

Is alternative response equitably provided to families of color with low-income status?

CHOI, M. J., KIM, J., ROPER, A., LABRENZ, C. A., & BOYD, R. (2021). RACIAL DISPARITIES IN ASSIGNMENT TO ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE. *CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES REVIEW*, 125.

What can we learn from this study?

Alternative response (AR) involves engaging and connecting families to community-based services. It is considered a more family-centered and strengths-based approach to child welfare practice than a traditional child protection investigation. AR also has been identified as a strategy for increasing equity in child welfare practice. This study examines the relationship between neglect allegations, poverty, and race on AR assignment.

Study details:

- **Population:** Five regions in Texas (N=119,389)
- **Data source:** National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System
- **Methodologies:** logistic regression; conditional process analysis
- **Dates:** 2016

What are the critical findings?

The type of alleged maltreatment, child's race, and family's poverty status all had a significant effect on whether the family was assigned to AR or traditional investigation. The study found that:

- Children whose families received public assistance were **less likely to be assigned** to AR (odds ratio = 0.74) than children in families that did not receive public assistance. Children involved in a report that alleged neglect were less likely to be assigned to AR (odds ratio = 0.37), compared to their counterparts without a neglect allegation.
- When all the variables were considered together, the negative effect of a neglect allegation on likelihood of AR assignment was **greatest for children of color**, and financial difficulty further amplified this negative effect among children of color, but not white children.
- White children were **more likely to be assigned** to AR than children of color (odds ratio = 1.18). Male children (odds ratio = 1.05) and older youth (odds ratio = 1.26) also were more likely to be assigned to AR.

The study's authors recommend additional analysis to further understand these findings, including the inclusion of more comprehensive variables, such as the severity of neglect, reporting source, state and county variation, and neighborhood poverty.

Why is this important for our work?

AR is seen as a helpful strategy for connecting families to community-based services and increasing equity in child welfare practice. But this study highlights that families are not being equitably assigned to AR. If families of color with low-income status that are eligible for AR instead are being screened-in for a traditional child welfare investigation, opportunities to reduce disparity in service access, minimize child and family trauma, and connect families to critical resources are being missed. Consistent guidelines for applying AR, as well as strong community-based partnerships and services, are critical for ensuring all families have equitable access to supports.

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research study. To learn more, see our [pathways for support resource webpage](#) and [Why should we bring a racial equity lens to our work with children and families?](#)

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