ROM Workgroup Report:

Agency Reporting on Racial

Disproportionality and Disparity

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Table of Contents

[Introduction 3](#_Toc365544952)

[ROM Workgroup 3](#_Toc365544953)

[Workgroup Goals 3](#_Toc365544954)

[Reporting Principles 4](#_Toc365544955)

[About this Report 4](#_Toc365544956)

[Chapter 1: Sources of Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Theory and Research 5](#_Toc365544957)

[Disproportionality: What, Where, and Why? 5](#_Toc365544958)

[Theories of Disproportionality 6](#_Toc365544959)

[Theory 1: Disproportional Poverty and Child Maltreatment Risk 6](#_Toc365544960)

[Theory 2: Racial Bias and Inconsistencies in Practice 7](#_Toc365544961)

[Theory 3: Organizational and Institutional Conditions 7](#_Toc365544962)

[Summary 8](#_Toc365544963)

[Chapter 2: Disproportionality Measurement Methods 101 9](#_Toc365544964)

[Decision Points 9](#_Toc365544965)

[Measurement Methods 10](#_Toc365544966)

[Decision Point Analysis 11](#_Toc365544967)

[Calculating Disproportionality and Disparity 11](#_Toc365544968)

[Base Population 13](#_Toc365544969)

[Population Data 14](#_Toc365544970)

[Race Classification 14](#_Toc365544971)

[Report Types 15](#_Toc365544972)

[Chapter 3: Plan for ROM Racial Disproportionality Reports 16](#_Toc365544973)

[Decision Points 16](#_Toc365544974)

[Measurement Methods 17](#_Toc365544975)

[Base Population 17](#_Toc365544976)

[Population Data 18](#_Toc365544977)

[Race Classification 18](#_Toc365544978)

[Reports Design and Data Display 19](#_Toc365544979)

[Reports in ROM by Race Group 20](#_Toc365544980)

[Summary of Reports Developed in Phase 1 20](#_Toc365544981)

[Use of Reports 21](#_Toc365544982)

[Timeline and Next Steps 21](#_Toc365544983)

[Appendix A: Example Reports 29](#_Toc365544984)

[Appendix B: ACS Survey Data 33](#_Toc365544985)

[Appendix C: Terminology 34](#_Toc365544986)

[Appendix D: Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality in Child Welfare Annotated Bibliography 35](#_Toc365544987)

# Introduction

This report is the final product of a multi-state workgroup formed to design and develop management reports for racial disproportionality and disparity in the ROM Reports[[1]](#footnote-1) system. This report is intended to provide a plan for the development of reports in the ROM Reports system. Further, it is our intent to provide background information and the thinking that went into the development of these reports to help inform other stakeholders in the states and counties that have implemented ROM. Lastly, we hope that the report will provide a starting point of discussion for other child welfare agencies who want to develop useful management reports for racial disproportionality and disparity in their jurisdictions, regardless of their current reporting system.

## ROM Workgroup

This workgroup was comprised of representatives from each of the member states and county child welfare agencies that have implemented ROM Reports as their reporting tool. The workgroup had five two-hour meetings during May and June 2013.

Workgroup Members

1. Ohio – Tresa Young\*, Kristine Monroe, Tim Doyle-Wenger, Dave Hubble
2. Connecticut – Susan Smith\*, Fred North
3. Iowa – Linda Miller\*, Jeff Regula
4. New Hampshire – Anastiya Vanyukevych\*, Denise Lodge
5. Montana – Lou Walters\*
6. Franklin County – Jessica Foster\*
7. Oregon – Anna Cox\*, Judy Helvig
8. Colorado – Jonathan Sushinsky\*, David Menefee, Donna Parish
9. Missouri – Meliny Staysa\*, Carla Gilzow
10. New Mexico – John Barela\*

**\* indicates workgroup site leaders**

## Workgroup Goals

There were three goals established by the workgroup.

1. Define and design a set of reports that leads to a better understanding of racial disproportionality and disparity that considers risk factors (e.g., poverty).
2. Develop a model that can be implemented across ROM sites, and identify customizations for specific agencies.
3. Increase awareness of the use of these data and implications for strategies for improving disproportionality once reports are developed.

## Reporting Principles

The workgroup strived to adhere to three principles in designing a set of reports:

1. Lean – Develop as few reports as possible that tells the story and leads to appropriate improvement actions. More reports and additional data can confuse and discourage users into inaction.
2. Ease of use – Present data in a way that is familiar and easily understood.
3. Utility for further analysis – Provide data in a way that the user can assess trends, compare administrative units and, to the extent possible, enable cross tabulation of the data. Provide additional analytic features that enable more advanced data analysts to answer more in-depth questions.

## About This Report

This report has three major chapters.

*Chapter 1: Sources of Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Theory and Research*

This section is a presentation intended to briefly summarize the research literature on racial disproportionality and disparity and to provide a theoretical framework for thinking about this important issue.

*Chapter 2: Disproportionality Measurement Methods 101*

This section is intended to provide information on measurement methods for measuring racial disproportionality and disparity and to outline the major issues that need to be addressed. Information is provided on some of the discussion that transpired during our workgroup meetings and the issues discussed. Definitions are provided for some of the terminology used.

*Chapter 3: ROM Plan for Racial Disproportionality Reports*

This section outlines the plan for the reports that will be developed in ROM. In the final analysis, the workgroup decided to approach the task of report development in two phases since many of our ROM sites have asked for reports on disproportionality and disparity to be made available by the end of 2013. Phase 1, outlined in this report, will provide a basic set of reports based on a limited number of decision points. These reports would offer Trend and Unit views. Phase 2, identified for development in 2014, would have more decision points and additional capacity for filtering and cross tabulation of the data.

The Appendices of this report provide a rich set of information that was used to inform the development of these reports, including such materials as other report models and an annotated bibliography on the topic.

# Chapter 1: Sources of Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Theory and Research

A number of studies have documented the overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic groups in the child welfare system, particularly African Americans and Native Americans, when compared with their representation in the general population. Recently, the child welfare community has moved from acknowledging the problem of racial and ethnic disproportionality in the child welfare system to formulating and implementing possible solutions. The intent of this presentation is to provide some context for the ROM Disproportionality Workgroup’s thinking and discussion on the topic by presenting three theories of racial disproportionality in child welfare and related empirical support. Interested readers are encouraged to consult the annotated bibliography that accompanies this presentation for a comprehensive listing of scholarly works on the topic of disproportionality in child welfare.

*The following is a presentation provided by Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, Ph.D. and Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare on May 16, 2013.*

*See annotated bibliography in Appendix D*

## Disproportionality: What, Where, and Why?

Agencies typically begin exploring questions of disproportionality by examining the extent to which certain groups are overrepresented in child welfare when compared to the general population of children. For example, data from the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey and AFCARS demonstrate the overrepresentation of African American and Native American children in foster care. However, national estimates are obviously not able to reveal discrepancies among States or within States. To understand disproportionality dynamics at the local level, jurisdictions are tasked to gather and evaluate their own data to identify *what* groups are over- or underrepresented, *where* disproportionality is occurring in the system, and *why* disproportionality is occurring to determine the best way to address the problem.

Determining *where* in the system disproportionality is occurring, and to what extent, is particularly salient given that racial disproportionality at each decision point or stage of child welfare involvement manifests in group-level disparities. In other words, every time one group is overrepresented, another group is, therefore, underrepresented. Research suggests that disproportionality occurs for different racial and ethnic groups at nearly every decision and stage, from reporting, investigation, and substantiation to service provision, out of home care, and permanency, but that the presence and magnitude of disproportionality may vary from race group to race group, decision to decision, and stage to stage. This is why decisions regarding which decision points and stages to examine are particularly relevant to this group’s work.

## Theories of Disproportionality

Today’s presentation explores the *why* question. What accounts for disproportionality and disparities? Is it race? Or do other factors play stronger explanatory roles? Three theories or explanations have emerged to address this question, with varying amounts of empirical research to support them.

These theories include

1. A theory of disproportional poverty and child maltreatment risk factors among overrepresented racial and ethnic groups
2. A theory of racial bias and inconsistencies in practice, which manufacture racial and ethnic differences in child welfare outcomes, and
3. A theory that implicates organizational and institutional conditions and features in the production and potential exacerbation of disproportionality

Each of these theories is considered in turn.

### Theory 1: Disproportional Poverty and Child Maltreatment Risk

Although poverty does not cause maltreatment, per se, considerable evidence suggests that maltreatment occurs disproportionately among families experiencing poverty. For example, findings from the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) indicate that children in households of low income experience maltreatment at a rate of more than 5 times the rate of other children. A growing body of research also links neighborhood poverty to child maltreatment. For example, a recent study conducted in Missouri by Melissa Jonson-Reid, Brett Drake and Pan Zhou demonstrated the salient role that community poverty plays in child neglect among African Americans when compared to whites after taking individual level income into consideration. Their study suggests that children reported for the same forms of neglect may face very different challenges in their communities based on race such as resource availability, as well as the disproportional experience of crime and neighborhood violence.

Although African Americans comprise approximately 12 percent of the total U.S. population, they represent 39% of residents living in concentrated poverty neighborhoods. Therefore, according to the theory of disproportional poverty, African American children may be disproportionately reported and processed through the child welfare system due to disproportional maltreatment risks associated with greater individual needs as well as fewer community resources.

In our work on this topic, Emily Putnam-Hornstein, Barbara Needell, Bryn King, and I examined child welfare involvement among a cohort of California infants that were born in 2002 and followed subsequently until their fifth birthday. In the full birth cohort we found elevated risks for referral among children born to African American and U.S. born Latino mothers. However, after accounting for a proxy measure of poverty, measured by public health insurance enrollment, and adjusting for a number of risk factors available from the child’s birth certificate, children born to African American and U.S. born Latino mothers in the publicly insured group were less likely to be referred for maltreatment when compared to their white counterparts. This was also the case for substantiated victims and for foster care entries.

While our data from California is compelling, Alan Dettlaff and his colleagues, using data from Texas, found that while lower household income was associated with higher risk assessment scores among child welfare caseworkers, race still emerged as a significant predictor of substantiation. The authors interpreted these findings through Dagleish’s general model of assessment and decision making. This model suggests that thresholds for actions such as maltreatment substantiation may not necessarily align with assessments of risk, depending on the decision maker’s experience. So while poverty may influence a caseworkers’ assessment of risk, this study suggested that racial differences were more important in influencing decisions to act. In other words, the decision threshold, as depicted in Dagleish’s model, could be seen as higher for whites than it was for African Americans after taking poverty into consideration.

This finding raises an important question of what race represents to the decision maker, which brings us to a second theory regarding racial bias and inconsistencies in child welfare practice.

### Theory 2: Racial Bias and Inconsistencies in Practice

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the presence of racial bias and inconsistencies in child welfare practice over the past decade, and this is primarily because all National Incidence Studies of child maltreatment that predated the fourth and most recent study found child maltreatment to be unrelated to race/ethnicity. Therefore, racial bias at the system level has been the most obvious and hotly pursued explanation for disproportionality, though from a research perspective, this dynamic has been difficult to isolate and findings have been mixed.

National surveys of mandated reporters suggest that race/ethnicity is a significant variable in report decision making in some studies but not others. Moreover, the relationship between race/ethnicity is inconsistent across maltreatment types and across reporters. For example, research suggests that African American children are referred at vastly higher rates than white children, yet African American children are more likely to be reported by medical personnel, while Hispanic/Latino children are most likely to be referred by school personnel.

Disproportionality and disparities have been documented at each stage along the child welfare pathway, however, few studies have examined the role of race/ethnicity in caseworker decisions. A study conducted in Illinois by Nancy Rolock and Mark Testa found no evidence that white workers substantiated cases involving African Americans at a higher rate than those involving whites. Yet the Texas study I mentioned by Alan Dettlaff revealed race to be an important factor in the substantiation decision when accounting for individual level poverty in the context of risk. In sum, a small number of studies suggest the absence of racial effects after adjusting for poverty. However, both qualitative and quantitative research studies also suggest a small but cumulative effect of race throughout the service system.

### Theory 3: Organizational and Institutional Conditions

A third theory suggests that system level factors such as agency infrastructure, resource availability, and leadership influence organizational culture, which in turn affects the structure and delivery of child welfare services to ethnic minority families. In theory, problems such as inadequate staffing, high caseloads, high turnover, and lack of leadership may in turn generate or exacerbate racial disproportionality.

This was one of the major findings of an institutional analysis that was conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy with the Los Angeles County participants in California Partners for Permanency or CAPP, a five year, $14.5 million federal grant which specifically focuses on finding and/or supporting legally permanent homes for African American and Native American children who are overrepresented in the child welfare system and stay in foster care for extended periods of time.

The institutional analysis addressed the following questions: “How does it come about that many African American children do not reunify with their parents or find alternative, timely permanency? What about the ways in which the child protection system and its partners are organized, through policies and practices, contribute to this poor outcome?” What the analysis revealed was a number of institutional conditions and features contributing to the outcomes experienced by African American families and children including high caseloads, an organizational culture of fear that was inhibiting workers from family centered practice, rules and regulations that were deterring relative placement, often for reasons of poverty, and a lack of meaningful infrastructure to support DCFS in providing parents with ‘reasonable efforts’ to reunify. In scrolling through the list specific institutional features that were found to be problematic for African American families, one might argue that these features are likely problematic for all families. However, a noteworthy feature of this analysis was its rich description regarding the complex challenges faced by African Americans as a result of the disinvestment in their communities, the struggle of African Americans to find adequate housing and jobs, healthy and affordable food, safe and academically challenging schools, and clean secure parks and neighborhoods. In addition, these neighborhoods were described as having poor services, particularly prevention services.

## Summary

These theories bring us full circle to a story that, at the end of the day, is less about competing ideas and more about how these factors interact to produce disproportionality. Each theory likely holds some degree of relevance and power to explain disproportionality, however, the relative contribution is likely to vary by jurisdiction. To determine the best way to address the problem of disproportionality, next steps include gathering and evaluating your own data to identify over- or underrepresented groups, examining where disproportionality is occurring in the system, and determining why disproportionality is occurring through an appropriate methodology.

# Chapter 2: Disproportionality Measurement Methods 101

The ROM workgroup was provided background information on measurement methods and terminology used from different reporting systems and published articles on racial disproportionality. Most of the workgroup had previously developed or were familiar with measurement of racial disproportionality and disparity, so were able to contribute substantially to this discussion. This section of the workgroup’s report will present some of the background information reviewed by the workgroup, some of the issues discussed, and the basics of measurement methods used to measure disproportionality and disparity. The following section will outline the decisions made and the development plan.

## Decision Points

The measurement and analysis of racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare is most often examined by comparing racial composition of children at various stages in which they move through the child welfare system. Each of these stages is the result of a decision made, so referred to as “decision points.”

Decision points are thought of as the linear progression of children through the child welfare system. Measuring disproportionality is done by comparing the racial composition of a group of children at each decision point to a base population (e.g., child census, child poverty census, or prior decision point) which shows if children of various race groups are disproportionally represented at that decision point.

The ROM Racial Disproportionality workgroup considered a wide range of decision points. Workgroup members provided information on the decision points they used in some of their existing reports and, ultimately, the group narrowed a much longer list to the following:

**CPS Reports or Referrals**

* CPS Reports (Referrals)
* Accepted Reports (screened-in referrals)
* Assigned Reports to Alternative Response
* Assigned Reports for Investigation
* Victim (substantiated/indicated or founded abuse neglect)

**Receipt of Services (started, receiving, or ended)**

* Began State Involvement Episode (ongoing, in-home or foster care)
* State Involved (ongoing, either in-home or foster care)
* Ended State Involvement (ongoing case closed)
* Started In-home Intact
* Receiving In-home Intact
* Exited In-home, Entering Foster Care
* Entered Foster Care
* In Foster Care (point-in-time)
* Exiting Foster Care
* In Foster Care 17+ months (point-in-time)
* Exiting Foster Care to Permanency

While there were no clear-cut answers, the discussion of each of these decision points helped shape the final decisions of what reports to provide and what views of the data were needed to facilitate a better understanding of this complex issue. These were a few of the issues that were discussed.

***Orientation of the decision point*** – Many decision points are stated in a way that is oriented in a negative direction (e.g., victim, entered foster care) whereas some are considered to be more positive (e.g., exiting foster care, achieved permanency). Given this mix of orientations, reports showing over or under representation are more difficult to interpret.

***Number of decision points*** – Too many decision points can be confusing and lead to non-use.

***Using an outcome as a decision point*** – Achieving an outcome was often brought up as a decision point (e.g., adopted, reunified, stability). However, a distinction was made around this and outcomes by race group and handled in a different way.

Several agency reporting models were presented. Examples of these various reports are provided in Appendix A of this report.

* ***Colorado*** – An interactive website with reports available at multiple decision points found at: <https://cdrc.state.co.us/disparities/countySplit/Colorado/> (see screen shot provided in Appendix A)
* ***Franklin County, Ohio*** – A one page “Quick Reference” that provided Disproportionality Index data across multiple decision points comparing White and Black.
* ***Oregon*** – A multipoint decision point analysis.
* ***Linn County, Iowa*** – A one page summary prepared by Casey Family Programs at the request of Linn County.

## Measurement Methods

Three methods were discussed for measuring racial disproportionality in reports to be developed in ROM. These methods are commonly used in the research literature and in the reporting models reviewed by the group.

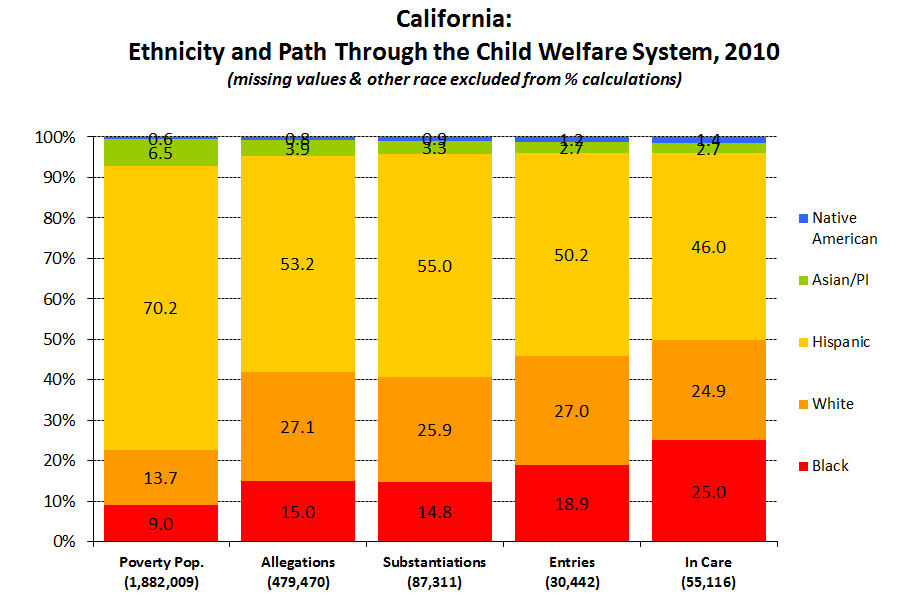
1. **Decision Point Analysis (DPA)** – comparing percent of race groups represented at various decision points with population data
2. **Disproportionality Index (DI)** – Percent of race group at decision point divided by the percent of the same race group in a base population
3. **Disparity Ratio (DR)** – The Disproportionality Index of one race group (e.g., black) divided by the DI of another race group (e.g., white)

The following explanation of the measurement methods for racial disproportionality uses materials provided by the Center for Social Services Research at the School of Social Welfare, UC Berkley.

### Decision Point Analysis

Figure 1 below shows a Decision Point Analysis that compares the racial composition of children across selected decision points in the child welfare system.

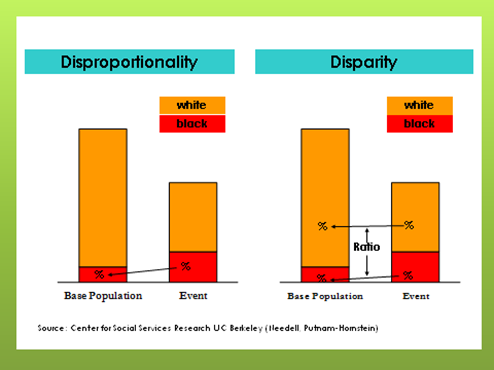
***Figure 1: Decision Point Analysis***

Note that the stacked bar on the left also displays the racial composition of the poverty population. Many models use the general child population as a point of comparison across child welfare decision points. Given the strong evidence for the impact of poverty, the report displayed used poverty population instead.

The Decision Point Analysis provides the building blocks of data used for calculating disproportionality and disparity and provides a good overview of the racial composition of children at various decision points.

The advantage of the Decision Point Analysis is that it is easily understood and shows all decision points together in relation to population data. The main disadvantage is of this report type is that trends are more difficult to display.

### Calculating Disproportionality and Disparity

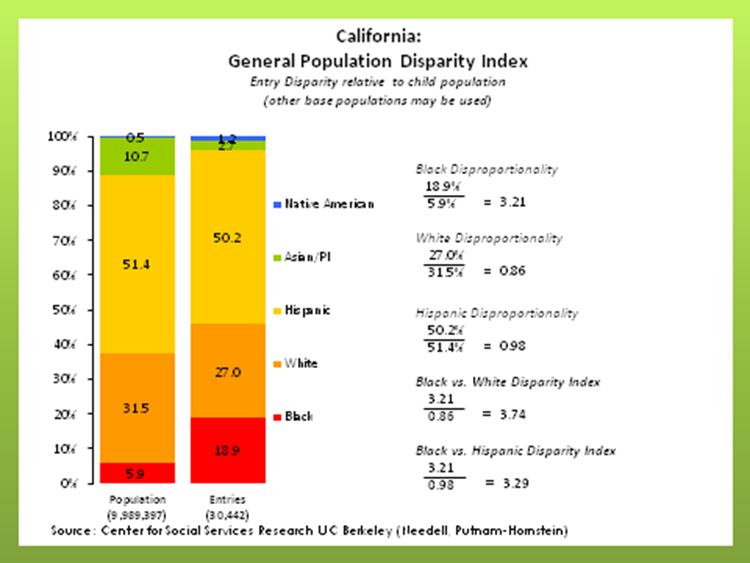
Disproportionality compares the percent of each race at a decision point with the same race percent in a base population. The left side of graphic shown in Figure 2 shows the comparison between the percent of the black children population in the event (decision point) with the selected base population. Disparity compares two disproportionality percent rates as shown in the right side of the graphic in Figure 2.

***Figure 2: Disproportionality and Disparity***

Figure 3 below shows more specifically how disproportionality and disparity rates are calculated. The Disproportionality Index (DI) uses the percent of a race group in a base population as the denominator and uses the percent of the race group in the decision point as the numerator.

In the example below the Disproportionality Index (DI) for black children is 18.9% (decision point) divided by 5.9% (base population) which is 3.1. Simply stated in this this example, the percent of black children entering foster care is 3.21 times higher than black children in the child population. A Disproportionality Index (DI) value under 1 means under representation. Note the DI is .86 for white children and .98 for Hispanic children thus indicating under representation. Disproportionality reports are fairly easy to grasp with some help (or good labeling) and provide a good comparison across race groups.

***Figure 3: Calculating Disproportionality and Disparity***



Disparity Ratio (DR) uses the Disproportionality Index numbers as described above to calculate a ratio between one race’s disproportionality to another race group’s disproportionality. The Black vs. White Disparity Ratio is 3.21 (DI for Black) divided by .86 (DI for White) for a 3.74 Disparity Ratio. A way of stating this is that in this sample black children were 3.74 times more likely to enter foster care than were white children in the general child population.

When reviewing Disparity Ratios reports across models, Disparity Ratios were most often calculated comparing children of non-white race groups to white children. However, a Disparity Ratio can be calculated using the Disproportionality Index of any two race groups.

While the Disparity Ratio calculation is more complex, several workgroup members experienced it as easier to use with stakeholders. They reported that people presented with these data seemed to grasp what the data were saying when they were able to make the simple statement like “black children were 3 times more likely to enter foster care than white children.”

A point of discussion and general agreement was that it could be confusing to internal or external stakeholders to present reports on both disproportionality and disparity. In general, sites will decide which measurement path to go down initially. The comparisons of disproportionality and disparity rates of existing reports reviewed by the workgroup did not seem to reveal enough additional information that made the added complexity worthwhile; however, both concepts are important.

## **Base Population**

The selection of a “base population” is a fundamental component of the calculation of the Disproportionality Index and, thus, the Disparity Ratio.

Three base population options were discussed by the workgroup:

1. General child population
2. Poverty child population
3. Population of children in prior decision points

While it is common to use racial composition of the general child population as a basis for calculating disproportionality, there are significant shortcomings to using this approach for each decision point. To this point Morton, Ocasio, and Simmel (2011) stated:

Using the general population method, the initial disproportionate representation at the first decision point is carried through to later stages through the static denominator in the calculation, possibly creating a mismatch between the analytic method and actual child welfare practice. (p. 1539)

The research discussed above, suggests a substantial connection between poverty and child welfare involvement.  Given this, a case can be made for using the racial composition of children in poverty as a base population for calculating disproportionality since these children are at higher risk for child welfare involvement.  While this would arguably be an improvement over the use of general population data as a base population, it still has limitations for use as a static denominator across decision points.

It is recommended that presenting data on the racial composition of children in poverty be available for examination in reports.  Having these data will help develop a deeper more nuanced understanding of disproportionality and the impact of poverty, providing a more detailed portrait of race and poverty on state and local levels upon which to design practice and community level strategies for reducing maltreatment and improving permanency.

Perhaps one of the more compelling approaches is to use the racial composition of the population of children from decision points that most immediately precede the one being examined. In other words, the population used as the denominator is the “at risk” population from which decisions are made. For example, the child population of accepted abuse/neglect reports could be used as the base population for examining victims (substantiated reports). This method has been called “chaining” and was used in some of the states represented in the ROM workgroup. While not perfect, providing data based on this chaining method can more narrowly identify which decisions may be influenced by race or racial bias and thus better inform where to direct improvement action.

## Population Data

Different sources of child census population data were reviewed. Some states use private sources for population estimates and others use the publically available census data. The American Community Survey Data, published by the US Census, had several advantages that are appealing for this project, such as providing yearly estimates by standard racial/ethnic breakdowns, age groups, and county level, as well as providing data on the child poverty population. Kristen Rudlang-Perman with Casey Family Programs provided an overview of ACS and provided the summary page found in Appendix B. Kristen discussed some of the challenges in using census data, as listed below:

* Timeliness of data
* Accuracy of estimates based on 1 or more years
* Creating accurate trends over time with the various data sets
* Additional breakdowns offered (e.g., gender, age, county)
* Availability of child poverty data
* Race classifications and matching these up with agency data

## Race Classification

Classification of race is a difficult and sensitive topic with imperfect solutions. The workgroup did not discuss best practices in terms of data collection; however, different practices were noted through the discussions. The workgroup members were very familiar with the AFCARS and NCANDS requirements where race categories are American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White. Hispanic is considered an ethnicity. A child can be recorded in one or more race categories.

Reporting on racial disproportionality is simplified when using a single race variable. The Children’s Bureau has used a method for doing this when reporting race in various federal reports. This method categorizes children with Hispanic ethnicity as Hispanic race regardless of other race fields also reported. This is also how categorization is done in the US Census. Children with one race noted (e.g., black) and not Hispanic, are categorized as that race. Children with more than one race fields and not Hispanic are classified as 2 or more races.

The important thing for developing reports on disproportionality is to treat race classifications as consistently as possible throughout the reports and the population data source.

Workgroup members pointed out that race data are sometimes not captured due to the choice of the child or family member or because it is unknown. This is particularly problematic at the CPS report intake stage, where it may not be recorded.

## Report Types

The workgroup looked at many report types and layouts. Several of the report layouts of existing reports are included in Appendix A. It was evident that some layouts of the data were more clear and intuitive for drawing the conclusions than others. The focus of the workgroup was to use the existing reporting formats and functionality in ROM as much as possible so that reports were consistent throughout the reporting application.

# Chapter 3: Plan for ROM Racial Disproportionality Reports

The workgroup decided to implement racial disproportionality and disparity reports into ROM in two phases. Given the more immediate need for reports, the workgroup agreed upon some basic set of reports as Phase 1. These reports would be developed in 2013 for roll-out in early 2014. Phase 2 would take this reporting to a more detailed and analytic level in 2014.

## **Decision Points**

Phase 1 Development – The workgroup decided to use the following decision points around which to develop reports:

1. All Child Reports
2. Accepted Referrals (include both alternative response and investigation, if possible)
3. Child Victim
4. Enter Foster Care
5. In Foster Care
6. Exit Foster Care

Seven ROM sites have implemented Alternative (Differential) Response and expressed interest in showing alternative response and investigations by race in the reports as either separate decision points or sub-categories under Accepted Referrals that can be ungrouped in the data table. Every effort will be made to accommodate this request in Phase 1, but if that is not possible, this will be incorporated in Phase 2.

A brief survey of workgroup members revealed the following prioritization which may be useful for planning in Phase 2.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1st Tier** | CPS Reports (referrals) |
| Accepted Reports (screened in referrals) |
| Victim (substantiated/indicated or founded abuse neglect) |
| Entered Foster Care |
| Exiting Foster Care |
| In Foster Care (point in time) |
| **2nd Tier** | State Involved (ongoing, either in-home or foster care) |
| Started In-home Intact |
| Began State Involvement Episode (ongoing, in-home or foster care) |
| Assigned for Investigation |
| Assigned to Alternative Response |
| In Foster Care 17+ months (point-in-time) |
| **3rd Tier** | Receiving In-home Intact |
| Exiting In-home, Entering Foster Care |
| Ended State Involvement |
| Exiting Foster Care to Permanency |

It is recognized that a number of ROM sites will not use the “All Child Reports” decision point due to incomplete, inaccurate, or non-existent data.

Operational definitions for decision points and other terminology are provided in Appendix C. All decision points except “In Foster Care” be provided as floating 12 month (annualized) data points. For example, the number of accepted reports shown for June 2013 would be those accepted from July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013.

Since the ROM In-home Intact reports are currently in the process of being developed and no ROM site has loaded data into the ROM Base Working Tables, these decision points (e.g., start in-home, receiving in-home, state involvement) would be delayed and reconsidered in Phase 2.

Phase 2 would have an additional set of decision points yet to be determined. At this future date, ROM sites would be in a better position to take advantage of the additional data on children in families receiving In-home Intact services for additional decision points.

## Measurement Methods

The workgroup decided to use all three of the measurement methods that were discussed above.

1. **Decision Point Analysis (DPA)** – comparing percent of race groups represented at various decision points with population data
2. **Disproportionality Index (DI)** – Percent of race group at decision point divided by the percent of the same race group in a base population
3. **Disparity Ratio (DR)** – The Disproportionality Index of one race group (e.g., black) divided by the DI of another race group (e.g., white)

The workgroup was unanimous on the use of the Decision Point Analysis. Some ROM sites wanted reports based on the DI, some wanted the DR, and others wanted access to both DI and DR. Initially the reports showing the Disparity Ratio (DR) would use the white population as the denominator so the DR would be computed for all other race groups compared to white.

These methods represent a sequential process of calculations. The percent of each race group at a decision point used in the DPA is needed for calculating the Disproportionality Index (DI) and the DI is necessary for calculating the Disparity Ratio.

## Base Population

The calculation of the Disproportionality Index (DI) and Disparity Ratio (DR) uses a Base Population as the denominator for the calculation. Given the range of what ROM sites wanted to use as a Base Population in these calculations, ROM will enable each state to select a Base Population for each decision point using the ROM administrative tools. Base Populations can be based on racial composition in census data provided by each ROM site (i.e., general child population, child poverty population) or the population of children from one of the decision points outlined above that is available in ROM.

The Workgroup discussed the concept of “chaining” which uses a race group percentage of a prior decision point as the denominator in the calculation. There were two approaches to chaining that came out of our discussion, flexible and strict. The flexible method uses a relevant prior decision point deemed relevant to the calculation. For example, entry into foster care may use accepted reports as a prior decision point. A strict method only uses only children from the prior decision point which limited the numerator to the children in the prior decision point (pathway). Using the same example, disproportionality for “Entry in Foster Care” would perhaps use “Child Victims” as the Base Population (denominator) and thus only use those children entering foster care that were child victims (numerator) rather than all children entering foster care.

Chaining or use of a child population as the denominator in the calculation of disproportionality or disparity will be the choice of the individual ROM Site. As discussed in the workgroup meetings, chaining offers a number of advantages for more precise identification of decision points for addressing disproportionality impacted by decision making while children are in the care of the child welfare agency. For sites using chaining, we will use the flexible method which uses a prior decision point deemed relevant to the calculation. Phase 2 would offer an increased number of decision points for use as base populations.

## Population Data

Each ROM site will have the capacity to enter the population data for both general child population and child poverty population. These data will need to be provided by calendar year and race group. Phase 2 will enable the inclusion of other data (e.g., gender and age groups) that will make crosstabs possible on general population data. ROM staff will define a standard data table from which these data will be populated into ROM Reports by each site.

## Race Classification

The common denominator for race data in ROM is from AFCARS. Just as in AFCARS, there is one field for Hispanic ethnicity and the same AFCARS yes/no fields for each race as follows:

* American Indian or Alaska Native
* Asian
* Black or African American
* Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
* White
* Unable to Determine

In addition to the above, ROM has an optional field in the Base Working Tables for a single race value that each ROM Site can define. The important task for each ROM site will be to define its single race variable in a way that is as consistent as possible with the source of population data being used. The calculation of disproportionality and disparity is dependent upon a having a single race variable.

The following logic for creating a single race variable is suggested to more easily align with census data and consistency with federal reporting which can enable cross-state comparisons.

1. Place all children with Hispanic ethnicity in a race field created as “Hispanic.”
2. Of the remaining children (non-Hispanic), create a “Two or more races” for children with more than one race identified.
3. All other children with only one race identified are placed in their race category.

ROM staff will investigate the possibility of showing the Hispanic group by identified race in the grouping controls. This could be considered for Phase 2.

All children with missing or “Unable to Determine” values will be identified as such with each decision point; however, percent of race group (used by all reports) would be calculated based upon children for whom race was known at that decision point. Having data on children with unknown race (unable to determine or refuse/decline to answer) displayed in the report enables the user of the data to understand the quality and completeness of the data being presented.

Race groups with smaller representation may be grouped into one classification (e.g., other smaller populations). This is dependent on the ability of new grouping controls being implemented into ROM. This would simplify graphs and tables, yet provide detail for every race group in the corresponding table. Each ROM site could potentially determine the grouping that makes sense for their jurisdiction and make such adjustments in the ROM administrative tools.

## Reports Design and Data Display

There are two general report types that will be provided in Phase 1.

Type 1: Decision Point Analysis – Figure 4 below provides a design mock-up for the Decision Point Analysis (DPA) using the decision points implemented in Phase 1.

Type 2: Disproportionality and Disparity – The second report type is displayed in Figures 5 and 6 below. This report type would display by decision point by either the Disproportionality Index or Disparity Ratio (separate reports). Disparity calculations would be done using the race group “white” as the denominator (index group). Both Trend and Unit Views will be provided for each report. Figure 5 represents a Trend View and Figure 6 provides a Unit View of the same report type. These reports will be provided on each decision point using the base population selected by the ROM administrator. There will be one set of reports for each decision point showing the Disproportionality Index and another showing the Disparity Ratio across race groups with “white” always having a Disparity Ratio of 1. The ROM Site Administrator can decide which of these reports to offer in their instance of ROM.

A new report type was identified for Phase 2 that displays a Disparity Ratio across decision points. Figure 7 offers an example of this report layout. It is envisioned that a report would be provided for each major race group comparison (e.g., black to white, Hispanic to white). A more advanced report may be developed where the end user selects the race groups upon which to base the disparity calculation.

Phase 2 would also enable the use of ROM’s Crosstab View that use selected variables as long as the variables are available in the decision point and the selected base population. For example, one could look at disproportionality at the “Enter Foster Care” decision point that uses “Accepted Reports” as the Base Population. Since a range of characteristics are available in both populations (e.g., age, gender, judicial district) the data can be cross tabulated. With the planned addition of crosstabs using two variables, one could be looking at disproportionality by race, age, and gender, for example.

## Reports in ROM by Race Group

A summary report will be made available in ROM that provides the following reports offered as crosstabs on race as a default. A ROM Site may modify this list.

1. Safe from Maltreatment Recurrence
2. Permanency in 12
3. Permanency in 24
4. No Re-entry into Foster Care
5. Placement Stability (in care under 12 months)
6. Siblings Placed Together
7. Placement Types (e.g., in family like setting)
8. Discharge Reason (e.g., exiting to permanency)

A summary report will be offered in the same style that other summary reports are currently being presented in ROM. Figure 8 below shows an example of what this looks like for two existing reports. Existing summary reports may be viewed in ROM (e.g., Composite 1 Summary: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification).

Phase 2 may include a new report type as displayed in Figure 9 which puts several measures on one report. This report type makes it easier for the user to look across measures and was viewed favorably by workgroup members.

## Summary of Reports Developed in Phase 1

The following are the 14 reports that will be developed for Phase 1 of ROM’s racial disproportionality and disparity reports. Decision Point Analysis has only one view that can be adjusted by the Unit (e.g. Statewide, Regional, Sub-Region, etc) for those Unit levels defined by geographic county. The Disproportionality and Disparity reports are for each decision point and will be available by Trend and Unit Views for those units defined by geographic county.

1. Decision Point Analysis
2. Disproportionality: All Child Reports
3. Disproportionality: Accepted Referrals
4. Disproportionality: Child Victim

Disproportionality

1. Disproportionality: Entered Foster Care
2. Disproportionality: In Foster Care
3. Disproportionality: Exit Foster Care
4. Disparity: All Child Reports
5. Disparity: Accepted Referrals

Disparity

1. Disparity: Child Victim
2. Disparity: Entered Foster Care
3. Disparity: In Foster Care
4. Disparity: Exit Foster Care
5. Summary of Outcomes By Race (Summary of eight reports cross tabulated by race)

## Use of Reports

Interest was expressed by several workgroup members for KU to provide additional information that could assist ROM sites with developing approaches for using the data to address disproportionality and disparity. Some states around the country have already worked to identify and implement practice and policy strategies addressing disproportionality. One of the examples put forward was Connecticut’s regional meetings (entitled “Courageous Conversations”) that presented data on disproportionality and provided opportunities for staff to engage in developing policy and practice responses. Concern was also expressed about misinterpretation of these data. Ideas put forth to prepare states on the use of these new reports included:

* Pulling together written material on approaches that states or counties have developed to address disproportionality.
* Host meetings among ROM sites for exchanging ideas and exploring ideas for addressing disproportionality.
* Host webinars to hear from other child welfare jurisdictions who have undertaken strategies they took to reduce disproportionality.
* Develop additional information as part of the Resources in the main menu and include information in Help that explains the report and provides a context for the information provided.

ROM staff will explore existing resources to provide this kind of information during the time reports are being developed. Casey Family Programs has done a great deal of work address racial disproportionality and will be consulted to explore what informational resources can be accessed.

The idea of establishing goals for reducing disproportionality was discussed. Generally, the goal of the DI and DR reports is to be as close to the value of 1 as possible. There is potential for improvement goal lines to be set in ROM just as there can be with any report.

## Timeline and Next Steps

July – August 2013

* ROM staff conducts individual ROM site meetings to make sure the proposal meets each agency’s needs and discuss plans for a single race field and use of census data.
* Write final report.

September 2013

* Begin development of the new reports.

December

* Complete development of Phase 1 of reports.
* Make reports available for UAT in January 2014.

January – February

* Conduct UAT and make corrections as needed.
* Put reports into production as indicated by UAT.

Further, the workgroup will reconvene in April or May 2014 to finalize Phase 2 plans. It was recognized that the development schedule was somewhat aggressive. ROM staff will strive to meet these target dates but may be slowed by a recent staffing change or other circumstances not foreseen.

**Figure 4 Decision Point Analysis Mock-up**



**Figure 5: Disproportionality Index or Disparity Ratio (available in separate reports) – Trend View Mock-up**

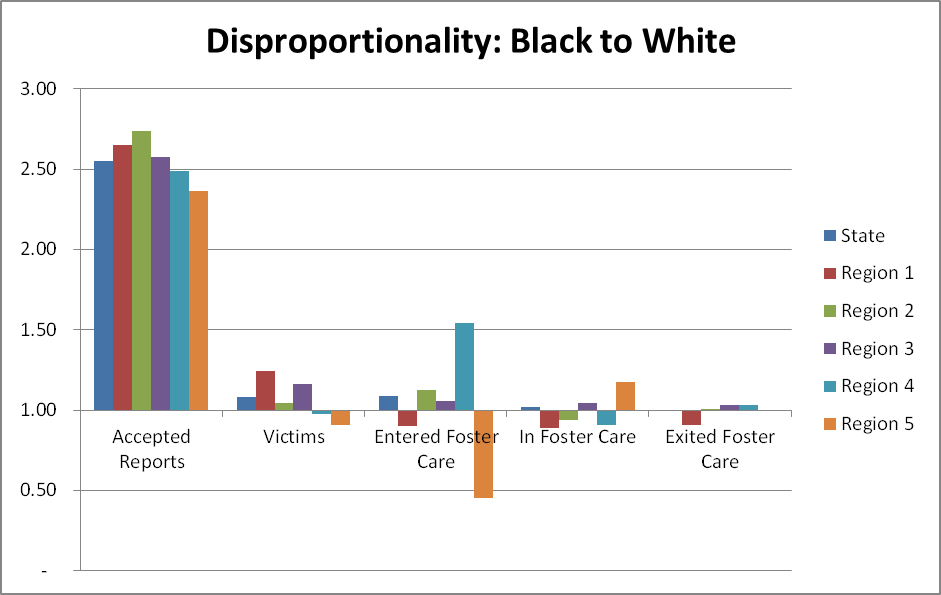


**Figure 6: Disproportionality Index or Disparity Ratio (both would be available in separate reports) – Unit View**



**Figure 7: Disparity Report Type (Phase 2)**

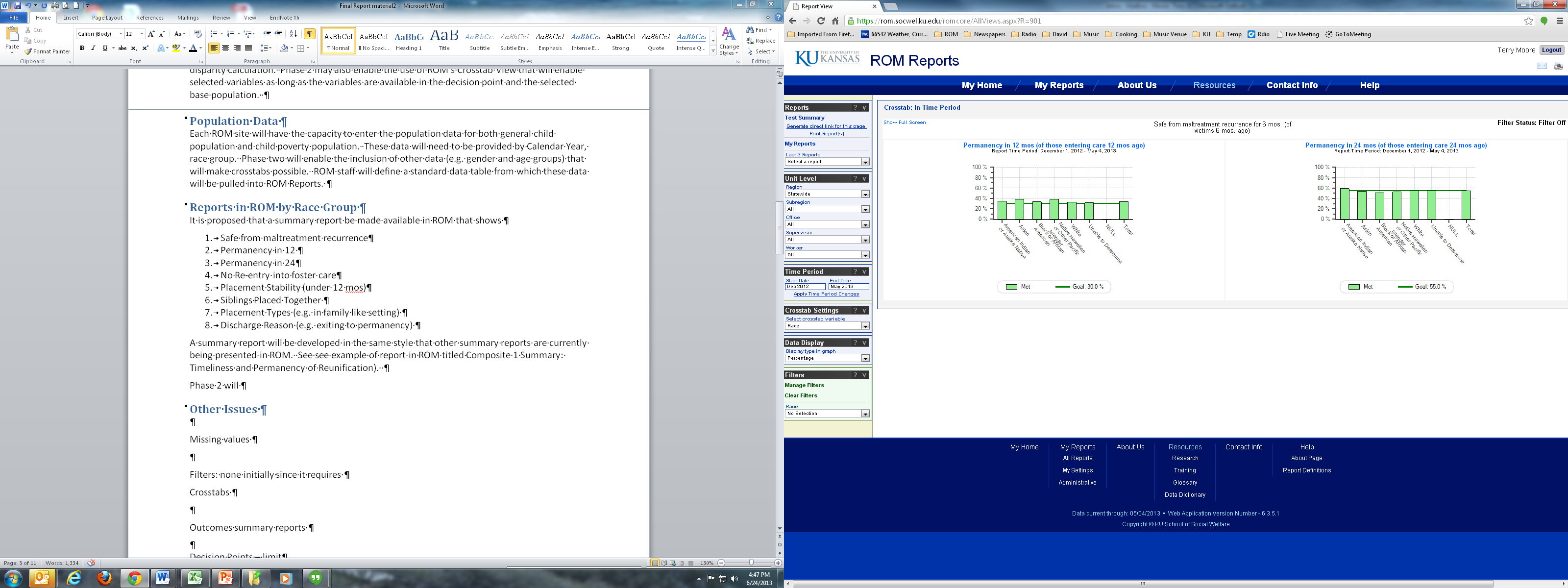
Unit View



In the Trend view this becomes the reports periods (e.g. months, quarters, years)



**Figure 8:** Summary Report for reports in ROM crosstabbed by race group.



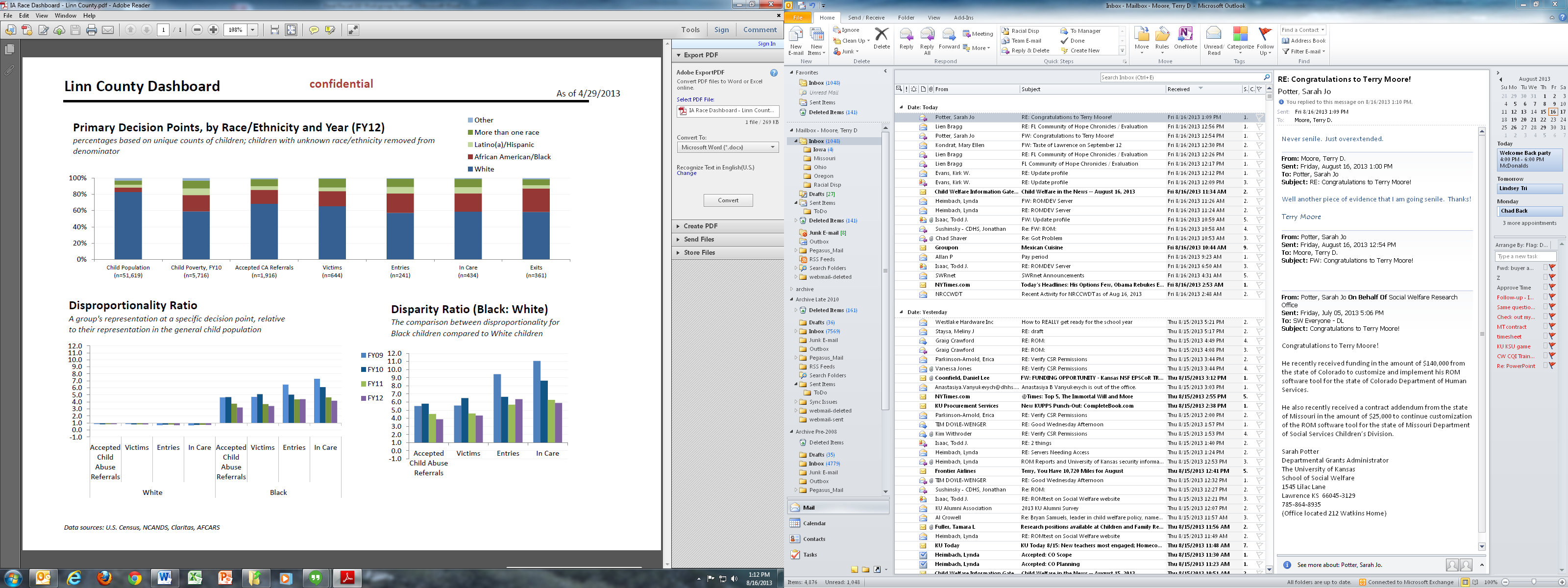
**NOTE:** only two reports are shown here but a ROM site could include as many of the reports that are currently available.

**Figure 9:** Phase 2 Summary Report for selected reports



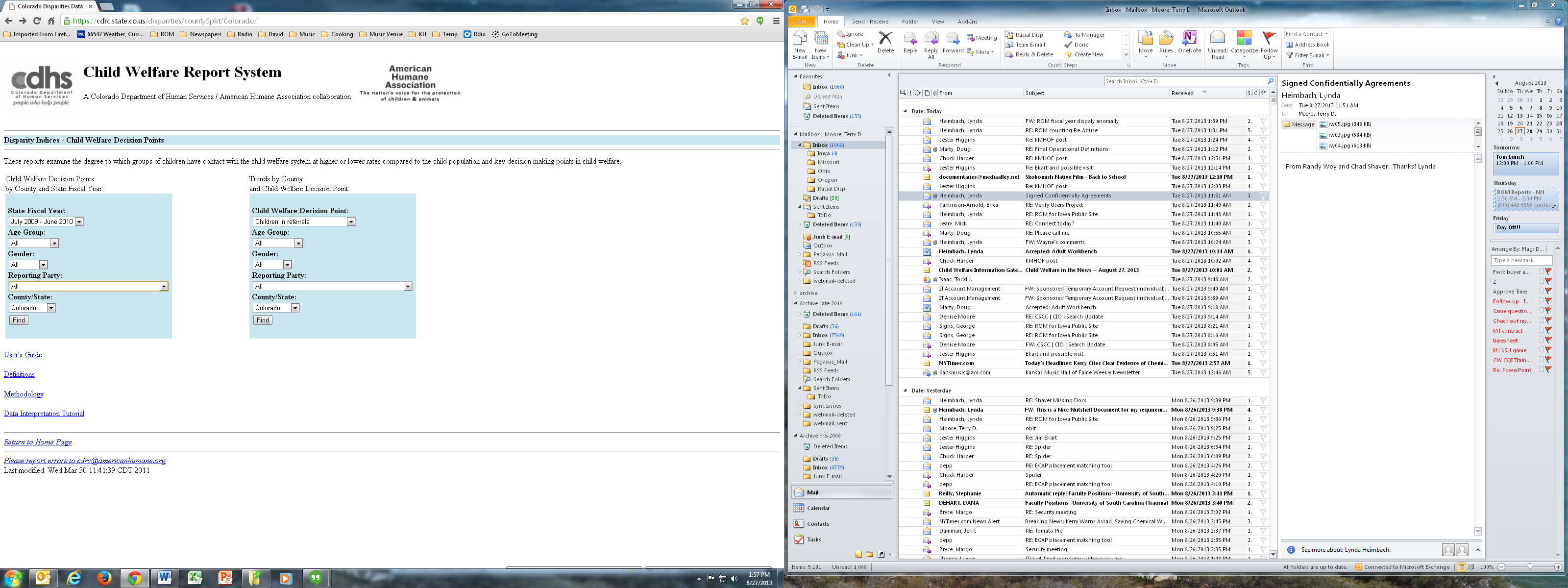
# Appendix A: Example Reports

Linn County, Iowa (prepared by Casey Family Programs)



Appendix A:

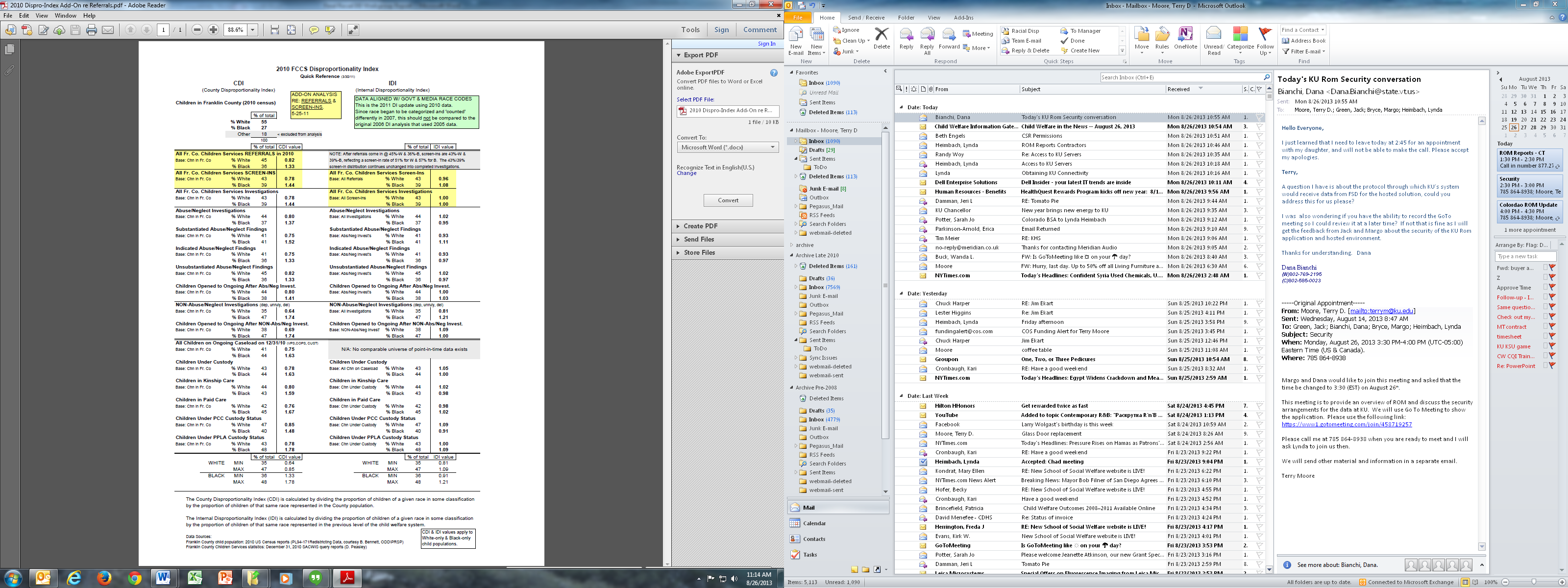
Colorado Department of Human Services (<https://cdrc.state.co.us/disparities/countySplit/Colorado/>)



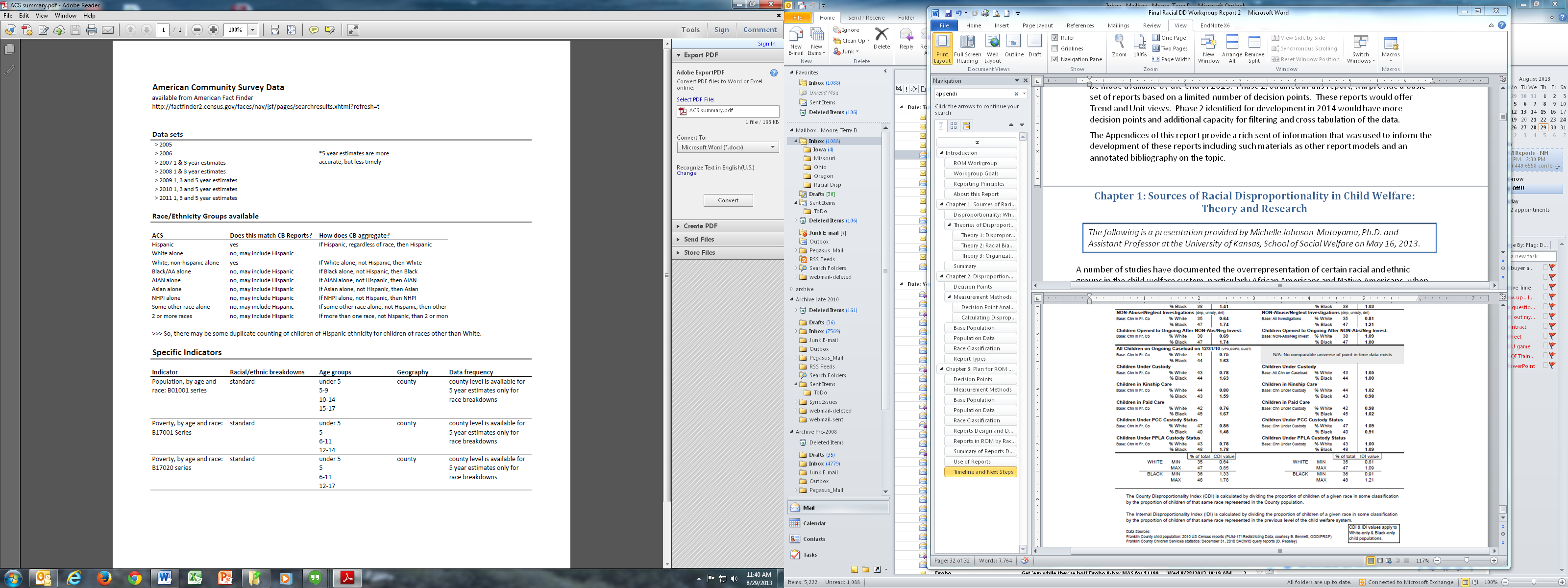
Appendix A: Oregon Department of Human Services



Appendix A: Franklin County Children Services in Ohio



# Appendix B: ACS Survey Data



# Appendix C: Terminology

Operational Definitions: ROM Racial Disproportionality and Disparity

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Key Terms** | **Definition** | **Source** |
| Child population | Number of children under age 18 in the general population (in calendar year as adjusted) | Determined by ROM Site (e.g.: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, or private sources such as Claritas) |
| Child poverty | Number of children under age 18 living in poverty in the general population (in calendar year as adjusted) | Source same as child population |
| Referral population | Number of child reports to CPS in a 12 month period (floating/annualized) | ROM |
| Base population | Population used for computing disproportionality or disparity for each decision point such as: 1) General child population; 2) Poverty population; or 3) a prior decision point (chain method) | Census or ROM |
| Disproportionality Index (DI) | Percent of race group at decision point divided by the Percent of the same race group in a base population | Internal calculation |
| Disparity Ratio (DR) | DI of one race group (e.g. Black) divided by the DI of another race group (e.g. White) | Internal calculation |
| Decision Point | Change in case/child status which represents a decision made by child welfare professionals or other key actors (e.g. accepted CPS report) |  |
| Decision Point: All Child Reports | Number of child reports to CPS in a 12 month period (floating/annualized) | ROM |
| Decision Point: Accepted Referrals | Number of child reports to CPS accepted (screened-in) for investigation or assessment in a 12 month period (floating/annualized) | ROM |
| Decision Point: Child Victim | Number of child reports substantiated or indicated (confirmed or founded) in a 12 month period (floating/annualized) | ROM |
| Decision Point: Enter Foster Care | Number of children entering out-of-home care (each episode) in a 12 month period (floating/annualized) | ROM |
| Decision Point: In Foster Care | Number of children in out-of-home care on the last day of a report period. This includes children all children in an open federal removal episode (point in time) | ROM |
| Decision Point: Exit Foster Care | Number of children who discharged during in a given year (floating/annualized) | ROM |

# Appendix D: Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality in Child Welfare Annotated Bibliography

**July 14, 2013**

***Search Strategies***

**Search terms:**

1. For *child welfare*: “child welfare”, “child protection”, “foster care”, “child protect”

2. For *race* and *ethnicity*: “race”, “racial”, “ethnic”

3. For *disproportionality*: “disparity”, “disparit”, “inequality”, “inequalit”, “unequal”, “inequity”, “inequit”, “disproportionality”, “disproportionalit”

**Years:** 2003-2013

**Databases:** Google Scholar, PSYCinfo, Social Service Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts, ERIC, PubMed, PolicyFile, JSTOR, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, The Cochrane Collaboration, The Campbell Collaboration

***Results***

**Anyon, Y. (2011). Reducing racial disparities and disproportionalities in the child welfare system: Policy perspectives about how to serve the best interests of African American youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 242-253.**

This article examines current debates about how to reduce the overrepresentation of African American youth in the child welfare system and address related disparities. These debates reflect tensions between four long-standing perspectives in child welfare: expedient permanency, cultural continuity, family preservation, and social advantage. For each point of view, proponents' unique framing of the problem, use of research, and preferred intervention strategies are described. The emphasis of current federal policy on expedient permanency and transracial adoption is explored, followed by a detailed review of the literature evaluating the impact of this intervention on child and system-level outcomes. It is argued that conclusive evidence does not exist in support of transracial adoption and the expedient permanency perspective above others. Implications for policy and future research are discussed. (Abstract)

**Ards, S. D., Myers, S. L, Jr., Malkis, A., Sugrue, E., & Zhou, L. (2003). Racial disproportionality in reported and substantiated child abuse and neglect: An examination of systematic bias. *Children and Youth Services Review, 25*(5/6), 375-392.**

Using data from Minnesota for 2000, we show that measures of discrimination in maltreatment substantiation are inflated by a failure to disaggregate counties with large minority populations from those with small minority populations. Racial disparities in substantiation rates, conditional upon reports to child protective service workers, are not huge. Nonetheless, measures of discrimination—once one accounts for characteristics of victims, offenders, reporters, counties and types of maltreatment—are non-trivial. For African Americans, they are higher in the state as a whole than in counties that have the largest share of minority children. Although the discrimination measures do not vanish when disaggregated analysis is performed, our findings suggest that caution should be displayed when reporting disproportionality statistics that include data from widely dispersed geographical areas. (Abstract)

**Bowman, A., Hofer, L., O’Rourke, C., & Read, L. (2009). *Racial disproportionality in Wisconsin’s child welfare system.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin—Madison.**

In the United States, studies show that African American and American Indian children are most overrepresented in the child welfare system and more likely to be reported, investigated, and removed from their homes than white children. This racial disproportionality is even greater in Wisconsin, compared to most other states. In 2008, African American children represented 8% of children in Wisconsin, but 54% of children in foster care (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2009c). Although American Indians make up 1.2% of the state’s child population, 2.8% of children that child protective services investigated were identified as American Indian in 2007, as this report shows.

Scholars have proposed three main theories to explain the causes of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. These include disproportionate risk factors among families of color that lead to greater incidents of maltreatment; the child welfare services decision-making model that suggests racially biased decision-making contributes to the overrepresentation of children of color; and difficulties in recruiting adoptive families for children of color, so they cannot exit the system as readily as white children.

Our study assesses disproportionality of African American and American Indian children in Wisconsin’s child welfare system. In line with past research, we find that investigation (entry into the system) and removal (out-of-home placement) are the decision points at which the overrepresentation of African American children is most severe and therefore most in need of further attention from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. We find that a high degree of overrepresentation exists at investigation for American Indian children. Due to data limitations, we cannot draw conclusions about the experience of American Indian children at later stages. American Indian children are overrepresented in foster care, but we do not have sound data about their treatment in child welfare beyond investigation.

We highlight three jurisdictions working to resolve racial and ethnic disproportionality. Ramsey County, Minnesota focuses on cultural competency staff training and the use of cultural consultants. The state of Michigan is increasing family participation in the system to reduce the number of children of color placed in out-of-home care. Sioux City, Iowa is addressing the needs of American Indians.

We recommend the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families follow the trajectory of other jurisdictions by exploring what we present as promising practices. These steps include further analysis of child welfare data, the creation of an action committee, and development of an action plan. We offer policy and practice recommendations that coincide with the promising practice steps. We hope this report serves as an impetus for the Department to continue to address racial disproportionality in Wisconsin’s child welfare system. (Executive Summary)

**Carter, V. B. (2010). Factors predicting placement of urban American Indian/Alaskan Natives into out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 657-663.**

American Indian/Alaskan Native children have disproportionately been placed into out-of-home care compared to White children in the child welfare system. What were the factors that child protective services (CPS) workers considered when deciding to remove a child from the home? Utilizing data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, this study examined out-of-home care factors for 2215 urban American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) and White children. In the urban sample, children from White families were younger and were more likely to be investigated for lack of supervision, while AI/AN families were investigated for physical neglect. In the placement regression models, urban AI/AN children came from homes where caregivers had greater alcohol, drug and mental health problems. Decisions by CPS workers to place AI/AN children may have been influenced by racial bias. A CPS system that acknowledges culture and race may reduce overrepresentation in placement. Efforts to work with AI/AN families prior to a child's removal may prove to be beneficial and less expensive. (Abstract)

**CSSP. (2004). Basic facts on disproportionate representation of African Americans in the foster care system**. **Fact sheet 1. *The Race + Child Welfare Project.* Washington, DC: Author.**

This fact sheet provides statistics on the number of African-American children in foster care to highlight the disproportionate representation of minority children in the child welfare system. It cites statistics that indicate 36.6% of total number of children in the child welfare system in fiscal year (FY) 2000 were African-American, despite the fact that African-American children only comprised 15% of the total U.S. child population under 18 in FY 2000. It notes that 46 States have disproportionate representations of African-American children in their child welfare systems, and that in these States, the proportion of African-American children in foster care is more than two times the proportion of African American children in the State's total child population 18 years and younger. A chart illustrates the degree of overrepresentation in each State's child welfare system. (Abstract)

**CSSP. (2004). State-by-state statistical profile of racial overrepresentation in foster care. Fact sheet 2. *The Race + Child Welfare Project.* Washington, DC: Author.**

Currently, there is no widely used method for calculating racial over-representation or racial disparity in the foster care system. This fact sheet offers one approach to quantifying the extent of this problem. The project calculated a "racial disproportionality ratio" by dividing the proportion of Black (or non-Hispanic White) children in foster care by the proportion of Black (or non-Hispanic White) children in the state population under the age of 18. They then classified the 50 states into the following four groups based on their racial disproportionality rates for African Americans: Comparable Representation (states with rates under 1.50); Moderate Disproportion (states with rates between 1.50-2.49); High Disproportion (states with rates between 2.50-3.49); and Extreme Disproportion (states with rates of 3.50 and over). "Racial disparity" occurs when the rate of disproportionality of one racial group (e.g., African Americans) exceeds that of a comparison group (e.g., White Americans). A table indicates the statistical overrepresentation of African-American children and black-white disparity among children in foster care in the 50 States for the year 2000. (Modified abstract)

**Cheng, T. C., & Lo, C. C. (2012). Racial disparities in access to needed child welfare services and worker–client engagement. *Child and Youth Services Review, 34,* 1624-1632.**

We studied secondary data from 2896 parents involved in the child welfare system, seeking any racial disparities in parents' receipt of needed services; in accessibility of services; and in caseworkers' engagement with parents. Our sample was extracted from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. We used generalized least squares random-effects modeling for panel data, separately with 3 ethnicity subsamples, to evaluate associations between receipt of needed services and several explanatory variables. For all 3 subsamples, results showed that services receipt was associated with availability of services, with problematic service access, and with client refusal of services. Results showed Hispanics were likeliest to receive services. African Americans whose services access had been problematic were less likely to receive services than were Whites encountering the same access problems. Reduced rates of services receipt among African Americans appeared associated with caseworker effort to maintain good relationships with clients. Among Hispanics, caseworker assistance with goal attainment was associated positively with services receipt. Implications for social work practice and child welfare services are discussed (Abstract).

**Chibnall, S., Dutch, N. M., Jones-Harden, B., Brown, A., Gourdine, R., Smith, J., Boone, A., & Snyder, S. (2003). *Children of color in the child welfare system: Perspectives from the child welfare community*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families.**

Executive Summary

Responding to concerns about the over-representation of minority children in the child welfare system, particularly African-American children, the Children's Bureau sponsored an exploratory qualitative study of the child welfare system's response to children of color. The project was intended to meet the following goals:

* To gain insight into the issue of over-representation (or racial disproportionality) from the perspective of the child welfare community, including agency administrators, supervisors, and direct service workers
* To describe the strategies child welfare and child-welfare serving agencies use to meet the needs of children and families of color in the child welfare system.

The findings from the study are important for several reasons. First, very few studies have considered the child welfare community's perception on over-representation. Second, few studies have looked at the manner in which agencies are responding to over-representation. As such, this study provides a unique perspective on the issue and potential solutions to it. Third, the information presented here can be used to inform policy makers about over-representation and potentially promising practices, strategies, and programs that are being implemented to reduce it. Finally, the information can educate and inform the child welfare community, by increasing awareness of over-representation, and providing examples of programs, practices, and strategies that they can implement in their own agencies to better serve children and families of color.

**METHODOLOGY**

As an exploratory study and one of the first major efforts in the child welfare field to explore the attitudes and perceptions of the child welfare community concerning racial disproportionality, a qualitative approach was chosen as the primary method of inquiry. In new fields of study such as this one, where little work has been done, few definitive hypotheses exist, and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon (e.g., the field's perception on over-representation), qualitative inquiry is a reasonable beginning point for the research.

To meet the goals of the study, the project team conducted site visits to nine child welfare agencies to talk with agency administrators, supervisors, and workers, among others, regarding the issue of over-representation, and to find out more about the types of programs, practices, and strategies that are being implemented to meet the needs of children and families of color, particularly African-American children and families.

Sites were selected with input from several key Federal stakeholders as well as a team of nationally recognized experts in the field of disproportionality. While the selection criteria varied somewhat across sites, at the minimum, sites were known to be implementing initiatives, reform efforts, or programs, activities, and projects that were aligned with the study's goals (e.g., to reduce disproportionality and meet the needs of children and families of color.) In addition, the sites were thought to have data available regarding disproportionality and program outcomes, and a willingness to participate in the study.

In the end, nine sites were selected for participation, including: one agency each in Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, California, North Carolina, Virginia, and Texas, and two agencies in Minnesota.

**FINDINGS**

**General Perceptions.** First, participants were encouraged to describe their own general perceptions of the issue of overrepresentation, that is, why they thought children of color were overrepresented in the child welfare system. The following themes emerged:

* *Poverty* — Across all sites, an overwhelming majority of participants at all levels cited poverty, and poverty-related circumstances, as primary reasons for the over-representation of minority children in the child welfare system.
* *Need for services and lack of resources* — Participants noted that, despite their need for services, poor families were more likely to be living in resource-poor communities, many of which also were geographically isolated from other communities that might offer support and services. As a result, families living in poverty were the least likely to have resources available to them.
* *Visibility of impoverished and minority families to other systems* — Participants reported that because minority families are more likely to be poor and to lack access to resources, they are also more likely to use public services, including public health care (e.g., hospitals and clinics), and to receive public assistance, including TANF and Medicaid. Participants felt that having more frequent contact with these systems made African-American families more "visible" in terms of the problems they might be experiencing, including child abuse and neglect.
* *Lack of resources available to minority families to negotiate the child welfare system* — According to participants, African-American parents frequently lack important information about how the child welfare system works, the financial resources to navigate the system, including hiring an attorney, and the confidence to advocate for themselves and their children.
* *Vulnerability of African-American communities* — Participants talked about the effects of oppression on the African-American community, including under-education and unemployment. They felt that as African-Americans experienced fewer and fewer opportunities, the community found itself disempowered. Over time, African-American communities became more vulnerable to such social ills as drugs and violence and, as communities became more vulnerable, so too did the families that lived in them, eventually finding themselves more vulnerable to involvement in social service systems, including child welfare.
* *Over-reporting of minority parents for child abuse and neglect* — Some theorists and researchers argue that disproportionality is a result of discriminatory practices within the larger society against minority, particularly African-American groups (e.g., differential treatment by race). According to participants in this study, in relation to the child welfare system, this differential treatment manifests itself most often in the over-reporting of minority parents for child abuse and neglect. The systems most frequently involved, at least as reported in this study, are the medical and school systems.
* *Pressure from the media* — According to participants, the media also play a role in the over-representation of minority children in the child welfare system. In recent years, increased media attention nationwide to extreme cases of abuse and neglect has left supervisors and workers alike feeling vulnerable and under increased scrutiny from the agency administration and the community. Unfortunately, participants in several agencies reported that these feelings of uncertainty often manifest in their substantiating more cases and, as a result, bringing more children into care.
* *Lack of experience with other cultures* — In many cases, participants felt that their colleagues, across racial and ethnic groups and job categories, brought preconceived ideas or biases against minority groups, most often African Americans, to their position within the agency. Participants, most often African-American participants, identified racial bias as a common problem that frequently interfered with good decision making. They felt that many staff, but Caucasian staff in particular, lacked exposure to cultures other than their own and had no context for understanding the cultural norms and practices of minority populations.
* *Defining abusive behavior* — One frequently cited example of worker bias was the difference in perception between white and black workers regarding what constitutes abuse and discipline, particularly discipline within the African-American culture. Many African-American workers gave examples of situations where physical discipline might be confused with abuse if the individual making the determination had no previous exposure to the African-American community and its disciplinary practices.

**Influences of Federal policy.** In discussions about how Federal policies, such as the Multi-ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) have influenced the way in which the agencies serve children and families, the following issues were common across sites:

* *Familiarity and confusion with MEPA* — In this study, participants' familiarity with MEPA varied based on their position within the agency. While agency administrators were generally familiar with and knowledgeable about MEPA, many direct service workers and supervisors were not. Placement workers were more familiar with MEPA than were investigators or in-home workers, but this is not surprising given that placement workers are responsible for finding and approving adoptive homes for children, a responsibility that requires them to be informed of adoption policies. In addition, supervisors and direct service workers alike reported confusion about what MEPA was designed to do and, subsequently, raised concerns regarding how to implement it.
* *Concerns regarding transracial placements* — The literature regarding MEPA suggests that some individuals who oppose it do so because they are concerned about the detrimental effects of transracial placements on a child's overall well-being. Specifically, some in the child welfare community believe that transracial placements are detrimental to children's overall well-being, including children's adjustment to adoption, their self-esteem, and their ethnic or racial identity. Participants in several sites expressed this viewpoint, reporting that MEPA was contrary to the "best interests" of African-American children.
* *Broadening the role of extended families* — Participants reported that MEPA had helped their agencies broaden the role of the extended family in placement decisions, a positive outcome. They reported that when MEPA was first passed, some of their agencies were desperate to find placement resources for African-American children. In many cases, without a lot of alternatives and little to no additional funding, agencies had no choice but to turn to the extended family network for help. Participants were not sure they would have considered these options if MEPA had not pushed them to consider alternatives. They also reported being pleased with the outcomes related to involving kin.
* *Shortened timelines under ASFA* — The primary concern expressed by participants regarding ASFA was that its shortened timelines were too restrictive for families dealing with multiple issues. Across sites and at all levels, participants voiced concerns about whether parents experiencing substance abuse, mental health or other serious problems would be able to manage and change their situations effectively within ASFA timelines. Their biggest fear was that the agency would be forced to move toward termination of parental rights before parents had sufficient time to receive appropriate services or become engaged in treatment in a therapeutic manner.
* *Limited resources* — Participants talked about the challenges of implementing ASFA without additional financial resources to support mental health and substance abuse treatment for parents working toward reunification and also for potential adoptive families. With the emphasis on permanency, agencies felt pressure to find large pools of adoptive families, while the emphasis on shortened timelines required quick access to quality services, something that is not always available.
* *Increased permanency options for children* — Participants felt that ASFA had resulted in positive change by increasing permanency options for children. While there were concerns regarding the timelines, participants perceived that the timelines also provided both workers and parents with the motivation to respond more quickly, assessing a family's needs and finding appropriate services in a timely manner.

**Directions for change.** Participants also described the types of policies, procedures or practices they thought would enable their agency to better serve children and families of color. Their comments are summarized below:

* *Emphasizing prevention* — The overwhelming emphasis among participants was for agencies to focus on prevention and provide more front-end or prevention programs and services to families.
* *Building public and private agency partnerships* — In recent years, public agencies have come to recognize the opportunities and resources that are available through new relationships with private agencies. All of the agencies represented in this study currently have relationships with private child welfare agencies, including community-based and ethnic-oriented agencies. These relationships include both formal contractual relationships and informal referral-based ones. One of the advantages of having relationships with private agencies is that they can be located within the community, especially the ethnic agencies.
* *Additional resources* — Overwhelmingly, participants across sites reported that they simply needed more resources to serve clients, including more time to spend with families, and more resources to support families to stay together, including such basic necessities as food, housing, employment, and child care options.
* *Culturally diverse and competent staff* — Participants agreed that staff should be culturally competent, which in this context means having a diverse workforce that is representative of the population being served and that, regardless of race, can understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities within and among groups.
* *More workers and smaller caseloads* — Across all sites workers reported that hiring more workers and reducing caseloads would improve the delivery of services not only to families of color but to all families. Across the board, workers talked about feeling pressured for time to spend with families, make good decisions and complete paperwork in a timely and efficient manner. In fact, some participants felt that they spend more time engaged in administrative tasks than they do working with families or that they feel pressure to trade administrative tasks for practice or practice for administrative tasks, but always lack sufficient time for both.
* *Administrative support* — Participants talked about the importance of an agency infrastructure that includes experienced workers, proper supervision and oversight, strong peer relationships, and manageable caseloads in reducing disproportionality. They felt that a strong agency infrastructure could reduce disproportionality by allowing supervisors and workers alike to do their jobs more effectively. If supervisors are able to supervise properly, then workers will be able to do their jobs more effectively, leading to better outcomes for children and families, including fewer children coming into the system in the first place.
* *External resources to serve families* — Participants referred to the importance of having access to resources external to the agency to help support families to stay together, including adequate housing, educational and employment opportunities, quality child-care services, and financial support. They also discussed the importance of ancillary services, including community-based drug treatment and mental health services, in keeping families stable and children out of the system. While tangible resources are important, many participants also talked about the importance of addressing larger, more systemic issues such as the lack of information, advocacy and power they often see in their African-American clients. According to some workers, if every family had equal access to these resources, over-representation would take care of itself because fewer children would come into the system in the first place.
* *Agency resources to serve families* — Participants talked about needing additional client resources within the child welfare agency, especially monetary resources, as critical to addressing over-representation. One of the issues most frequently discussed by participants was the need for financial incentives and resources for foster and adoptive families, particularly for kinship care providers. In addition to incentives to foster and adopt, families also need post-adoption support services.
* *Community connections* — Participants in all sites felt that developing relationships with communities and partnerships with community-based systems and agencies was another important mechanism for reducing over-representation, re-emphasizing the need to establish collaborative and contractual relationships with ethnic and community-based agencies to provide services to minority families.

**Current efforts to serve children of color**. Participants described their own agencies' ongoing programs and policies that address the needs of children and families of color. Some of these activities include:

* *Prevention programs* — including alternative response systems designed to identify and engage at-risk families before they come to the attention of the formal child welfare system. Another prevention program, Schools First, assigns culturally appropriate caseworkers to families who then work with them in their homes to identify needs and negotiate services.
* *Recruitment strategies for minority foster care and adoptive families* — Several agencies are implementing programs targeted toward creating and supporting adoption options for minority families, including recruitment efforts, and strategies to provide financial support to kinship care providers who have assumed guardianship for a relative's child.
* *Systems change efforts* — Two sites have implemented system reform strategies that have resulted in the provision of financial support to kinship care providers. Through a Federal government waiver, local child welfare agencies now have the option of transitioning relatives who are caring for children to legal guardian status, and to provide them with higher payments than they would receive from child-only TANF payments.
* *Collaboration and contracted services* — To better serve minority clients and reduce over-representation, agencies also are increasing the frequency with which they collaborate and contract with community-based agencies for services, another form of system reform. While most of the nine agencies had formal contracts with outside service providers, some also had contracts with ethnic-based and other child-welfare serving agencies to provide foster care, adoption, and support services to minority clients as a major resource to them.
* *Councils on over-representation* — Some agencies have responded to the issue of over-representation by developing and implementing coalitions, councils or other collaborative boards to examine the issue of over-representation, and problem-solve ways to reduce it.
* *Agency practices* — Agencies also have responded to improving the delivery of services to minority families by focusing on agency practices, including implementing practices related to training and supervision of staff, as well as implementing hiring practices designed to diversify the staff to better represent the client population.

**ISSUES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

* *Administrative support* — In order for child welfare staff to feel confident and effective and, one might argue, perform accordingly, they require support from within the agency. This support takes several forms, including administrative support and encouragement, supervision and oversight, strong peer relationships, and manageable caseloads. In agencies in which one or more of these factors was reported absent, participants (usually direct service workers) talked about feeling overwhelmed and unsure of their ability to make good decisions.
* *Staff training and experience* — Similar to employees in any agency or organization, child welfare agency staff are most effective when they are well educated and well trained. Increasingly, however, to be effective in dealing with increasingly more diverse and troubled families, child welfare staff require greater breadth and depth of education and training than in previous years, before the influx of immigrant groups and the proliferation of drugs into society. As one of the only means for workers to stay abreast of new policies and procedures and strategies for dealing with such client-specific issues as mental illness, addiction, and different and varied cultures, it was important to participants that ongoing, agency-sponsored training remain a priority.
* *Training in cultural competence* — Participants reported needing more training in cultural awareness and sensitivity, especially in light of the number of participants who reported having observed worker bias toward children and families of color. Participants believed that workers sometimes made decisions based on the race or socio-economic background of a family rather than on the specifics of the case, and that this differential decision making often results in African-American and impoverished families being more likely to have children removed from the home or parental rights terminated. While most agencies have some training focused on cultural issues, the training sessions are frequently short-term or one-time events that may be insufficient to address such difficult and complex issues as racial or class bias.
* *Resources* — Participants reported needing access to resources both internal and external to the agency. With regard to internal resources, participants reported needing more resources to support foster and adoptive families, including kin. With regard to external resources, participants reported that they simply need more resources to serve clients, including financial resources to pay for, and agencies to provide, mental health and substance abuse services. They also reported needing additional resources to keep families together, including relationships with agencies that could provide such necessities as food, housing, employment opportunities, and child care options.
* *Emphasis on prevention* — Participants felt strongly that shifting the philosophy of the child welfare system from one that intervenes after the fact to one that focuses on keeping children out of the system would have profound implications for the numbers of children coming into care, and especially for children of color.
* *Relating policy more closely to practice* — Another issue that emerged is the manner by which policies are created. Because policy often is driven by public perception, and because public perception is influenced by the media's portrayal of events, child welfare policies are often developed in response to a perceived problem or crisis. Creating policies this way sometimes results in policies that are removed from the practices they were designed to guide.
* *Improving services through support of contractual relationships* — Participants emphasized improving services to children and families by contracting out more services to community-based and private child welfare agencies. Participants in this study talked about the value of having access to these services, especially community-based services. Community-based services are invaluable because they can meet the needs of children and families right in their own neighborhood, reducing the amount of time and burden on families to travel long distances to receive services; provide child welfare agency staff with viable options for quality service delivery; and are more likely to have an ethnic focus, allowing for service delivery within a culturally appropriate and sensitive context.
* *Improving the reporting system* — Participants across sites talked about a variety of factors influencing who gets reported and for what. In general, there is a lack of consistency across child welfare agencies regarding standards for what constitutes abuse or neglect. To reduce worker bias and uncertainty when making judgments regarding cases, definitions of abuse and neglect could be standardized and mandated by policy. Standard definitions also might reduce the fear and concern workers have when they are forced to make decisions in the eye of the media.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Three global themes emerged from this qualitative study that can guide future research in this area. These are:

* *Research on racial disproportionality must move beyond the examination of administrative data.* The results of this small qualitative study provided a richness that has not existed in this area of research to date. Other qualitative studies, in combination with exploratory and hypothesis-driven quantitative studies, would provide an increased understanding of this complex issue.
* *It is essential that the research in this area inform practice.* Many participants expressed a desire to address the issue of racial disproportionality head-on, but felt uncertain about effective strategies that a child welfare system could undertake. In addition, in those agencies where research was being conducted around the issue of disproportionality, staff were generally unaware that these efforts were underway and had no knowledge of findings. Empirical evaluations of practice strategies would provide guidance in this area as would an overall dissemination plan for findings that would better target the field itself.
* *It is essential that the research on racial disproportionality examine more than just black and white differences in the trajectories of children in the child welfare system.* The sites in this study served children and families of many ethnic and racial groups that are not represented in the empirical literature on racial disproportionality. For example, the evidence on the newly arrived Southeast Asian immigrants is basically non-existent in the current empirical literature. Additionally, it is important to unpack the larger ethnic groupings to conduct sub-group analyses (e.g., children with Mexican ancestry versus Puerto Rican ancestry). (Executive summary)

**CWLA. (2004). *Children of color in the child welfare system.* Washington, DC: CWLA.**

Children of color are "disproportionately" represented in the child welfare system, meaning that their relative numbers do not reflect those in the general United States population. In many cases they are "over-represented", where the percentage of children of color in the child welfare system is greater than the corresponding percentage in the overall U.S. population. CWLA's National Data Analysis System has devoted this portion of their website to facilitate access to racial and ethnic data and relevant literature about the subject. (Abstract)

**CWLA. (2011). *Addressing racial disproportionality in child welfare. Issue brief.* Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. Retrieved from www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue\_briefs/racial\_disproportionality**

The child welfare community has moved from acknowledging the problem of racial and ethnic disproportionality in the child welfare system to formulating and implementing possible solutions. As jurisdictions and agencies evaluate their systems to identify where and how disproportionality is occurring, they are seeking changes that show promise for their own populations.

This issue brief explores *efforts to address* racial disproportionality in child welfare by focusing on changes in policy and practice at specific decision points in the child welfare process—prevention, reporting, investigation, service provision, out-of-home care, and permanency—as well as policies and practices that can be implemented across several or all of these decision points. The issue brief is designed to help administrators, program managers, and policymakers explore solutions to racial disproportionality in their own child welfare systems. Specific examples of State and local projects that address disproportionality are highlighted throughout. (Abstract)

**Cort, N. A., Cerulli, C., & He, H. (2010). Investigating health disparities and disproportionality in child maltreatment reporting: 2002-2006. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 16*(4), 329-336.**

Objectives: We examined health disparities and disproportionality in child protective services (CPS) reporting at a regional academic health center.

Methods: We computed disproportionate representation and disparity indices from archived CPS reports for pediatric patients (*N* = 1 020) from 2002 to 2006.

Results: Findings indicated that medical personnel reported African American and Hispanic pediatric patients to CPS (1) at higher rates than their representation in the general pediatric patient population and (2) at a rate approximately four times that of White pediatric patients. However, White pediatric patients were reported to CPS at lower rates than their general pediatric patient representation. Additional examination of socioeconomic factors demonstrated that pediatric patients from poor neighborhoods were reported to CPS (1) at higher rates than their numbers in the patient population and (2) five times more often than pediatric patients from prosperous neighborhoods.

Conclusions: We found significant racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disproportionality and disparities in medical personnel's CPS reporting practices. These findings augment the limited literature investigating disparities and disproportionality in medical personnel's CPS reporting practices. The inclusion of pediatric and general departments allows for increased generalizability of study results. However, more rigorous empirical examination is needed to identify the causal factors responsible for noted differences. Consequently, healthcare systems' collection and examination of patients' racial/ethnic data are imperative to effectively address the multifaceted, social welfare issues of health disparities and disproportionality. (Abstract)

**Crane, K. D., & Ellis, R. A. (2004). Benevolent intervention or oppression perpetuated: minority overrepresentation in children's services.  *Journal of human behavior in the social environment*, *9*(1/2), 19-38.**

Recent efforts prompted by both federal legislation and private lawsuits have directed the attention of bureaucrats, researchers, and practitioners to the existence of a disturbing and persistent phenomenon: the overrepresentation of minorities among children in state custody. The 1988 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 recognized and legitimized the disproportionate representation of minorities in secure confinement as a national problem. Lawsuits and research projects in several states have identified a similar problem within the dependency system. Research from both fields has identified potentially devastating consequences for children who are placed in state custody by either system. These consequences may be devastating not only for individual children, but may actually serve to perpetuate many of the conditions generated by oppressive histories such as slavery, discriminatory immigration practices, and prejudicial legislation. These issues are critical not only to the nation, but to social work, whose code of ethics mandates advocacy for oppressed groups. (Abstract)

**Dettlaff, A. J, Rivaux, S. L., Baumann, D. J., Fluke, J. D., Rycraft, J. R., & James, J. (2011). Disentangling substantiation: The influence of race, income, and risk on the substantiation decision in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33,* 1630-1637.**

Understanding the source of disparities found at decision-making points along the child welfare pathway is essential to understanding and addressing the overrepresentation of African American children. Although research has documented the existence of disparities, it has been less successful in identifying the explanatory factors behind them. Critiques of research examining these disparities have suggested that poverty is likely a stronger explanatory factor than race, yet analyses that include measures of poverty using data from child welfare systems have largely not been conducted. This study uses data from the Texas child welfare system to identify the factors contributing to disparities at the substantiation decision. Given the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment, the analyses control for the effect of family income, as well as other factors related to maltreatment, to better understand the effect of race on this decision-making point. Findings indicate that when family income is controlled, race is not a significant factor in the substantiation decision. However, when also controlling for caseworker perceptions of risk, race emerges as the stronger explanatory factor. This suggests not only an important relationship between race, income, and risk assessment, but also that disproportionality in the child welfare system is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single factor. These results further demonstrate that the effect of racial bias on decision-making remains an important consideration in understanding the overrepresentation of African American children. (Abstract)

**Denby, R. W., & Curtis, C. M. (2003). Why special populations are not the target of family preservation services: A case for program reform. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 30*(2), 149-173.**

The number of children who have been placed outside their homes of origin as a result of abuse, neglect, delinquency, emotional problems, or developmental disabilities, is astronomical and steadily increasing. Of this number, "special populations" like children of color continue to be disproportionately represented. Intensive family preservation, a program that attempts to reduce out-of-home placement rates, has not demonstrated empirically, a sustained record of success in the reduction of placement rates among special populations. The purpose of the current study was to understand the manner in which special populations are targeted for services by examining the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of a national sample of family preservation workers. Results indicate a significant bias against targeting family preservation services to special populations in general, and children of color in particular. Specific recommendations about the targeting of special populations are given. (Abstract)

**Derezotes, D., Poertner, J., & Testa, M. F. (Eds.). (2005). *Race matters in child welfare: the overrepresentation of African American children in the system.* Washington, DC: CWLA.**

Although African Americans constituted 15% of the child population of the United States in 1999, they accounted for 45% of the children in substitute care. In contrast, Caucasian children, who constituted 60% of the U.S. child population, accounted for only 36% of the children in out-of-home care. Additionally, several studies show that children of different ethnic or racial backgrounds receive dissimilar treatment by the child welfare system, but little is known about the appropriateness of the treatment. This compilation of papers critically examines child welfare policy and practice, the causes of child maltreatment, and how each impacts the disproportionate representation of African American children in the system. (Abstract)

**Drake, B., Jolley, J. M., Lanier, P., Fluke, J., Barth, R. P., & Jonson-Reid, M. (2011). Racial bias in child protection? A comparison of competing explanations using national data. *Pediatrics, 127*(3), 471.**

**Objective:** Cases of child abuse and neglect that involve black children are reported to and substantiated by public child welfare agencies at a rate approximately twice that of cases that involve white children. A range of studies have been performed to assess the degree to which this racial disproportionality is attributable to racial bias in physicians, nurses, and other professionals mandated to report suspected child victimization. The prevailing current explanation posits that the presence of bias among reporters and within the child welfare system has led to the current large overrepresentation of black children. A competing explanation is that overrepresentation of black children is mainly the consequence of increased exposure to risk factors such as poverty.

**Methods:** We tested the competing models by using data drawn from national child welfare and public health sources. We compared racial disproportionality ratios on rates of victimization from official child welfare organizations to rates of key public health outcomes not subject to the same potential biases (eg, general infant mortality).

**Results:** We found that racial differences in victimization rate data from the official child welfare system are consistent with known differences for other child outcomes. We also found evidence supporting the presence of cultural protective factors for Hispanic children, termed the “Hispanic paradox.”

**Conclusions:** Although our findings do not preclude the possibility of racial bias, these findings suggest that racial bias in reporting and in the child welfare system are not large-scale drivers of racial disproportionality. Our data suggest that reduction of black/white racial disproportionality in the child welfare system can best be achieved by a public health approach to reducing underlying risk factors that affect black families. (Abstract)

**Drake, B., Lee, S. M., & Jonson-Reid, M. (2009). Race and child maltreatment reporting: Are Blacks overrepresented? *Children and Youth Services Review, 31,* 309-316.**

This paper uses Census and child welfare report data from Missouri (1999, 2000 & 2001) to determine if Whites and Blacks are reported for child maltreatment at similar or different rates while controlling for poverty and racial homogeneity. We do not find evidence for high levels of racial disproportionality once poverty is controlled. Poverty is generally associated with higher rates of reporting for both races. We found some evidence of differential sensitivity, with the relationship between poverty and report rate being somewhat stronger for Whites than for Blacks. (Abstract)

**Dworsky, A., White, C. R., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P., Courtney, M., Kessler, R., Sampson, N., & Hwang, I. (2010). Racial and ethnic differences in the outcomes of former foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32,* 902-912.**

This paper uses data from two studies, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth and the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, to examine whether there are racial or ethnic differences in foster youth outcomes and, if so, whether those differences can be explained by factors other than race or ethnicity, such as differences in family background or placement history. We find that racial or ethnic differences in outcomes are more the exception than the rule, and that some of those differences can be explained by other factors. Others mirror racial or ethnic differences observed in the general population. (Abstract)

**Fluke, J. D., Yuan, Y. T., Hedderson, J., & Curtis, P. A. (2003). Disproportionate representation of race and ethnicity in child maltreatment: Investigation and victimization. *Children and Youth Services Review, 25*(5/6), 359-373.**

Disproportionality of racial and ethnic representation in investigation and disposition of child maltreatment was examined using National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data for more than 700,000 children in five states. State disproportionality representation indices (DRI) and disparity indices (DI) were constructed for children who were the subject of an investigation of child abuse and neglect and for children who were found to be victims of maltreatment by child protective services agencies. In all five states and for both indices, African American children were overrepresented and White children consistently underrepresented at the stage of investigation for each of the states. At the determination of victimization, results for African Americans and Whites using the DRI varied greatly from county to county, but demonstrated little disproportionality. (Abstract)

**Font, S. A., Berger, L. M., & Slack, S. K. (2012). *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 2188-2200.**

Using a national sample of 1461 child protective services (CPS) investigations in the United States, we examine differences between black and white families with regard to caseworker ratings of risk and harm to the child, as well as the probability that a case is substantiated for maltreatment. We employ difference-in-difference methods to identify whether gaps in outcomes for black and white families are equivalent when black and white CPS workers conduct the investigation, and Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition methods to identify the portion of the black–white difference in outcomes that is attributable to differences in case characteristics (risk factors) versus differences in associations between these characteristics and the outcomes by race (differential treatment). We find no differences in outcomes by child race after adjusting for case characteristics. At the same time, we find that, relative to white caseworkers, black caseworkers are more likely to rate black children at subjectively higher risk of harm than white children and are also more likely to substantiate black families for maltreatment. The decomposition results suggest that—even after accounting for caseworker race—differences in outcomes for black and white children are primarily explained by differences in family and case circumstances rather than differential treatment. Thus, our analyses suggest that interventions addressing maltreatment-related risk factors that disproportionately affect black families may have greater utility for reducing racial disparities in CPS involvement than current emphases on cultural competence training. (Abstract)

**Garland, A. F., Landsverk, J. A., & Lau, A. S. (2003). Racial/ethnic disparities in mental health service use among children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 25*(5/6), 491-507.**

Children in foster care show elevated need for mental health services, and there is some evidence of greater unmet need among racial/ethnic minority youth compared to Caucasian youth. This paper reviews the evidence for racial/ethnic disparities in mental health service use among children in foster care, including previously published data, as well as new, unpublished data, and examines the extent to which the disparities persist when the effects of other service use predictors are accounted for. Potential explanations for racial/ethnic disparities in service use are also explored, including cultural differences in help seeking and factors associated with decision-making processes in child protective service systems. (Abstract)

**Harris, M. S., & Hackett, W. (2008). Decision points in child welfare: An action research model to address disproportionality. *Children and Youth Services Review, 30*, 199-215.**

Researchers conduct secondary analysis of data collected in community-based focus groups convened to analyze key decision points where racial disproportionality grew wider in child welfare. Analysis confirms findings of other research pointing to referral bias, unclear or problematic policies related to engaging kin, the confounding role of poverty, and racial disparities in the availability of services to ameliorate family problems. A new finding suggested by this work was that lack of professional awareness of the influence of bias is in and of itself a barrier. Authors assert that professionals who believe the court system is fair and rational will not be vigilant in seeking out checks and balances to racial bias and may also be less likely to seek training or consciousness-raising experiences to address their own bias. The research methodology used serves as an example of ways university-based researchers can team with community-based action planning coalitions to stimulate systems change. (Abstract)

**Hill, R. B. (2003). Disproportionality of minorities in child welfare: Synthesis of research findings. *Center for the Study of Social Policy.* Retrieved from http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/other-resources/Disproportionality-of-Minorities-in-Child-Welfare-Synthesis-of-Research-Findings.pdf**.

The disproportionality of minority children has been a major concern of child welfare for decades. Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne Giovannoni (1972) were among the first scholars to focus on the overrepresentation of African American children in their seminal work, “Children of the Storm: Black Children and American Child Welfare.” By 2000, children of color accounted for six out of ten of the more than 550,000 children in foster care, while comprising only three out of ten of all children in this country.

Why has this situation endured despite many government initiatives over the years to reduce the number of minority children in foster care? Its persistence may be due to the fact that the child welfare field is characterized by two conflicting perspectives. One camp views this overrepresentation as appropriate, since minorities have higher levels of poverty, single-parent families, and joblessness, they are perceived to be at greater risk of child maltreatment and in greater need of child welfare services than non-minorities (Bartholet 1999; McCabe et al, 1999; Pelton 1978). The opposing camp, however, considers overrepresentation to be a problem, since minorities are not believed to maltreat their children more than Caucasians. This group feels that systemic changes are needed to change child welfare policies and practices to reduce minority disproportionality (Holton 1990; Morton 1999; Roberts 2002). Yet, another major concern is, regardless of one’s position, “Are there disparities between the treatment and services provided to minorities and non-minorities by the child welfare system?”

Thus, this research summary will focus on two dimensions of disproportionality: (a) *disproportionate representation*, i.e, the over- or under-representation of minority children in child welfare as compared to their representation in the general population; and (b) *disproportionate treatment*, i.e, the disparate treatment or services provided to minority children as compared to those provided to similarly- situated Caucasian children. Clearly, disproportionate treatment is strongly correlated with disproportionate representation, since disparate treatment of minority children at various stages of the child welfare processes is likely to contribute to their over- or under- representation. But in order to adequately understand disproportionality in child welfare, it is important to assess the role of “child-oriented” services in related systems. Consequently, this summary will have four objectives:

1. Describe the impact of related systems on child welfare

2. Summarize major research findings about disproportionality

3. Discuss implications for further research on this issue

4. Present implications for policies to reduce disproportionality (Introduction)

**Hill, R. B. (2004). Institutional racism in child welfare. *Race and Society, 7*, 17-33.**

Three reasons are most often provided to explain the persistent overrepresentation of black children in the child welfare system. One, since black families have more risk factors (unemployment, single-parent families, poverty, etc) that cause them to abuse and neglect their children more than white families, the higher representation of blacks is appropriate. Two, since blacks are more highly concentrated among the poor than whites, blacks are expected to be overrepresented in child welfare due to their lower class status—not because of their race. But this article focuses on a third explanation—institutional racism. This thesis holds that systemic discrimination, which emanates from decision-making processes in child welfare, is a major contributor to the disparate representation of black children.

This analysis examines how institutional racism influences the operation of the child welfare system to result in disparate adverse effects on black children and their families. The evolution of blacks in child welfare is viewed from an historical perspective. It assesses the impact of other systems (notably mental health, special education and juvenile justice) on the child welfare system. It examines the extent to which decision-making processes at various stages of child welfare screen in black children and screen out white children. It describes how systemic racism denies vital social and economic supports to kin caregivers who are responsible for their related children. This assessment ends with practice, policy and research recommendations to reduce the overrepresentation of black children in child welfare. (Abstract)

**Hill, R. B. (2005). An analysis of racial/ethnic disproportionality and disparity at the national, state, and county levels*. Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare.* Washington, DC: Author.**

Disproportionality and the disparate treatment of children of color in the child welfare system is a phenomenon that is gaining a great deal of attention today. Previous analyses have shown us that black children are overrepresented in the child welfare system in every state. Native American/American Indian and Alaska Native children are all overrepresented in the jurisdictions in which they reside. Hispanic children are overrepresented in more than 10 states, and their representation in the child welfare system is on the rise. At the same time, Asian/Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children tend to be underrepresented in the child welfare system. While a significant body of research has been executed to better understand this phenomenon for black children in the child welfare system, many questions remain. Additionally, much less work has been done to understand what is going on for children of other racial and ethnic groups in this country.

This study expands the knowledge of this phenomenon in the field of child welfare through the further examination of racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities for children within five racial and ethnic groups at the national, state, and county levels:

• American Indians/Native Americans/Alaska Natives

• Asian Americans/Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders

• Blacks

• Hispanics

• Whites

Through an analysis of child welfare system participation using two national data sets, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), the participation of children by race and ethnicity is examined at the following three child protection decision-making stages: child protection investigations (investigation), substantiated investigations (substantiation), and placement into foster care (placement).

Two measures were used for the analysis: the disproportionality rate and the disparity ratio. The former compares children within a race or ethnic group, and the latter compares the information across racial and ethnic groups to better understand how the representation of one group compares to another.

**Disproportionality rates and disparity ratios: The national picture**

This study confirms that both black children and Native American children are overrepresented disproportionately within the foster care system at the national level. This disproportionality is seen at each of the three decision-making stages outlined above. Both groups have been observed at twice their representation in the general population at both investigation and substantiation, and two to three times their proportion in the general population while they are in care. The treatment of both black and Native American children also shows increasing disparities compared to the treatment of white children as they progress through gate- ways into the child welfare system, with the disparity ratios of Native American children increasing to a much higher rate than black children. This can be compared to Asian/Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and white children who are each disproportionately represented at lower rates at each of the decision stages than they are in the general population. Interestingly, children of all racial and ethnic groups, except white children, have increasing percentages of representation at progressive stages, whereas the proportion of white children decreases as they advance farther into the decision-making stages of the child welfare system.

County-level data were analyzed for five counties in which promising practices to reduce racial disproportionality and promote racial equity were identified in a national scan commissioned by the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare:

• Bexar County, Texas

• Guilford County, North Carolina

• King County, Washington

• Ramsey County, Minnesota

• Wake County, North Carolina

State-level data were gathered for these four states, providing a vehicle for observing similarities and differences in racial disproportionality at each of the levels of data collection. (Executive summary)

**Hines, A. M., Lemon, K., Wyatt, P., & Merdinger, J. (2004). Factors related to the disproportionate involvement of children of color in the child welfare system: a review and emerging themes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26,* 507-527.**

There exists a little research on children of color in the child welfare system (CWS) and most of what we know focuses on provision of child welfare services and system-related outcomes rather than the processes that lead to these outcomes—how families and children of color become and stay involved. Rather than one primary cause, there appear to be numerous interrelated factors associated with the disproportionate rates of involvement of children of color in the CWS. This review focuses on four areas: (1) parent and family-related risk factors and CWS involvement; (2) social factors related to poverty, neighborhood effects and other community-related predictors of children of color entering and staying in the CWS; (3) race and class biases in initial reporting and subsequent processing of children in the CWS, and (4) the impact of recent child welfare policy initiatives on children of color. Limitations of the current body of literature on children of color in the CWS are presented as well as emerging themes and areas for further inquiry. (Abstract)

**Irwin, M. E. (2009). The impact of race and neighborhood on child maltreatment: A multi-level discrete time hazard analysis. (Doctoral dissertation). Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH.**

**Purpose**: This project focused on individual and neighborhood characteristics associated with child maltreatment in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. It sought to better understand risk and protective factors associated with child maltreatment, specifically the roles of race and neighborhood disadvantage. It used an ecological framework that takes into account multiple levels, and incorporated a developmental perspective that suggests that risk and protective factors vary by child age. Particular attention was paid to race and racial disproportionality in the child welfare system.

**Methodology**: This study used a multi-level discrete time hazard model to estimate the effects of individual/household and neighborhood factors on the timing of child maltreatment reports accepted for investigation and indicated/substantiated reports of child maltreatment.

**Findings**: This study showed that younger children are at highest risk of being the subject of a maltreatment report, yet much of this increased risk is explained by mother’s age, marital status, use of alcohol and tobacco during pregnancy, and child’s birth weight and receipt of TANF. Additionally, being born to an African American mother greatly increases the likelihood of being the subject of a maltreatment report. However, once other individual and neighborhood factors are taken into consideration, the increased risk for Black children drops considerably and is no longer a significant predictor of investigated reports of child neglect or substantiated/indicated reports of maltreatment. This study found the hazard of child maltreatment to be greater among children living in impoverished and instable neighborhoods. Moreover, the impact of neighborhood characteristics was found to exert its strongest effect on reports of child neglect compared to all types of reports or indicated/substantiated reports of maltreatment. Finally, findings suggest that for Black children, the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and maltreatment is less strong than for White children. In fact, White children living in very impoverished or instable neighborhoods have a higher hazard of being the subject of a maltreatment report than Black and Hispanic children. These findings suggest there may be a differential sensitivity to neighborhood disadvantage. (Abstract)

**Jonson-Reid, M., Drake, B., & Zhou, P. (2013). Neglect subtypes, race, and poverty: Individual, family, and service characteristics. *Child Maltreatment, 18*, 30.**

Recent child maltreatment research has highlighted the very different context of poverty for Black and White children. Neglect is the most common form of maltreatment and strongly associated with poverty. Neglect is, however, not a unitary construct. We lack an understanding of whether reporting of and responding to different types of neglect may vary by poverty, race, or the intersection of the two. Administrative census, child welfare, welfare, health, and education data were used to examine how family and community poverty factors associate with various subtypes of neglect and subsequent case dispositions for Black and White children. Black children reported to child welfare reside in far poorer communities than Whites, even after taking into account family income (Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]/Temporary Aid to Needy Families [TANF]). Black children were more commonly reported and substantiated for severe and basic needs neglect. Community poverty indicators had a different relationship to report disposition for Black as compared to White children after controlling for neglect subtypes, child and family characteristics. Implications for practice and policy are discussed. (Abstract)

**Kaufman, A. M. (2011). Keeping the white family together: Racial disparities in the out-of-home placements of maltreated children. (Master thesis). Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH.**

The likelihood of being removed from the home following a substantiated case of maltreatment is much higher for black youth than for their white counterparts. There are two competing explanations in the literature. The first is that black children experience more serious forms of maltreatment and have fewer resources to remedy the maltreatment situation through informal means than do white children. The second is that there is an underlying bias within the child welfare system, where discriminatory beliefs about the perceived threat and dangerousness of certain groups and their abilities to care for their children may contribute to black children being disproportionately removed from their homes. The present study examines whether race has an effect on child placement within the child welfare system after taking into account various risk factors associated with race and placement. It also examines whether the factors influencing placement are the same for white and black youth. Findings illustrate a racial disparity in out-of- home placements supporting both of the competing explanations in the current literature. Parental mental illness and emotional abuse as the maltreatment type are identified as factors operating differently for black and white children within the child welfare system. Overall, the present study finds that two separate processes seem to be at play in the placement decisions of maltreated youth, and concludes with possible explanations for this differential treatment. (Abstract)

**Kim, H., Chenot, D., & Ji, J. (2011). Racial/ethnic disparity in child welfare systems: A longitudinal study utilizing the Disparity Index (DI). *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1234-1244.**

The purpose of the study is to examine racial/ethnic disparity among children and families that are involved with the child welfare system. Specifically, the authors explore whether or not disparity levels and long-term changes in disparity in California child welfare systems are significant. In addition, the study investigates how county characteristics such as child poverty rates, unemployment rates, and rurality are associated with levels of disparity and changes in racial/ethnic disparity over time. Using a Latent Growth Curve (LGC) modeling approach, the study estimated the trajectories of county-level Disparity Index (DI) scores (Shaw, Putnam-Hornstein, Magruder, & Needell, 2008). African American and Hispanic/Latino children were compared to Caucasian children for two phases of the child welfare process: substantiated allegations and entries, between 2005 and 2008. The results demonstrate that racial/ethnic disparity between African American and Caucasian children was significant at both phases of the child welfare process in 2008. However, disparity between Hispanic/Latino and White children was not significant. Levels of disparity between African American and Caucasian children remained constant over time. Regarding the effects of county characteristics, higher child poverty rates, higher unemployment rates and rurality were related to lower levels of disparity. In addition, unemployment rates were associated with increasing rates of change in entries disparity between African American and Caucasian children. And urbanicity was associated with increasing rates of change in substantiated allegations disparity between Hispanic/Latino and Caucasian children. The study's implications for future research are discussed. (Abstract)

**Knott, T., & Donovan, K. (2010). Disproportionate representation of African-American children in foster care: Secondary analysis of the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, 2005. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32,* 679-684.**

Few studies utilize large national data sets to provide statistical estimates of the degree of disproportionate representation of African-American children placed in CPS foster care. The current study examined the association of African-American racial identity with foster care placement while controlling for child, caregiver, household and abuse characteristics. We conducted secondary analyses of the 2005 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) on investigated reports of child abuse and neglect that received a maltreatment disposition in the reporting year, 2005. NCANDS 2005 Child File reflects case-level data based on the submissions of 48 states and the District of Columbia resulting in 3,461,872 investigations. Our unweighted study sample was restricted to 71,802 investigations of primary substantiated maltreatment in the reporting year 2005. A logit model was used to examine the association between foster care placement and racial identity. After controlling for child, caregiver, household and abuse characteristics African- American children had 44% higher odds of foster care placement when compared with Caucasian children. This study supports the cumulative evidence that African-American racial identity is a significant predictor of foster care services. Continued examination of the factors associated with foster placement is warranted to unravel the complex circumstances facing this vulnerable segment of children. (Abstract)

**Knott, T., & Giwa, S. (2012). African American disproportionality within CPS and disparate access to support services: Review and critical analysis of the literature. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 29*(3), 219-230.**

This critical analysis of the literature examines the racial disproportionality of African American children in the U.S. child welfare and foster care systems, and disparate access to Child Protective Services (CPS) referred support services. At each critical decision point within child welfare and foster care services, African American children are disproportionately represented and Black children and families subject to disparate access to employment, housing, mental health assessment and treatment. Competing data regarding non-findings of racial disproportionality in CPS and foster care and disparate treatment among African American families is presented and examined. (Abstract)

**Lau, A. S., McCabe, K. M., Yeh, M., Garland, A. F., Hough, R. L., Landsverk, J. (2003). Race/ethnicity and rates of self-reported maltreatment among high-risk youth in public sectors of care. *Child Maltreatment, 8*(3), p183.**

This study examined rates of youth-reported maltreatment history and the association between youth-reported maltreatment and foster care history across four racial/ethnic groups in a public system of care. Interviews were conducted with 1,045 youth (European Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Pacific Islanders) and their primary caregivers, sampled from one of five service sectors (alcohol/drug services, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and special education) in San Diego. Overall, racial/ethnic differences in youth-reported maltreatment were minimal. However, in the child welfare sector, African American youth self-reported maltreatment less frequently than other youth. There were significant racial/ethnic differences in foster care history, with African Americans far more likely to have been placed, even after controlling for youth-reported maltreatment, income, age, and gender. Furthermore, maltreatment history was associated with placement for all youth except African Americans. These results suggest that the overrepresentation of minority children in child welfare does not stem from greater rates of maltreatment. (Abstract)

**Leslie, L. K., Hurlburt, M. S., Landsverk, J., Barth, R., & Slymen, D. J. (2004). Outpatient mental health services for children in foster care: a national perspective. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 28*(6), 697-712.**

The purpose of this study was to determine factors influencing the use of outpatient mental health services provided by mental health professionals (OMHS) for children in foster care using a national probability sample in the United States. As part of the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Wellbeing, detailed survey data were collected on 462 children, ages 2-15, who had been in out-of-home care for approximately 12 months at the time of sampling. A multivariate logistic regression model was used to determine how clinical need, as measured by a Total Problem, Externalizing, or Internalizing Scale Tscore of 64 or greater on the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), and non-clinical factors affected OSMHS use. Over half of the children in the sample received at least one OMHS. Need, older age, and history of sexual abuse history all positively predicted OMHS. A history of physical neglect negatively predicted OSMHS. African-Americans used fewer services than children of Caucasian ancestry at all values on the CBCL. This finding was particularly salient at lower levels of CBCL scores; at higher levels, the discrepancy in the use of services diminished but the proportion of children receiving services remained lower for African-American children. This national study confirms previous findings regarding the use of mental health services based on regional data. Limitations in the use of services imposed by non-clinical factors, specifically, age, race/ethnicity and type of abuse, need to be examined in order to address implicit and explicit policies and practices that may result in inequitable distribution of services. (Abstract)

**Lu, Y. E, John Landsverk, J., Ellis-Macleod, E., Newton, R., Ganger, W., & Johnson, I. (2004). Race, ethnicity, and case outcomes in child protective services. *Children and Youth Services, 26*, 447-461.**

This study reviews the records of 3936 children and adolescents under the age of 17 who were referred to the public receiving home for suspected maltreatment. The study examines the correlation between background characteristics (i.e. age, gender, race/ethnicity, reasons for referral), and case outcome decisions (i.e. case open to service, out-of-home placement, and family reunification), using bivariate and multivariate analysis. Racial/ethnic differences are observed. Compared to census data, African Americans are the only over-represented group. Latinos, Asians, and Anglos are all under-represented. Significant differences were detected when race/ethnicity was analyzed with respect to the case opened, length of stay in the foster care, and length of time for family reunification. African American subjects are consistently observed in each outcome category at higher proportions than all other racial/ethnic groups, both mainstream and minority populations. (Abstract)

**Marshall, J. M. (2012). A mixed method examination of racial disproportionality among youth who cross over from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system: Child welfare and juvenile justice professionals’ perspectives and racial attitudes. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, IL.**

This dissertation uses a mixed method approach to examine why African-American youth are disproportionately represented in those who cross over from involvement in the child welfare to the juvenile justice system. During individual, semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews, 33 experienced child welfare, law enforcement and court professionals first described their perspectives on why youth cross over from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system, in general, and then described reasons for racial disproportionalities in crossing over. Next, they communicated their racial sensitivity and awareness through assessments of racial colorblind ideologies (Neville et al., 2000) and racial identity (Worrell & Vandiver, 2010). Specific research questions are: 1) How do professionals understand and explain the disproportionate crossing over? 2) How racially sensitive and aware are these professionals? 3) Is there a relation between professionals‘ interpretations of disproportionate crossing over and their racial sensitivity and awareness?

Professionals described a variety of interrelated reason for crossing over at the youth, parent/family and larger social systems levels. These reasons included: poverty, education, and emotional and behavioral problems at the levels of youth, their parents and family, and larger social systems. Twenty-seven percent of the sample spontaneously discussed race as a contributor to crossing over. When asked about racial disproportionalities, professionals described the interaction of reasons youth generally cross over with race. They also described several unique risk factors for black youth: 1) distrust of authorities resulting, in part, from racial socialization practices beginning in the home, 2) communication breakdown between African Americans and authorities, and 3) structural racism in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Quantitative results on professionals‘ group differences on racial sensitivity and awareness suggest that black professionals and child welfare professionals are less colorblind and identify more as racialized Americans than as non-racialized Americans, compared to white professionals and law enforcement professionals, who are more colorblind and identify more as non-racialized Americans than as racialized Americans. Results also indicate an interaction between race and profession. Specifically, whites who worked in the child welfare system or the courts identified more as non-racialized American, while blacks who worked in the child welfare system or the courts identified more as racialized American. There were no differences in racial identity between black and white law enforcement professionals.

Results also suggest a relationship exists between professionals‘ perspectives of disproportionalities and their racial sensitivity and awareness. Specifically, professionals who were less colorblind and identified more as racialized Americans placed more weight on macro and system level factors that may contribute to disproportionalities among crossover youth and less weight on child and parent/family level contributors. Those who were more colorblind and saw themselves more as American, rather than a black or white American, placed greater emphasis on reasons for disproportionalities at the level of the child and parent/family.

Results are interpreted from the perspective of ecological systems and critical race theories. Professionals‘ perspectives on racial disproportionalities and their racial attitudes may serve as a reference point for how they might carry out their work with diverse youth and families. Patterns of results may be reflective of different lived experiences of black and white professionals, as well as professional socialization within (or self-selection into) particular occupations. Results raise issues for supporting relationships in youth‘s environment between youth, families, and authorities. Through professional training initiatives on culturally responsive practices, enhanced community outreach by professionals, and dialogue among professionals from different disciplines as well as with civilians, relationships between authorities and families of color may be enhanced. Once these relationships are strengthened, racial disproportionalities may then diminish. (Abstract)

**McDaniel, M., & Slack, K. S. (2005). Major life events and the risk of a child maltreatment investigation.** ***Children and Youth Services Review, 27*(2), 171-195.**

We examined whether moving to a new home, having a baby, being arrested, or having a child who is suspended or expelled from school increases low-income parents’ (n=1137) risk of being investigated for child maltreatment. These events posed a significant risk for investigations that was not explained by parenting stress or material hardship. We hypothesize that caregivers on welfare and those who experience major life events are investigated more often because they are more visible to those placing reports to the child protection system. (Abstract)

**Miller, K. M., Cahn, K., & Orellana, E. R. (2012). Dynamics that contribute to racial disproportionality and disparity: Perspectives from child welfare professionals, community partners, and families. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34,* 2201-2207.**

This qualitative study used focus groups to explore child welfare and collaborating system decision makers, community partners, and families' perspectives on the dynamics that contribute to racial disproportionality and disparity in Oregon's child welfare system. Findings revealed that poverty, lack of trust, negative perceptions of clients' behaviors, inability to relate to clients, raising/differing expectations for families of color, holding onto the past, and lack of family engagement were dynamics that contributed to racial disproportionality and disparate treatment of families of color in the child welfare system. Practice and policy implications are discussed and recommendations for action steps and interventions to improve outcomes for children and families of color are presented. (Abstract)

**Morton, C. M., Ocasio, K., & Simmel, C. (2011). A critique of methods used to describe the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1538-1542.**

The overrepresentation of minority children in the child welfare system has long been a troubling issue. Strategies to reduce this racial imbalance have typically focused on child welfare decision making at various time points in the course of a case, informed by descriptive statistics used to measure racial disproportionality and disparity at these key decision points. In this paper we make comparisons between two methods used to describe racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare: one uses the general child population as its reference group and the other uses the child welfare population as it changes from one decision point to the next. This paper discusses and critiques these two methods, using the data from four states to illustrate the utility of each in describing racial overrepresentation in child welfare. (Abstract)

**Mumpower, J. L. (2010). Disproportionality at the “front end” of the child welfare services system: An analysis of rates of referrals, “hits,” “misses, “ and “false alarms.” *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration, 33*(3), 364-405.**

Data from NIS-4, NCANDS, and the State of California were used to analyze the front end of the child welfare services system - the referral and substantiation components - in terms of the system's ability to diagnose or detect instances of child maltreatment. The analyses show that Blacks are disproportionately represented in rates of referral into the system. Moreover, the analyses demonstrate that the system is less accurate for Blacks than for other racial or ethnic groups. There is a higher rate of false positives (or "false alarms") for Blacks than for other groups - that is, referrals leading to unsubstantiated findings. There is also a higher rate of false negatives (or "misses") for Blacks than for other groups - that is, children for whom no referral was made but who are in fact neglected or abused. The rate of true positives (or "hits") ~ children for whom a referral has been made and for whom that allegation has been substantiated - is generally higher for Blacks than for other groups, but this is attributable largely to the higher rate of referral for Blacks. In sum, the system demonstrates lower levels of accuracy for Blacks than for other groups. A model is proposed demonstrating that random error, as opposed to systematic bias, could produce a pattern of results much like that observed in the data. (Abstract)

**Needell, B., Brookhard, M. A., & Lee. S. (2003). Black children and foster care placement in California. *Children and Youth Services Review, 25*(5/6), 393-408.**

This study examines the possible role of race/ethnicity in the decision to remove children from their caregivers and place them in foster care following a substantiated allegation of maltreatment. The population in this study is 137,300 (50,066 White, 65,392 Hispanic, and 21,842 Black) children who had at least one substantiated child maltreatment referral between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 2000. We employed logistic regression analyses to determine the effect of the ethnicity of a child with a substantiated allegation on placement into foster care. We find that Black children in California are more likely than White or Hispanic children to be removed from their caretaker and placed in foster care, even when other factors (e.g., age, reason for maltreatment, neighborhood poverty) are taken into account. (Abstract)

**Osterling, K. L., D'andrade, A., & Austin, M. J. (2008). Understanding and addressing racial/ethnic disproportionality in the front end of the child welfare system. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 5*(1/2), 9-30.**

Racial/ethnic disproportionality in the child welfare system is a complicated social problem that is receiving increasing amounts of attention from researchers and practitioners. This review of the literature examines disproportionality in the front-end of the child welfare system and interventions that may address it. While none of the interventions had evidence suggesting that they reduced disproportionality in child welfare front-end processes, some of the interventions may improve child welfare case processes related to disproportionality and outcomes for families of color. (Abstract)

**Putnam-Hornstein, E., Needell, B., King, B., Johnson-Motoyama, M. (in press). Racial and ethnic disparities: A population-based examination of risk factors for involvement with child protective services. *Child Abuse & Neglect.***

**Objective**: Data from the United States indicate pronounced and persistent racial/ethnic differences in the rates at which children are referred and substantiated as victims of child abuse and neglect. In this study, we examined the extent to which aggregate racial differences are attributable to variations in the distribution of individual and family-level risk factors.

**Methods**: This study was based on the full population of children born in California in 2002. Birth records were linked to child protective service (CPS) records to identify all children referred for maltreatment by age 5. Generalized linear models were used to compute crude and adjusted racial/ethnic differences in children’s risk of referral, substantiation, and entry to foster care.

**Results**: As expected, stark differences between Black and White children emerged in the rates of contact with CPS. Black children were more than twice as likely as White children to be referred for maltreatment, substantiated as victims, and enter foster care before age 5. Yet, there were also significant differences across racial/ethnic groups in the distribution of socioeconomic and health factors strongly correlated with child maltreatment and CPS involvement. After adjusting for these differences, low socioeconomic Black children had a lower risk of referral, substantiation, and entry to foster care than their socioeconomically similar White counterparts. Among Latinos, before adjusting for other factors, children of U.S.-born mothers were significantly more likely than White children to experience system contact, while children of foreign-born mothers were less likely to be involved with CPS. After adjusting for socioeconomic and health indicators, the relative risk of referral, substantiation, and foster care entry was significantly lower for Latino children (regardless of maternal nativity) compared to White children.

**Conclusions**: Race and ethnicity is a marker for a complex interaction of economic, social, political, and environmental factors that influence the health of individuals and communities. This analysis indicates that adjusting for child and family-level risk factors is necessary to distinguish race-specific effects (which may reflect system, worker, or resource biases) from socioeconomic and health indicators associated with maltreatment risk. Identifying the independent effects of these factors is critical to developing effective strategies for reducing racial disparities. (Abstract)

**Rodenborg, N. A. (2004). Services to African American children in poverty: Institutional discrimination in child welfare? *Journal of Poverty, 8*(3), 109-130.**

Using national secondary case file data, this study addressed race, poverty, and service equity in public child welfare. Two research questions were posed: (a) Do poor children and families receive services to meet the conditions of poverty? (b) Does service delivery impact African American and Caucasian children equitably? Answers to questions were framed within the context of institutional discrimination theory. Using descriptive and variance estimation statistics, African American children were found to be poorer on all indicators. Service disparity occurred due to higher African American poverty coupled with low overall rates of poverty-related service. Indirect institutional discrimination was suggested. (Abstract)

**Smith, C. J., & Devore, W. (2004). African American children in the child welfare and kinship system: From exclusion to over inclusion. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 26*(5), 427-446.**

African American children have had a unique relationship to the development of the formal child welfare system. Originally excluded from the system, their numbers grew in later years of the system's development. Currently, as a group they represent the largest proportion of children in out-of-home care nationally. This pattern of overrepresentation has extended to the emerging practice of kinship care. Attention is needed to insure that these children are served in a manner that reflects sensitivity to culture as well as serious consideration for the support and permanency of children in kinship families. The purpose of this paper is to describe the relationship of African American children and families to the formal child welfare system and to the practice of kinship care as an integral part of foster care planning in the child welfare system. In addition, it encourages social workers to become more culturally competent practitioners. The evolution of kinship care policy is reviewed and the implication for culturally competent social work practice to enhance the potential for effective permanency planning is considered within an ecological theoretical perspective. (Abstract)

**Tilbury, C., & Thoburn, J. (2009). Using racial disproportionality and disparity indicators to measure child welfare outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31,* 1101-1106.**

This article examines the utility of racial disproportionality and disparity data to measure the performance and outcomes of child welfare systems. Given the differential patterns of entry, exit and service responses for black, indigenous and ethnic minority children in many child welfare systems around the world, the conceptualisation of both quality and outcomes should take account of their needs. Clarity is required about which dimensions of effectiveness are measured by racial disparity indicators, in order to design strategies to address its causes and consequences. The article discusses how data on racial disproportionality and disparity can be used, as part of a suite of performance indicators, to highlight issues regarding the quality, equity and accessibility of child welfare services. (Abstract)

**Wells, S. J., Merritt, L. M., & Briggs, H. E. (2009). Bias, racism and evidence-based practice: The case for more focused development of the child welfare evidence base. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31,* 1160-1171.**

In spite of continuing concerns about disproportionate representation of African Americans, American Indians, and selected other groups in foster care, development of the practice and policy evidence base has paid scant attention to incorporating the specific concerns of these communities in intervention research. The authors review the current foundation of evidence-based practice and identify gaps in the knowledge base with specific reference to race/ethnicity/culture and class. They recognize the current concerns regarding disproportionality in child welfare services; and summarize the current research on bias and racism to establish potential mechanisms contributing to racially disproportionate outcomes. Addressing these literatures in concert with one another gives new meaning to the phrase, culturally competent evidence-based practice. Culturally competent practice goes beyond admonishing practitioners and policy makers to be more sensitive or to undertake such training. It is a pathway to the development of a more targeted and relevant evidence base: 1) rigorous intervention research with diverse populations could be more intentionally developed and 2) existing rigorous research on successfully addressing bias could be more broadly applied and tested in child welfare. A model for evaluating the validity of the evidence base with respect to diverse populations is proposed. (Abstract)

**Wright, R., & Thomas, W. (2003). Disproportionate representation: communities of color in the domestic violence, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal, 54*(4), 87-95.**

A number of state and federal surveys show that communities of color are involved with the domestic violence, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems at rates that are disproportionately higher than their population size. As courts are responsible for decisions that could propel families into these systems, it has become increasingly critical that judges became aware of these trends. This article provides and overview of the current statistics on the disproportionate representation of communities of color in these systems. It discusses the factors that are contributing to these trends and presents preliminary recommendations for judicial leadership and decision making. (Abstract)

**Wulczyn, F. (2003). Closing the gap: Are changing exit patterns reducing the time African American children spend in foster care relative to Caucasian children? *Children and Youth Services Review, 25*(5/6), 431-462.**

Despite the persistent finding that African American children typically remain in foster care longer than similar Caucasian children, there has been little effort to understand whether the magnitude of the race effect varies for children admitted to care in different years. This paper presents three sets of findings: data describing exit probabilities and placement duration for children admitted to care in 1990; annual estimates of the conditional probability of exit for successive entry cohorts; and results from stratified proportional hazard models. The data show that the magnitude of the race effect is age-, exit-, and cohort-specific, and that the so-called race effect grew smaller during the 1990s. With respect to adoption, in particular, the length of stay differential has diminished. The data also point to the need to better understand the role of relatives within the foster care system. Finally, the study suggests the kind of time horizon that is necessary to understand the performance of the foster care system. (Abstract)

**Wulczyn, F., Gibbons, R., Snowden, L., & Lery, B. (2013). Poverty, social disadvantage, and the black/white placement gap. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35,* 65-74.**

In this paper, we examine whether county-level measures of poverty and social disadvantage are correlated with county-level variation in the black/white foster care placement gap. The black/white placement gap refers to the fact that when the rate of placement into foster care for black children is compared to the rate for white children living in the same area, the black placement rate is almost always higher than the rate for whites. Although differential exposure to poverty is often used to explain why the placement gap is so large, the problem has rarely been studied. Using Poisson event count models, we find that poverty, measured at the county ecological level, is associated with a narrower gap rather than a wider gap. The counter- intuitive finding is due to the fact that the relationship between poverty and placement rates depends on race. (Abstract)

*Prepared by Aislinn Conrad-Hiebner, Graduate Research Assistant, and Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, Assistant Professor, University of Kansas School of Social Welfare.*

1. ROM Reports is a web-based reporting system developed by the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare; Terry Moore, Director [terrym@ku.edu](mailto:terrym@ku.edu). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)