

Five Poor Excuses for Failing to Address Disproportionality

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1. It's not the child welfare system's fault

- Societal conditions outside the system increase risk of involvement
 - “Evidence about the needs of children and families prior to service receipt cannot be used to argue that less favorable outcomes result from worse child welfare services for AA children than for Caucasians rather than from worse initial circumstances of AA families.”
(Courtney et al. 1998)

v.

- Racially differential practices within the system

Evidence of bias

- Doctors failed to detect abusive head trauma 2X as often in white children as minority children (Jenny et al. 1999).
- Black and Hispanic toddlers hospitalized for fractures between 1994 and 2000 5X more likely to be evaluated for child abuse, and 3X more likely to be reported, than white children with same injuries (Lane et al. 2002).
- Black women 10X more likely to be reported by doctors for substance abuse during pregnancy than white women. (Chasnoff et al. 1990); placement of newborns.
- “AA children are more likely to be placed in foster care than Caucasian children with comparable characteristics.” (Hill 2001)

False dichotomy

- Both societal conditions and bias
- Systemic v. individual causes
- Practice and policy choices
- History of race and foster care

2. There's not enough evidence

- More research needed on causes
- More research needed on effective practices
- Research is important BUT we know enough to move forward; need official imperative

3. It would harm children #1

- Black children benefit from receiving needed child welfare services (Barth et al. 2000)
 - “When many factors are considered, AA children are not overserved or overinvolved in the child welfare system.” (Barth et al. 2001)
- BUT are there unrecognized harms; less intrusive means of providing for nonwhite children?
- Assumptions: why aren't white children harmed by lower rates?

4. It would harm children #2

- Causes caseworkers to be biased in favor of leaving children in or returning them to dangerous homes.
- Seattle, New York City
- Misunderstands the issue; injuries tied to other problems; placing more children in care more harmful.

“When Bias Kills,” NY Post 3/20/06

The recent rash of child killings has put a spotlight on the city's ACS. A close look shows that part of the problem at ACS is a twisted, racially biased ideology in much of the child-welfare community.... One far-too-influential school of thought in the child-welfare community blames racism – and says the solution is to avoid racism by making every effort to preserve families.

Which inevitably means erring on the side of leaving children in danger.

My response, NY Post 3/27/06

Contrary to Charles Millard's irresponsible accusations, there is not a shred of evidence that family preservation efforts [or concern about racial disproportionality] by ACS caused an increase in child deaths....

We don't advocate endangering children; rather, we seek to avoid the devastating harms to children caused by their unnecessary placement in foster care.

Respecting and supporting families of color is the best way to ensure children's safety and welfare.

5. No consensus on meaning of “addressing disproportionality”

- Eliminating unequal treatment of children by case workers (cultural competency, training)
- Keeping children in their communities and extended families (recruitment of foster parents, kinship care)
- Reducing numbers of nonwhite children placed in foster care; family supports

The real challenge

- Are we really prepared to make the fundamental changes in our approach to child protection, child welfare, and support for families necessary to eliminate racial disproportionality?
- What changes can we make in the meantime?