

Does contact with child protective services vary by race/ethnicity and county?

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What can we learn from this study?

Involvement with child protective services is not uncommon in the lives of children, but the risks are unequally distributed by race/ethnicity and geography. Prior analysis indicates that 1 in 3 children will be involved in a maltreatment investigation at some point in their childhood, 1 in 8 will experience confirmed maltreatment, 1 in 17 will experience foster care, and 1 in 100 will be involved in a case where parental rights are terminated. Outcomes are elevated for Black children across all decision points, and for American Indian/Alaska Native children in the areas of foster care placement and the termination of parental rights. This study provides county-level estimates of the cumulative prevalence of the above four categories for the 20 largest counties in the U.S.

Study details:

- **Population:** Children with CPS contact living in the 20 most populous counties in the U.S.
- **Data source:** Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System; National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System
- **Methodology:** Synthetic cohort life tables
- **Dates:** 2014 to 2018

What are the critical findings?

Involvement in a child protection investigation is relatively common in large counties, but there is wide variation in the data at later stages of child protection involvement. Among the 20 large counties:

- 34.5% (median) children are estimated to experience a child maltreatment investigation before the age of 18. For Black children, rates are consistently higher, ranging from 32.9% in King County, Wash., to 63.3% in Maricopa County. In 11 of the 20 counties analyzed, the risk of investigation exceeded 50% for Black children, while Latinx and white children had rates between 25%-40% and 15-35%, respectively. Asian/Pacific Islander children consistently had the lowest rates, and American Indian/Alaska Native children experienced uneven patterns.
- Variation is greater in county-level estimates after an investigation, including the cumulative prevalence of confirmed maltreatment, foster care placement, and termination of parental rights (median percentages: 20%, 10%, and 2% respectively). For Black children, exceptionally high rates of later-stage involvement with child protection routinely exceeded the medians.

Why is this important for our work?

Most critical decisions about child protection involvement occur at the county level. Understanding how common child maltreatment investigations are in large urban counties, particularly among families of color, is critical and necessary, and requires an ongoing examination of both the reasons behind the inequities and the variation in later-stage involvement with the child protection system.

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research study. To learn more and review additional resources, please see our [racial equity resource webpage](#).

For additional information, [access the article directly](#) or email KMResources@casey.org.