

DATA BRIEF: **Racial Disproportionality in Allegheny County's Child Welfare System**

1 For the purpose of this data brief, “disproportionality” refers to the unequal representation of a racial group within the child welfare system compared to the group’s representation in the County as a whole and in preceding child welfare stages.

2 The child welfare system is responsible for protecting children from abuse and neglect. When a report of suspected abuse or neglect is received, an assessment is made of the child’s risk and, depending upon the results of that assessment, a family’s involvement with child welfare may continue to an investigation, acceptance for services, and/or removal of the child from the home.

3 Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect. See <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/About/Contact/Mandated-Reporters.aspx>

This brief provides data on racial disproportionality¹ in Allegheny County’s child welfare system by analyzing the number and rate of children of different races involved at four major stages in the child welfare system:² referral, investigation, accept for service and removal from home.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis focuses on the 20,190 children referred for abuse and/or neglect in Allegheny County in 2015. Data was pulled from Allegheny County’s child welfare case management system (Key Information and Demographics System [KIDS]) and the 2010 United States Census. The analysis looks at four possible stages in a child’s involvement in the system:

1. **Referral:** If a member of the public or a mandated reporter³ suspects that a child under the age of 18 is being abused or neglected, he or she may make a referral to ChildLine or to the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF). The referral stage is considered the “front door” of child welfare because it is the first point of contact for many families.
2. **Investigation:** The next stage is investigation, which includes a safety assessment, a risk assessment, and interviews with the children, parents and others who have knowledge of the family (e.g., referral sources, family members, professionals involved with the family). All referrals for suspected child abuse must be investigated; however, referrals for neglect or other non-abuse-related causes (e.g., parent/child conflict, truancy, parental drug abuse) may be either “screened-in” for an investigation if warranted by the severity of the allegation or if further information is required, or “screened-out” (although resources may still be provided) if it is determined that the child is not at risk.
3. **Accept for Service:** Based upon the results of the investigation, the family may be accepted for service if there are ongoing concerns about the safety or well-being of the child or if the family requires additional support. Once accepted for service, a family and their identified supporters works with a child welfare caseworker to formulate a Family Plan, which sets forth family goals and a plan for receiving services so that the child can remain safely in the home.
4. **Removal from Home:** If, despite the provision of services, the child’s safety continues to be at risk, or if the court determines that a child is in immediate danger, the child may be removed from the home and placed in out-of-home care (e.g., kinship or foster care, congregate care).

⁴ The "all children" category comprises children of all races, including children whose race was unknown. In the analysis of specific races, three racial groups were used: white, black and bi/multiracial children. Children of another single race or whose race was unidentified are not included in the disproportionality analysis because of their small sample size in DHS's data and in the County as a whole. For this reason, the "all children" figures in the accompanying tables do not equal the total of black, white and bi/multiracial children.

⁵ The rate of children investigated is based on the population of children referred. Similarly, the rate of children accepted for service is based on the population of children investigated, and home removal rates are based on the accepted-for-service population. Using this method, it is possible to examine racial disproportionality within the child welfare system once a family has been referred.

⁶ Totals do not equal 20,190 due to unknown/unreported/other race.

The following analysis presents the number and rate of children, in total and by race,⁴ at each stage of the child welfare system. The rate of referral is based on Allegheny County's total population of children/youth younger than 18. All subsequent rates are calculated using the size of the population from the prior stage.⁵

ANALYSIS

Referral

A total of 20,190 children were referred by the community for alleged child abuse and/or neglect in Allegheny County in 2015. The total under-18 population of the County was 241,663, so children of all races were referred to the child welfare system at a rate of 84 per 1,000 (20,190 divided by 241,663). (See **Table 1**.)

Looking more closely at the referrals by race of the child, we find that 7,662 black children were referred. Black children accounted for 45,552 of the Allegheny County population, so their rate of referral was 168 per 1,000. Using the same method, bi/multiracial children (11,877 in Allegheny County) were referred at a rate of 137 per 1,000. White children were referred at a rate of 48 per 1,000. To say it a different way, 3.5 black children and 2.8 bi/multiracial children were referred for every white child. While this analysis does not identify the reasons for this disproportionality, it is clear that community members and mandated reporters are referring black and bi/multiracial children more than what would be expected based on their share of the County's population.

TABLE 1: County Child Population and Rates of Referral by Race, 2015⁶

	ALL CHILDREN	BLACK	WHITE	BI/MULTIRACIAL
2010 County Census population under age 18	241,663	45,552	174,938	11,877
Population (per 1,000 children in Allegheny County)	1,000	190	720	50
Children referred for alleged child abuse and/or neglect ⁴	20,190	7,662	8,385	1,623
Referral rate (per 1,000 children in Allegheny County)	84	168	48	137

Differences between races can also be seen when looking at who refers children to the child welfare system. **Table 2** displays race groups of referred children as a percentage of each reporting source. White children are referred more frequently by friends/neighbors and by anonymous sources than are black children. Black children are more likely than white children to be referred by courts or to refer themselves.

TABLE 2: Referrals by Reporting Source*

REPORTING SOURCE 2015 REFERRALS	TOTAL	BLACK	WHITE	BI/MULTIRACIAL
School/Day Care	4,528	39%	41%	7%
Public/Private Social Service Agency	3,653	35%	39%	9%
Medical/Dental Provider	3,533	43%	37%	9%
Mental Health Provider	3,214	34%	48%	7%
Anonymous	2,224	30%	48%	13%
Parent/Guardian	2,131	45%	38%	11%
Other	1,821	37%	43%	8%
Law Enforcement Agency	1,806	40%	41%	10%
Relative	1,168	39%	42%	12%
Courts ⁷	806	51%	32%	7%
Friend/Neighbor	669	27%	53%	11%
Child/Self-Referral	73	59%	34%	4%
Total	25,626**	38%	42%	9%

⁷ This includes all civil and criminal courts in Allegheny County.

*Percentages do not equal 100% due to unknown/unreported/other race.

**The number of referrals (25,626) exceeds the number of children referred (20,190) because of duplicate referrals.

Investigation

Although children are referred by the community, decisions are made by child welfare staff and judges at the investigation stage and at all subsequent stages. At these later stages, disproportionality continues to exist but at lower rates.

In 2015, the families of 13,167 children were part of a child welfare investigation. (See Table 3.) Thus, children were screened in for an investigation at a rate of 652 per 1,000 referrals.

For black and bi/multiracial children, the rate of investigation was higher than that of white children. In 2015, 5,461 black children were the subject of investigations. Based on the 7,662 black children referred to the child welfare system, the rate of investigations was 713 per 1,000. For bi/multiracial children, the rate of investigation was 685 per 1,000, and for white children, the rate of investigation was 615 per 1,000. In other words, compared to white children, bi/multiracial children were investigated at a rate 1.1 times higher and black children at a rate 1.2 times higher.

TABLE 3: Rates of Investigation by Race, 2015

	ALL CHILDREN	BLACK	WHITE	BI/MULTIRACIAL
Children referred for alleged child abuse and/or neglect	20,190	7,662	8,385	1,623
Children associated with an investigation	13,167	5,461	5,157	1,112
Investigation rate (per 1,000 children of that race who were referred)	652	713	615	685

Accept for Service

At the accept-for-service stage, black and bi/multiracial children continue to be disproportionately represented (Table 4). Per 1,000 children investigated, 309 black children and 348 bi/multiracial children were accepted for service compared to 239 white children. Based on these rates, black children were accepted for service 1.3 times more often than white children, and bi/multiracial children were accepted for service 1.5 times more often than white children.

TABLE 4: Rates of Children Accepted for Service, 2015

	ALL CHILDREN	BLACK	WHITE	BI/MULTIRACIAL
Children associated with an investigation	13,167	5,461	5,157	1,112
Children accepted for services	3,594	1,685	1,234	387
Accept for service rate (per 1,000 children of that race who were investigated)	273	309	239	348

Removal from Home

At the final stage of this analysis, removal from home, the rates are similar across races, with white children having a slightly higher rate of home removal than black children (238 per 1,000 vs. 219 per 1,000), but still lower than the removal rate of bi/multiracial children (269 per 1,000).

TABLE 5: Rates of Removal from Home, 2015

	ALL CHILDREN	BLACK	WHITE	BI/MULTIRACIAL
Children associated with an investigation	13,167	5,461	5,157	1,112
Children removed from home within one year of being accepted for service	809	369	294	104
Rate of children removed from home within one year (per 1,000 children of that race who were accepted for service)	225	219	238	269*

**The rate of home removal is higher than the number of children who were removed from home because the population of bi/multiracial children accepted for service is well under 1,000.*

CONTENT AND ANALYSIS

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