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# The Community Impact of Racial Disproportionality

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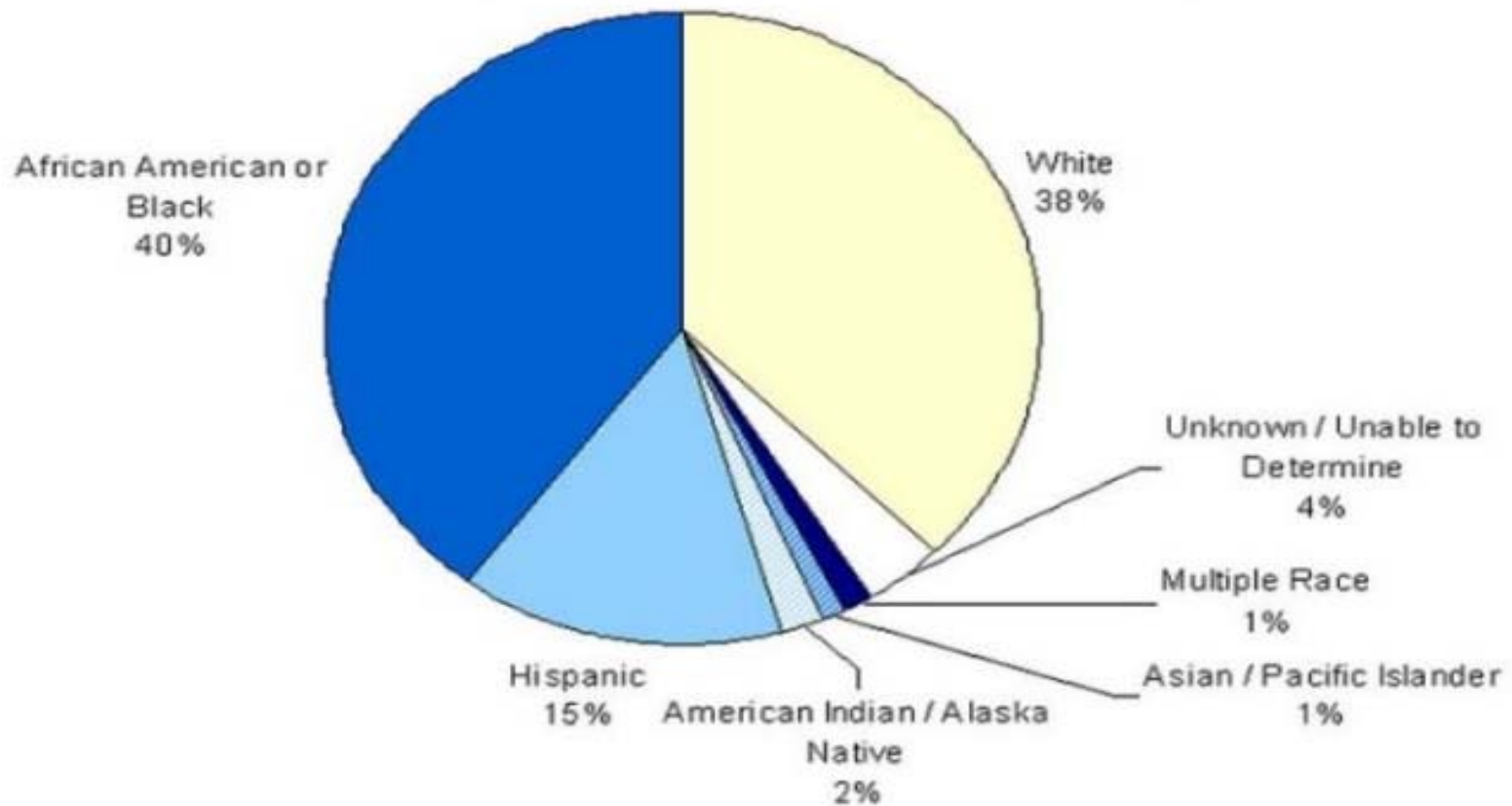
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# Measuring Racial Disparities: National Numbers

- Overrepresentation: percentage of children in system from racial group is greater than group's proportion in the general population.
  - In 2000, children of color comprised only 31% of general population, but 59% of children in out-of-home care ("foster care"); 61% of children awaiting adoption.
    - African Americans: 15% population v. 41% in foster care
    - Native Americans: 1% population v. 2% in foster care
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# Who is in Foster Care? Children by Race or Ethnicity, 2000



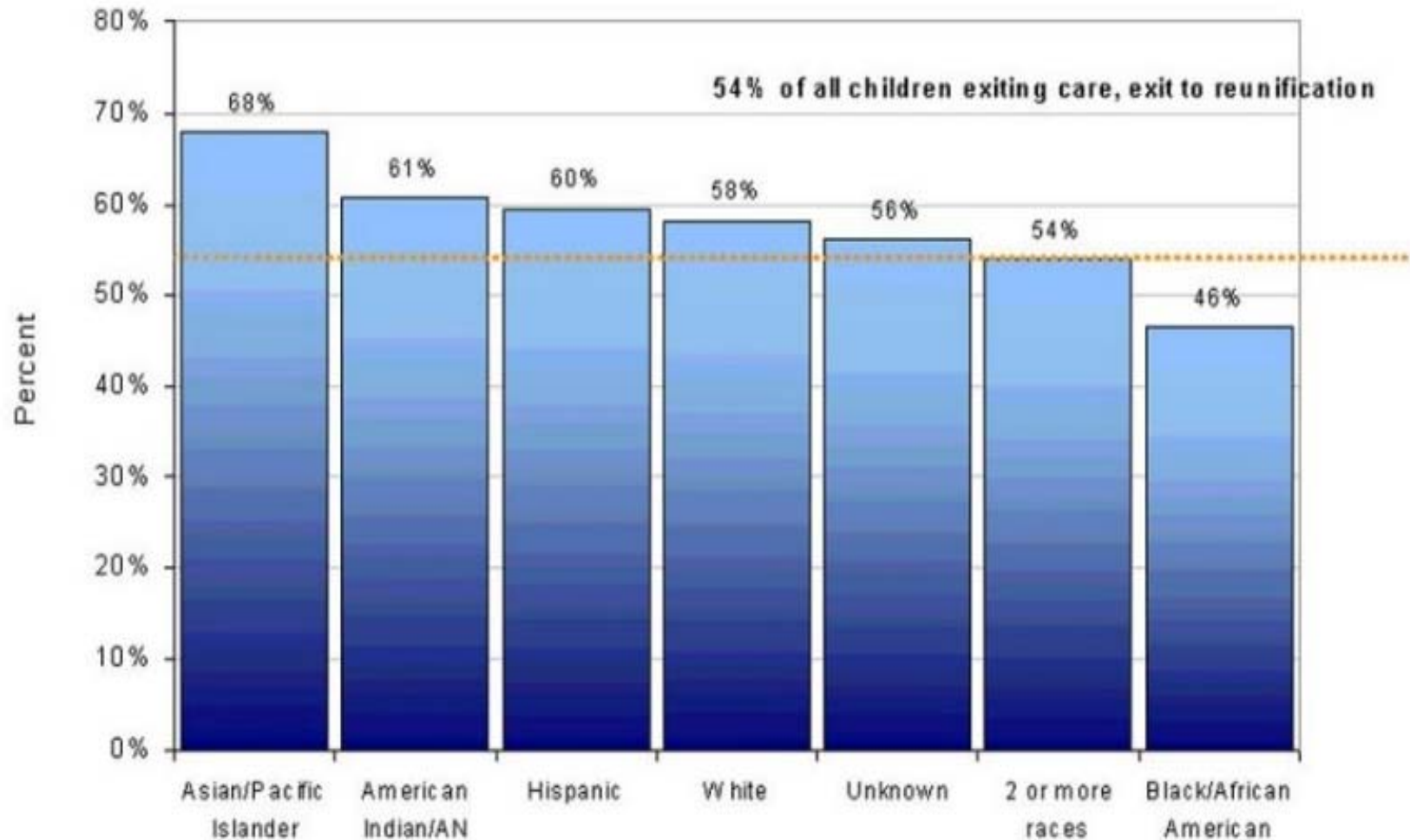
Sources: The AFCARS Report (August 2002)

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# Racial Disproportionality

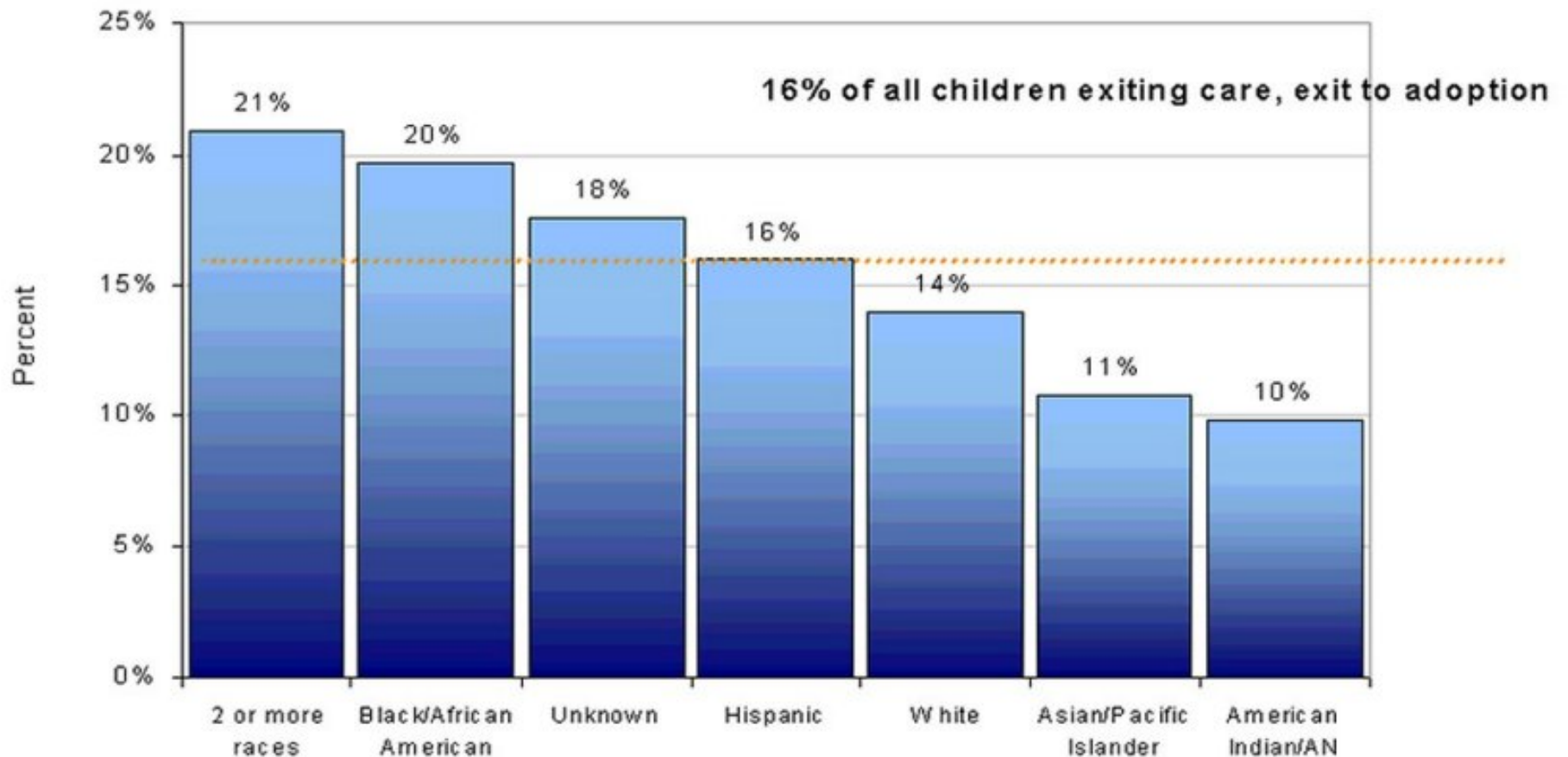
- Compares rates of child welfare system involvement for children of a particular group with those for another (e.g., rates for children of color v. white children).
  - Numbers in foster care per 1,000 children:
    - African American: 21
    - Native American: 16
    - Hispanic: 7
    - White: 5
  - **African American children were 4 times as likely as white children to be in foster care.**
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# Percent of Children Exiting Care to Reunification within Race, 2000



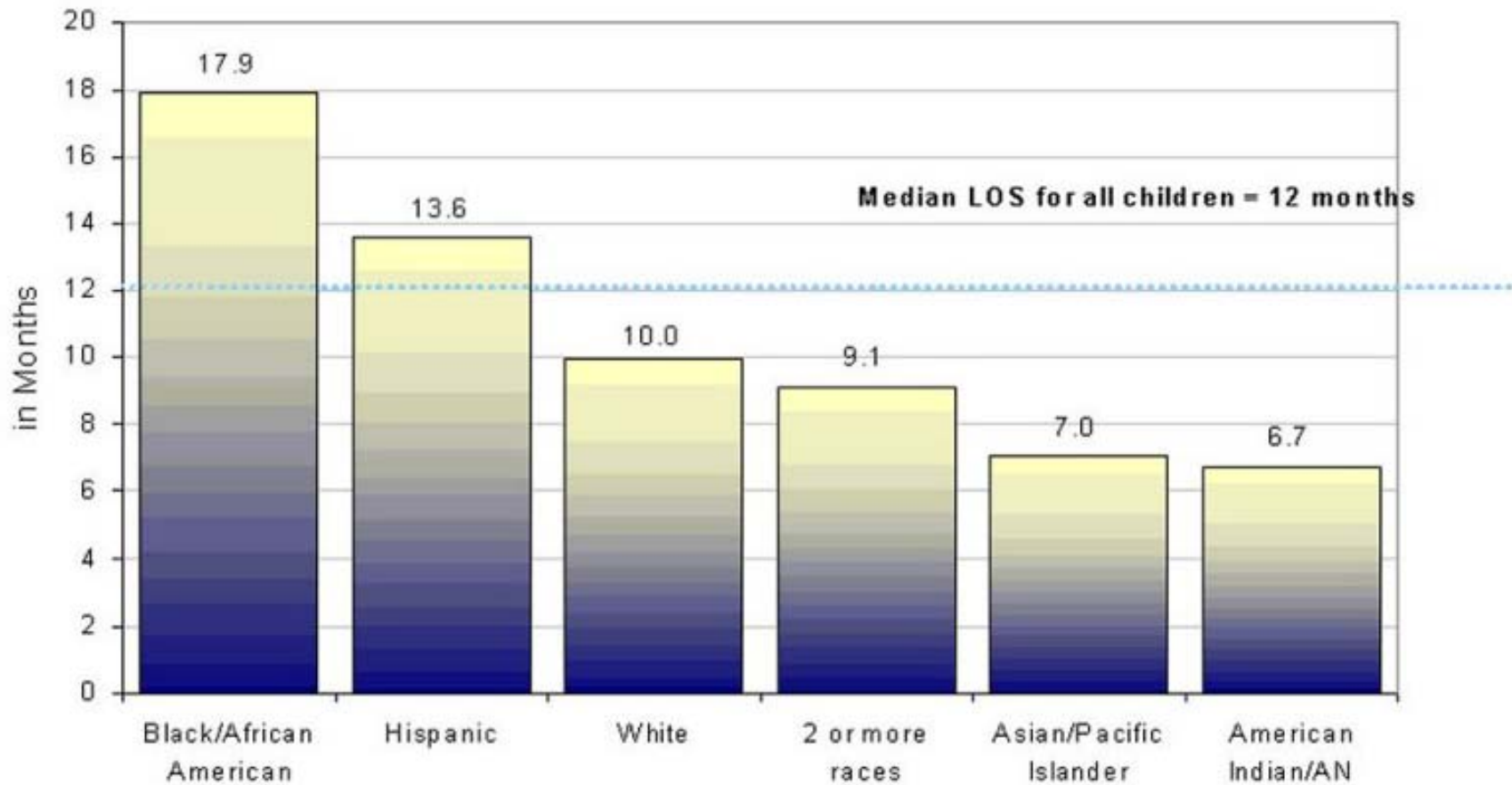
Source: AFCARS Case Files 2000 Version 1. Calculations and tabulations by CWLA.

# Percent of Children Exiting Care to Adoption within Race, 2000



Source: AFCARS Case Files 2000 Version 1. Calculations and tabulations by CWLA.

# Median Length of Stay for Children Exiting Care, 2000



Source: AFCARS Case Files 2000 Version 1. Calculations and tabulations by CW LA.

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# Other Racial Disparities

African American children:

- Reported more often for abuse and neglect.
  - More likely to have charges substantiated.
  - Less likely to receive needed mental health services once in foster care.
  - Have fewer visits with parents and siblings.
  - Families receive fewer preventive, reunification, and other services.
  - Families have fewer contacts with caseworkers.
  - Parents' rights more likely to be terminated.
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# The System's Racial Geography

- Child welfare agency involvement concentrated in poor communities of color.
  - One in ten children in some African- and Native-American neighborhoods is in foster care.
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# The Community Dimension of CPS

- What connections between communities and families have policy makers, researchers, social workers recognized?
  - What connections have they failed to see?
  - Why are some aspects more prominent in research, policy, and practice than others?
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# Social Science Research

- “It takes a village to raise a child”
  - “Neighborhood Effects”: impact of neighborhood characteristics & community-level social dynamics on children and families.
  - William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987): “concentration effects.”
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# Social Work Practice

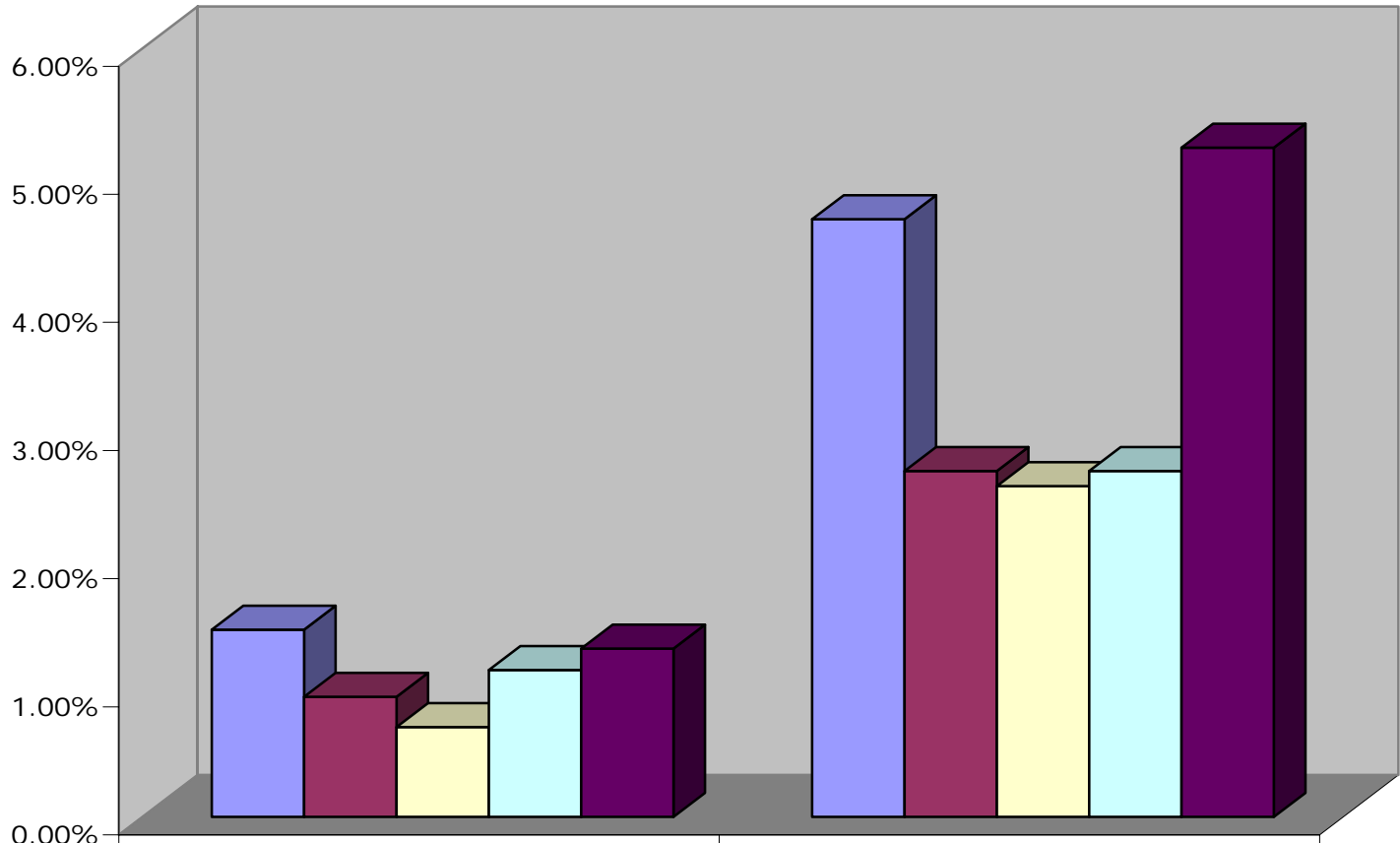
- Community-based approaches to child welfare decision making & service delivery
  - Identifying interventions
  - Two main approaches:
    - Integrate communities into case work with clients.
    - Build capacity of neighborhoods to provide healthier environments for children.
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## What's Left Out

- Identifying the child welfare system itself as aspect of neighborhoods with community-wide impact on residents.
  - Socio-political impact of spatial concentration of child welfare supervision in disadvantaged neighborhoods.
  - Community impact of racial disproportionality.
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■ Near West Side ■ East Garfield Park ■ Washington Park ■ Woodlawn ■ Grand Boulevard

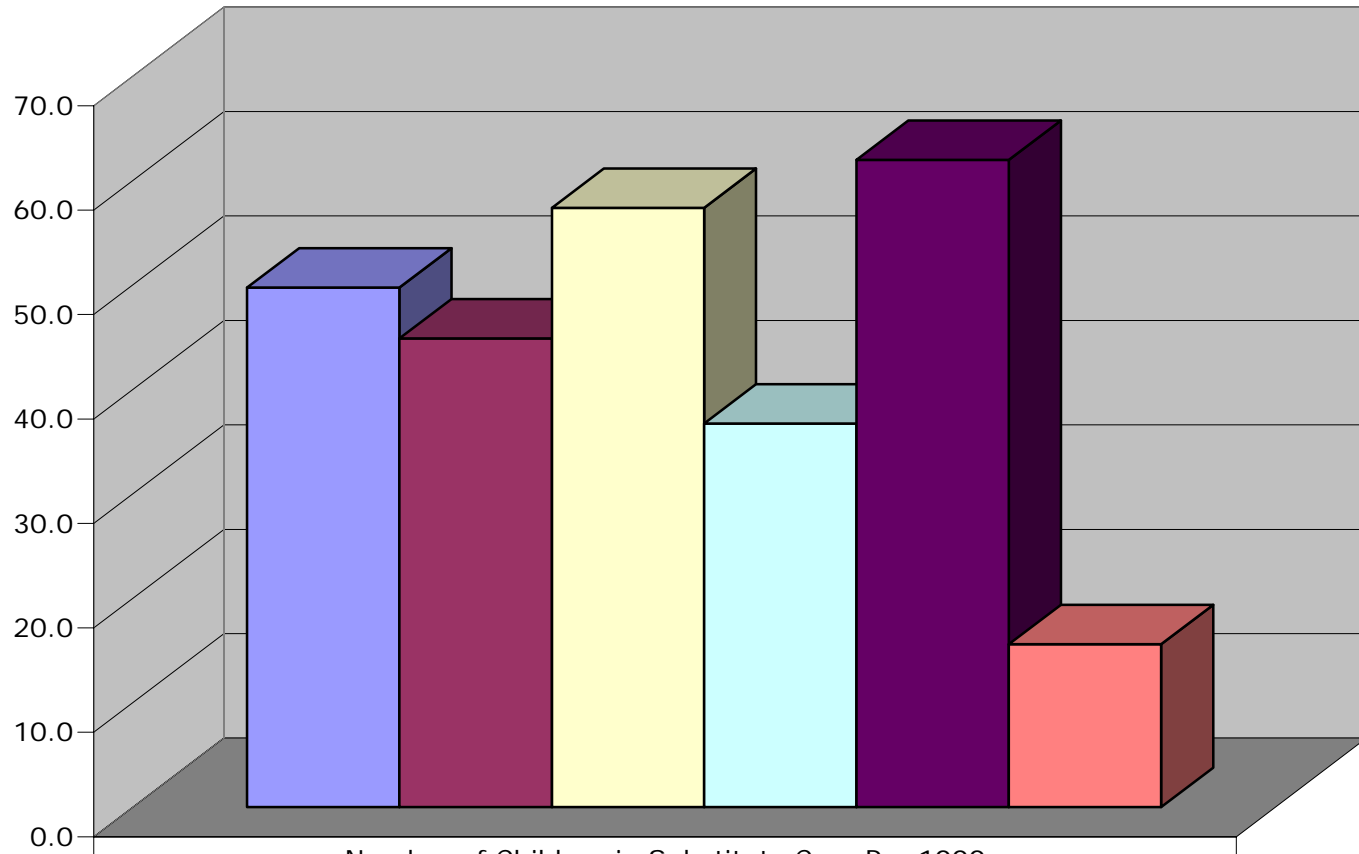


Percentage of All Chicago Children

Percentage of all Chicago Children in Substitute Care

■ Near West Side	1.46%	4.67%
■ East Garfield Park	0.94%	2.70%
■ Washington Park	0.70%	2.58%
■ Woodlawn	1.15%	2.70%
■ Grand Boulevard	1.31%	5.22%

■ Near West Side 
 ■ East Garfield Park 
 ■ Washington Park 
 ■ Woodlawn 
 ■ Grand Boulevard 
 ■ Chicago



Number of Children in Substitute Care Per 1000

<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Near West Side	49.8
<span style="color: maroon;">■</span> East Garfield Park	44.9
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Washington Park	57.4
<span style="color: cyan;">■</span> Woodlawn	36.7
<span style="color: purple;">■</span> Grand Boulevard	62.0
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Chicago	15.6

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- Racial differences in rates of foster care placement affect more than individual child's risk of placement.
  - Also risk of growing up in neighborhood where state supervision prevalent.
  - Makes child welfare system distinctively different institution for white and African American children in U.S.
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# Why is Community Impact Obscure?

- Child welfare philosophy: child maltreatment as parental pathology; private remedies v. social reform.
  - Law: parental accountability; best interests of the child.
  - Sociology: aggregating individual-level data.
  - Social work: outcomes for individual children & families; culturally competent practice.
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## Does Disproportionality Have Community-Level Effects?

Other research on community-level effects of social policies and institutions.

- Social costs of mass incarceration in Black neighborhoods.
  - “Exposure to incarceration [by both ex-offenders and other residents] is a defining experience in influencing how people feel, both about public and private social control.” (Rose, Clear & Ryder 2002)
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# Woodlawn Study: Research Questions

- Interviews with 27 African-American female residents; ages 24-56.
  - How do high rates of child welfare agency involvement affect:
    - community life?
    - residents' social networks, civic participation, and collective efficacy?
    - Attitudes about government and self-governance?
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## Hypotheses: Possible Community Effects

High rates of child welfare agency involvement (using current framework):

- Disrupt residents' social networks, civic participation, and collective efficacy.
  - Affect attitudes about government and self-governance.
  - Contradict role of family v. government in our constitutional democracy.
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# Awareness of Community Involvement

- highly aware of intense DCFS involvement with families in their neighborhood
  - understood DCFS function as placement of children in foster care and provision of financial support to families.
    - *I try not to know what the initials stand for, but I do know that in this neighborhood, to me, DCFS is the people that take your kids if you are not taking care of them correctly.*
    - *It just seems like they're all about taking the child out of the home. You know I've never really known of a situation where if someone told on the family and they let the child stay and deal with the problem.*
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## Most estimated number of Woodlawn families in DCFS at at least half.

- *Over half of the community I would say. Yeah, it's a lot.*
  - *My God, probably thousands.*
  - *I'm gonna say 90%.*
  - *It's definitely common because people always getting their children taken away.*
  - *From 60th to 67th, State to Stoney Island, even with it being 150 cases just in that little vicinity, 150 apartments or families or whatever, or everybody in the whole three-flat.*
  - *I think everyone in Woodlawn knows someone in the system.*
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# Social Effects

- interference with parental authority
  - family conflicts over placement of children
  - damage to children's ability to form social relationships
  - distrust among neighbors
    - *[DCFS] disrupts the community... I would say it's a trust thing....*
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*Because of my job[as a DCFS case manager] I have to call, but I don't always agree and I don't call as much as I did when I started. I call in desperate cases, but that is not true of all cases, some cases may not need DCFS. I think my friends, family and neighbors call more than I do. Sometimes I think they have DCFS on speed dial like it's an answer, a one and only answer. Even though they will say they think DCFS is overly involved they will be the first to call. It doesn't really make sense, but they do.*

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# Civil and Political Involvement

- difficulty seeing any relationship between impact on *social* relationships and residents' *political* involvement
  - impact of coercion and separation
    - *When you are taken away from your family, that is a form of separation and they learn from that growing up to be separated. I can't really explain it, but it's not really set in them to be united, or to be one, or to come together to do anything because they've been separated I guess.*
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# Is DCFS Too Involved?

- NO!: additional financial resources to families; monitor foster homes better.
  - Key positive role: financial support for mothers, foster parents, and foster children.
    - *It does help them out financial wise, pay bills and stuff like that, they help them out, they do give them money for keeping the kids too.*
    - *The only [positive impact of DCFS] that I can think about is the resources that they do provide children or grandparents or other family members who take in their family members....A lot of people need them....*
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## But a different kind of involvement

- more financial support with less disruption of family relationships.
  - criticized the narrow role DCFS plays, rooted in investigating families rather than helping them.
    - *I think there are a lot of problems with DCFS because they only help when they are called. Other than that they don't care.*
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*The advertisement, it just says abuse. If you being abused, this is the number you call, this is the only way you gonna get help. It doesn't say if I'm in need of counseling, or if I'm in need of my children don't have shoes, if I just can't provide groceries, even though I may have seven kids, but I only get a hundred something dollars food stamps. And my work check only goes to bills. I can't feed eight of us all off a hundred something dollar food stamps. ... I don't want to lose my children, so I'm not going to call DCFS for help because I only see them take away children.*

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## What does this mean for policy & practice?

If racial disproportionality causes community-wide harms:

- Community involvement in developing child welfare policy, programs, & practice
  - More support for families to avoid system involvement
  - Family advocacy/ parent education & organizing
  - Voluntary v. punitive, disruptive services
  - Neighborhood-building strategies
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