



## FOURTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON FAIRNESS & EQUITY ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE TRAINING

### *Presentation/Discussion:*

### **Disproportionality vs. Disparity Indices of California's Child Welfare Administrative Data**

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### Summary of Presentation

April 28, 2006

Dr. Barbara Needell, Principal Investigator with the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), provided an update about CSSR and its work analyzing quarterly child welfare data from the California Department of Social Services. She also reviewed the types of data sets that are available on the website based upon quarterly CDSS data extracts – referral, cohort, point-in-time, foster care dynamics, and AB 636 outcome measures. Data is available for the state as a whole as well as at the county-specific level. In addition, several presentations that have been created by CSSR using state level data are available on the website at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/presentations/> and many of these presentations can be reproduced using county specific data.

Dr. Needell reviewed the newest PowerPoint presentation available on the CSSR website on disproportionality and disparity. She began by acknowledging that there is currently no consensus about how disproportionality and disparity are defined. Though it may become more important in the future to develop a common usage of these terms as they apply in child welfare, in the context of this presentation and for the purposes of understanding how disproportionality and disparity are defined and used on the CSSR website and in their materials, Dr. Needell provided the following definitions:

- **Disproportionality** refers to the proportion of children by race that experience a child welfare event, in comparison to the proportion of children of that same race in the child population as a whole.
- **Disparity** refers to the proportion of children by race that experiences a child welfare event in comparison to children of another race or to all children.

Within the disproportionality slides, the second, third, fourth and fifth slides offer a new way to visually present foster care dynamics by both race and age. The three dimensional format paints a dramatic picture of how Black and Native American children, in particular, are overrepresented in the child welfare system in California when compared to their presence in the overall population.

The second set of slides explains how to calculate a disproportionality and disparity index. The disproportionality index compares the ratios of children experiencing child welfare events by race to their presence in the overall child population. The disparity index can be used to compare the ratios of children of one race experiencing a child welfare event to children of another race or to children of all other races. The disparity index demonstrates how disparity can tell an even more compelling story about the effects of the overrepresentation of Black and Native American children and the resulting underrepresentation of children of other races in the child welfare system in California.