



**An Evaluation of Factors Related to
the Disproportionate Representation
of Children of Color in Santa Clara
County's Child Welfare System:**

**Promising Practices to Address
Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in
the Child Welfare System**





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Three Phase Study

- Multi-method/multi-phase 3-Year Study
- Phase 1: April 2000 to March 2001, exploratory phase
- Phase 2: September 2001 to August 2002
- Phase 3: January 2003 to August 2003

Phase 1 Methods

- Review of research literature and pertinent documents at the national, state and county level.
- Descriptive analyses using national, state and county databases
- Focus groups and interviews with administrators and key staff in the CWS, as well as parents/caregivers and youth

Phase 1 Conclusions

1. Factors related to the disproportionate representation of children of color in the CWS are multiple and complex.
2. System-level changes and policies have an impact on children of color in the CWS.
3. Various racial/ethnic groups may receive different treatment at key choice points.
4. Little is known about specific pathways through the CWS and how these pathways differ for various racial/ethnic groups.

Phase 2 Methods

- Extensive in-depth reviews of 403 closed child welfare cases
- Parallel descriptive analysis of 1,720 closed cases within the CWS/CMS database
- Key informant interviews with managers and supervisors in the CWS

Phase 2 Conclusions

1. Families belonging to each of the four racial/ethnic groups (African American, Asian American-Pacific Islander, Latino/Hispanic & White) are characterized by different constellations of risk factors.
2. Children in each of the four racial/ethnic groups follow different pathways once in the CWS.
3. Services are generally “one size fits all,” and do not appear to meet the needs of diverse racial/ethnic groups.

Three Overall Aims in Phase 3

1. An assessment of identified key practices for children and families of color in Santa Clara County's CWS
2. An exploration of the influence of the court system on child welfare practice
3. A statewide comparative analysis of identified key practices that may affect the disproportionate representation of children of color

Phase 3 Methods: Promising Practices

- 1) **Review of research literature on effective practices with children and families of color**
 - Practices divided into *choice points* in the CWS, including beginning choice points and continuing care/ending choice points
- 2) **Qualitative analysis of practices:**
 - Key informant interviews with supervisors
 - Focus groups with workers
 - Focus groups with parents

Phase 3 Methods: Promising Practices

3) Statewide survey

- Survey administered to child welfare directors, managers, or supervisors via email, telephone or fax (N = 45)
- Effective practices for children and families of color were identified by respondents

4) Comparison of Main County Offices with the South County Offices:

- CWS/CMS sample (N=1,720)
- Focus group results from workers

Results: Promising Practices at Beginning Choice Points

- Team decision-making/ case conferencing, family group decision-making
- Orientation for parents on child welfare and court processes
- Voluntary Family Maintenance/ Family Preservation Services
- Child care
- Home visitation services
- Risk assessment tools

See Promising Practices Handout

Results: Promising Practices at Continuing Care/Ending Points

- Parenting education involving both parent and child
- Cultural matching for children in foster care
- Recruitment, training and coaching for foster parents
- Placement-related practices
- Family-to-Family Initiative
- Intensive and collaborative interventions for high-risk children
- Community-based services

See Promising Practices Handout

Results: Promising Practices at the Organizational Level

- Cultural matching between staff and clients and cultural consultation
- Supportive supervision of staff
- Collaborations with other agencies or systems
- Strength-based approach to services
- Organizational culture that prioritizes maintaining and reunifying families
- Vertical case management
- Cultural competence of staff
- Collaboration with American Indian tribes

See Promising Practices Handout

Barriers to Promising Practices

- Large numbers of inappropriate referrals
- Inconsistency in decision-making
- Inadequate prevention
- Problems with service plan recommendations
- Need for stronger linkage with substance abuse services
- Barriers related to relative and foster placements
- Heavy caseloads/staff shortages
- Need for more bilingual/bicultural workers
- Time limit constraints

See Barriers to Promising Practices Handout

Overall Conclusions From Phases 1, 2, & 3

Need to expand child welfare services

- ↑ preventive, in-home services
- ↑ non-traditional, culturally-sensitive services
- ↑ services that are inclusive, collaborative, culturally appropriate, & involve clients' communities
- ↑ services targeted to fathers (family-based)
- ↑ innovative services & evaluation of their success with different racial/ethnic groups
- ↓ barriers to implementing such practices

Overall Conclusions From Phases 1, 2, & 3

Need to involve multiple social service systems

- Developing interagency formal agreements & connections w/ agencies
- Outstationed social workers, co-location of services and Family Drug Court can serve as models

Overall Conclusions

From Phases 1, 2, & 3

Ways in which Agency organizational context & culture impacts children & families of color merits attention

- Large bureaucratic organization may impede the implementation of best practices
- South County practices of parent orientation, vertical case management, culture of commitment to maintaining/reunifying families might be beneficial in the Main County offices.

Overall Conclusions

From Phases 1, 2, & 3

More attention to the impact of system-level changes of children and families of color is warranted

- Regular assessment of impact of policy changes, such as shortened timelines or termination of parental rights is needed.
- Close monitoring of the effect of new policies or programs, or changes in organizational culture that may impact children and families of color.