
African American Children In Foster Care

Presentation on GAO Report for Casey Family 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence

May 1, 2008

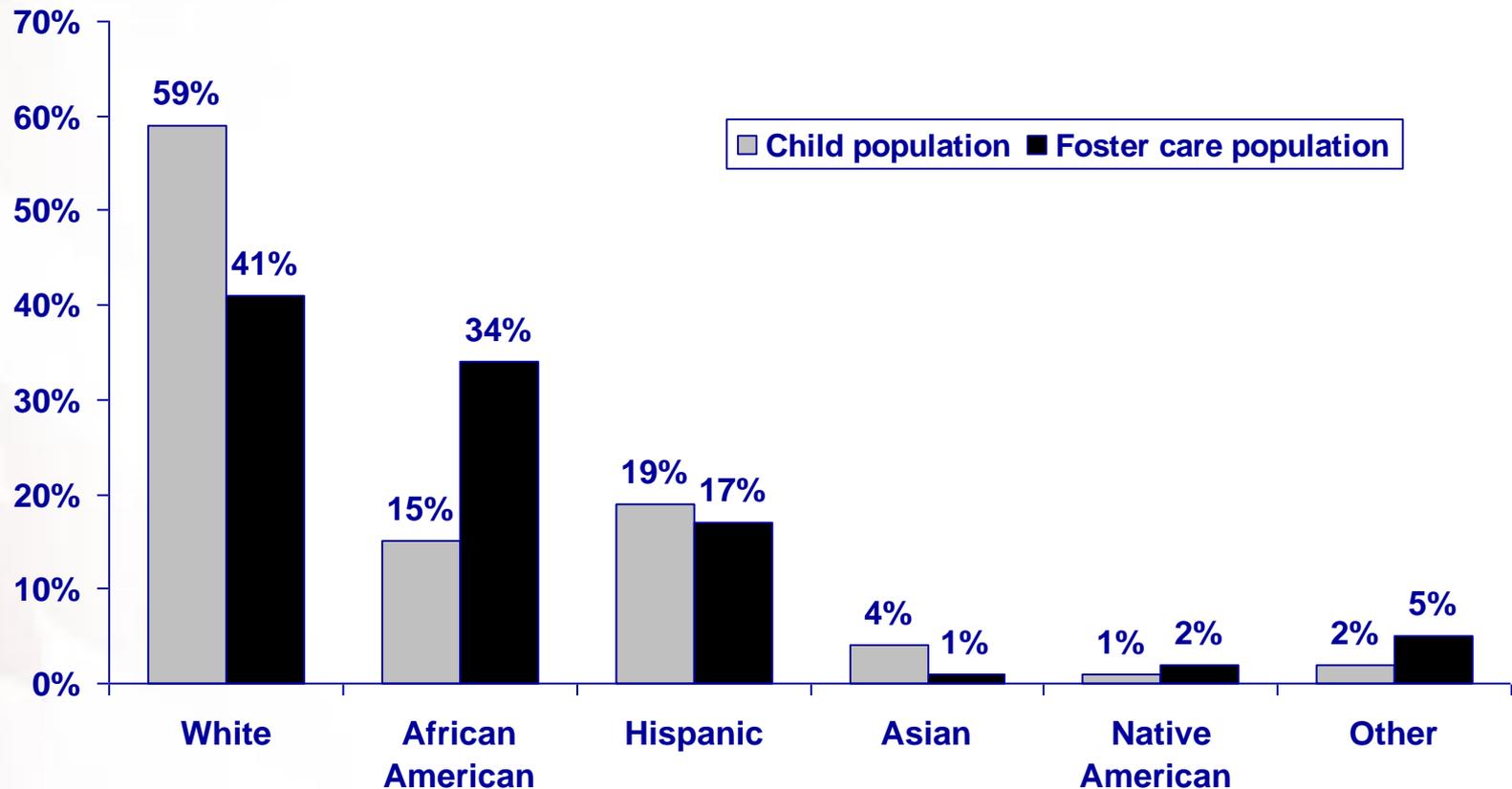
Deborah A. Signer, Ph.D., Senior Analyst, GAO
Education, Workforce, and Income Security

*African American Children in Foster Care: Additional HHS Assistance Needed to
Help States Reduce the Proportion in Care, GAO-07-816 at www.gao.gov*

Why We Did this Study

- Children of all races and ethnicities are equally likely to be abused or neglected (National Incidence Study - NIS)
- African American children were more than twice as likely to enter foster care in 2004 when compared with white children.
- After entering foster care, African American children remained in foster care about 9 months longer.
- Disproportionality is the extent to which a certain group is over- or under-represented relative to its proportion in the general population

Proportion of Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity, End of FY 2004



Source: GAO Analysis of AFCARS and Census data.

Our Key Research Objectives

The Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, asked us to analyze the:

1. Factors influencing African American children's entry and length of stay in foster care
2. Extent that states and localities have implemented promising strategies to address disproportionality
3. Federal child welfare policies - influence on proportion of African American children in foster care

Our Methodology

- Conducted Nationwide Web-based survey of state child welfare directors – 48 responded (incl. DC)
 - Gathered in-depth perspectives:
 - Site visits/interviews with CA, IL, MN, NY, NC, TX
 - Analyzed research on factors and strategies
 - Interviewed federal officials, policy groups, researchers
 - Analyzed state-reported foster care and adoption data--HHS
 - Reviewed federal laws and policies
 - Conducted work between June 2006 and June 2007
-

Several Factors Influence African American's Greater Entry and Length of Stay in Foster Care

Complex set of interrelated factors that contribute to disproportionate entry and length of stay:

- Poverty-related
- Bias and cultural misunderstanding among decision-makers
- Finding and facilitating permanent placements

Few States Addressing Directly, Many Employing Best Practices that Address Factors

- No easy answers; this is a complex problem that requires multi-faceted solution
- Few states directly addressing disproportionality through such actions as legislation or councils
- Many states use best practices that researchers believe may help address the roots of disproportionality

States Are Implementing Strategies that May Address Key Factors

Best practices that can address poverty/ access to supports:

- Collaboration with neighborhood-based service providers
- Inter-agency agreements to improve access to services
- Alternative / dual response (different tracks for families depending on level of risk)

States Are Implementing Strategies that May Address Key Factors (Cont.)

Best practices that may address bias:

- Involving family/community in decisions about children
- Training caseworkers to better work across cultures
- Use of tools to systematically assess risk of harm

States Are Implementing Strategies that May Address Key Factors (Cont.)

Best practices that may address length of stay:

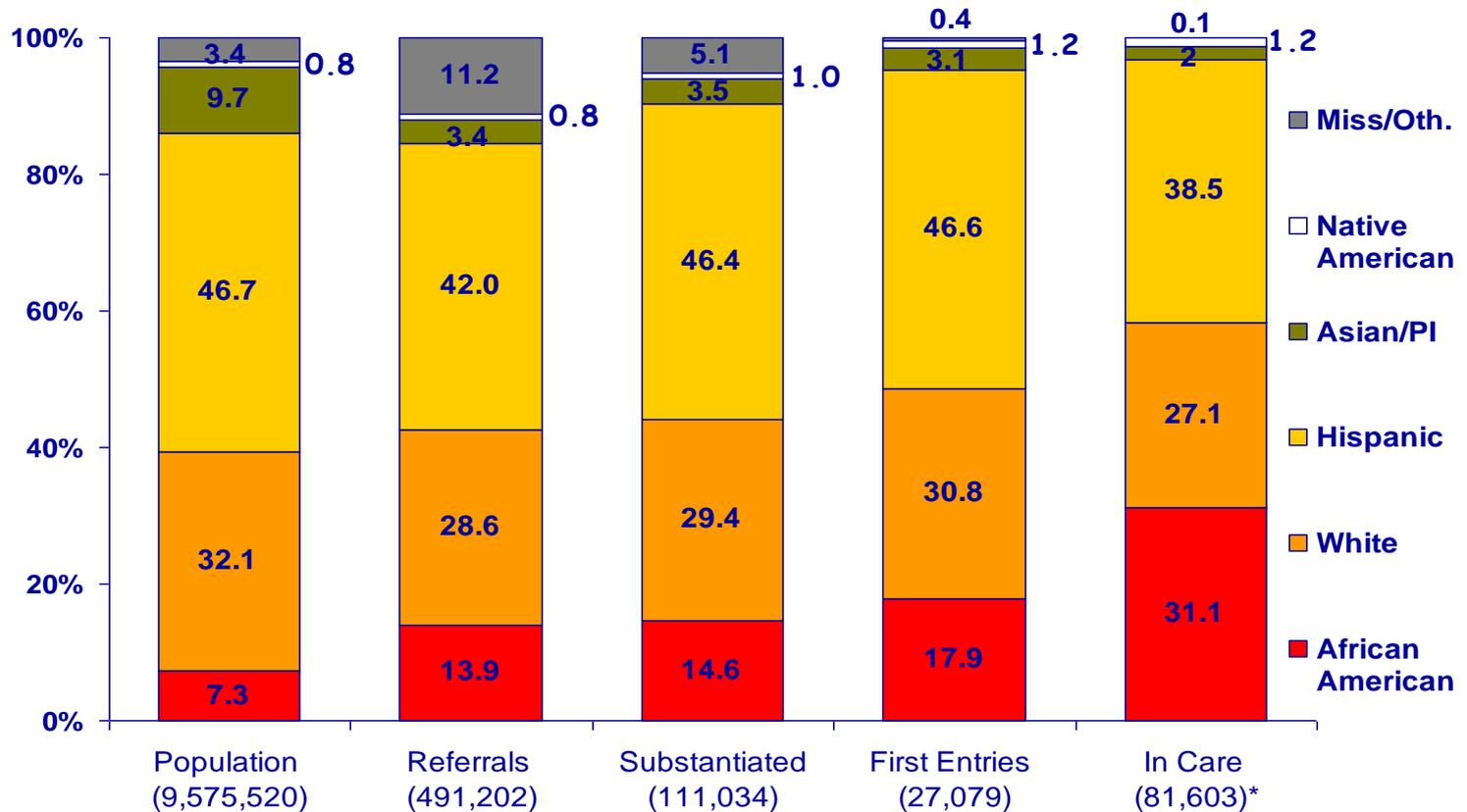
- Diligently searching for paternal kin
- Recruiting more African American adoptive families
- Subsidizing legal guardianship

Three Elements Can Support Efforts to Address Disproportionality

Important elements of various strategies:

1. Sustained leadership
2. Working across different social service systems
3. Collecting, analyzing and disseminating data

Researcher's Analysis of Data to Highlight Disproportionality



Source: Barbara Needell, University of California Berkeley

Some Federal Policies Viewed as Helpful; Others Hinder Progress

Federal policies that were seen as generally helpful:

- Ability to use TANF block grant funds to provide social services, family supports, & preventive services
 - Subsidies for adopting children with special needs
 - Recognition of legal guardianship as a permanent placement option
 - Requirement to diligently recruit minority families
-

Some Federal Policies Viewed as Helpful; Others Hinder Progress (Cont.)

Federal policies that were seen as generally hindering progress:

- Inability to use federal funds for subsidizing legal guardianship
 - Caps on child welfare funding available for preventive services (IV-B)
 - Limited flexibility in use of Title IV-E foster care funds
-

Some Federal Policies Viewed as Helpful; Others Hinder Progress (Cont.)

Federal policies that were viewed as having less effect/
mixed:

- Usefulness and meaning of “race neutral adoption” provision (MEPA)
- Federally mandated timeframes for permanency planning and termination of parental rights

GAO Recommendations and Matter for Congressional Consideration & Update

SECRETARY of HHS should:

- Encourage states to track state and local data on racial disproportionality in foster care and use the data to develop strategies to prevent entry into foster care and speed exit
- Complete and make publicly available information from HHS initiative to improve culturally competent practices

CONGRESS could consider:

- Amending federal law to allow federal reimbursement for legal guardianship – as currently provided for adoption
-

Additional GAO Reports on Child Welfare

Child Welfare: Improving Social Service Program, Training, and Technical Assistance Information Would Help Address Long-Standing Service Level and Workforce Challenges, GAO-07-75 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2006).

Child Welfare: Federal Oversight of State IV-B Activities Could Inform Action Needed to Improve Services to Families and Statutory Compliance GAO- 06-787T (Washington, D.C.: May 23, 2006).

Indian Child Welfare Act: Existing Information on Existing Issues Could be Used to Target Guidance and Assistance to States, GAO-05-290 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 2005.)

Foster Youth: HHS Actions Could Improve the Coordination of Services and Monitoring of States' Independent Living Programs, GAO-05-25 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 2004).

Child Welfare: Enhanced Federal Oversight of Title IV-B Could Provide States Additional Information to Improve Services, GAO-03-956 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 12, 2003.).

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice: Federal Agencies Could Play a Stronger Role in Helping States Reduce the Number of Children Placed Solely to Obtain Mental Health Services, GAO-03-397 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 2003).
