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Project Purpose

In 2008, the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS) recognized that minority representation in Georgia's child welfare system was an important issue that deserved focused attention. In response to this, this project was funded in 2009-2010 with a Poverty and the Economy Grant from the University of Georgia's Faculty Research Grants Program.

This project was designed to provide DFCS with additional methods of analyzing data to better inform policy and practice.

Do the following child welfare factors vary within a county by the demographic characteristics of the geographic area (income, poverty, education, age of mother, educational attainment of mother, family structure)?

1. the rate of removal (per 1,000 children)
2. length of time in care/length of time to achieve permanency
3. permanency goal or outcome (reunification/guardianship/adoption/aging out)
4. distance between removal and placement

Data Analyses

- Presented interactive maps to multiple audiences to analyze and gain feedback including:
  - Social work students
  - DFCS leadership
  - General University group
- Compared results across groups and counties to develop findings and recommendations

Next Steps

- Secure a grant to implement state-wide research
- Work with State DFCS office to identify ways to better share data
- Create more interactive maps of more counties in Georgia

Results/Recommendations

- Resources seem to be a better indicator of child placement than other demographic variables.
- Length of time in care was not consistently related to any of the demographic variables identified.
- Contrary to expectations, unemployment was not related to rate of removals in most counties examined.
- Relationships vary county from county

Benefits of GIS

- Great way to engage stakeholders in analysis
- Novel way of examining and understanding data and relationships between variables
- Often illicit new ideas or hypothesis to examine
- Can select level of analysis as appropriate to the stakeholder group and research question
- Generates a wealth of information and discussion even among ‘non-data’ stakeholders

Resources & Tips

- ESRI (http://www.esri.com/)
- Involve as many people as possible in the analysis/interpretation of the data and include people familiar with the area
- Carefully consider the unit of assessment