

Issue 2, 2008 Special Issue: Overrepresentation of Minority Youth in Care

Introduction: Gaps in Research and Public Policies

Kathleen Belanger, Deborah K. Green, and Lloyd B. Bullard

Editorial: Commentary on Disproportionality in Child Welfare

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PART I - UNDERSTANDING AND MEASURING RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY OF OUTCOMES

Measuring Racial Disparity in Child Welfare

Terry V. Shaw, Emily Putnam-Hornstein, Joseph Magruder, and Barbara Needell

Overrepresentation of certain racial/ethnic groups in the foster care system is one of the most troubling and challenging issues in child welfare today. In response, many states have started reporting outcomes by race and ethnicity to identify disproportionately high rates of system contact. The identification of disproportional representation is the first step in developing targeted strategies to address disproportionality--highlighting where resources should be directed and guiding future research. However, present and future efforts to address disproportionality must be accompanied by statistically sound and meaningful methods of measurement. In this article, we argue for the adoption of a relative rate measure of representation--a "Disparity Index"--as the primary instrument for assessing racial disparity in child welfare.

Deconstructing Disproportionality: Views From Multiple Community Stakeholders

Alan J. Dettlaff and Joan R. Rycraft

While the existence of racial disproportionality has been well documented, the causes of disproportionality are less clear. Studies identifying contributing factors have relied largely on analyses of state and national data sets, which may lack the robust data necessary to fully explain the factors related to this issue. Further, a limitation of existing research is the lack of data from the voice of those in communities affected by disproportionality. This study was designed to develop a deeper understanding of disproportionality from the views of multiple community stakeholders. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected to provide a greater depth of information that can be used alongside existing studies toward developing an enhanced understanding of disproportionality in child welfare.

Visible Minority, Aboriginal, and Caucasian Children Investigated by Canadian Protective Services

Chantal Lavergne, Sarah Dufour, Nico Trocmé, and Marie-Claude Larrivée

The aim of this descriptive study was to compare the report profiles of Caucasian, Aboriginal, and other visible minority children whose cases were assessed by child protective services in Canada. The results show that children of Aboriginal ancestry and from visible minority groups are selected for investigation by child protective services 1.77 times more frequently than are children in the general population. Physical abuse is reported and substantiated more often for Asian children, whereas neglect is chiefly an issue with Aboriginal and black children. Child vulnerability factors and parental and housing risk factors alone cannot explain the higher

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substantiation percentages, except for Aboriginal children, for whom the risks are higher than for the other groups. The individual and family profiles of Asian and black children appear to be significantly less of a burden than those of Aboriginals and Caucasians. These results may reflect a certain degree of racial bias in the identification and reporting of maltreatment cases to child protective services and in decisions about the substantiation of maltreatment.

Connective Complexity: African American Adolescents and the Relational Context of Kinship Foster Care

Ann Schwartz

Attempts to address racial disproportionality in child welfare must include a focus on the benefits and challenges facing children in kinship care. African American children not only are overrepresented in the child welfare system, but also are placed disproportionately in kinship foster care. Using a sample of 18 African American adolescents ages 11 to 14, this article explores how the relational context of care experienced by adolescents in kinship foster care differs from that of adolescents in nonkinship foster family placements. Findings are presented regarding the stability of relationships as well as complex role dilemmas experienced by kinship youth as they relate to caregivers and birthparents in the child welfare context. Implications are given for practice with kinship families.

The Role of Faith in Adoption: Achieving Positive Adoption Outcomes for African American Children

Kathleen Belanger, Sam Copeland, and Monit

African American children are overrepresented in foster care by more than twice their proportion in the population (U.S. Government Accountability Office [USGAO], 2007). Building upon research relating faith (religiosity) to positive health and mental health, this study utilized cognitive and religious coping theories to examine the influence of faith on choosing to adopt, achieving positive adoption outcomes, and reducing disproportionality. From Louisiana and Texas, 113 families who adopted 226 children, 48% African American, participated in a survey measuring children's behavior and parent distress (PSI-SF Difficult Child and Parent Distress Subscales) and religiosity (Hoge Intrinsic Religiosity Index). Of the respondents, 93% of the respondents belonged to a religious congregation, 86% attended church weekly. Controlling for child's behavior, religiosity predicted lower stress in adoptive parenting; church attendance was related to improvement in parental health since adopting. Faith was rated most frequently as essential in parents' decisions to adopt. The study concludes that faith may be an asset in increasing adoptions and improving adoption outcomes resulting in increased numbers of African American children adopted.

The Racial Geography of Child Welfare: Toward a New Research Paradigm

Dorothy E. Roberts

This article examines the community-level impact of concentrated child welfare agency involvement in African American neighborhoods. Based on interviews of 25 African American women in a Chicago neighborhood, the study found that residents were aware of intense agency involvement in their neighborhood and identified profound effects on social relationships including interference with parental authority, damage to children's ability to form social relationships, and distrust among neighbors. The study also discovered a tension between respondents' identification of adverse consequences of concentrated state supervision for family and community relationships and neighborhood reliance on agency involvement for needed financial support. The author discusses the implications of these findings for a new research paradigm aimed at understanding the community-level effects of racial disproportionality.

The Intersection of Race, Poverty, and Risk: Understanding the Decision to Provide Services to Clients and to Remove Children

Stephanie L. Rivaux, Joyce James, Kim Wittenstrom, Donald Baumann, Janess Sheets, Judith Henry, and Victoria Jeffries

Studies have found that certain racial groups, particularly the children of African American families, are placed in foster care at a higher rate than children of other races. These families are also sometimes found to be afforded fewer services that might prevent these removals, relative to families of other races. It is unclear why this is so. Poverty has been suspected, and sometimes found, to be the primary cause of the disparity. Lacking in some of these analyses, however, was how risk of future abuse/neglect to the child entered into the decisions and particularly, how assumptions about race, poverty, and risk are factored into the decisionmaking process. It is important to understand this process if we are to find a way to correct it.

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The current study addresses this process.

Findings indicate that even when controlling for risk and poverty (as well as other relevant factors), race affects the decision to provide services and to remove. We find that poverty is associated with higher risk scores. We also find that the risk scores of African American families in cases that are closed, those receiving Family Based Safety Services, and those resulting in children being removed are lower than the risk scores for Anglo families in the same groups. This suggests that rather than racial bias in the assigning of the risk score itself, disproportionality may be better explained by racial/ethnic differences in the risk threshold workers use to decision to take action on a case. In particular, the risk threshold for providing services or removing a child is higher for Anglo Americans than for African Americans.

Children Ever in Care: An Examination of Cumulative Disproportionality

Joseph Magruder and Terry V. Shaw

Most studies of ethnic disproportionality in child welfare examine data in one of two ways: a point in time approach or an entry cohort approach. While each provides insight into disproportionality, neither gives a full picture of the differences among ethnic groups in the experience of the child welfare system over time. This study uses longitudinal administrative child welfare data to examine ethnic disproportionality in involvement with the child welfare system during the first seven years of life at three levels of contact: (1) initial referrals, (2) substantiated referrals, and (3) first entries. Findings suggest the experience of African American families, and probably Native America families, with the child welfare system is much different from other families.

The Benefits of Life Table Analysis for Describing Disproportionality

David Crampton and Claudia J. Coulton

This article reviews how life table analysis can improve on cross-sectional analysis of disproportionality by comparing African American and Caucasian children's risk of being investigated for child maltreatment or being placed in foster care before their 10th birthday. We then highlight the application of life table results in advocacy. Newspaper commentaries and presentations for community groups using these results raised awareness with policymakers and in turn helped to increase funding and programming that addresses disproportionality. Life table results point to the role of age and geography in understanding why disproportionality occurs. We conclude by describing how one community is using these results to develop interventions and reform strategies based on addressing these age and geography factors.

PART II: PRACTICE METHODS TO REDUCE RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY OF OUTCOMES

Editorial: Acknowledging Disproportionate Outcomes and Changing Service Delivery

Ruth G. McRoy

Emerging Strategies for Reducing Racial Disproportionality and Disparate Outcomes in Child Welfare: The Results of a National Breakthrough Series Collaborative

Oronde A. Miller and Kristin J. Ward

Racial disproportionality in child welfare has been discussed as a seemingly intractable challenge with complex contributing factors. Some argue that these dynamics are far too difficult to be significantly impacted by public child welfare systems alone. The Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) methodology, incorporating an analysis of structural racism and potential system bias, was proffered as a tool for engaging public child welfare agencies in a rapid, action-oriented process for identifying innovative strategies and practices to reduce racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes. This article describes the Disproportionality BSC process, as well as the work of participating jurisdictions with respect to transforming organizational culture and testing/implementing child welfare practice improvements. A theory of change is presented and critical lessons learned are shared in the form of collaborative reflections.

Evaluating Multisystemic Efforts to Impact Disproportionality Through Key Decision Points

Dennette Derezotes, Brad Richardson, Connie Bear King, Julia Kleinschmit-Rembert, and Betty Pratt Working in four communities, Casey Foundation/Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) Alliance on Racial Equity (the Alliance) have developed a Racial Equity Scorecard for measuring disproportionality at key decision points for use in impacting disproportionality in the

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child welfare system. The four communities include King County, Washington, Guilford County, North Carolina, Ramsey County, Minnesota, and Woodbury County, Iowa. Data from one site--Woodbury County, Iowa--are used as an example. This article provides the background and method for identification and measurement of key decision points in the child welfare system to track change affected by multisystemic approaches to reduce disproportionality. Interpretation of the results in the scorecard is provided and recommendations for future interventions based on the data are discussed.

Addressing the Disproportionate Representation of Children of Color: A Collaborative Community Approach

Monique Busch, Jacqueline Remondet Wall, Steven M. Koch, and Clara Anderson

The state of Indiana recommended a committee be formed to address the disproportional representation of black youth in out-of-home placements. In response, the Indiana Disproportionality Committee (IDC) was established. This article presents the development, objectives and future of the IDC. One of the objectives, research, will be offered as an example of the committee's collaborative strategies. The IDC, in partnership with another organization, has begun exploring relationships between ethnicity, risk factors and treatment outcomes. The results of this research effort have examined disproportion and disparity, leading the IDC to identify needs for change within the state. Barriers and successes of the IDC will be shared, so that others can use these efforts to guide their own strategies to reduce disproportionality.

Addressing Disproportionality Through Undoing Racism, Leadership Development, and Community Engagement

Joyce James, Deborah Green, Carolyne Rodriguez, and Rowena Fong

In 2005 the Texas 79th legislature passed Senate Bill 6, which included mandates to address disproportionality. This article will describe how the Texas Department of Family Protective Services in collaboration with Casey Family Programs' Texas State Strategy systems improvement initiative is addressing disproportionality statewide through promising practices and innovations in undoing racism trainings, values-based leadership development, and community engagement strategies

Comparative Analysis of Two Community-Based Efforts Designed to Impact Disproportionality

Brad Richardson

Children of color are overrepresented in child welfare in Iowa at a rate double their percentage

of the population. In 2005 the Iowa Department of Human Services implemented two pilot demonstration projects to address overrepresentation of Native American and African American children in the child welfare system. The projects, called the Minority Youth and Families Initiative (MYFI), included ongoing evaluation. Results obtained over two years indicate improved worker and participant alliance, family functioning, and outcomes for children. Findings are discussed and recommendations are provided for further improvements in practice, research, and evaluation to reduce racial disparities the child welfare system.

Taking Action on Racial Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System

Patricia Clark, Jackie Buchanan, and Lyman Legters

Mirroring national trends, children of color in Washington state's King County are overrepresented at every point in the child welfare system and fare worse by most measures than are Caucasian children. The King County Coalition on Racial Disproportionality was formed to reduce and ultimately eliminate racial disproportionality in the county's child welfare system. The research-based strategies implemented to address the issue focused on children in care longer than two years. They included participation in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Racial Disproportionality, implementation of benchmark hearings, and development of Champions for Permanence.

Now in the beginning stages, perhaps the most significant success is heightened awareness within the community of the disparate outcomes for children of color in the child welfare system.

Point of Engagement: Reducing Disproportionality and Improving Child and Family Outcomes

Eric J. Marts, Eun-Kyoung Othelia Lee, Ruth McRoy, and Jacquelyn McCroskey

This paper describes an innovative service delivery model to reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system. Point of Engagement (POE) is a collaborative family- and community-centered approach initiated in Compton, a regional office in Los Angeles County that serves south Los Angeles, a predominantly African American and Hispanic/Latino area.

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Over the past two years, the POE has been implemented in the Compton area by providing more thorough investigations, engaging families, and delivering needed services to children and families within their homes and communities. POE has demonstrated a reduction in the number of children removed from their families, an increase in the number of children returned to their families within one year, and an increase in the number of children finding legal permanency.

Closing: Gaps in Research and Public Policies

Robert B. Hill