



Overrepresentation of Black children in Child Welfare

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WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This article is based on a systematic review that confirmed racial disparities and overrepresentation of Black youth, ages 10-17, involved with the child welfare system in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand where Black communities are the population minority. The authors analyzed risk and protective factors associated with their findings.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Racial disparities are the unequal outcomes of one racial/ethnic group compared to another. This study confirmed racial disparities and disproportionate overrepresentation of Black youth at all levels of child welfare involvement including report investigations, allegation substantiations, out-of-home placements, re-entries into foster care, reunification and adoption rates, ongoing services, number of alternative response paths, and number of placement changes.

Overrepresentation of Black youth was associated with two categories of risk factors:

Sociodemographic risk factors:

Race and ethnicity - Being Black is a main factor that explains racial disparities and overrepresentation of Black youth

Gender - Girls are more likely to be transferred to ongoing services and placed in out-of-kinship homes

Low socioeconomic status (combined education, income, and occupation status)

Geographic location - Increased risk of being reported when living in racially/ ethnically mixed neighborhoods compared to living in a neighborhood that is made up of the same race/ethnicity

Racial bias risk factors – most evident in:

Referral sources, including law enforcement and schools

Investigation reasons, including reports of neglect, physical or sexual abuse, or caregiver partner violence allegations

Caregiver risk factors, including parental substance use and lack of parental supervision



WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

These disparities are structurally embedded in our educational, legal, juvenile, and child welfare systems and must be addressed at the federal, local government, institutional, and university levels.

Child welfare programs should:

1. **Compile data reports across the continuum using race/ethnicity categories to assist with data-informed decision making**
2. **Create and support an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity team to examine and revise policies and procedures that contribute to disparate outcomes**
3. **Provide learning and discussion opportunities that examine systemic bias and individual implicit bias**

These actions help break the trend of disparities and strengthen services that keep children and youth safely supported within their families and communities.