

The Race + Child Welfare Project

Fact Sheet 1 – Basic Facts on Disproportionate Representation of African Americans in the Foster Care System

The United States child welfare system is embroiled in an epidemic involving race and bad child and family outcomes. African-American children and families are significantly more likely to be torn apart by the local child welfare agency than any other racial group in the country – despite the fact that multiple national research studies prove that African-American families are *not* more likely to abuse or neglect their children.¹ This situation has resulted in severe levels of over-representation of African-American children in the country’s child welfare system.²

Basic Facts

Total Number of Children in the Child Welfare System, FY 2000: 812,599

Total Number of Children in the Child Welfare System, by Race, FY 2000:

African American:	297,095	36.56%
Non-Hispanic White:	373,695	45.98%
Hispanic:	109,648	13.49%
Native American:	20,774	2.55%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	<u>11,387</u>	<u>1.40%</u>
Total	812,599	99.98%

A Closer Look at Racial Disproportionality Using U. S. Census and AFCARS Data

- African American children account for 37% of the total number of children placed in foster care in America in 2000, approximately 46% were accounted for by non-Hispanic White children.³ This was the case despite the fact that African-American children only comprised 15% of the total U.S. child population under 18 in 2000 (U.S. Census).
- Forty-six (46) states have disproportionate representations of African-American children in their child welfare systems.⁴ 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.
- States vary considerably in the degree of over-representation in their child welfare services. Table 1 assigns states into three categories: Moderate Disproportion, High Disproportion, and Extreme Disproportion.⁵

Moderate Disproportion (15 states)	High Disproportion (15 states)	Extreme Disproportion (16 states)
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)
		Wisconsin (5.48)

- In seven (7) states, the proportion of African-American children in foster care is four times what you would expect based upon their occurrence in the general child population of those states. The states with the highest African American disproportionality ratios based upon 2000 AFCARS and Census data are: California (4.14), Oregon (4.38), Wyoming (4.53), Minnesota (4.77), Idaho (4.84), New Hampshire (4.93), and Wisconsin (5.48). The African American disproportionality ratio for the entire U.S. is 2.43.
- *In every state*, the occurrence of white children in the child welfare system is *at least* proportional to their occurrence in the states' total child population under 18. In all but four states, the proportion of white children in the foster care population is less than what would be expected given the proportion of all children under 18.
- Only four (4) states have white disproportionality ratios of 1.0 or higher: Nevada (1.19), Vermont (1.02), Arizona (1.0), and Oklahoma (1.0). The White disproportionality ratio for the entire U.S. is .76.

ENDNOTES

¹ National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau. *Study Findings: National Study of the Incidence and Severity of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1981; Sedlak, Andrea J. *National Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect: 1988* (Revised Report). Rockville, MD: Westat, 1991; Sedlak, Andrea J. and

Broadhurst, Diane D. *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Rockville, MD: Westat, 1996.

² In this brief, we use the term “overrepresentation” as a general label for both racial disproportionality and racial disparity. “Racial Disproportionality” refers to a situation where racial minorities occur in the child welfare population at rates higher than their occurrence in the general population. “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).

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families. AFCARS, Report #8. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003. The report is available online at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/report8.htm>.

⁴ Indices of overrepresentation in each state are derived from the proportion of Black children in foster care based on 2000 AFCARS data divided by the proportion of Black children in the total state population under the age of 18 based on the 2000 Census. Since the Census Bureau permitted respondents to check more than one racial group in the 2000 Census, HHS also permitted states to check more than one racial group in providing foster care data to AFCARS beginning in the year 2000. To facilitate this analysis, it was necessary to reduce the multiracial combinations to five single race/ethnic groups (e.g., non-Hispanic Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and Asian/Pacific Islanders in both the 2000 Census and 2000 AFCARS data). Any combinations involving Whites and a racial minority (e.g., White and Black) were classified into the racial minority (e.g., Black). Any combinations involving Hispanics and a racial minority were classified into the racial minority. And, any combinations involving only racial minorities were classified into the smaller size minority. Since two of the jurisdictions either submitted no foster care data (Puerto Rico) or no racial/ethnicity data (Michigan) to AFCARS in 2000, they are not included in this analysis.

⁵ We 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. We 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).