

Disproportionality and Disparities in Oregon’s Child Welfare System County Level Analysis of Administrative Data: Multnomah County

A Report to the Oregon Child Welfare Equity Task Force

Decision Point 1: Intake/Reports to CPS

Calls to Child Protective Services about the safety of child(ren) in families.

The first Decision Point on the child welfare continuum is Intake/Report to Multnomah County’s Child Protective Services (CPS). During the six-month reporting period that the analyses were completed, citizens made over 15,500 reports to the CPS hotline. The research question at Decision Point 1 was: *Do racial and ethnic minority families received more reports of abuse or neglect than do White families?*¹

Table 1. shows that American Indian/Alaskan Native families were nearly 3 times more likely to be reported to the CPS hotline/intake than they were represented in Multnomah County’s general population. Black families were over 2 times more likely to have CPS reports than their representation in Multnomah County’s general population. Asian families are the least likely to be reported to the CPS hotline/intake. Asian families were 4 times less likely to be reported than what they represent in Multnomah County’s general population. At the point of intake, 17.3% of families were designated race/ethnicity “Unknown.”

Table 1. Multnomah County Adult Population Compared to Child Welfare Intake by Race and Cultural Origin (n = 15,589)

| Group | Adults in Multnomah’s General Population | Adults in Multnomah’s Child Welfare Intake |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 1.2% | 3.6% |
| Black | 6.0% | 13.7% |
| Asian | 6.7% | 1.7% |
| White | 86.0% | 63.7% |
| Unknown | — | 17.3%* |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Hispanic | 8.7% | 9.8% |

*Unknown includes 0.4% Pacific Islander.

¹ At Decision Point 1, the adult caregiver’s race and ethnic identities are represented.

Decision Point 2: Screening

Is the report serious enough for an assessment or should the report be screened out?

Once a report is made to the Child Protective Services Hotline, the person receiving the call uses specific screening criteria to decide whether the report appears serious enough to refer for a full assessment/investigation. The intake decision of whether to ‘refer for an assessment’ is the second decision point in the child welfare continuum but the first decision point that actively involves families in the child welfare system. The research question at Decision Point 2 was: *Are children of color less or more likely to be screened for an assessment to be conducted with child welfare than White children?*

Table 2. shows that White (56.7%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (55.2%), and Black (58.7%) families were referred for an assessment at similar rates and at a lower rate than all families (59.4%). Asian (69.4%), Pacific Islander (67.2%), designated race/ethnicity “Unknown” (69.9%), and Hispanic (67.4%) families were more likely to be referred for an assessment than White families.

Table 2. Screening Decision by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 15,589)

| Group | Screened Out | Referred for Assessment |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 44.8% | 55.2% |
| Black | 41.3% | 58.7% |
| Asian | 30.6% | 69.4% |
| Pacific Islander | 32.8% | 67.2% |
| White | 43.3% | 56.7% |
| Unknown | 30.1% | 69.9% |
| Total | 40.6% | 59.4% |
| Hispanic | 32.6% | 67.4% |

Decision Point 3: Disposition

Upon assessment/investigation, was there reason to be concerned for the safety of the children in their home?

The next point in the decision-making pathway is based on findings from assessments/investigations conducted with children, families, and collateral contacts. Findings from the assessment/investigation will determine whether the original report of child abuse or neglect merits a disposition finding of either founded, unfounded, unable to determine, or no assessment needed. While services may be provided to any family who comes to the attention of child welfare, the most active child welfare response is when an assessment/investigation disposition is founded. The research question at Decision Point 3 was: *Are children of color more or less likely to have disposition findings of founded—the disposition category that leads to greater involvement with child welfare?*

Table 3. reports that the greatest apparent disparity for founded disposition decisions was between American Indian/Alaskan Native (27.8%) and Hispanic (23.9%) families. Pacific Islander (14.3%) were the least likely to have a founded disposition. White (20%), Black (18.5%), and Asian (21.5%) families had close to similar percentages of founded dispositions.

To note, approximately 20% of all families assessed at Decision Point 3 had designated race/ethnicity as “Unknown.”

Table 3. Referral Disposition Decision by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 9,237)

| Group | Founded | Unfounded | Unable to Determine | No Assessment Needed |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 27.8% | 39.5% | 16.3% | 16.3% |
| Black | 18.5% | 52.9% | 19.6% | 9.1% |
| Asian | 21.5% | 46.8% | 22.6% | 9.1% |
| Pacific Islander | 14.3% | 47.6% | 33.3% | 4.8% |
| White | 20.0% | 50.1% | 19.2% | 10.8% |
| Unknown | 17.1% | 55.5% | 19.3% | 8.1% |
| Total | 19.5% | 51.1% | 19.3% | 10.2% |
| Hispanic | 23.9% | 50.9% | 19.0% | 6.2% |

Decision 4: Removal/Hold

Is the situation serious enough to remove a child or keep the child from going home?

The next decision point is the determination of whether a child becomes less or more involved in child welfare (i.e., placed in foster care or not). The decision to remove a child is considered an important decision point as it has implications on the well-being of children and families, specifically concerning the short- and long-term effects of parent-child separation, safety, and service needs. The research question posed at Decision Point 4 was: *Are children of color more or less likely to be removed from their families than White children when abuse or neglect has been founded?*

The data illustrated in Table 4. suggest that American Indian/Alaskan Native (56.5%) and Pacific Islander (50%) children are removed from their parents at a higher rate than White children (41.6%). Asian (23.1%) and designated race “Unknown” (24.4%) children are removed at a lower rate than all other races/ethnicities.

Table 4. Removal/Hold Decision by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 1,880)

| Group | Removal/Hold | No Removal/Hold |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 56.5% | 43.5% |
| Black | 43.1% | 56.9% |
| Asian | 23.1% | 76.9% |
| Pacific Islander | 50.0% | 50.0% |
| White | 41.6% | 58.4% |
| Unknown | 24.6% | 75.4% |
| Total | 39.3% | 60.7% |
| Hispanic | 32.2% | 67.8% |

Decision 5: Foster Care

Comparison of the foster care population and general county child population.

A comparison of the racial/ethnic representation of Multnomah County’s child population to the racial/ethnic representation of children in the foster care system was analyzed. At Decision Point 5 the question was: *Are children of color more likely to be represented in the foster care population as they are in the general population.*

Table 5. shows that of all children in Multnomah County’s foster care population, approximately 45.3% were racially designated children of color. Black children are 2 times and American Indian/Alaskan Native were 16.5 times more likely to be represented in foster care than what they were represented in the Multnomah County child population. Asian and Hispanic children were underrepresented in Multnomah County’s foster care population as proportionate to their racial/ethnic representation in Multnomah County’s child population.

Table 5. Multnomah County Child Population Statistics and Length of Stay in Foster Care by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 2,488)

| Group | Multnomah County Population | Multnomah County Foster Care Population |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 1.3% | 21.7% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA | Unknown | 4.4% |
| Black | 10.7% | 21.1% |
| Asian | 8.2% | 2.0% |
| Pacific Islanders | Not Included | 0.5% |
| White | 79.8% | 49.8% |
| Unknown | — | 4.8% |
| Total | | |
| Hispanic | 16.8% | 8.8% |

Decision Point 6: Type of Placement

What type of foster home is the child placed?

At Decision Point 6 the research team was interested in the type of foster care children are placed, with a special emphasis on is the type of foster homes children are placed. The research question for Decision Point 6 was: *Are children of color more likely to be placed in certain types of foster homes than others as compared to White children?*

The data in Table 6. show that Black (20.6%) and Pacific Islander (23.1%) children were the most likely to be placed in kinship care. This finding is in comparison to White children who 15% were placed in kinship care. Approximately, 11% (10.9%) of children with a race/ethnic designation of “Unknown” were placed in with relatives.

American Indian/Alaskan Native (12.4%) and American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA (11%) children were the most likely to have a pre-adoptive foster care placement. There were no Pacific Islander children in pre-adoptive foster care placements. Black (7%) and White (7.2) children had similar percentages of pre-adoptive foster care placements.

Table 6. Foster Care Placement Setting by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 2,488)

| Group | Pre-Adoptive Home | Non-Relative Foster Care | Relative Foster Care | Institutional Setting | Independent Living | Trial Home Visit | On the Run |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 12.4% | 48.5% | 18.9% | 3.0% | 0.9% | 13.3% | 3.0% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA | 11.0% | 47.7% | 18.3% | 5.5% | 1.8% | 11.9% | 3.7% |
| Black | 7.0% | 46.3% | 20.6% | 2.7% | 1.5% | 18.5% | 3.4% |
| Asian | 5.9% | 52.9% | 19.6% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 21.6% | 0.0% |
| Pacific Islander | 0.0% | 53.8% | 23.1% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 23.1% | 0.0% |
| White | 7.2% | 46.9% | 15.0% | 4.3% | 2.3% | 21.6% | 2.7% |
| Unknown | 9.2% | 47.9% | 10.9% | 3.4% | 1.7% | 26.1% | 0.8% |
| Total | 8.3% | 47.3% | 17.0% | 3.5% | 1.8% | 19.4% | 2.7% |
| Hispanic | 6.8% | 45.7% | 15.1% | 4.1% | 1.4% | 25.1% | 1.8% |

Decision 7: Length of Stay in Foster Care

Does a child stay in foster care an extended period of time or exit from foster care quickly?

Once children are removed, many are involved in processes that determine that help determine their length of stay in foster care. Such processes include social services, case management, advocacy, and decision-making conducted with court, caseworker, attorney, and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) oversight to facilitate progress. Each of these factors contribute to the length of stay in foster care, which can vary for each child. The research question at Decision Point 7 was: *Do children of color have longer or shorter stays in foster care?* To determine which children in foster care were more likely leave foster care more quickly or remain in foster care longer, research team examined two cohorts: 1.) Children who were *still in care* during a six-month analysis period and 2.) Children *who exited care* during a six-month analysis period. ²

Table 7. reports that of the children still in the foster care cohort, American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA eligible (1.2%) and Black (1.6%) children were the least likely to return to their homes within 30 days than all other racial and ethnic groups. Pacific Islander (20%) and race/ethnicity designated “Unknown” (17.9%) children were the most likely to exit foster care within 30 days as compared to all other races/ethnicities.

Of all the children who were still in care during the six-month period, Asian (39%) and Pacific Islander (30%) children were more likely to experience foster care 2-4 years than all other races/ethnicities. Children with an “Unknown” racial/ethnic designation were the least likely to experience foster care 2-4years as compared to all other racial/ethnic children.

Results of the percentages of children who were still in foster care more than 4 years are that 27.2% of American Indian/Alaskan Native, 36.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA-eligible, and 28.2% of Black children who were still in foster care over 4 years as compared to 23.1% of White children still in care over 4 years. Race/ethnicity designated “Unknown” (7.1%) and Asian (7.3%) children still in foster care were the least likely to experience foster care 4 years or longer.

Table 7. Length of Stay in Foster Care for Children *Who Were Still in Foster Care* at the end of the period by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 1,966)

| Group | 0 – 30 days | 1 - 6 months | 6 months - 1 year | 1 - 2 years | 2 - 4 years | Over 4 years |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 4.3% | 11.9% | 13.6% | 17.4% | 25.5% | 27.2% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA | 1.2% | 8.5% | 9.8% | 15.9% | 28.0% | 36.6% |
| Black | 1.6% | 17.6% | 15.3% | 19.0% | 18.3% | 28.2% |
| Asian | 9.8% | 7.3% | 17.1% | 19.5% | 39.0% | 7.3% |
| Pacific Islander | 20.0% | 10.0% | 10.0% | 10.0% | 30.0% | 20.0% |
| White | 5.0% | 12.9% | 18.0% | 18.5% | 22.7% | 23.1% |
| Unknown | 17.9% | 27.4% | 21.4% | 15.5% | 10.7% | 7.1% |
| Total | 4.8% | 14.2% | 16.5% | 18.2% | 22.2% | 24.2% |
| Hispanic | 8.3% | 19.0% | 19.6% | 23.8% | 19.0% | 10.1% |

² The 6-month reporting period to calculate length of stay was October 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009.

Table 8. shows that of the children who exited care cohort, American Indian/Alaskan Native children, regardless of whether the children were ICWA designated or not, were the least likely to return to homes within 30 days than all other racial and ethnic groups. Further analyses of children who exited care within 30 days of the 6-month analysis period revealed that there were no American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA eligible, Asian, and race/ethnic designated “Unknown” children who exited foster care within 30 days. Pacific Islander children were the most likely to exit foster care within 30 days at a rate of 33.3%.

Of all the children who exited foster care during the six-month period, American Indian/Alaskan Native (39.7%), American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA (44.4%), and Asian (40%) children were more likely to experience foster care 2-4 years than all other races and ethnicities. Hispanic (21.6%) children were the least likely to stay in care 2-4 years.

Results of the percentages of children who exited foster care more than 4 years are that there were 22.3% of American Indian/Alaskan Native and 29.6% of American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA-eligible children in foster care over 4 years compared to White children (14.2%). Asian (0%), and Pacific Islander (0%), Hispanic (3.9%), and race/ethnic designation “Unknown” (2.9%) children were the least likely to remain in foster care over 4 years.

Table 8. Length of Stay in Foster Care for Those Children *Who Exited Foster Care* (an exit cohort) by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 522)

| Group | 0 – 30 days | 1 – 6 months | 6 months - 1 year | 1 – 2 years | 2 - 4 years | Over 4 years |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 3.3% | 5.0% | 13.2% | 16.5% | 39.7% | 22.3% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA | 0.0% | 3.7% | 7.4% | 14.8% | 44.4% | 29.6% |
| Black | 5.4% | 14.0% | 29.0% | 15.1% | 26.9% | 9.7% |
| Asian | 0.0% | 0.0% | 30.0% | 30.0% | 40.0% | 0.0% |
| Pacific Islander* | 33.3% | 33.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 33.3% | 0.0% |
| White | 1.9% | 8.1% | 26.2% | 23.1% | 26.5% | 14.2% |
| Unknown | 0.0% | 22.9% | 28.6% | 22.9% | 22.9% | 2.9% |
| Total | 2.9% | 9.4% | 23.8% | 20.1% | 29.7% | 14.2% |
| Hispanic | 3.9% | 11.8% | 37.3% | 21.6% | 21.6% | 3.9% |

Decision Point 8: Plan for Permanence

What are the goals of the child welfare system concerning *possible* child(ren) exit pathways?

The next decision point examined is the possible permanency plans that are pursued for children in foster care. The research question at Decision Point 8 was: *Do the permanency plans pursued for children in long-term foster care differ for children of color than White children?*

One of the possible permanency plans for the children in foster care is long-term foster care. Approximately, 20.3% of children in foster care had long-term foster care as a permanency plan during our 6-month study period. White children with long-term foster care permanency plans have similar percentages to the total (21%). American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA-designated (34.9%) had the highest percentages of long-term foster care permanency plans. Hispanic (11.4%) and designated race/ethnicity “Unknown” (4.2%) had the lowest percentages of a long-term foster care permanency plan. (See Table 9.)

Table 9. Long-term Foster Care Plan by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 504)

| Group | Plan for Long-Term Foster Care |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 22.4% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native ICWA | 34.9% |
| Black | 20.2% |
| Asian | 15.7% |
| Pacific Islander | 23.1% |
| White | 21.0% |
| Unknown | 4.2% |
| Total | 20.3% |
| Hispanic | 11.4% |

Decision Point 9: Exit pathways

By what pathway (permanency or other pathways) does a child exit foster care?

One of child welfare’s priorities is the goal to reunify children with safe and supportive parents. However, this goal is not always possible and other exit pathways from the child welfare system are pursued. Additional exit pathways include relative care, adoption, emancipation, guardianship, and transfer to another state’s child welfare system. Sometimes children exit child welfare by running away or due to death while in care. The research at Decision Point 9 was: *Are there differences in exit pathways from foster care for children of color than White children?*

While there are a number of different potential pathways, the research team chose to highlight three: reunification, adoptions, and guardianship. Table 10. illustrates the results of several additional pathways other than the pathways chosen to highlight.

Amongst the children who reunified with their parents, Hispanic children (71.4%) were the most likely to have a reunification exit pathway. White (65.7%), Pacific Islander (66.7%), and Black (67%) children who exited by reunification had similar percentages. American Indian/Alaskan Native children (41.7%) were the least likely to exit foster care through reunification. Designated race/ethnicity “Unknown” (54.3%) children were the least likely to have reunification exits, less than the total for all races/ethnicities (59.3%).

American Indian/Alaskan Native and race/ethnicity designated “Unknown” children were the most likely to exit foster care through adoption at a rate of 30.7% and 28.6% respectively. These percentages are significantly higher as compared to White children who exited foster care at a rate of 19%. Pacific Islander children (0%) were the least likely to exit foster care via adoption.

Guardianship is an exit pathway that allows children to maintain emotional permanence with their parent, retain financial support through federal Title IV-E funds, and avoid a termination of parental rights. Asian (20%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (12.5%), and Hispanic (12.2%) were the most likely to exit foster care through guardianship. White children exited via guardianship at a rate of 2.4%.

Table 10. Foster Care Permanency Exit by Race and Hispanic Cultural Origin (n = 504)

| Group | Reunify | Relative Care | Adoption | Emancipation | Guardianship | Transfer | On the Run | Death |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------------|----------|--------------|--------------|----------|------------|-------|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 41.7% | 0.8% | 36.7% | 5.8% | 12.5% | 0.8% | 1.7% | 0.0% |
| Asian | 60.0% | 0.0% | 10.0% | 10.0% | 20.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Black | 67.0% | 0.0% | 17.0% | 8.0% | 4.5% | 3.4% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Pacific Islander* | 66.7% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 33.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| White | 65.7% | 0.0% | 19.0% | 6.9% | 2.4% | 2.8% | 2.8% | 0.4% |
| Unknown | 54.3% | 0.0% | 28.6% | 2.9% | 5.7% | 5.7% | 2.9% | 0.0% |
| Total | 59.3% | 0.2% | 23.2% | 6.5% | 5.8% | 2.8% | 2.0% | 0.2% |
| Hispanic | 71.4% | 0.0% | 14.3% | 2.0% | 12.2% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |