in overall maltreatment rates between black and white families, according to three national incidence studies.[xi] After controlling for such factors as income level, unemployment, and location (urban or rural), African American communities actually have lower rates of child maltreatment than Caucasian communities.[xii]

While the overall maltreatment rates for black families are no greater than those for Caucasians, most research studies have found race to be an important factor in making reports to child protective services hotlines. Additionally, many public and private hospitals have over reported abuse and neglect among African Americans while they underreport maltreatment among Caucasians.[xiii] Some research studies suggest that race alone, or in interaction with other factors, is strongly related to the decision to investigate a call made to the child protective services hotline.[xiv] But additional studies are needed that control for a variety of factors such as family structure, employment, and income level.

Child Maltreatment Investigation Determination Rates
In some jurisdictions, child maltreatment is more likely to be indicated when families are African American or Hispanic than when they are Caucasian, and this overreporting is not corrected during the investigative process. Consequently, disproportionality continues from reporting to substantiation.[xv]

Children Entering Care
Race is an important factor that affects the decision to place a child in foster care.[xvi] In 2005, 50% (158,196) of the 311,000 children who entered foster care placements in the United States were children of color. Of these, 26% (80,430) were African American and 18% (56,603) were Hispanic.[xvii]

Length of Stay
Data show that in 2002, 27.9 percent of African American children were in care less than a month compared to 47.1 percent of white children. [xviii]

Limited Services while in Foster Care
Some research shows that families of color, when compared with white families, have less contact with child welfare workers and receive fewer services.[xix] For example:

- African American foster parents reported fewer hours of contact between social workers and their children than was reported by other racial and ethnic groups.[xx]
- Caucasian foster care parents received more services than any other racial and ethnic groups

Permanent Placements—Reunification
African American children are less likely than children of other races to be reunited with their families.[xxi] Five major studies in four states between 1990 and 1999 revealed that Caucasian children are four times more likely than African American children to be reunited with their families, and they are reunited more quickly.

Moreover, a reanalysis of national data in 2005 reconfirmed this finding. This analysis found race to continue to be a strong predictor of reunification, even when combined with other factors: age of entry, parental job skills, parental substance abuse problem, and services provided to caretaker.[xxii] In contrast, about equal proportions of children from different ethnic groups who are reunited with their families later return to foster care.[xxiii]

Permanent Placements—Adoption
One research study has shown that children of color, particularly African American children who are legally available for adoption, wait longer to be adopted. This study documented that African American children are adopted eventually in the same numbers but the process takes much longer.[xxiv]

What Causes Disproportional Representation of Different Racial and Ethnic Groups?
What are the reasons for disproportional representation of children of color in the child welfare system? What is the "most appropriate" representation of any group of children in the child welfare system? Theories about causation can be classified into three types: parent and family risk factors, community risk factors, and organizational and systemic factors.[xxv] The next sections describe each major reason, but it is important to note that risk factors, community factors, organizational factors, and systemic factors are often interrelated, and do not operate in isolation.

According to theories about ***parent and family risk factors*****,** children of color are overrepresented in the child welfare system because they have disproportionate needs. They are more likely to have risk factors, such as unemployment, teen parenthood, poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, domestic violence, mental illness, etc., that result in high levels of child maltreatment.[xxvi]

Proponents of ***community factors*** assert that overrepresentation has less to do with race or class and more with residing in neighborhoods and communities that have many risk factors, such as high levels of poverty, welfare assistance, unemployment, homelessness, single-parent families, and crime and street violence that make residents more visible to surveillance from public authorities.[xxvii]

In contrast, theories about ***organizational and systemic factors*** contend that racial overrepresentation results from: the decision-making processes of CPS agencies, cultural insensitivity and biases of workers, governmental policies, and institutional or structural racism.[xxviii]

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[i] Disproportionality for the purposes of this fact sheet refers to the extent to which children are over- or under-represented in the child welfare system relative to their proportions in the census population. This definition was obtained from Hill, R.G. (2006). Synthesis *of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update*. Washington, D.C: Casey/Center for the Study of Social Policy, Alliance for Racial Equity. Special thanks to Dennette Derezotes of *Race Matters*, Robert Hill of Westat and Barbara Needell and Terry Shaw of the University of California at Berkeley for consultation regarding these statistics.

[ii] Race/Ethnicity information is available for 501,229 (98%) of the 513,000 children in foster care on September 30, 2005. This number (501,229) is used as the denominator for all percent calculations.

[iii] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (September 2006). *The AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System) Report.* Retrieved January 19, 2007 from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm; The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2005). KIDS COUNT State level Data On-line. Retrieved January 19, 2007 from http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/profile_results.jsp?r=1&d=1&c=9&p=5&x=146&y=5.

[iv] IBID

[v] IBID

[vi] IBID

[vii] IBID

[viii] IBID

[ix] The Relative Disparity Rate or Relative Rate Index compares the likelihood of one group experiencing an event to the likelihood of another group experiencing the same event. Source: Barbara Needell, "*Race/Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparity in Child Welfare: New Views, New Measures"* power point presentation available at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/presentations/.

[x] Derezotes, D (2006) *Race Matters in Child Welfare. Permanency Planning Today.* National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, Summer 2006.

[xi] Hill, R.B. (2006). *Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update*, Washington, DC: Casey/Center for the Study of Social Policy Alliance for Racial Equity.

[xii] Ards, S. (1992). Understanding patterns of child maltreatment. *Contemporary Policy Issues*. 10(4): 39-50. Korbin, J., Coulton, C.I., Chard, S., Platt-Houston, C. & Su, M. (1998). Impoverishment and children maltreatment in African American and European American neighborhoods. *Development and Psychopathology*, 10: 215-233.

[xiii] Hill, R.B. (2006). *Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update*, Washington, DC: Casey/Center for the Study of Social Policy Alliance for Racial Equity. Sedlak, A., & Schultz, D. (2001). Race Differences in Risk of Maltreatment in the General Child Population. In D. M. Derezotes, J. Poertner, & M. F. Testa, (Eds.). *Race Matters in Child Welfare: The Overrepresentation of African American Children in the System*. Washington, DC.: CWLA Press.

[xiv] IBID

[xv] IBID

[xvi] IBID

[xvii] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (September 2006). *The AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System) Report.* Retrieved January 19, 2007 from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm.

[xviii] Source: *Children of Color at a Glance: CWLA (Child Welfare League of America) Fact Sheet and Relevant Research.* Retrieved online at http://ndas.cwla.org . Data Source: Length of Stay for Children in Care by Race/Ethnicity, 2002. Special tabulation of 2002 Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) prepared by Child Welfare League of America, National Data Analysis System.

[xix] Roberts, D.E. (2002). *Racial Disproportionality in the U.S. Child Welfare System: Documentation, Research on Causes, and Promising Practices. Working Paper #4*. Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Northwestern University School of Law: Institute for Policy Research.

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[xxi] Source*: Children of Color at a Glance: CWLA (Child Welfare League of America) Fact Sheet and Relevant Research.* Retrieved online at http://ndas.cwla.org . Data sources are: Barth, R. P., Courtney, M.; Needell, B., & Jonson-Reid, M. (1994). Performance indicators for Child Welfare Services in California. Berkeley: Child Welfare Research Center; U.S. Children's Bureau (2002, August). The AFCARS report: Interim FY 2000 Estimates as of August 2002. Available online at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/report7.htm. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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[xxiii] Hill, R.B. (2005). The role of race in parental reunification. In D. Derezotes, M.F. Testa and J. Poertner (eds.) *Race matters in child welfare: The overrepresentation of African American children in the system.* Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

[xxiv] Source*: Children of Color at a Glance: CWLA (Child Welfare League of America) Fact Sheet and Relevant Research.* Retrieved online at http://ndas.cwla.org . Data Source: Barth, R., Miller, J., Green, R./,. & Baumgartner, J. (2002). *Children of Color in the Child Welfare System: Toward Explaining the Disproportionate Involvement in Comparison to their numbers in the General Population.* Chapel Hill and Research Triangle Park, N.C.: University of North Carolina School of Social Work, Jordan Institute for Families and Research Triangle Institute; Ards, S. & Harrell, A. (1993). Reporting of child maltreatment: A secondary analysis of the national incidence surveys, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *17*(3): 337-344.

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