



# Disproportionate Minority Representation in the Child Welfare System

The overrepresentation of children of color in the nation's child welfare system has been documented in numerous studies. Disproportionate representation of racial or ethnic minorities is found at every point in the child welfare system.

Recent data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation show that African American children were disproportionately represented at several decision points in a child welfare case, including investigation, substantiation, and placement in out-of-home care. The Casey Foundation has also found that Native American children are about three times more likely to be placed in foster care than White children nationally.

This report presents recent data on disproportionate minority representation of children in the U.S. child welfare system.

*Children's  
Research Center*

*A division of the  
National Council on  
Crime and Delinquency*

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## Overview

- Forty-six states have disproportionate representation of African American children in their child welfare systems. In these states, the proportion of African American children in foster care is more than 2 times the proportion of African American children in the state's total child population 18 years and younger. (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2004)
- In 7 states, the proportion of African American children in foster care is about 4 times what one would expect based on their occurrence in the general child population of those states. The states with the highest African American disproportionality ratios based on 2000 AFCARS and Census data are California, Oregon, Wyoming, Minnesota, Idaho, New Hampshire, and **Wisconsin**. (CSSP, 2004)

**Table 1: 2003 National Race/Ethnic Distribution of Child Participation at Three Child Welfare Decision-making Stages**

Race/Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>	Child Welfare Decisions			2005 Child Population <sup>d</sup> % Distribution
	Investigation <sup>b</sup> % Distribution	Substantiation <sup>b</sup> % Distribution	Placed in Foster Care <sup>c</sup> % Distribution	
White	59	57	42	60
African American	25	27	36	15
American Indian	2	2	3	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1	2	4
Hispanic	13	13	17	20
Total	100	100	100	100

a Data are gathered on Hispanics as an ethnicity, apart from racial identity. For each of the other designations (racial), only non-Hispanic members are included.

b Source: Percentages calculated with 2003 NCANDS Child File, which includes all completed investigations or assessments between 1/1/2003 and 12/31/2003.

c Percentages calculated with data from the 2003 AFCARS foster care placement data element.

d Percentages calculated with CWLA National Data Analysis System based on unpublished 2005 Current Population Survey data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau.

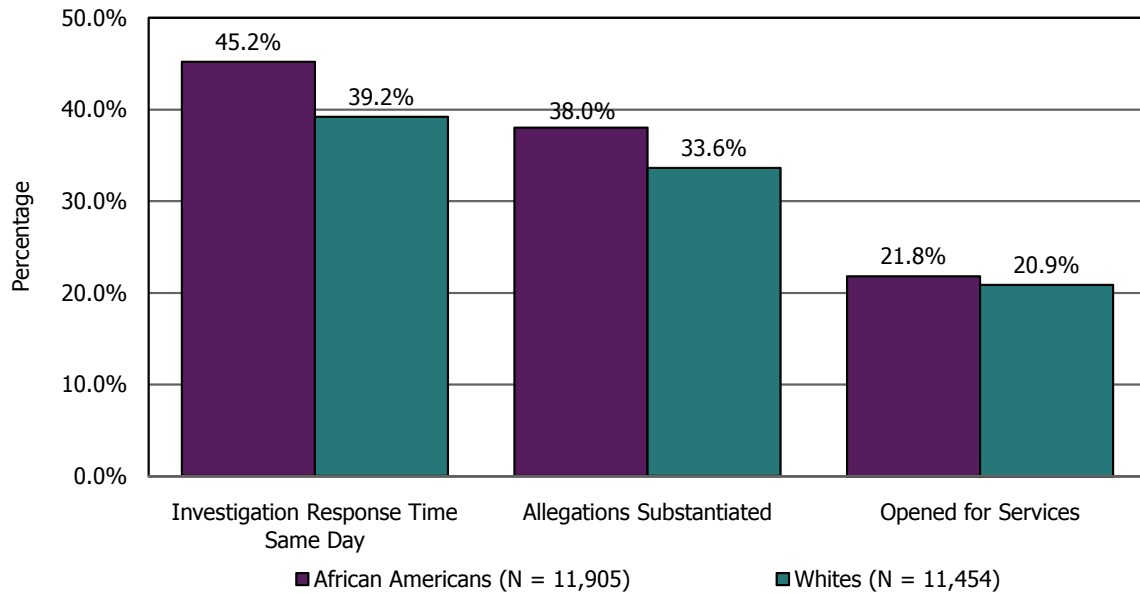
**Table 2: 2003 National Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality Rates and Disparity Ratios for Investigation, Substantiation, and Children Placed in Foster Care**

Race/Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>	Disproportionality Rates			Disparity Ratios		
	Investigation	Substantiation	Placed in Foster Care	Investigation	Substantiation	Placed in Foster Care
White	0.98	0.95	0.70	--	--	--
African American	1.67	1.80	2.40	1.7	1.9	3.4
American Indian	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.0	2.1	4.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.25	0.25	0.50	0.3	0.3	0.7
Hispanic	0.65	0.65	0.85	0.7	0.7	1.2

a Data are gathered on Hispanics as an ethnicity, apart from racial identity. For each of the other designations (racial), only non-Hispanic members are included.

Source for Tables 2 and 3: Hill, R. (2007). *An Analysis of Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparity at the National, State, and County Levels*. Washington, D.C.: Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

**Figure 1: Comparisons at Various Decision Points for African Americans and Whites in Georgia**



**Table 3: Georgia: Percentage of Families at Each Risk Level**

Risk Level	White (N = 3,441)	African American (N = 3,985)
Low	26.7%	31.7%
Moderate	60.7%	59.1%
High	12.6%	9.1%

**Table 4: Michigan: Percentage of Families at Each Risk Level**

Risk Level	White (N = 6,651)	African American (N = 5,296)
Low	10.5%	11.3%
Moderate	30.7%	30.0%
High	45.1%	46.0%
Very High	13.7%	12.7%

Source for Figure 1 and Tables 3 and 4: Baird, C. (2005). The Effects of Risk Assessments and Their Relationship to Maltreatment Recurrence Rates Across Races. In D. Derezotes, J. Poertner, and M. Testa (Eds.), *Race Matters in Child Welfare: The Overrepresentation of African American Children in the System*, pp. 131–146. Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press.

While disproportionality is evident at all points of the system, objective research-based risk assessment models illustrate that African American children are NOT at greater risk of subsequent maltreatment than Whites. As Tables 3 and 4 show, White children are actually at greater risk of continued maltreatment. The Children’s Research Center (CRC) has determined this to be consistent throughout the nation.

Of all Wisconsin children in out-of-home care on September 30, 2005, 40.1% were White, 44% were African American, 2.4% were American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN), and 5.9% were of other races and ethnicities. The breakdown of Wisconsin's general population at the time was 88.7% White, 6.4% African American, 1.3% AIAN, 0.1% Native American, and 2.7% of other races (Child Welfare League of America and U.S. Census data).

Unfortunately, Wisconsin has the nation's highest rate of African American disproportionate overrepresentation of children in foster care in the nation.

**Table 5: Levels of Disproportion for African American Children in the Foster Care Population by State, 2000**

<b>Moderate Disproportion (15 states)</b>	<b>High Disproportion (15 states)</b>	<b>Extreme Disproportion (16 states)</b>
Louisiana (1.56)	Kentucky (2.50)	Rhode Island (3.57)
South Carolina (1.60)	Texas (2.55)	New Jersey (3.74)
Alabama (1.65)	Delaware (2.56)	New Mexico (3.74)
Georgia (1.72)	Nevada (2.56)	Iowa (3.76)
Arkansas (1.74)	Missouri (2.71)	Indiana (3.79)
Tennessee (1.77)	Utah (2.84)	Pennsylvania (3.80)
North Carolina (1.84)	Vermont (2.92)	Arizona (3.91)
Washington (2.12)	Nebraska (2.92)	Montana (3.92)
Florida (2.22)	West Virginia (2.98)	Illinois (3.93)
Virginia (2.22)	Kansas (3.01)	California (4.14)
Maine (2.22)	Colorado (3.08)	Oregon (4.38)
New York (2.26)	North Dakota (3.09)	Wyoming (4.53)
Oklahoma (2.32)	South Dakota (3.27)	Minnesota (4.77)
Maryland (2.39)	Ohio (3.39)	Idaho (4.84)
Alaska (2.46)	Connecticut (3.42)	New Hampshire (4.93)
		<b>Wisconsin (5.48)</b>

Note: A "racial disproportionality ratio" was calculated by dividing the proportion of African American children in foster care by the proportion of African American children in the state population under the age of 18. The 50 states were classified into the following four groups based on their racial disproportionality ratios for African Americans: comparable representation (states with ratios under 1.50); moderate disproportion (states with ratios between 1.50 and 2.49); high disproportion (states with ratios between 2.50 and 3.49); and extreme disproportion (states with ratios of 3.50 and over).

Source: *The Race + Child Welfare Project, Fact Sheet 1: Basic Facts on Disproportionate Representation of African Americans in the Foster Care System.* (2004, March 16). Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved June 19, 2009, from <http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/factSheet1.pdf>.