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Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

**Racial Disproportionality in the U.S. Child Welfare System:
What We Know
2003-2005**

Race matters in child welfare: the overrepresentation of African American children in the system.

Derezotes, Dennette (Editor)

Poertner, John (Editor)

Testa, Mark F. (Editor)

Race Matters Consortium

2005

Publication Information: Washington, DC : Child Welfare League of America

Distributed by: CWLA Press

440 First Street NW

Third Floor

Washington, DC 20001-2085

Tel: 800-407-6273

770-280-4164

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Distributor's Website: <http://www.cwla.org/pubs/>

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. (Author abstract)

Chapters in this book are:

- Factors contributing to the overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system : What we know and don't know / Dennette M. Derezotes and John Poertner
- Child welfare and race: Models of disproportionality / Richard P. Barth
- Race differences in risk of maltreatment in the general child population / Andrea J. Sedlak and Dana Schultz
- The role of race in child protective services screening decisions / Brian M. Gryzlak, Susan J. Wells, and Michelle A. Johnson
- Racial differences in child protective services investigation of abused and neglected children / Andrea J. Sedlak and Dana Schultz
- Indicated child abuse and neglect reports: Is the investigation process racially biased? / Nancy Rolock and Mark F. Testa

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- The effect of risk assessments and their relationship to maltreatment recurrence across races / Christopher Baird
- Effects of a research-based risk assessment on racial/ethnic disproportionality in service provision decisions / Will Johnson
- Factors that predict the decision to place a child in substitute care / Gardenia Harris, Gail Tittle, and John Poertner
- The entry of children from the welfare system into foster care: Differences by race / Robert M. Goerge and Bong Joo Lee
- The role of race in foster care placements / Robert B. Hill
- The effect of race on reunification from substitute care in Illinois / Robert M. Goerge and Lucy Mackey-Bilaver
- The role of race in parental reunification / Robert B. Hill
- The changing significance of race and kinship for achieving permanence for foster children / Mark F. Testa

Major life events and the risk of a child maltreatment investigation.

McDaniel, Marla.

Slack, Kristen Shook.

Columbia University.

2005

Children and youth services review.

27(2)p. 171-195

Publication Information: Amsterdam ; Boston : Elsevier.

Reprints available from: Elsevier

Customer Service Department

6277 Sea Harbor Drive

Orlando, FL 32887

Tel: 877-839-7126

407-345-4020

usjcs@elsevier.com

Distributor's Website: <http://www.sciencedirect.com>

Numerous studies have shown that urban, low-income, and minority parents are investigated more often than others for child abuse and neglect. Some research reveals that parents with these characteristics are more vulnerable to harming their children due to stress and fewer resources. Others suggest that child maltreatment reporters make biased judgments about poor, minority families and suspect them more often of abusive or neglectful behaviors. A third explanation is that when caregivers receive public assistance and have fewer same-race neighbors, they are more visible to the child protection system. This is because they are more frequently observed by individuals who are mandated to report suspected child maltreatment, or by those who voluntarily report suspected abuse and neglect. These explanations suggest that stress, bias, and visibility may contribute to disproportionate investigations of low-income caregivers. In the present study we examine which theory best explains who, among a sample of parents from the 1998 Illinois Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload, is investigated by child protective services (CPS) by December 2001. We introduce and test the life event perspective of child protection etiology and focus on moving to a new home, giving birth, being arrested, and having a child who is suspended or expelled from school to assess whether parents who experience these life events have a greater likelihood of CPS investigations. We also test whether a greater risk of an investigation stems from stress, material hardship, or heightened visibility. (Author abstract modified)

The Race + Child Welfare Project. Fact sheet 1, Basic facts on disproportionate representation of African Americans in the foster care system / Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Center for the Study of Social Policy (Washington, D.C.)

2004

Publication Information: Washington, DC : Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Distributed by: Center for the Study of Social Policy.

1575 Eye Street NW

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Distributor's Website: <http://www.cssp.org>

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 over-representation in each State's child welfare system. 5 references.

<http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/factSheet1.pdf>

The Race + Child Welfare Project. Fact sheet 2, State-by-state statistical profile of racial over-representation in foster care / Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Center for the Study of Social Policy (Washington, D.C.)

2004

Publication Information: Washington, DC : Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Distributed by: Center for the Study of Social Policy

1575 Eye Street NW

Suite 500

Washington, DC 20005

Tel: 202-371-1565

clear@cssp.org

Distributor's Website: <http://www.cssp.org>

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. (Author abstract modified)

<http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/statORFactSheet2.pdf>

Factors related to the disproportionate involvement of children of color in the child welfare system: a review and emerging themes.

2004

Children and youth services review

26(6)p. 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. (Author abstract)

Services to African American children in poverty: institutional discrimination in child welfare?

Rodenborg, Nancy A.

Augsburg College. Dept. of Social Work.

2004

Journal of poverty.

8(3)p. 109-130

Publication Information: Binghamton, NY : Haworth Press.

Reprints available from: Haworth Press

10 Alice Street

Binghamton, NY 13904

Tel: 800-429-6784

607-722-5857

getinfo@haworthpress.com

Distributor's Website: <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JPOV/>

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. (Author abstract)

Benevolent intervention or oppression perpetuated: minority overrepresentation in children's services.

Crane, Kimberly D.

Ellis, Rodney A.

University of Tennessee.

2004

Journal of human behavior in the social environment.

9(1/2)p. 19-38

Publication Information: Binghamton, NY : Haworth Social Work Practice Press.

Reprints available from: Haworth Press

10 Alice Street

Binghamton, NY 13904

Tel: 800-429-6784

607-722-5857

getinfo@haworthpress.com

Distributor's Website: <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JHBSE/>

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. (Author abstract)

African American children in the child welfare and kinship system: from exclusion to over inclusion.

Smith, Carrie Jefferson.

Devore, Wynetta.

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

Syracuse University. School of Social Work.

2004

Child abuse and neglect.

26(5)p. 427-446

Publication Information: New York : Pergamon.

Reprints available from: Elsevier Science Ltd.

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6277 Sea Harbor Drive

Orlando, FL 32887

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Distributor's Website: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>

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. (Author abstract)

Outpatient mental health services for children in foster care: a national perspective.

Leslie, Laurel K.

Hurlburt, Michael S.

Landsverk, John.

Barth, Richard.

Slymen, Donald J.

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

San Diego State University. Child and Adolescent Services Research Center.

2004

Child abuse and neglect.

28(6)p. 697-712

Publication Information: New York : Pergamon.

Reprints available from: Elsevier Science Ltd.

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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 Well-being, 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 T-score 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. (Author abstract modified)

Children of color in the child welfare system.

Child Welfare League of America.

2004

Distributed by: Child Welfare League of America

440 First Street NW

Third Floor

Washington, DC 20001

Distributor's Website: <http://ndas.cwla.org>

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.

<http://ndas.cwla.org/Include/text/Children%20of%20Color.pdf>

Race, ethnicity, and case outcomes in child protective services.

Lu, Yuhwa Eva.

Landsverk, John.

Ellis-Macleod, Elissa.

Newton, Rae.

Ganger, William.

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

New York University. Ehrenkranz School of Social Work.

2004

Child abuse and neglect.

26(5)p. 447-461

Publication Information: New York : Pergamon.

Reprints available from: Elsevier Science Ltd.

Customer Service Department

6277 Sea Harbor Drive

Orlando, FL 32887

Tel: 877-839-7126

407-345-4020

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Distributor's Website: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>

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. (Author abstract)

Disproportionate Representation of Race and Ethnicity in Child Maltreatment: Investigation and Victimization.

Fluke, J. D.

Yuan, Y. Y. T.

Hedderson, J.

Curtis, P. A.

Walter R. McDonald and Associates, Inc., Rockville, MD.

2003

Children and Youth Services Review

25(5/6)359-373

Publication Information: New York: Pergamon

Reprints available from: Elsevier Science Ltd.

6277 Sea Harbor Drive

Orlando, FL 32887

Tel: 877-839-7126

usjcs@elsevier.com

Distributor's Website: <http://www.elsevier.com>

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 and disparity indices 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 states. At the determination of victimization, results for African Americans and Whites using the disproportionality representation indices varied greatly from county to county, but demonstrated little disproportionality. (Author abstract) 15 references, 4 tables.

Children of color in the child welfare system: perspectives from the child welfare community.

Chibnall, Susan.

Dutch, Nicole M.

Jones-Harden, Brenda.

Brown, Annie.

Gourdine, Ruby.

United States. Children's Bureau.

2003

Publication Information: United States. Children's Bureau.

Distributed by: Caliber Associates

10530 Rosehaven Street

Suite 400

Fairfax, VA 22030

Tel: 703-385-3200

Sponsoring Organization: Children's Bureau.

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 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, and 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 project team conducted site visits to 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. 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. Participants were asked to describe their own general perceptions of the issue of overrepresentation, the types of policies, procedures or practices they thought would enable their agency to better serve children and families of color, and their own agencies' ongoing programs and policies that address the needs of children and families of color. 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. In terms of directions for change, the overwhelming emphasis among participants was for agencies to focus on prevention and provide more front-end or prevention programs and services to families. Current efforts of agencies to serve children of color included prevention programs, recruitment of minority foster and adoptive families, systems reform, collaboration and contracted services, developing councils on over-representation, and focusing on agency practices, including implementing practices related to training and supervision of staff and hiring a diverse staff to better represent the population. A literature review, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research are provided. 111 references. (Author abstract modified)

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/otherpubs/children/index.cfm>

Why Special Populations Are Not the Target of Family Preservation Services: A Case for Program Reform.

Denby, R. W.

Curtis, C. M.

2003

Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare

30(2)149-173

Publication Information: Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, School of Social Work.

Reprints available from: Western Michigan University, School of Social Work

1903 W. Michigan Ave.

Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5354

Tel: 269-387-3205

Distributor's Website: <http://www.wmich.edu/hhs/Newslettersjournals/jssw/>

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 this 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. Based on "A Theoretical Model of Decision Making in Family Preservation Programs" by Denby, the survey inquired about criteria for service, barriers to consideration of special population service criterion, and reasons why workers do not utilize special population criterion. Special population was defined as children of color, medically vulnerable children, homeless children, older children, reunified families, severely emotionally disturbed children, and children who are chronic juvenile or status offenders. Results indicate a significant bias against targeting family preservation services to special populations in general, and children of color in particular. Respondents noted that they do not use special population as a service criterion because they believed that everyone can be considered a special population and that there are few resources for families with special needs. Specific recommendations for targeting special populations include clarify the definition of "special population" and implement culturally-specific interventions. (Author abstract modified) 67 references, 2 tables.

Disproportionate representation: communities of color in the domestic violence, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems.

Wright, Richard.

Thomas, Wadie.

Center for Violence and Injury Prevention.

2003

Juvenile and Family Court Journal

54(4)p. 87-95

Reprints available from: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Univ. of Nevada-Reno Campus

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Reno, NV 89507

Tel: (800)52PEACE

Distributor's Website: <http://www.ncjfcj.org/dept/fvd/publications/>

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 an 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. (Author abstract) 63 references.

Closing the Gap: Are Changing Exit Patterns Reducing the Time African American Children Spend in Foster Care Relative to Caucasian Children?

Wulczyn, F.

University of Chicago. Chapin Hall Center for Children.

2003

Children and Youth Services Review

25(5/6)431-462

Publication Information: New York: Pergamon

Reprints available from: Elsevier Science Ltd.

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6277 Sea Harbor Drive

Orlando, FL 32887
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Distributor's Website: <http://www.elsevier.com>

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. (Author abstract) 24 references, 9 figures, 1 table.

Racial Disproportionality in Reported and Substantiated Child Abuse and Neglect: An Examination of Systematic Bias.

Ards, S. D.
Myers, S. L.
Malkis, A.
Sugrue, E.
Zhou, L.
Benedict College, Columbia, SC.
2003
Children and Youth Services Review
25(5/6)375-392
Publication Information: New York: Pergamon
Reprints available from: Elsevier Science Ltd.
Customer Service Department
6277 Sea Harbor Drive
Orlando, FL 32887
Tel: 877-839-7126
usjcs@elsevier.com
Distributor's Website: <http://www.elsevier.com>
Sponsoring Organization: National Institutes of Health

Using data from Minnesota for 2000, this study shows 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, discrimination rates are higher in the state as a whole than in the counties that have the largest share of minority children. Although the discrimination measures do not vanish when disaggregated analysis is performed, the findings suggest that caution should be displayed when reporting disproportionality statistics that include data from widely dispersed geographical areas. (Author abstract) 13 references, 5 tables.

The overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system.

Courtney, Mark (Editor)
Skyles, Ada (Editor)
Lindsey, Duncan (Editor)
2003
Children and youth services review

25(5/6)p. 355-509

Publication Information: New York : Elsevier.

Distributed by: Elsevier.

6277 Sea Harbor Drive

Orlando, FL 32887-4800

Tel: (877) 839-7126

usics@elsevier.com

Distributor's Website: <http://www.elsevier.com>

Abstract not available.

Race/Ethnicity and Rates of Self-Reported Maltreatment Among High-Risk Youth in Public Sectors of Care.

By: Lau, Anna S.; McCabe, Kristen M.; Yeh, May; Garland, Ann F.; Hough, Richard L.; Landsverk, John.
Child Maltreatment, Aug2003, Vol. 8 Issue 3, p183, 12p, 5 charts;

Examines 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. Factor associated with maltreatment history among African Americans; Evidence of the impact of race on the likelihood of maltreatment; Need to examine competing explanations for racial/ethnic disparities.; (AN 10591375)