



## **Executive Summary**

Racial Disproportionality, Race Disparity, and Other  
Race-Related Findings in Published Works Derived from  
the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being

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## ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

In 2004, the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare was established to develop and implement a national, multiyear campaign to address racial disparities and reduce the disproportionate representation of children from certain racial or ethnic communities in the nation's child welfare system.

The Alliance includes the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct service agency, Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), and parents and alumni of foster care. The Race Matters Consortium and Black Administrators in Child Welfare (BACW) are also partners in this work.

The efforts of the Alliance to reduce disparities and the disproportionate number of children and youth of color in the care of child welfare agencies are ultimately aimed at improving the outcomes for all children in care by:

- Learning what works to achieve race equity in child welfare services, in partnership with states and local communities
- Developing and disseminating new knowledge to the field
- Promoting effective federal and state policy through education about policy options
- Designing and implementing data collection, research, and evaluation methods that document evidence-based practices and strategies
- Ensuring that birth parents and foster youth and alumni are leaders in helping child welfare agencies achieve race equity in child welfare services and programs

**For more information, go to [www.cssp.org/major\\_initiatives/racialEquity.html](http://www.cssp.org/major_initiatives/racialEquity.html).**

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## OVERVIEW

This paper draws on peer-reviewed papers and chapters from data gathered during the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) to examine correlates and contributors to racial disproportionality. NSCAW was commissioned in 1997 by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to learn about the experiences of children and families who come in contact with child welfare agency–supervised services. The first national longitudinal study of its kind, NSCAW is examining the characteristics, needs, experiences, and outcomes for these children and families.

This report summarizes published and in-press articles and chapters based on the NSCAW study in order to examine the evidence on the relationship between race/ethnicity and several important areas related to child welfare and well-being. Topics in this review include:

- (1) Child factors and related services, including (a) early childhood development and early intervention services and (b) mental health and substance abuse treatment need and access
- (2) Parental factors and related services including (a) parental arrest and child involvement with child welfare services agencies and (b) domestic violence—epidemiology and services
- (3) Reunification and related services

The sample size varies in these studies, as authors have endeavored to select subsamples of NSCAW that are best suited to answer their question. The CPS sample of NSCAW was 5504<sup>a</sup> children who underwent child maltreatment investigations between November 1999 and April 2001. The sample for each specific analysis, however, may vary due to substantive or methodological reasons (e.g., whether the analysis is limited to in-home, out-of-home, or reunified cases, or whether there are missing data on variables to be included in the analysis). The analyses in these studies were, generally, not intended to isolate the effects of race or ethnicity on child welfare outcomes or child well-being. All of the studies did, however, include race and ethnicity in their multivariate models—allowing for an understanding of whether race and ethnicity was associated with outcomes of interest, above and beyond other family and child characteristics.

<sup>a</sup> After some initial papers and reports were written, three cases were dropped from the study because they involved participants who were incarcerated and were judged not to have given allowable informed consent.



## FINDINGS

**Overall:** Race/ethnicity was not found to be a significant predictor in the receipt of services for children remaining at home, nor was it an indicator of whether children would be placed in out-of-home care. Differences were found by race, however, with respect to reunification and services received.

### CHILD FACTORS

**Early Childhood Development and Early Intervention Services:** What can NSCAW studies tell us about the relationship between early childhood development needs and service receipt? The findings show that race and ethnicity are strongly correlated with the overall level of child welfare involvement and the receipt of services. White children are more likely to remain at home than to be removed from their homes following the investigation of the case. Race and ethnicity were also found to be predictive factors in service receipt: Black children are less likely to receive developmental services than white children, and the racial inconsistencies in services received remain even after controlling for need.

**Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment Need, Use, and Access:** What can NSCAW studies tell us about the relationship between race, mental health care services, and substance abuse treatment need, use, and access? Race/ethnicity accounts for differentials in overall mental health service use. Specifically, African American and Hispanic children were more likely to use services than white children even though African American children did not demonstrate elevated need as a group—that is, their mental health problems were no greater than other children. In the 6- to 10-year-old age group, however, African American children showed significant unmet need. They were less likely to receive mental health services than white children in this age group when other variables were controlled.

Racial/ethnic disparities in mental health service use are also related to the organization of services. African American and Hispanic children are less likely to receive specialty mental health services than white children (while holding the county variable constant). In another study of caregivers, Hispanic caregivers were significantly more likely to receive substance abuse services, and black non-Hispanic caregivers were significantly less likely to receive mental health services.

Emotional and behavioral problems for youth and *need for mental health treatment* were measured using the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991). Interaction between Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) score and race/ethnicity was found to be statistically significant: African American children used fewer services than children

of Caucasian ancestry at all values on the CBCL, which suggests lower service use at equal levels of need. As the CBCL levels increased, the inconsistency in service use was reduced. Nonetheless, the relative percentage of African American children receiving services was still smaller. Race/ethnicity (African American versus White) was found to predict outpatient mental health services use while other variables were constant. This does not suggest the reason for the non-use of services, only the occurrence.

#### **PARENT/FAMILY FACTORS**

**Domestic Violence:** What do we know about the relationship between domestic violence, race, and child welfare system participation from the NSCAW studies? Race was not found to be a significant predictor in the under identification of domestic violence in a home. Race/ethnicity was, however, found to be a significant factor in the continuation of domestic violence occurrences in a case. Caregiver<sup>b</sup> race or ethnicity was associated with severe physical violence (relative to no violence) reported at 18 months, with African American women having approximately twice the odds for reporting severe physical violence compared to white non-Hispanic women. In addition, African American women who were referred to child welfare agency-supervised services reported approximately three times greater risk of experiencing more severe forms of physical violence (e.g., getting beaten up, choked, threatened with a weapon) compared to white non-Hispanic women when age, marital status, socioeconomic factors, and other background variables were controlled.

**Parental Arrest:** What is the relationship between parental arrest, race, and entry into the child welfare system? NSCAW-related studies have found that parents of African American children who entered out-of-home care were significantly more likely to have experienced a recent arrest, and African American children with incarcerated parents were also found to be overrepresented in the proportion of investigated cases. At the same time, family and child risk factors identified by child welfare workers (e.g., serious mental illness, active domestic violence) at the time of intake were lower among African American parents who had been arrested than among other arrested parents. This suggests that some of the overrepresentation of entrances into foster care is mediated by police actions in arresting African American parents and, perhaps, by child welfare agency inaction in developing mechanisms that help divert children from foster care during parental arrests.

**Reunification:** What do we know about the relationship between race, reunification, child's age, and receipt of services? Findings show that race and reunification have differing relationships, depending on a child's age. Overall, for children younger than 7 months and children older than 10 years of age, racial differences are large; indeed, the greatest racial

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<sup>b</sup> The information from the study from which this information was extracted was taken from permanent caregivers, generally biological family members. Connelly, C., Hazen, A., Coben, J., Kelleher, K., Barth, R., & Landsverk, J. (2006). Persistence of intimate partner violence among families referred to child welfare. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*(6), 774–797.

variation between predictors of reunification and the outcome of reunification is evidenced for infants and adolescents.

African American infants are less likely to experience reunification than white infants; in addition, African American youth over 10 years of age, as well as youth of other racial and ethnic groups over 10, are significantly less likely to return home than white youth. For youth over 10 years old, the likelihood of reunification continues to be significantly smaller for children of color compared to white children even when controlling for risk factors, child behavior, and agency and parent actions. Offsetting the lower risk of reunification for some age groups are parenting support (for infants) and a higher frequency of seeing mothers during visits (for children 10 and older).

## Summary

A wide array of findings was drawn from the analyses. Some findings suggest that race and ethnicity effects are related to developmental status or to the organization of mental health services in the agency, in addition to the potential association with parental arrest. These findings offer more specificity about how to further understand and address racial disproportionality. Findings related to parental arrest indicate that African American families that experience arrest are more common than non-African American families that experience arrest but have fewer family and child risks, suggesting that child welfare interventions for African Americans before and after arrest should be developed to address this aspect of their experience.

Other than this finding, there is a lack of a consistent race or ethnicity effect, suggesting a continued need to better understand how unfair services to African American children and families are most likely to arise, e.g., under which circumstances, which children of what age and with what challenges, and in which families.

# Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare



**CSSP** is a nonprofit public policy organization that develops and promotes policies and practices that support and strengthen families and help communities to produce equal opportunities and better futures for all children. We work in partnership with federal, state and local government, and communities and neighborhoods—from politicians who can craft legislation, state administrators who can set and implement policy and practice, and networks of peers, community leaders, parents and youth to find workable solutions to complex problems.



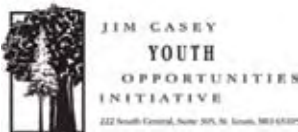
**Casey Family Programs** is the largest national foundation whose sole mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately prevent the need for—foster care. The foundation draws on its 40 years of experience and expert research and analysis to improve the lives of children and youth in foster care in two important ways: by providing direct services and support to foster families and promoting improvements in child welfare practice and policy. The Seattle-based foundation was established in 1966 by UPS founder Jim Casey and currently has an endowment of \$2 billion.

[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)



The **Marguerite Casey Foundation** was created by Casey Family Programs in 2001 to help expand Casey's outreach and further enhance its 37-year record of leadership in child welfare. Based in Seattle, the Marguerite Casey Foundation is a private, independent grant-making foundation dedicated to helping low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities.

[www.caseygrants.org](http://www.caseygrants.org)



**Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** was created in 2001 by Casey Family Programs and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Based in St. Louis, the Initiative is a major national effort to help youth in foster care make successful transitions to adulthood.

[www.jimcaseyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyouth.org)



The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

[www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)



**Casey Family Services** was established by United Parcel Service founder Jim Casey in 1976 as a source for high-quality, long-term foster care. Casey Family Services today offers a broad range of programs for vulnerable children and families throughout the Northeast and in Baltimore, Maryland. The direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services operates from administrative headquarters in New Haven, Connecticut, and eight program divisions in Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)