Disproportionality of African-Americans in Public Child Welfare Services

One Organization’s Experience

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What is Disproportionality? Disparity?

**Disproportionality:** Degree to which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower percentages or rates than in the general population.

**Disparity:** A comparative measure of unequal, or disparate, contact in the context of child welfare.
Disproportionality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Disparity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratio

(Putnam-Hornstein, 2008)
Why Are Disproportionality and Disparity a Problem?

African-American and Indian children more likely to be placed in foster care and stay longer

How is a system meant to protect children treating children of color and poor people

Example: Are children being unnecessarily separated from their parents?
Why We Chose This Topic

After several years, major organizational changes resulted in many positive results, but with lesser impact on disproportionality. Often there are as many lessons to be learned from our failures as our successes.
Disproportionality

Nationally, the number of African American children in foster care is disproportional to the number of African American children in the general population.
## Race/Ethnicity of Children in Total U.S. Population vs. in Foster Care in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Child Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Children in Foster Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009)
Race/Ethnicity of Children in Total California Population vs. in Foster Care in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Child Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Children in Foster Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-race</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Needell, B., et al., 2013)
## Race/Ethnicity of Children in Total Solano County Population vs. in Foster Care in 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Child Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Children in Foster Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-race</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Needell, B., et al., 2013)
Causes of Disproportionality

Many studies: agreement that causes are complex and co-exist, but no definitive answers and disproportionality continues.

- Disproportional and disparate needs of children in families of color
- Racial bias and discrimination in the CWS system
- CWS processes and resources
- Geographic influences

(Hines, 2004)
Causes of Disproportionality: Disproportional and Disparate Needs for Families of Color

CWS clients have many needs that are positively correlated with maltreatment. Poverty, unemployment, single parent households, large family size (four or more children), mental health issues, domestic violence and substance abuse are correlated to disproportionality.

(Flukes, 2011)
Child Abuse & Neglect Referrals and the Unemployment Rate

Median Number of Referrals, Average Annual Unemployment Rate
March Unemployment for 2011.

(Solano County, 2011)
Causes of Disproportionality: Racial Bias and Discrimination in the CWS System

Inequitable practices by CWS and referring parties/institutions

Referrals: Studies indicate that people are more likely to report African Americans in comparison to other ethnicities

Worker bias: Regardless of worker race, white children are less likely to be investigated

(Flukes, 2011)
Causes of Disproportionality: CWS Processes and Resources

Inequitable resources for families of color, e.g., housing, child care, counseling

Multiple caseworkers or without MSW, children had longer lengths of stay

(Flukes, 2011)
Causes of Disproportionality: Geographical Influences

- California study: Neighborhood factors-- higher rates of poverty and higher density of alcohol outlets
- Type and magnitude of disparity varied by location

(Flukes, 2011)
One Jurisdiction’s Approach

In Solano County, we applied a systematic approach to improving quality of services to abused children and their families through implementation of identified best practices.

Results were significant, yet mixed in addressing disproportionality.
Public Child Welfare Services in California

4 primary services:
Emergency Response – receive reports of child abuse and investigate as indicated
Family Maintenance – services while child remains home
Family Reunification – services while child is in foster care
Permanency Placement – services for children not reunified
Child Welfare Performance Measures & Outcomes

Safety, Permanency, and Well-being:
- Timely response to referrals
- Regular visits with children
- Children placed with relatives, with siblings
- Indian children placed with tribe
- Placement stability
- Length of time to reunification
- Recidivism after reunification
- Timely adoption of non-reunified children
Strategies to Address Disproportionality and Disparity

- Increasing Transparency
- Reengineering Structures and Procedures
- Changing Organizational Culture
- Mobilizing Political Leadership
- Partnering in Developing Family and Community Resources
Strategies:
Increasing Transparency

Work groups:
Building community partnerships
Team decision-making
Recruitment and development of resource families
Self-evaluation
Members included community organizations, community members, and staff of CWS and other public agencies
CWS Nuts n Bolts trainings for community, stakeholders, and partners
Set up Youth and Parent Action Teams
Used existing venues to provide training
Shared outcome data
360 degree assessments of supervisors to CWS Director
Strategies: Reengineering Structures and Procedures

Changed Emergency Response from quasi-law enforcement investigators to SWs who engaged families & offered services

Established Voluntary Family Maintenance and later expanded to more intensive program

More family reunifications sooner, with minimal increase in recidivism

Established intensive concurrent planning so that if FR failed, there was alternate plan ready for children

For nonreunified children, provided intensive services to prevent aging out
Strategies: Reengineering Structures and Procedures

Evidence-based and informed practices implemented with model fidelity

Structured Decision Making, Team Decision Making meetings, Wraparound, Nurse Family Partnership

In-home visitation services, specialized relative approval, staffing according to workload study, team based service delivery, service timeline reviews, elimination of visit exemptions, quarterly contact with parents who didn’t reunify,
Strategies: Changing Organizational Culture

Family to Family
A child's safety is paramount
Children belong in families
Families need strong communities
Public child welfare systems need partnerships with the community and other systems to achieve strong outcomes for children

Child Welfare League of America assessment – staff work groups to address:
Clear expectations and guidelines for staff
Support and resources to strengthen agency performance
Increase mutual accountability and teamwork
Improve organizational communication
Strengthen leadership skills

California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I)
California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)
In-house consultants and TA helped accountability
Strategies: Mobilizing Political Leadership

Board of Supervisors – updates and advocating for staff resources
Blue Ribbon Committee – Judge, Academics, non-Solano CWS experts
Judges – changes in direction
Community – updates, resource needs
State – System Improvement Plan
Strategies: Partnering in Developing Family and Community Resources

Superagency structure: Mental Health, Health, Substance Abuse, Eligibility

Other county agencies – Probation, First 5, Office of Family Violence, Office of Education

CASA – family finding, HUD grant, Community College
Impact of Organizational Restructuring and Best Practices Implementation?
Impact of Changes

Timely Social Worker Visits With Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State &amp; County Goal</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Solano County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>74.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>98.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>92.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FY 2011 Data YTD through March*

(Solano County, 2011)
Impact of Changes: State Reduction in CWS Cases
21.6% change 2005-2010

(Bill Dawson Consulting, 2013)
Impact of Changes: Solano County CWS Caseload Reduction
36 % Change 2005-2010

(Bill Dawson Consulting, 2013)
Impact of Changes: Fewer Children in Foster Care

(Solano County, 2011)
Impact of Changes: Solano County
Reductions in Time to Adoption

Solano and California: Median Months to Adoption

(Bill Dawson Consulting, 2013)
Impact of Changes: Solano County Reductions in Youths Aging Out of Care

(Bill Dawson Consulting, 2013)

Social Equity Leadership Conference
Impact of Changes: Foster Care Entries

(California Entries Black)

(California Entries Black)

Rate per 1,000
DM(2)
Compared with Black
Compared with White

(Solano County Entries Black)

Rate per 1,000
DM(2)
Compared with White
Compared with Black

(UC Berkeley, 2013)
Impact of Changes: Mixed Results

Significant improvements in organizational effectiveness
Decrease in number of African-Americans entering foster care but not in those already in care
Harvard study: Does maltreatment occur at a higher rate among African-Americans?

(Bartholet, 2009)
Recommendations

- Continue to refine the research question and research practices.
- Direct more resources on those factors that are known to increase child maltreatment and that are beyond the scope of CWS: poverty, housing, unemployment.
- Need increased research on interventions.
- Continue with current best practices because they have produced improved overall system performance.
References

- California Welfare Performance Indicators Project (cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (ndacan.cornell.edu).
- Solano County Health & Social Services. (Nov 1, 2011) Child Welfare Services Report to the Board of Supervisors 11-0545
- U.S. Census Bureau’s 2008 American Community Survey, which provides statistics on children and youth under 18 as 1-year estimates.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (2009) AFCARS data for FY 2008, which provides statistics on children and youth in the child welfare system up to age 20 (although only 5 percent are 18+ years) on September 30, 2008.