TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN

Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care

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Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care

Children of color are disproportionately[1] represented in the United States foster care system. In most states, there are higher proportions of African American/Black and Native American children in foster care than in the general child population (Hill, 2006). In some states, Hispanic/Latino children are disproportionately represented as well. The overrepresentation of children of color is an issue of interest to juvenile dependency stakeholders, practitioners, and scholars. This Technical Assistant Bulletin briefly describes the issue of disproportionality, including an overview of prior research and information on how disproportionality can be measured. Disproportionality rates are then presented for all 50 states and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Model Court jurisdictions.[2]

Starting in 1997, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89) required child welfare agencies to submit data regarding children in foster care to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The AFCARS data include the number of children who have entered foster care, the number who have exited foster care, and the number who are still in foster care at the end of the year. The dataset also contains basic demographic information, including race for each child.

In 2000, African American/Black children represented 36% of the foster care population, even though they comprised only 15% of the general child population. Native American children represented 2.6% of the foster care population, yet only encompassed 1.2% of the general child population. Hispanic/Latino children, although not overrepresented nationally, were disproportionately represented in 17 states. These numbers have led child welfare system stakeholders to make efforts to increase awareness of the issue of disproportionality (Child Welfare League of America, 2003). Many of these early efforts had little success, as the proportion of children of color in foster care continued to increase between 2000 and 2004 (United States Government Accountability Office, 2007).

The 2007 Government Accountability Office report identified every state's disproportionality index using 2004 population estimates and 2004 AFCARS data. The disproportionality findings were summarized in a table that illustrated the problem of disproportionality and highlighted states whose disproportionality rates were greater than 2 (i.e., this racial/ethnic group was represented in foster care at a rate twice their proportion in the general population). We have duplicated this table and included the 2009 data for comparison. Some states have substantially reduced their disproportionality. Other states show slight increases or decreases, or have remained consistent in the five-year time span. Overall, in 2004, the United States had an African American/Black disproportionality rate of 2.65. In 2009, this was reduced to 2.36. The change for Native American children has been slightly less prominent. In 2004, the overrepresentation score for Native American children in the nation was 1.83. In 2009, that was reduced slightly to 1.76. Table 1 illustrates the 2004 and 2009 disproportionality rates for children in foster care for each state and nationally.

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[1] Disproportionality is the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower percentages or rates than in the general population.

[2] Small jurisdictions are not uniquely identified in the AFCARS dataset. Therefore, data was not available for all Model Courts.

Table 1:
Disproportionality Index of Children in Foster Care by Race and State for 2004 and 2009[3]

	African American/ Black[i]		Caucasian/White[ii]		Hispanic/Latino[iii]		Asian/Pacific Islander[iv]		Native American/ Alaska Native[v]	
STATE	**2004**	**2009**	**2004**	**2009**	**2004**	**2009**	**2004**	**2009**	**2004**	**2009**
Alabama	1.5	1.4	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.5	0.3
Alaska	**2.2**	1.2	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.3	3.1	**3.1**
Arizona	**2.4**	**2.5**	1.0	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.7
Arkansas	1.4	1.4	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2
California	**4.0**	**4.1**	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.2	0.2	1.8	1.8
Colorado	**2.8**	**3.3**	0.8	0.8	1.3	1.1	0.3	0.3	1.9	1.1
Connecticut	**2.8**	**2.5**	0.5	0.5	**2.0**	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.3
Delaware	**2.3**	**2.2**	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.9
Florida	1.9	1.8	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.9	1.3
Georgia	1.4	1.4	0.8	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Hawaii	0.4	0.9	0.6	0.8	0.2	0.1	1.0	0.8	1.8	0.8
Idaho	**3.4**	**2.8**	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.7	0.2	1.0	**5.9**	**6.6**
Illinois	**3.5**	**3.5**	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.9
Indiana	**3.0**	**2.6**	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.4	0.2
Iowa	**4.4**	**3.8**	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.6	**5.4**	**5.4**
Kansas	**2.9**	**3.2**	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2	1.2	1.2
Kentucky	**2.0**	1.7	0.9	0.9	0.3	0.8	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.6
Louisiana	1.4	1.3	0.8	0.9	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.6	0.5
Maine	1.7	1.1	0.9	0.9	**2.2**	1.3	0.4	0.0	1.5	1.5
Maryland	**2.3**	**2.2**	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.8	0.2
Massachusetts	**2.2**	**2.3**	0.7	0.7	**2.2**	1.6	0.4	0.4	0.9	0.7
Michigan	**2.9**	**2.8**	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.8	1.2
Minnesota	**3.6**	**2.5**	0.6	0.6	1.4	0.8	0.4	0.4	**7.3**	**11.6**
Mississippi	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.2
Missouri	**2.1**	**2.1**	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.2	1.0	0.7
Montana	**2.68**	**2.3**	0.6	0.6	1.6	0.7	0.6	0.3	**3.4**	**3.8**
Nebraska	**2.76**	**3.4**	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.3	0.4	**6.5**	**6.8**

[3] States with disproportionality indexes of 2.0 or higher are indicated in **bold.**

STATE	African American/ Black		Caucasian/White		Hispanic/Latino		Asian/Pacific Islander		Native American/ Alaska Native	
	2004	2009	2004	2009	2004	2009	2004	2009	2004	2009
Nevada	**2.7**	**3.0**	1.1	1.0	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.4	1.2
New Hampshire	**4.4**	**2.1**	0.9	0.9	1.8	1.3	0.2	0.2	0.9	1.6
New Jersey	**3.8**	**3.5**	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.0	0.1	1.3	0.3
New Mexico	**2.8**	**2.2**	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.9	0.2	0.2	0.4	1.0
New York	**2.6**	**3.0**	0.4	0.4	1.0	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.9	0.6
North Carolina	1.6	1.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.2	1.5	0.9
North Dakota	**3.3**	**2.3**	0.7	0.7	1.9	1.3	**3.0**	1.4	**3.1**	**2.9**
Ohio	**2.9**	**2.6**	0.7	0.7	1.0	0.5	0.1	0.1	1.0	0.9
Oklahoma	1.8	**2.2**	0.7	0.6	1.1	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.1	0.8
Oregon	**3.3**	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.1	**8.7**	1.0
Pennsylvania	**3.6**	**3.5**	0.5	0.5	1.4	0.9	0.2	0.1	1.1	1.4
Rhode Island	**2.7**	**2.4**	0.8	0.8	1.1	1.0	0.5	0.8	**2.1**	1.7
South Carolina	1.4	1.4	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.2
South Dakota	1.7	1.6	0.4	0.4	**2.3**	0.5	0.3	0.3	**3.7**	**3.9**
Tennessee	1.5	1.4	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.4	1.0
Texas	**2.0**	**2.1**	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.7
Utah	**6.1**	**4.4**	0.8	0.8	1.6	1.3	0.1	0.5	**4.0**	**3.8**
Vermont	**3.2**	1.1	1.0	1.1	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.0
Virginia	1.9	1.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.0
Washington	**3.1**	**2.4**	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.2	0.2	**5.0**	**6.9**
West Virginia	**2.0**	1.4	0.9	0.9	1.2	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.0
Wisconsin	**4.7**	**4.2**	0.5	0.6	1.3	0.8	0.3	0.3	**2.5**	**3.9**
Wyoming	**4.3**	**6.0**	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.8	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.6
United States	**2.65**	**2.36**	**0.74**	**0.76**	**0.97**	**0.71**	**0.27**	**0.25**	**1.83**	**1.76**

[i] Children identified by the child welfare system as African American, non-Hispanic, and with only one race category.

[ii] Children identified by the child welfare system as White, non-Hispanic, and with only one race category.

[iii] Children identified by the child welfare system as having Hispanic origins; not a racial category.

[iv] Children identified by the child welfare system as Asian, which includes Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic and with only one race category.

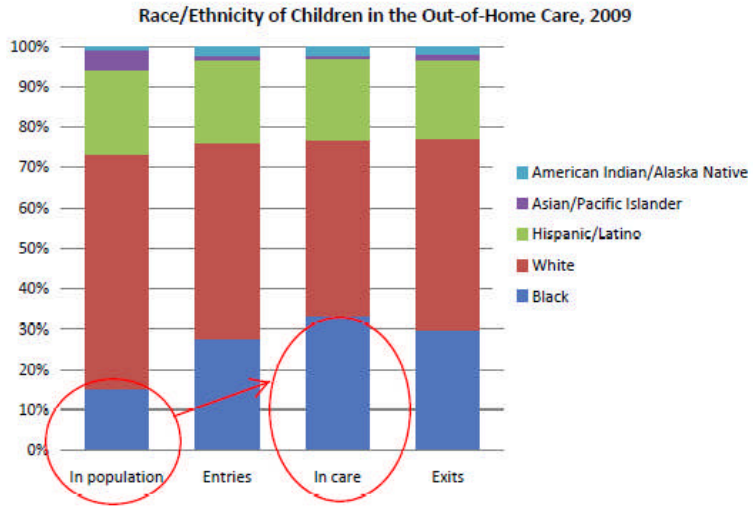
[v] Children identified by the child welfare system as Native American, non-Hispanic, and with only one race category.

CALCULATING DISPROPORTIONALITY

Disproportionality is defined as the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower percentages or rates than in the general population. Hill (2006) developed the "disproportionality index" as an indicator of the degree a given jurisdiction is disproportionate.[3] The disproportionately index is calculated by taking the proportion of children in foster care for a given race and dividing it by the proportion of the same racial group in the child population. This creates a ratio where scores ranging from 0.00 to 0.99 are indicative of underrepresentation, scores of 1.0 indicate no disproportionality, and scores of 1.1 and greater indicate overrepresentation. For example, in a community where 40% of the children entering foster care are African American, and only 20% of the child population is African American, the disproportionality index would be 2.0, indicating African Americans are twice as represented in foster care as they are in the general population. Disproportionality scores are calculated for the number of children "entering" care, "exiting" care, and "remaining" in care at the end of the year. These calculations require (1) the *child population* (*by race*) for any given state or jurisdiction, available from census data; and (2) the *number of children in the child welfare system (by race),* available from the AFCARS.

DATA SOURCES		
Data Element	**Available From**	**Most Recent Date**
Child Population (by Race)	The U.S. Census Bureau (Total Population – Adult Population) www.census.gov	2010
Number of Children In Care Entering Care Exiting Care (by Race)	National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) www.ndacan.cornell.edu	2009

[3] We would like to thank Casey Family Programs (www.casey.org) for their contribution in the development of the racial disproportionality index template.

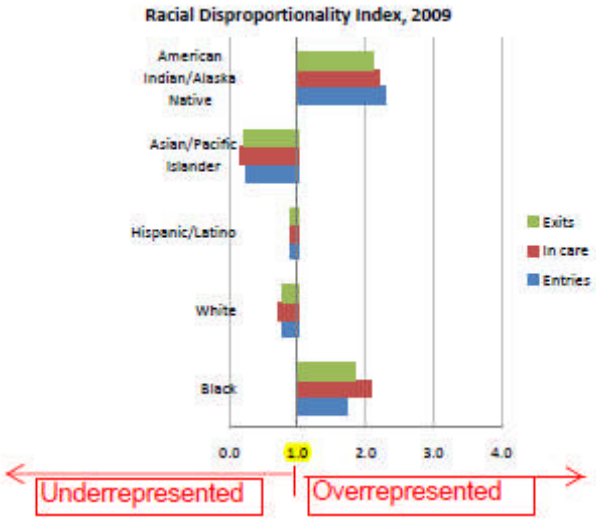


The results of these disproportionality calculations are presented numerically and graphically. The graph on the left compares the racial breakdown of the population to the percentage of each racial group entering, in, and exiting foster care in 2009. In this chart, the race of African American/Black children in the population is approximately 14 % (first oval). Compare that to the rate of African American/Black children in foster care—more than 30% (larger oval). These differences are also reported in a corresponding table under the graph (see below).

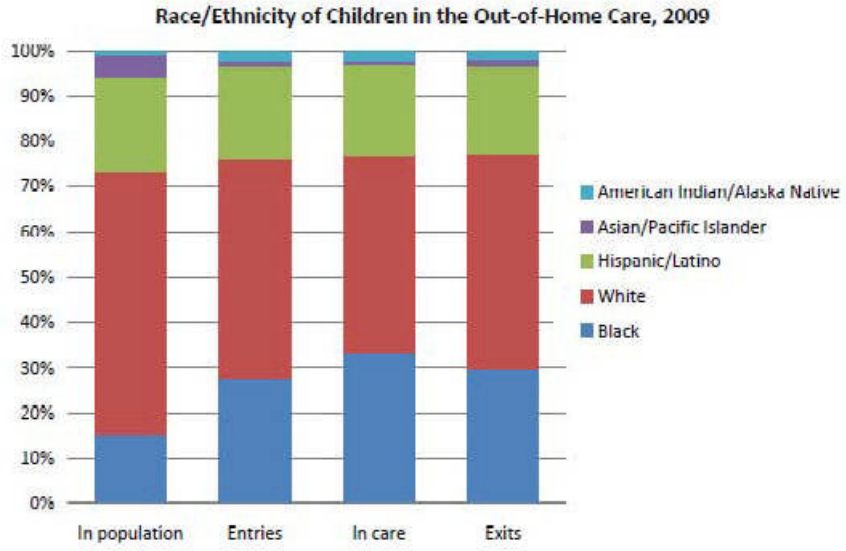
Race/ethnicity breakdowns	Population	Entries	In care	Exits
African American/Black (a)	14.5%	25.1%	30.1%	26.9%
Caucasian/White (b)	55.6%	43.6%	39.5%	43.0%
Hispanic/Latino (c)	20.1%	18.3%	18.1%	17.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander (d)	4.6%	1.1%	0.8%	1.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native (e)	0.9%	2.1%	2.0%	1.9%
More than one race	3.9%	6.9%	2.0%	6.9%
Missing	0.3%	2.9%	7.4%	2.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

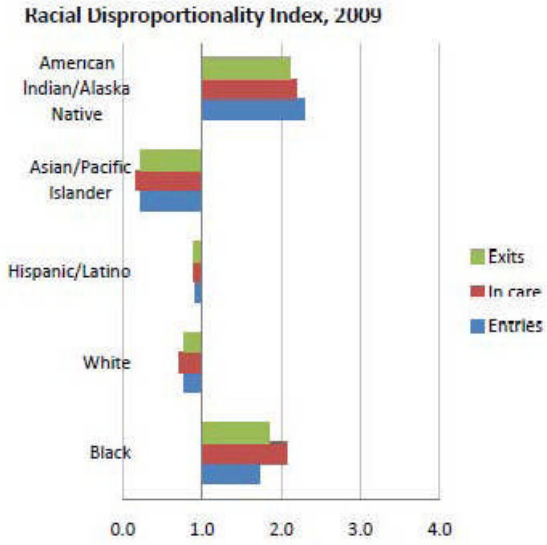
The graph (right) and table (below) portray the disproportionality index. The *Racial Disproportionality Index* graph depicts the disproportionality scores for each race in terms of entries, exits, and in care rates. Bars moving to the right of 1.0 indicate overrepresentation; bars moving to the left of 1.0 demonstrate underrepresentation. The highlighted text in the *Racial Disproportionality Index* table below identifies disproportionality indexes in which the racial group is overrepresented.

Racial Disproportionality Index	Entries	In care	Exits
African American/Black (a)	1.7	2.1	1.9
Caucasian/White (b)	0.8	0.7	0.8
Hispanic/Latino (c)	0.9	0.9	0.9
Asian/Pacific Islander (d)	0.2	0.2	0.2
American Indian/Alaska Native (e)	2.3	2.2	2.1



Disproportionality in the United States



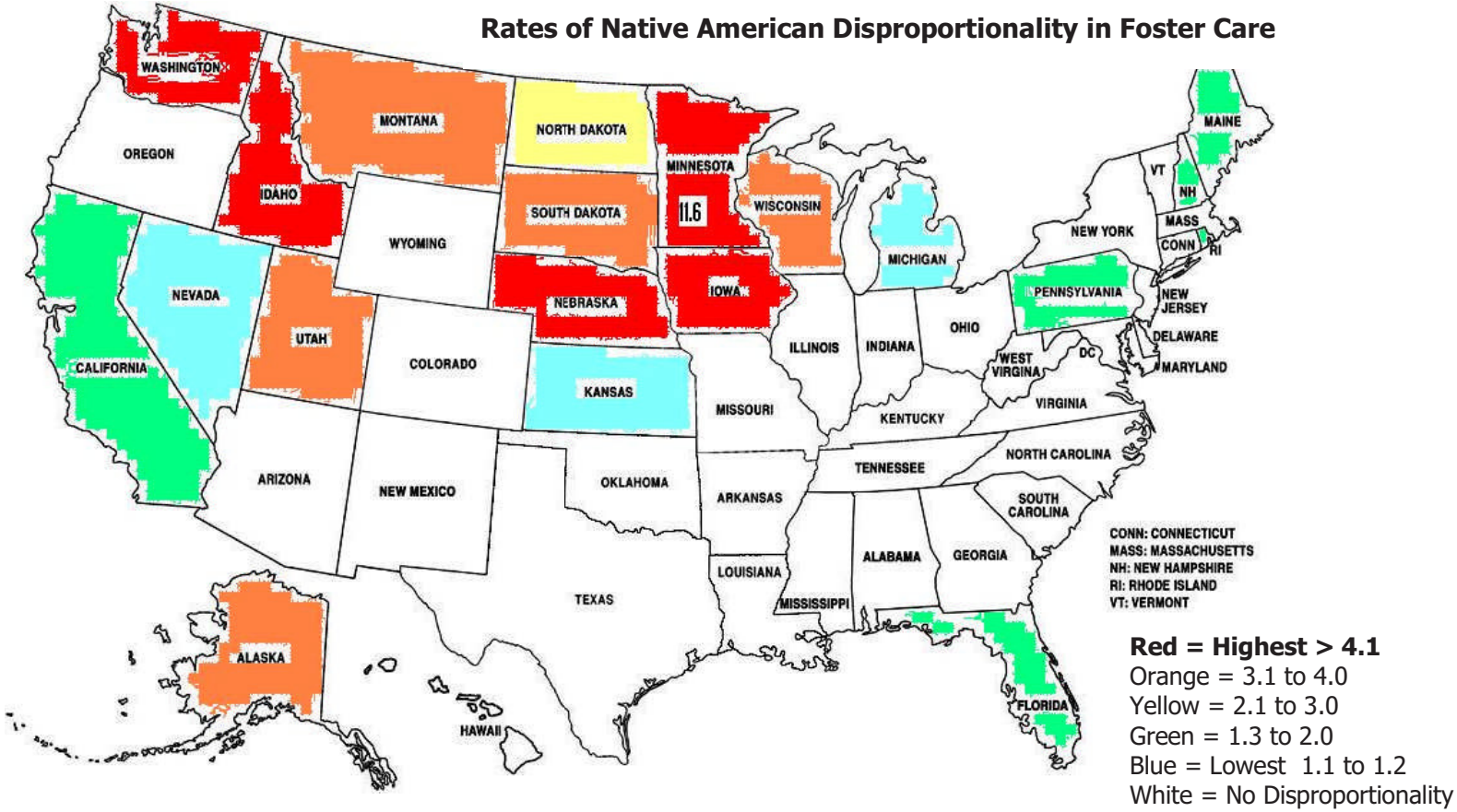


Race/ethnicity breakdowns	Population	Entries	In care	Exits
African American/Black (a)	14.5%	25.1%	30.1%	26.9%
Caucasian/White (b)	55.6%	43.6%	39.5%	43.0%
Hispanic/Latino (c)	20.1%	18.3%	18.1%	17.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander (d)	4.6%	1.1%	0.8%	1.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native (e)	0.9%	2.1%	2.0%	1.9%
More than one race	3.9%	6.9%	2.0%	6.9%
Missing	0.3%	2.9%	7.4%	2.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Racial Disproportionality Index	Entries	In care	Exits
African American/Black (a)	1.7	2.1	1.9
Caucasian/White (b)	0.8	0.7	0.8
Hispanic/Latino (c)	0.9	0.9	0.9
Asian/Pacific Islander (d)	0.2	0.2	0.2
American Indian/Alaska Native (e)	2.3	2.2	2.1

Disproportionaltiy is the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower percentages or rates than in the general population. An index of 1.0 reflects no disproportionality. An index of greater than 1.0 reflects overrepresentation. An index of less than 1.0 reflects underrepresentation.

Disproportionality continues to be a trend throughout the nation. As noted in the graphs above, African American/Black children and Native American children are consistently overrepresented in the foster care system. These graphs illustrate the national average across all 50 states. Within this national trend, there are considerable variances at the state and local levels.

Comparisons of Disproportionality by State
Native American

Across the United States, Native American children are overrepresented in foster care at a rate of 2.2 times their rate in the general population. While not all state show disproportionality, 21 states do have some overrepresentation. Twenty-six percent of the states that have overrepresentation have a disproportionality index of greater than 4.1. In Minnesota, the disproportionality is index 11.6.