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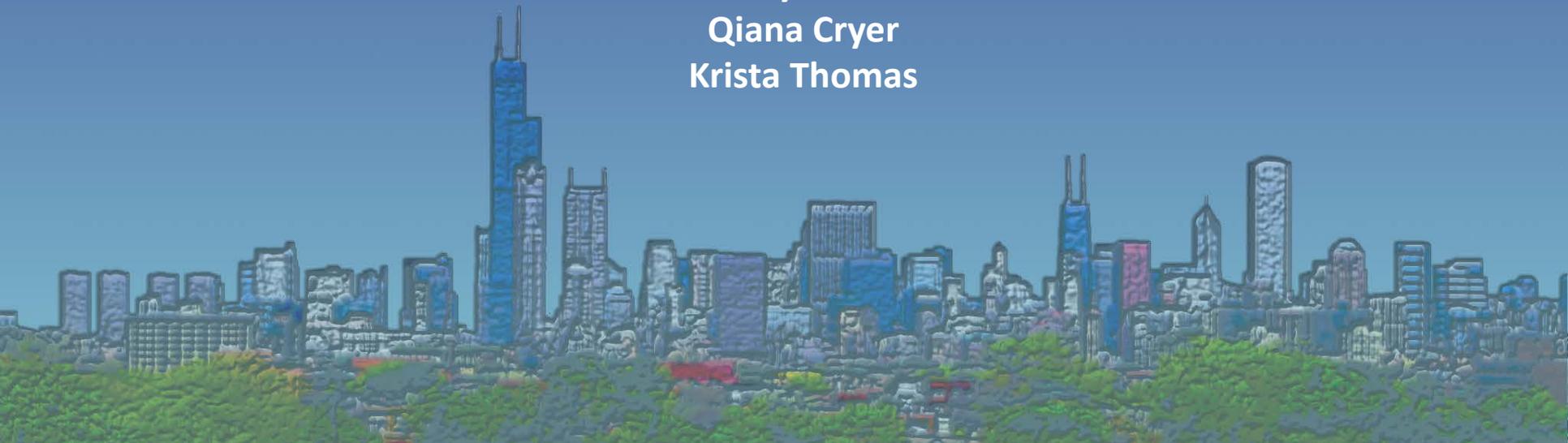
JANE ADDAMS
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK
Child Welfare Research Collaborative



Advancing
social,
racial,
economic
justice.

**Identifying and Describing Disproportionality and
Disparities in Child Welfare: A Critical Discussion of Race
and Research Methods**

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Framing the Issue

- Racial disproportionality and disparities have long represented preeminent concerns in child welfare.
- Recent research concerning differential rates of maltreatment and increased awareness of differential risk factors has brought increased attention to these concerns and has called into question the appropriateness of past efforts to address them.
- As understanding and awareness have evolved over time, it has become increasingly important to ensure that disproportionality and disparities are described and identified appropriately, both conceptually and empirically.

Defining Disproportionality

- Disproportionality refers to the state of being out of proportion.
- Disproportionality describes a condition when the percent of persons of a certain race or ethnicity in a target population differs from the percentage of persons of the same group in a reference (or base) population.
- In the child welfare system, disproportionality occurs when the proportion of one group in the child welfare population (e.g., children in foster care) is either proportionately larger (overrepresented) or smaller (underrepresented) than in the general population.

Defining Disparity

- While disproportionality refers to the state of being out of proportion, disparity refers to a state of being unequal.
- Disparity occurs when the ratio of one racial or ethnic group in an event is not equal to the ratio of another racial or ethnic group who experienced the same event.
- In the child welfare system, disparity is used to describe inequitable outcomes experienced by one racial or ethnic group at various decision-making points compared to *another* racial or ethnic group.
- Disparities can occur at every decision-making point, including the initial report of alleged maltreatment, acceptance of reports for investigation, substantiation of maltreatment, entries into substitute care, and exits from care.

Evolving Understanding

- Early research focusing on disproportionality
- Limitations of population-based denominator
- Emergence of disparity as a more useful indicator
- Emergence of decision-point analyses
- Impact of shifting dialogue and NIS-4

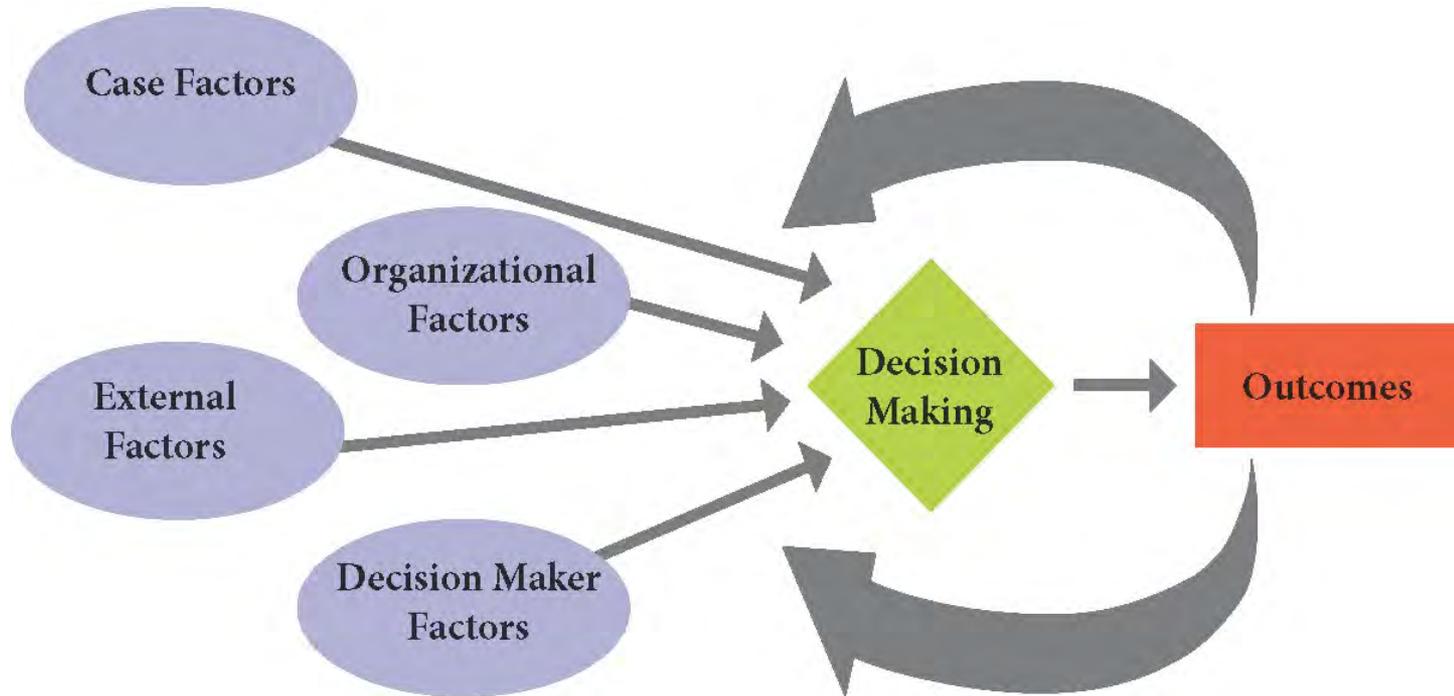
Current and Emerging Understanding

- Disproportionality and disparities have become value laden terms that imply inequities
- Although much research has documented the presence of disproportionality and disparities, much less research has examined the factors explaining their presence
- Differences in poverty and risk exposure are likely significant contributors to observed disparities and need to be considered
- Differences in poverty and risk do not mean that bias is not present within child welfare systems

Advancing Research

- Research is needed that examines the extent to which observed disparities result from differential need and the extent to which they result from bias
- Caution needs to be taken when interpreting or making judgments concerning the presence of disproportionality and disparities
- Methods for examining the factors explaining disparities need to be disseminated
- Studies need to acknowledge limitations when all possible explanatory factors are not included
- Racial disparities are not caused by a single factor

The Decision-Making Ecology



Baumann, D . J . , Dalgleish, L . , Fluke, J . , & Kern, H . (2011) . *The decision-making ecology*. Washington, DC: American Humane Association .

Measurement Defined

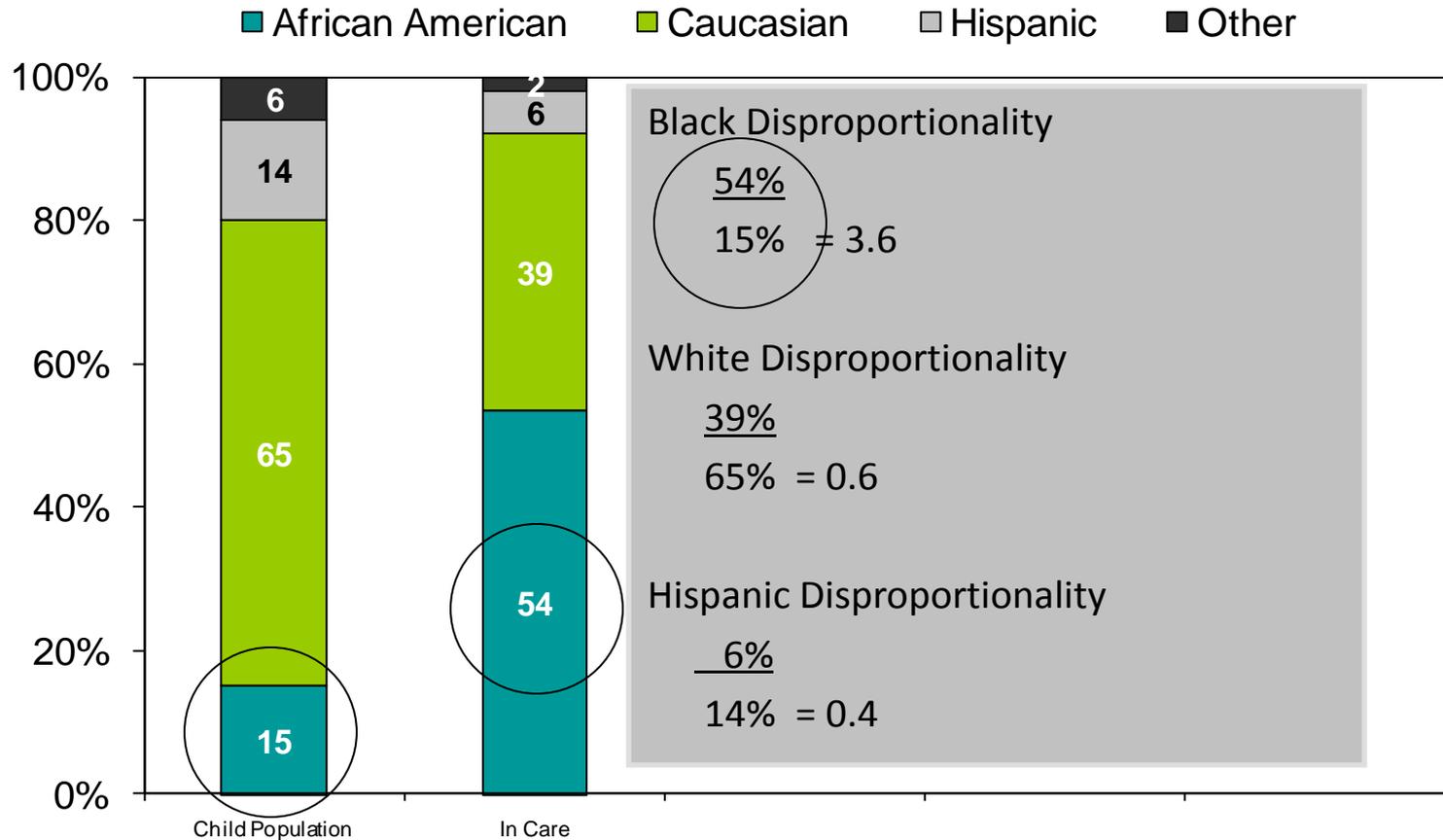
- Disproportionality vs. disparity
- Population vs. decision based enumeration
- Reference group
- Advancing research

Definitions

Disproportionality

- The state of being out of proportion
- When the proportion of one group (i.e., children investigated) is proportionately larger (overrepresented) or smaller (underrepresented) than the general population

Illinois Child Welfare System: 2010

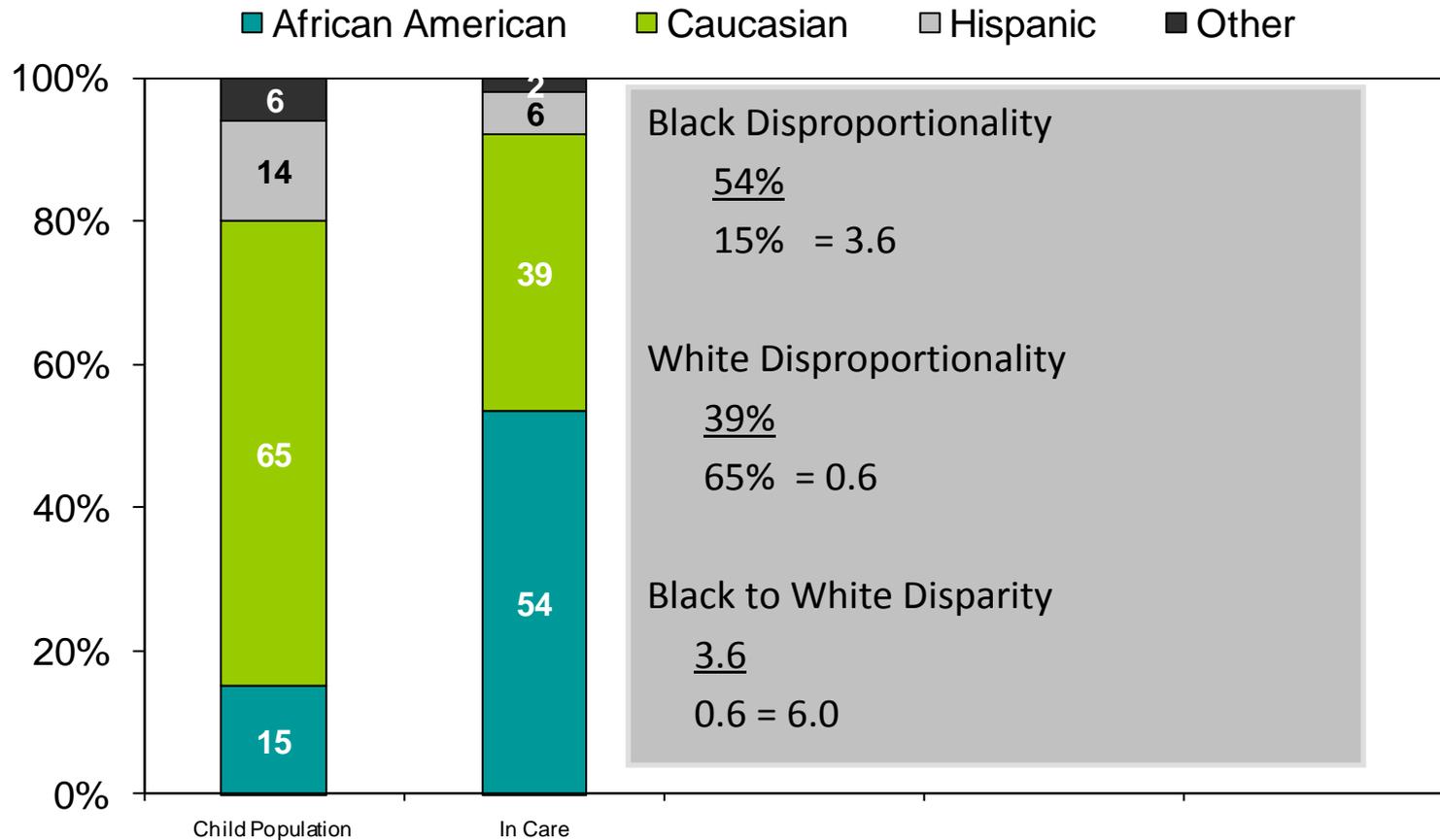


Definitions

Disparity

- The state of being unequal
- Often used to describe inequitable outcomes experienced by one group compared to *another*
- Can occur at any decision-making point
- Ultimately, disparities that occur in both entries to the child welfare system and exits from the system produce disproportionality

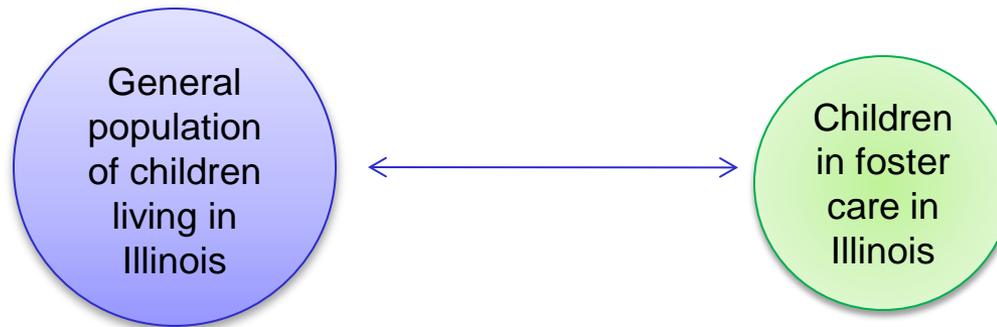
Illinois Child Welfare System: 2010



Population vs. Decision-Point Enumeration

Population Enumeration

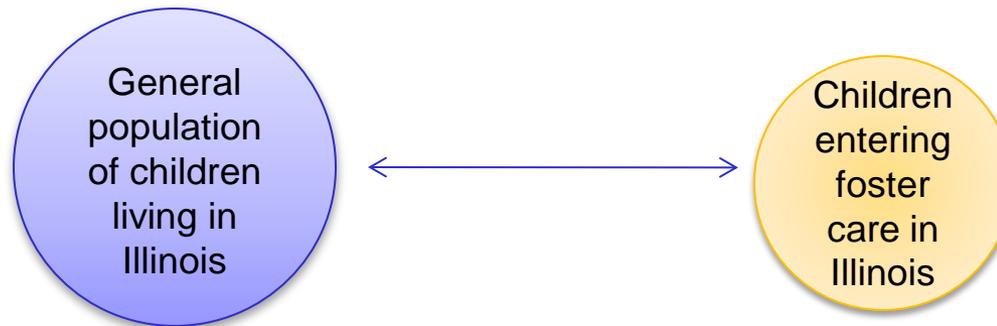
- Compares children in the general population to children involved with the child welfare system



Population vs. Decision-Point Enumeration

Population Enumeration

- Compares children in the general population to children involved with the child welfare system



Population vs. Decision-Point Enumeration

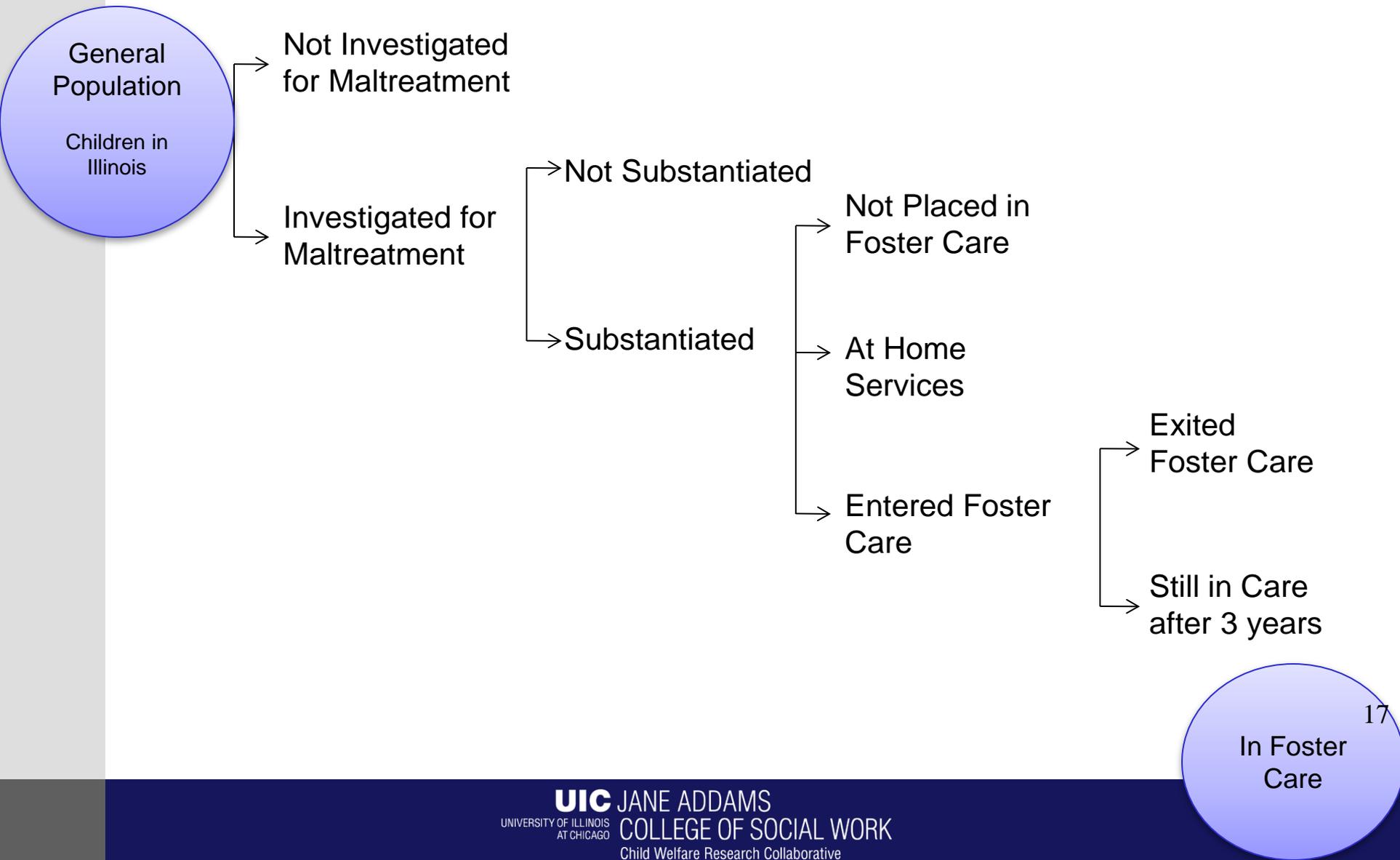
Population Enumeration

- Compares children in the general population to children involved with the child welfare system

Decision Based Enumeration

- Uses the children at risk as the comparison group

Population vs. Decision-Point Enumeration



Reference Group

Multiple comparison groups

- One group compared to each of the other racial/ethnic groups

One comparison group

- One group compared to another (usually White)
- One group compared to all who are not part of that group

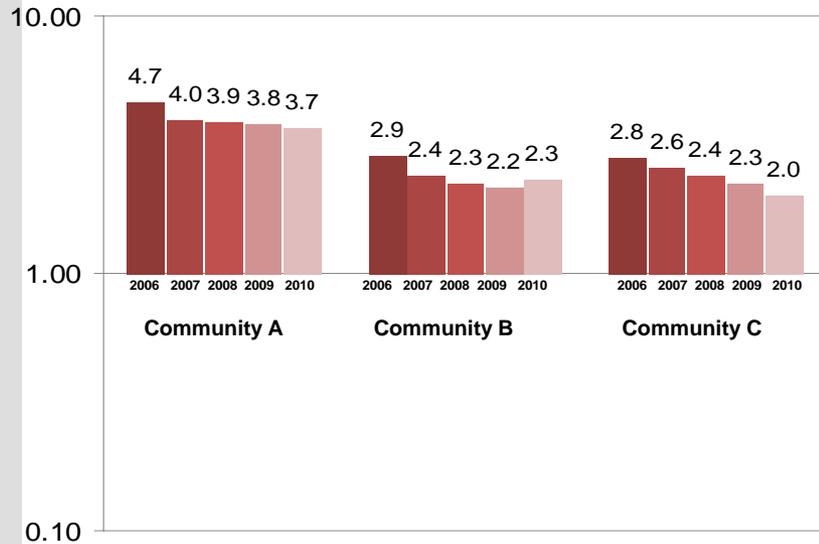
Reference Group

Data	Total
Disparity Indices:	Total
	Age 1
	Age 2
	Age 3
	Age 4
	Age 5
Age 6	
California	
2006 (Q4_06 Data)	

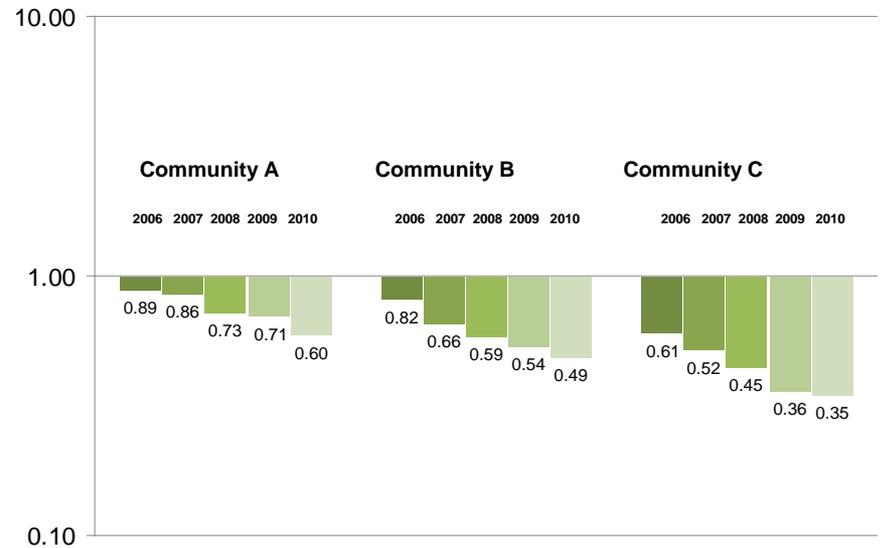
		Counts		Census		Rate per 1,000	DM+	Disparity Indices (DI)								
		n	%	n	%			Compared w/ All Others	Compared w/ Black	Compared w/ White	Compared w/ Hispanic	Compared w/ Asian/PI	Compared w/ Native American	Compared w/		
System Contact Level	Race															
	Hispanic	52,650	51.43	4,648,348	48.10	11.33	1.069	1.143	0.514	1.154	1.000	2.608	0.814	--		
	Asian/PI	4,129	4.03	950,710	9.84	4.34	0.410	0.385	0.197	0.442	0.383	1.000	0.312	--		
	Native American	1,133	1.11	81,452	0.84	13.91	1.313	1.317	0.631	1.417	1.228	3.203	1.000	--		
		--	%	--	%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--		
Entries	Total	35,074	100.00	9,664,747	100.00	3.63										
	Missing	155	--	0	--	--										
	Black	6,642	19.02	693,451	7.18	9.58	2.651	3.039	1.000	2.907	2.633	8.248	1.653	--		
	White	9,789	28.03	2,971,474	30.75	8.29	0.912	0.877	0.344	1.000	0.905	2.837	0.568	--		
	Hispanic	16,912	48.43	4,648,348	48.10	3.64	1.007	1.014	0.380	1.104	1.000	3.133	0.628	--		
	Asian/PI	1,104	3.16	950,710	9.84	1.16	0.321	0.299	0.121	0.352	0.319	1.000	0.200	--		
	Native American	472	1.35	81,452	0.84	5.79	1.604	1.612	0.605	1.759	1.593	4.990	1.000	--		
		--	%	--	%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--		
In Care (PIT)	Total	74,676	100.00	9,664,747	100.00	7.73										
	Missing	42	--	0	--	--										
	Black	20,687	27.72	693,451	7.18	29.83	3.863	4.961	1.000	4.534	4.381	16.832	2.305	--		
	White	19,552	26.20	2,971,474	30.75	6.58	0.852	0.800	0.221	1.000	0.966	3.713	0.508	--		
	Hispanic	31,656	42.41	4,648,348	48.10	6.81	0.882	0.795	0.228	1.035	1.000	3.842	0.526	--		
	Asian/PI	1,685	2.26	950,710	9.84	1.77	0.230	0.212	0.059	0.269	0.260	1.000	0.137	--		
	Native American	1,054	1.41	81,452	0.84	12.94	1.676	1.685	0.434	1.967	1.900	7.301	1.000	--		
		--	%	--	%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--		

Reference Group

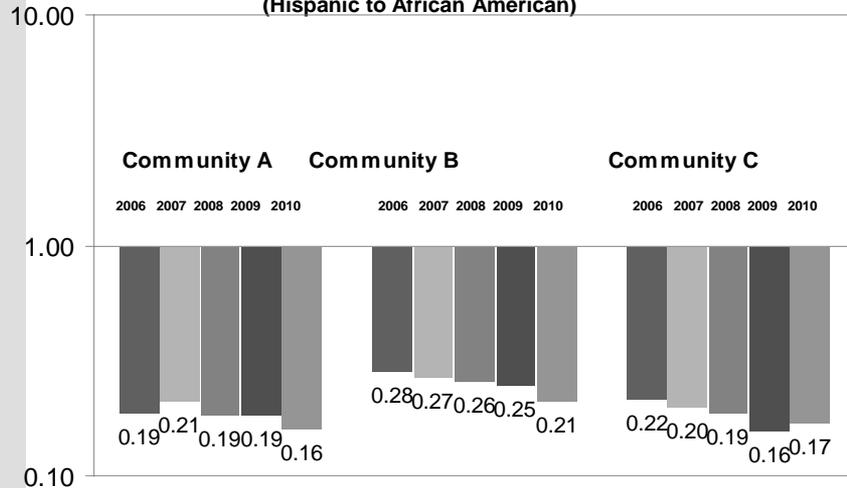
Disparity Index for Investigated Reports: 2006 to 2010
(African American to White)



Disparity Index for Investigated Reports: 2006 to 2010
(Hispanic to White)

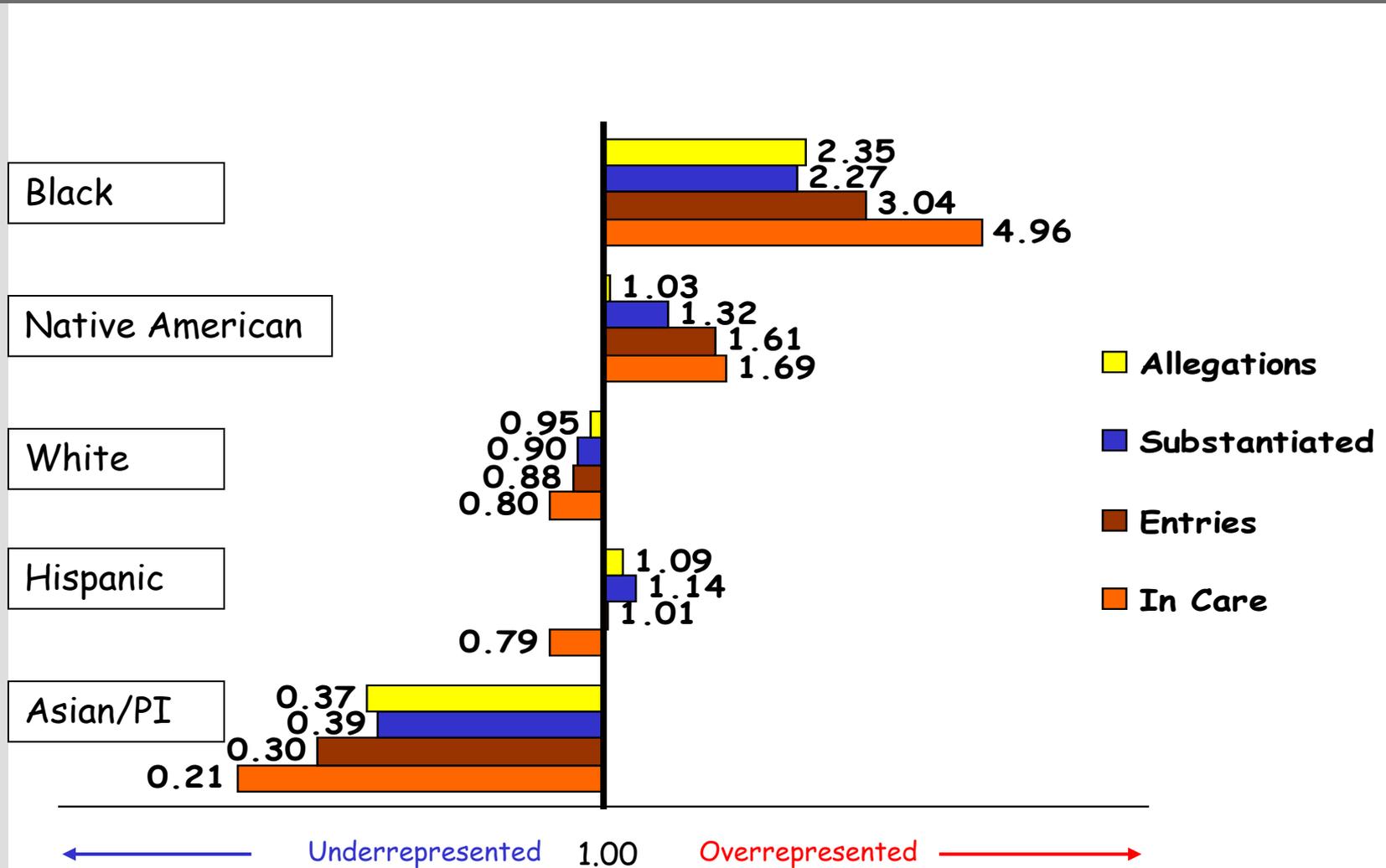


Disparity Index for Investigated Reports: 2006 to 2010
(Hispanic to African American)



Comparison group is 'all others'

2006 California: Racial Disparity Indices



Source: Shaw, T., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Magruder, J. & Needell, B. (2008) Center for Social Services Research University of California at Berkeley

Reference Group

When using the “all others” as the reference group a weighted risk ratio (WRR) may produce more stable results

- A WRR uses the community-level risk for the racial/ethnic group for the numerator and a weighted risk for all other children for the denominator.
- Allows comparison of communities with dissimilar population distributions by normalizing it to the state population distribution.
- When risk ratios are based on small numbers, minor variations in the number of children in either the numerator or denominator produces dramatic changes in the size of the risk ratio.
- The WRR standardizes the demographic distribution to match that of the state to which the community belongs. This allows for comparisons across communities and enables states to rank communities and target assistance.

Additional information:

Bollmer, J., Bethel, J., Garrison-Mogren, R., & Brauen, M. (2007). Using the risk ratio to assess racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education at the school-district level. *Journal of Special Education*, 41(3), 186-198.

Rolock, N. (2011). New methodology: Measuring racial or ethnic disparities in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.03.017

Reference Group

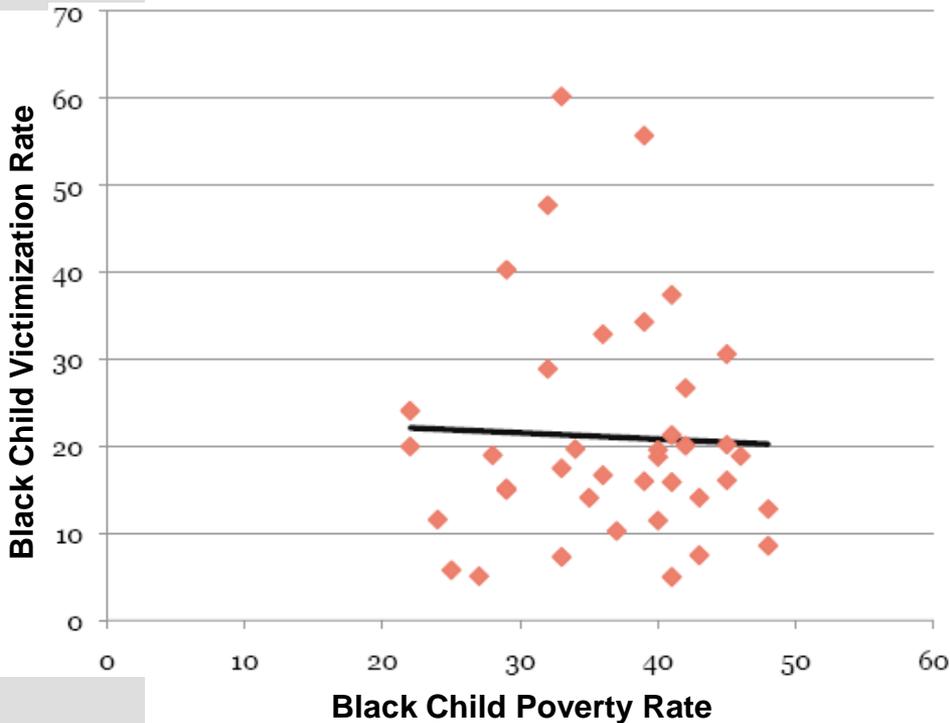
- **Group A to Whites**
 - The conventional comparison
 - Same comparison group for all races/ethnicities
- **Group A to all children not part of group A**
 - Does not set White as the standard
 - The comparison group includes children of many races/ethnicity
- **Group A to each of the other groups**
 - Most comprehensive approach
 - May be difficult to summarize

Advancing Research

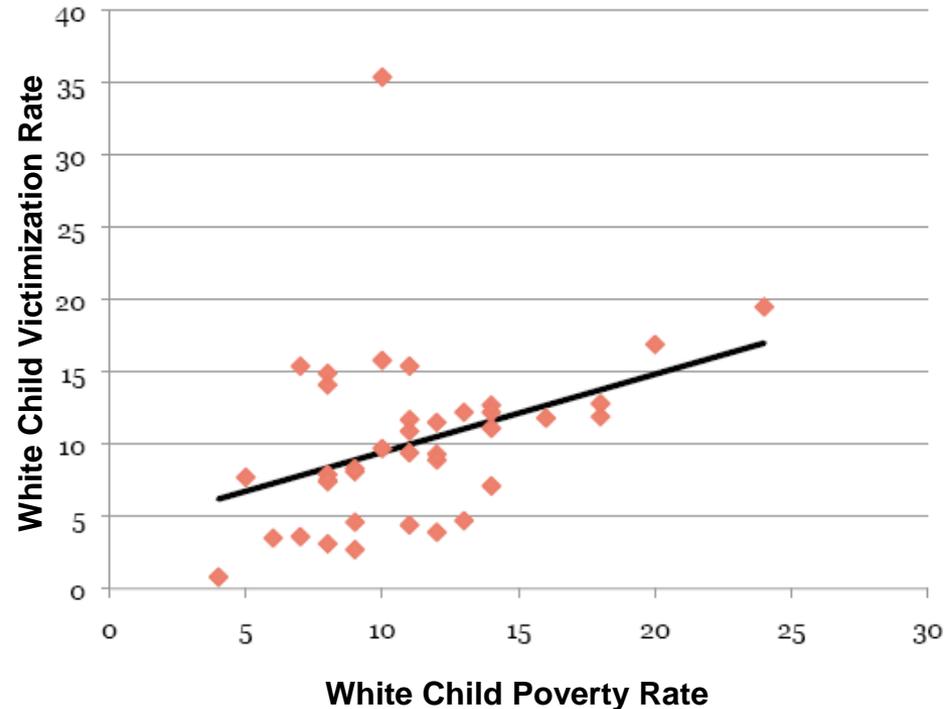
- Thus far our discussion has focused on descriptive data. To further advance this issue we need to look towards more complicated analysis.
- Poverty has been identified as a key factor

Poverty

**Black Child Victimization Rates
by Black Child Poverty Rates and State: 2006**

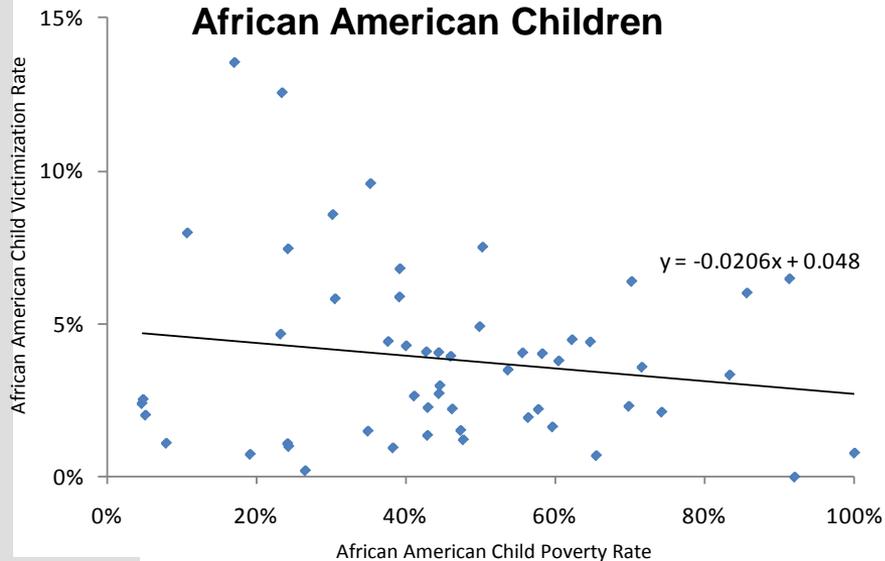


**White Child Victimization Rates
by White Child Poverty Rates and State: 2006**

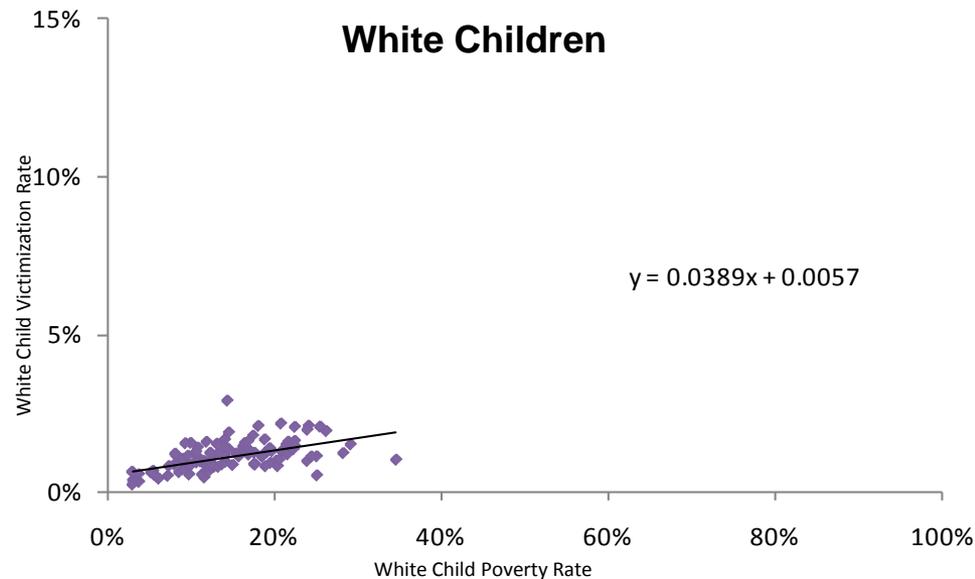


Poverty

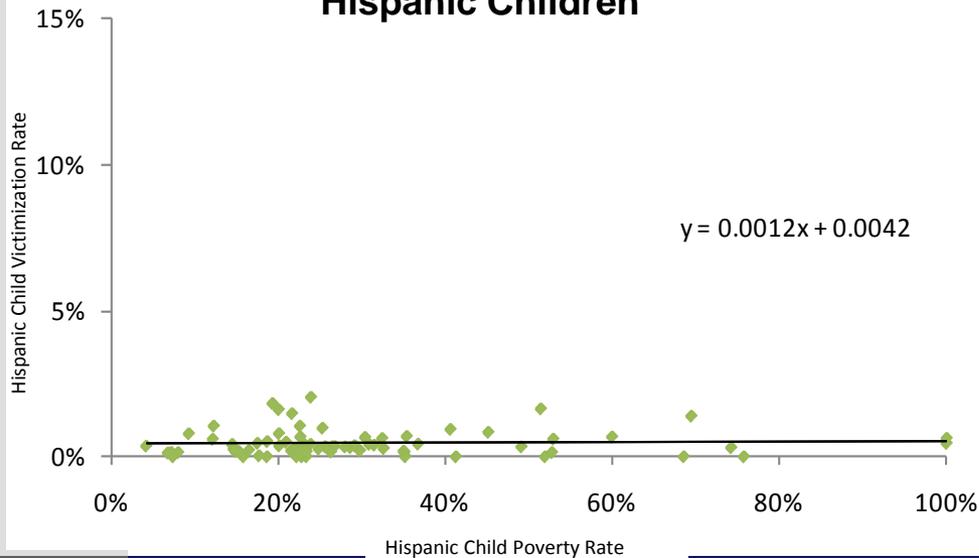
African American Children



White Children



Hispanic Children



Rolock, N., Dettlaff, A. D., Wilder J. R. & Jantz, I. (2011). The relationship between child victimization and child poverty rates in Illinois. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois at Chicago. Available at: www.socialwork.uic.edu/cwrc

Advancing Research

- Decision-making ecology
- Differential risk
- Individual level considerations
- Community level considerations

Contact Information

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