

KEEPING THE WHITE FAMILY TOGETHER: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE
OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS OF MALTREATED CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The likelihood of being removed from the home following a substantiated case of maltreatment is much higher for black youth than for their white counterparts. There are two competing explanations in the literature. The first is that black children experience more serious forms of maltreatment and have fewer resources to remedy the maltreatment situation through informal means than do white children. The second is that there is an underlying bias within the child welfare system, where discriminatory beliefs about the perceived threat and dangerousness of certain groups and their abilities to care for their children may contribute to black children being disproportionately removed from their homes. The present study examines whether race has an effect on child placement within the child welfare system after taking into account various risk factors associated with race and placement. It also examines whether the factors influencing placement are the same for white and black youth. Findings illustrate a racial disparity in out-of-home placements supporting both of the competing explanations in the current literature. Parental mental illness and emotional abuse as the maltreatment type are identified as factors operating differently for black and white children within the child welfare system. Overall, the present study finds that two separate processes seem to be at play in the placement decisions of maltreated youth, and concludes with possible explanations for this differential treatment.

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INTRODUCTION

More than 3.5 million children received Child Protective Service (CPS) investigations or assessments in 2007, and of these cases, an estimated 794,000 children were found to have substantiated cases of maltreatment (U.S. Dept. 2009). While the estimated rate is 10.6 cases of maltreatment per 1,000 children in the overall population, this victimization rate varies considerably across racial and ethnic groups. For example, the rate among whites is 9.1 per 1,000. Meanwhile, African American, American Indian, Alaska Native and Hispanic children show rates of 16.7, 14.2, 14.0 and 10.3 per 1,000, respectively (U.S. Dept. 2009). More importantly, these same disparities can be seen when looking at the intervention decisions concerning the maltreated child. Studies show that children of minority groups, particularly the children of African American families, are placed in foster care at higher rates than children from white families (Rivoux et al. 2008; Lu et al. 2004; Needell et al. 2007).

The above statistics illustrate not only how serious a problem child maltreatment is in general, but also how society's response differs across racial-ethnic groups. The challenge is in trying to identify what makes certain groups more susceptible to maltreatment, and in turn, whether we respond to these various groups differently as a result. Two main arguments have been put forth in trying to understand these relationships. The first is that racial-ethnic minorities experience social and structural conditions that truly put them at a higher risk for experiencing child maltreatment, and, in turn, increase the likelihood that their experiences will be reported to CPS and other welfare agencies. Higher out-of-home placements reflect this higher level of risk among minority youth. The second argument is that there is an underlying bias within both the general public and the child welfare system, where prejudicial beliefs about the perceived threat and dangerousness of certain groups and their abilities to care for their children may help

determine which child maltreatment cases are both reported and substantiated within the system, as well as how they are handled once verified (Kirk and Griffith 2008).

In the present study, I examine whether race has an effect on child placement once a child's case has been reported to the child welfare system after taking into account risk factors associated with maltreatment. Furthermore, I examine whether these risk factors matter differently for whites and blacks in deciding where to place the maltreated child. Importantly, I look at the initial placement order put forth by the dependency judge of the presiding case. Earlier stages of the child welfare system are important to look at for at least two reasons. First, as prior research on racial disparities within the juvenile justice system has illustrated, race effects are more likely to emerge at earlier stages of processing than in later stages. Hill et al. (1985) propose that as subjects are filtered through the justice process, they become more homogeneous as a population which reduces the potential for disparities to exist at later stages. In addition, not all factors of the case may be known at the initial stages of case processing. In child maltreatment cases, for instance, these factors could pertain to such things as the economic and social resources of the family and the community to resolve the maltreatment without removing the child from the home (Courtney 1999; Mangold 2007). Second, summary measures that combine several stages within the case process may under- or over-state the extent of racial disparity at any one stage because initial and later decisions may add up or cancel out the apparent impact of race over the process (Engen, Steen and Bridges 2002).

Looking at decision making within the child welfare process is important because removing maltreated children from their homes can have lifelong consequences on their ability to form bonds and attachments with others. Out-of-home placement for maltreated children may increase or decrease their risk for later juvenile and adult criminal offending, depending on the

circumstances of their removal and placement (Ryan et al. 2008). Examining placement decisions in the earlier stages of the child welfare process, where caseworkers and judges have more discretion in deciding how the maltreatment case will be handled, will also allow for the further understanding of where in the decision making process any unwarranted disparities might develop.

In the present study, I use data collected by Widom and English (2003) for their study, “Childhood Victimization and Delinquency, Adult Criminality, and Violent Criminal Behavior in a Large Urban County in the Northwest United States,” and if available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) online database. Their data collection was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice and National Institute of Justice, and produced by the State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services and the Office of Children’s Administration Research.

The data are retrospective and longitudinal in nature, detailing administrative records from 1980 to 1997, taken from a large urban county in the Northwest United States. There are 877 treatment cases within the data set, the treatment cases being those children who were officially subject to court review for maltreatment. I examine the relationship between race and the ordered placement outcomes of these children. Importantly, I control for important risk factors that might account for the greater likelihood of out-of-home placement among black youth. These controls include approximate socioeconomic status, parents’ health and children’s behavioral problems, and the type of maltreatment. While this study includes controls similar to those used in other data sources, these data are unique in that they have rich measures of maltreatment and allow for the analysis of the initial order of placement, allowing researchers to delineate if racial disparities may be occurring in the earlier stages of the child welfare process.

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND

Two Explanations for Racial Disparities

Although much research has been done on the causes of child maltreatment (Phillips et al. 2004; Barth et al. 2006; Polansky et al. 1981; Dixon et al. 2009; Barth et al. 2009), much less has examined placement decisions associated with maltreatment. The little research on placement has focused on whether or not out-of-home placement is beneficial to the child's well-being, both short- and long-term. For example, looking at officially reported maltreated children and a matched control group, DeGue and Widom (2009) find that it is not placement in itself that affects long-term deleterious outcomes, specifically adult criminality, but placement instability that increases the risk for such negative behaviors. What has been largely neglected until recently is whether race and ethnicity play a role within the child welfare system. Behl et al. (2001), in a meta-analysis study of child maltreatment, found only 6.7 percent of child maltreatment articles published in three major journals between 1977 and 1998 included race or ethnicity as a focus in their studies. Additionally, for the few studies that have looked at the link between race and placement, there is often much controversy over whether the overrepresentation of blacks within the child welfare system can be accounted for by differences in impoverishment and other forms of structural disadvantage, or if there is some other factor, perhaps racial bias, that contributes to the greater representation of black children in the system (Ards et al. 1997; Lindsey 1994; Pinderhughes 1991; Garland et al. 1998; Barth et al. 2006; Phillips et al. 2004).

One explanation for the greater likelihood of out-of-home placement among black children is that the disadvantaged social and structural locations of racial-ethnic minority groups in society put them at a higher risk of maltreatment, but also makes the evidence of this maltreatment more visible to child protective service (CPS) agencies and law enforcement individuals (Howell 2008; Drake et al. 2009; Knott and Donovan 2010). Characteristics

contributing to higher levels of maltreatment and greater intervention include lower socioeconomic status, greater family instability, and parental health problems. Additionally, these same characteristics are often viewed as more difficult to remedy through both community and official interventions (Brown 2008).

However, an alternative argument is that these racial-ethnic disparities exist in part because of an underlying bias within the system itself (Ards et al. 1997; Hampton and Newberger 1985; Hill 2004; Miller and Gaston 2003; Osterling et al. 2008; Knott and Donovan 2010). This research, through the examination of reported versus substantiated claims of child maltreatment, and other samples of at-risk parents and their children, finds that racial-ethnic minorities are at no greater risk of child maltreatment than their white counterparts, even when social and structural factors are taken into account. Thus, if these research findings represent the true nature of the racial disparity in child welfare, where neither maltreatment characteristics nor social and structural factors fully account for the higher levels of out-of-home placement among blacks, it is possible that part of this disparity might be due to judgments based on race.

The Race-Poverty Link

The main characteristic found to explain the over-representation of racial-ethnic minorities in the child welfare system is poverty. The association between race and poverty is one of long-recognized significance and is supported by much national data. For instance, according to the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Current Population Survey (CPS) in 2003, the poverty rate for non-Hispanic whites was eight percent, while the rate for blacks was about 24 percent (U.S.Census 2003). Furthermore, even in our current economic decline, these disparities remain largely unchanged, with data from 2007 showing that 8.6 percent of non-Hispanic whites were declared impoverished according to the national poverty thresholds, while 24.7 percent of blacks met such thresholds (National 2007).

According to Lindsey's (1994) analysis of national survey data, parent's income level was the major determinant in a child's removal from his or her family, this finding being consistent for children across all age groups. While Lindsey's analysis did not focus on race, economic inequalities that disadvantage racial minorities prevent the informal rectification of child maltreatment once reported. This is often because impoverished minorities are more likely to reside in highly disorganized urban areas where key protective neighborhood factors and prosocial community services that could help reestablish a healthy, functioning family environment are often lacking (Sampson et al. 2005; Rivaux et al. 2008). This argument is supported by Schuck (2005) who finds that in urban counties, black child maltreatment is strongly associated with community-level disadvantages, such as concentrated poverty and the percentage of black female-headed families in poverty. Therefore, without the ability to remedy the situation in the allotted timeframe between case reporting and appearing before the dependency judge, an out-of-home placement may be seen as the only feasible alternative in alleviating the maltreated child's suffering.

Although national poverty statistics and the studies finding a link between racial-ethnic status, poverty, and maltreatment provide important insights into the child welfare system, these studies suffer from a number of limitations. First, one should not assume that just because racial minorities experience higher rates of poverty and higher rates of out-of-home placements that it is their impoverished status that causes black children to be removed from their home. Second, studies supporting a race-poverty explanation for racial disparities in the child welfare system still find that socioeconomic status cannot fully explain the race gap, with black children experiencing upwards of a 77 percent increased likelihood of home removal after such variables as household income are taken into account (Rivaux et al. 2008).

Third, while studies supporting the poverty explanation claim that disparities in the treatment of maltreated children cannot be explained by race, they sometimes neglect to include racial status into their regression analyses. For instance, Barth et al. (2006) divide their maltreated sample into two groups based on poverty status and, finding no difference in poverty level among various racial categories in bivariate analyses, chose not to include race in their regression analyses.

Finally, many of these studies focus mainly or solely on racial disparities in the reporting of child maltreatment cases to CPS workers and not the actual substantiation rates or the decision-making process within the child welfare system. This distinction is an important one, as research has found that although income as a case factor influences risk assessment, it is not always a factor that influences the threshold for placement decisions (Rivaux et al. 2008). Additionally, prior research has also found that while black children are more likely than white children to come to the attention of the child welfare system, they are also less likely to have their cases verified, and the explanatory power of poverty-related measures in explaining this initial disparity becomes less significant in latter stages of the child welfare process where black children are still over-represented (Schuck 2005).

The Importance of Familial Characteristics

In addition to poverty, there are a multitude of other social and structural characteristics that may contribute to the racial-ethnic disparity in out-of-home placements. One important characteristic is family structure. Poverty rates are highest for families headed by single women, particularly if they are black or Hispanic, with 28.7 percent of households headed by single women being classified as poor in 2006 (National 2007). Furthermore, Martin et al. (2009) found that among non-Hispanic whites, 27 percent of all births were to unmarried women, as compared to 50 percent for Hispanics and 71 percent for non-Hispanic blacks. These familial

characteristics are relevant to child maltreatment cases, specifically regarding instances of neglect, where the maltreatment may not be purposeful, but rather an unfortunate consequence of lacking both the human and monetary resources necessary to provide a healthy and safe environment for children.

Similarly, a second explanation put forth by those who argue that racial-ethnic disproportionality in reporting and out-of-home placement is legitimate based on the child's perceived welfare is that poor families are more likely to become involved with CPS agencies through avenues other than the maltreatment situation itself. For instance, impoverishment often increases risks for substance abuse and related activities, and impoverished populations are also more likely to have greater exposure to parental arrest, detention, or incarceration (Barth et al. 2006; Phillips et al. 2004). Finally, mental health problems that have strong associations with poverty, chronic illness, nonmarriage, low education, and both real and perceived discrimination, are more prevalent among racial-ethnic minorities, which may help further contribute to racial disparities (Bratter and Eschbach 2005; Polansky et al. 1981).

Similar to studies citing a race-poverty link, studies citing familial characteristics more prevalent among racial minorities that contribute to maltreatment also suffer from limitations. For instance, while Phillips et al. (2004) find a significant relationship between involvement in CPS and parental arrest, with blacks also having higher arrest rates than whites, they also find that the rate of each parent risk factor, such as substance abuse and mental illness, is lower among black parents who had been arrested than among other arrested parents. Therefore, if such factors as parental substance abuse and mental illness were significant in deciding a maltreated child's placement, then, according to this study, we would expect that a greater number of white children would be removed from the home, as compared to their black counterparts, whose

parents suffer less from such issues. Furthermore, while the relationship between racial-ethnic minority status and deleterious familial characteristics is cited as having only marginal statistical significance in bivariate analyses, the authors close their article in stating that this difference, however marginal, may still be a factor in determining which children come to the attention of child welfare agencies when a parent is arrested (Phillips et al. 2004).

Racial Differences in Child Maltreatment Risk

The belief that biases and discrimination are behind the racial-ethnic disparities in CPS agency involvement is supported by several national studies suggesting that there are no racial-ethnic differences in the occurrence of child maltreatment (Sedlack and Broadhurst 1996). Sedlack and Broadhurst (1996) reported findings from the National Incidence Studies (NIS) in the years 1980, 1986 and 1993, based on official reports provided by child welfare agencies across the nation, as well as information from community professionals likely to encounter cases of child maltreatment, such as day care providers and school officials, that may not necessarily be reported to the child welfare system. All three NIS studies found that being a minority did not increase the risk of child maltreatment occurrences. Rather, after controlling for a variety of risk factors, African American families were found to actually have less risk of child maltreatment than white families.

However, formally sponsored reviews of NIS data have identified several shortcomings and possible improvements that could be made to this data source. Organized under eight major themes, these limitations include problems with the definitions used to identify possible cases of maltreatment and neglect; hidden duplications in maltreatment reports; issues with the sample itself in the form of nonresponse, weighting issues, and coverage of uninvestigated children; interpreting changes across studies, policy implications of uninvestigated children; and general

usability of the NIS data, where there is a considerable amount of missing data and using the pre-defined weights poses an impediment to prospective analyses (Sedlack 2001).

Nevertheless, data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) further support the discrimination argument in that relative to their base rate in the child population at large, black children are overrepresented in foster care by a ratio of 2:1, even after controlling for other variables such as age, gender, type of maltreatment and service location (Kirk and Griffith 2008). Casey Family Programs, the nation's largest operating foundation entirely focused on foster care, cite Hill (2006) in using these NCANDS data, claiming that "this lack of differences in base rates suggest that disproportionality in the child welfare system is not due to disproportionate need, but rather to discriminatory practices in society (reports) or within the child welfare system (investigations, substantiations, placements and permanency outcomes)." However, although certain demographic information is taken into account, these data fail to include many other factors that could account for a child entering the foster care system, such as poverty, family structure and the stability of the familial environment, among other things.

Similarly, other research finds that black families are held to different standards based on their perceived dangerousness and threat to mainstream society (Albonetti 1991; Tonry 1995; Bridges and Steen 1998; Hill et al. 1985; Sampson 1986). According to the racial threat hypothesis, when a dominant group perceives another group as being a threat, whether for safety, economic, cultural or political reasons, the dominant group will enforce an increased level of social control over the threatening group (Hayes-Smith and Hayes-Smith 2009).

Analyzing racial disparities in relationship to juvenile justice processing and drug-related crimes, much prior research has demonstrated that drug activity among black, underclass

populations is often seen as a major source of threat among dominant groups. As a result, minority youth often experience much more severe penalties for such crimes than their white counterparts (Tonry 1995; Engen et al. 2002; Sampson and Laub 1993). Albonetti (1991) cites that this differential treatment based on threat can be understood by a process of bounded rationality, where individual-level differences in outcomes between blacks and whites are largely due to the perception that blacks constitute a more dangerous group, even when their associated criminal offenses are similar to that of whites. This is further supported by Bridges and Steen (1998) in their examination of delinquency assessments by juvenile court officials. Whereas the offenses of minority youth were seen as individual failings in the form of negative attitudinal and personality traits, these same offenses were often portrayed as being a result of negative environmental factors for white adolescents.

Racial disparities in court processing are even further compounded with the interaction of socioeconomic disadvantage, particularly at community levels, in cases of both juvenile justice and child welfare. Although community characteristics do not always have a direct effect on minority overrepresentation, they often do indirectly. For instance, community-level poverty, unemployment and crime rates were found to affect the mean detention rates of minority youth in the juvenile justice system (Rodriguez 2007).

Specifically related to maltreatment, child welfare agencies in 33 states in the U.S. reported that high community poverty rates may increase the proportion of black children entering foster care compared to whites, who are much less likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods (Brown 2008). This is because residing in poor communities oftentimes limits access to the kinds of support and services needed to both prevent and rectify child maltreatment. Necessary support and services, according to child welfare practitioners, include, but are not

limited to, affordable and adequate housing, substance abuse treatment and family counseling (Brown 2008). Mental health services are particularly important for black youth, who have been found to demonstrate the greatest level of need compared to both white and Hispanic youth, but are the least likely to receive such services (Rawal et al. 2004).

Understanding the Racial-Ethnic Disparity within the Child Welfare System as Resulting from Bias

There are a variety of ways in which bias may emerge in the system, from the front-end of incident reporting, all the way to the final outcome phase of whether or not to recommend an out-of-home placement for the maltreated child. Ards et al. (1997) state that even if no racial disparities exist in the incidence of child maltreatment, one may still find disparities in the reporting of child maltreatment cases, and that these reporting differentials may exist because of cultural differences in child-rearing between the reporter and the perpetrator, or an unwillingness to report perpetrators with socioeconomic characteristics similar to the reporter's.

The empirical literature on overt racism within the child welfare system is scarce. However, evidence from case review studies often supports racial bias in the reporting of child maltreatment cases. For example, studies evaluating reporting decisions among physicians and other hospital staff find statistically significant differences between black and white children who are seen for similar physical injuries, with black children being the subjects of more CPS reports and investigations (Hampton and Newberger 1985; Lane et al. 2002).

Also related to the front-end of the system is the finding by some researchers and practitioners that a universal set of standards is oftentimes used to evaluate families, without taking into account the social and cultural diversities that may exist among them. This can then lead to such things as poverty or single parenthood as being seen as deviant in the system if, for example, two-parent middle-class households are held as the standard of a well-functioning

family (Miller and Gaston 2003; Hill 2004; Billingsley and Giovannoni 1972). This phenomenon is especially evident in less serious reports, where case workers have greater discretion in their recommendations, and are thus more susceptible to the practice of differential response (Osterling et al. 2008).

Additionally, the cultural phenomenon is not just limited to case workers, but also to the placement decisions handed down by judges. This is because if there was only a racial-ethnic disparity in reports and investigations, then we would see this disparity diminish in the decision of out-of-home placements; however, minorities are over-represented at this stage as well. Rivaux et al. (2008) shows that even though African Americans are assessed as having lower risk scores for maltreatment when controlling for other factors, they are more likely to be removed and given service provision orders by the judge than are whites. For instance, according to Rivaux et al. (2008), a black child experiencing the same type and severity of neglect or abuse as a white child would have a higher likelihood of foster care placement. This difference in thresholds has been attributed to a variety of factors, from black families' abuse and neglect being seen as less remediable than white families', to black families being held to oftentimes unattainable white middle-class standards, and the devaluing of the culture and functioning of black families (Knott and Donovan 2010; Hill 2004; Billingsley and Giovannoni 1972).

Disparities in reporting and intervention can also be explained by the visibility hypothesis, which suggests that there is a higher probability of minority children being placed in foster care when living in geographic areas where they are visibly less represented (Jenkins and Diamond 1985). Garland et al. (1998) find support for this hypothesis in their study analyzing longitudinal data for children suspected of experiencing maltreatment in San Diego County, California. They found that being a numerical minority within a community made a child more

susceptible to public and official scrutiny, leading to an increased risk of CPS encounters and foster care placements once identified as maltreated. Moreover, this visibility pattern was specific to African American children, who represented the greatest proportion of minority children, at 58 percent.

Although not empirically tested, many academic scholars (Billingsley and Giovannioni 1972; Robinson 1995; Dominelli 1997; Roberts 2002) cite discrimination within the child welfare system as a result of historical race relations within the U.S. Initially excluded from child welfare policies, black children became the baseline for hierarchical models of child welfare services, where no dependent white child would receive less support than the enslaved black child. However, with the migration of black families from the South to the North, renewed national interest on issues concerning poverty, and the civil rights movement which brought about federal legislation mandating integration, black children experienced a shift from exclusion to over-inclusion in the child welfare system during the 1950s and 1960s (Billingsley and Giovannioni 1972).

More explicitly, other scholars have stated that when differences in child-rearing and ethnicity are analyzed, black families are often pathologized, with caseworkers holding such stereotypical beliefs that black families have too many children and parents are therefore unable to cope, or that black parents are too strict and beat their children as a matter of course (Robinson 1995; Dominelli 1997). Finally, Roberts (2002), citing both historical evidence and national child welfare data sources, claims that current child welfare policies are discriminatory and serve only to reflect the political choices of the majority for addressing what are seen as problems in black families.

However, while grounded in historical and educational practice, these more explicit reasons for the racial disparity within the child welfare system are largely theoretical in nature. As such, skeptics of bias and discrimination arguments may see these explanations as subjective and question the representativeness of the qualitative evidence that is often used to support such claims. More research is required to empirically test some of these claims about racial bias as a primary cause of disparities in the child welfare system.

What We Currently Know: A Summary

That a racial-ethnic disparity in the child welfare system exists is no longer debated. However, what accounts for this difference continues to be disputed. While there is evidence that social and structural disadvantages relevant to the placement decision are correlated with racial-ethnic minority status, most studies show that even after these characteristics are controlled for, racial-ethnic minorities are still greatly overrepresented within the system.

The duty of CPS is to promote the positive welfare of the child. This involves balancing the need to remove children from maltreatment while also minimizing the potentially deleterious effects of unnecessarily removing children from their homes. The goal of social science researchers is to tease out whether CPS and other law enforcement agencies are truly acting in the best interests of those children who are maltreated, or if after controlling for relevant at-risk characteristics, there is an underlying bias within the system that further disadvantages minority children and their families.

While previous research has tried to partial out the effects of race-ethnicity from other social and structural variables, it has often been limited by an incomplete account of the full range of variables that could be confounding the relationship between race-ethnicity and placement outcomes. This study, having a rich set of both social and structural variables, allows

for a more rigorous examination of how much of the racial-ethnic disproportionate representation within the child welfare system can be accounted for by relevant risk factors. Additionally, this study looks not only at whether race matters in the child welfare process, but whether certain factors matter differently for white and black children when deciding whether to remove a child from the home.

Study Significance

Two main research questions guide this study. First, does a maltreated child's race affect the likelihood of receiving an out-of-home placement? Second, do different factors matter for black and white children within the decision making process? Based on the prior research within this arena, I hypothesize that black children will be more likely to have an out-of-home placement than their white counterparts. However, I hypothesize that some of the race gap is explained by risky familial characteristics such as low socioeconomic status, substance abuse and mental illness that may be more common among blacks than whites. I also hypothesize that these familial risk factors exert a stronger effect among blacks than among whites, as these characteristics may serve to further reinforce beliefs about the perceived inability of black families to care for their children, as well as the fact that the threshold when identifying these factors as problematic is often lower for black families than it is for whites (Albonetti 1991; Tonry 1995; Sampson and Laub 1993; Bridges and Steen 1998). Finally, given that familial characteristics will matter more in determining placement for black children, I hypothesize that characteristics specific to maltreatment, such as the type of abuse experienced, will matter more for white children than black children in deciding whether a child is removed from the home.

By controlling for social and structural characteristics that are associated with both racial-ethnic minority status and out-of-home placement, I hope to better understand the extent to which racially-disparate outcomes in the child welfare system are unwarranted. By doing so, this

study will enable CPS and other law enforcement officials to tailor their response and treatment of minority groups in handling child maltreatment cases, so that the children and families involved in these occurrences do not unduly suffer from the separation process of removing a child from the home.

CHAPTER II: DATA AND METHODS

Data

The dataset I use to conduct this study is “Childhood Victimization and Delinquency, Adult Criminality, and Violent Behavior in a Large Urban County in the Northwest United States” from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) online database. It was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice and National Institute of Justice, and produced by the State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services and the Office of Children’s Administration Research.

The target population in this dataset is maltreated children, while the frame population is those children from age birth to 11 years born in a large urban county in the Northwest United States between 1980 and 1984. The sampling frame came from administrative records; including birth records, county court house dependency records, and arrest records of local, county, state and federal law enforcement offices; as well as the U.S. Census Bureau for the socioeconomic data variables.

Potential respondents for the treatment group were selected based on whether they met the study criteria, meaning the child (unit of analysis) was born in the state, their maltreatment case stayed within the county during the study and they were made a dependent of the state within that county, their dependency record was available for data documentation, and the child was still alive, i.e. did not die as a result of maltreatment or other causes throughout the study. After these rules were applied, 877 of the initial 2,262 dependency petitions were included in the study.

In the original data collection, the principal investigators, Cathy Spatz Widom and Diane English, sent out “interviewers” to collect documentation data from county courthouses and law

enforcement offices. These data files were recorded using various documentation forms, and the courthouse dependency records for the maltreated children were coded using a modified version of the Maltreatment Classification Coding Scheme (MCS).

These data use both social and structural variables found to be risk factors of child maltreatment and placement decisions in prior research, including socioeconomic status, child behavioral problems, parental substance abuse and parental mental illness (Ards et al. 1997; Lindsey 1994; Rivaux et al. 2008). Especially unique to these data is the inclusion of the original dependency order put forth by the judge. Looking at earlier decision making within the child welfare system allows for a more direct analysis of whether race matters when deciding to place a child, as prior research on race effects in other literatures has demonstrated that race effects are more likely in earlier stages of case processing (Engen, Steen and Bridges 2002).

Measures

Dependent Variable

Child placement serves as the outcome variable in this analysis. This variable is divided into several categories: remained with parent or guardian, group home, adopted, kin care, foster care and aged out of the system. In this analysis, placement is dichotomized with an in-home placement coded as 0 and including only those children ordered to remain with their parents or guardian, while out-of-home placement is coded as 1, including all other categories, except those cases in which the subject aged out of the system. Those who aged out between the maltreatment report and the dependency hearing were not eligible for a placement decision and thus are deleted from the sample.

While the original coding of this variable allows for a three-level categorization of placement, with relative and kin care categorized into a group separate from both in-home and out-of-home placement, preliminary multinomial logistic regression analyses illustrated that kin and relative care show statistically similar results to out-of-home placement. Therefore, collapsing relative and kin care into the out-of-home placement category will allow for a more parsimonious model, and will not affect the estimation rates of placement for black and white children.

Independent Variable

The main independent variable is the racial identification of the maltreated child. Although the original coding of this variable categorizes children as Native American, African American, American Asian, American Pacific Islander, Caucasian, and Other classification, due to small sample sizes in some of these categories, the race variable is recoded into a white (coded as 0 for the reference category) and black (coded as 1) dichotomous variable, while all other racial-ethnic categories, 66 cases representing less than eight percent of the sample, are dropped from the analyses.

Relevant Placement Factors

Relevant placement factors include all those factors that should be considered by CPS and other legal officials when deciding whether or not to remove a child from the home. These include the characteristics of the maltreatment, as well as other disadvantageous familial characteristics that could be detrimental to the child's well-being, regardless of whether or not the maltreatment alone warrants removal from the home. These are important to take into account, as much prior research claims that it is both abuse characteristics and other co-occurring

issues that account for the higher representation of black children within the system (Barth 2009; Semidei et al. 2001; Courtney et al. 2004; U.S. Dept. of Health 2003; Burns et al. 2004).

Maltreatment Characteristics: The type of maltreatment constitutes a legitimate reason for removing the child from the home, as it may identify the seriousness of the situation and the likelihood of continued victimization, both of which should be main determinants of the placement decision.

The measure of maltreatment type in the present study differentiates between four major types of maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect, as well as a fifth category of multiple abuse types which encompasses those children who have experienced any combination of two or more types of the major maltreatment categories. These five categories of maltreatment will be dichotomized into a 0,1 coding, indicating which type of maltreatment each subject experienced. Physical abuse encompasses hitting or kicking the child in the torso, head, and limbs, as well as such acts as choking and burning. Emotional abuse includes, but is not limited to, exposure to marital conflict and marital violence, rejecting the need for affection, confinement and isolation, and abandonment for more than 24 hours. Sexual abuse is defined by sexual stimuli or activities, requests for sexual contact, mutual sex touching, attempts to penetrate and forced intercourse. Finally, neglect encompasses a wide range of activities which include failure to provide food, clothing, shelter and medical care, as well as providing inadequate supervision and child care.

Additionally, whether or not another child is being victimized in the home demonstrates the overall safety of the home environment, as well as the likelihood that the subject may suffer from further maltreatment. Sibling victimization is also dichotomized into a 0,1 coding, signifying whether a sibling of the subject has also suffered from abuse or neglect.

Socioeconomic Status: As poverty has been cited repeatedly as the number one consideration in removing a child from the home (Lindsey 1994; Barth 2009; Rivaux et al. 2008; Schuck 2005), and is also highly correlated with racial-ethnic minority status (National 2007), as well as the ability to remedy the maltreatment situation, it is imperative to take this variable into account. In this analysis, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments will be used as a proxy for the measurement of parental socioeconomic status. The variable AFDC reports the percent of families receiving such payments in the subject's birth census tract based on the 1980 census, and is a continuous measurement at the census tract level.

Parental Characteristics: Parental mental illness and substance abuse problems are important familial characteristics to take into account as they contribute to the possible instability of the home environment in which the maltreated child lives, and have been found in prior research to be correlated with racial minority status (Polansky et al. 1981; Barth et al. 2006; Phillips et al. 2004). Both of these parental characteristics are dichotomized into a 0, 1 coding, signifying whether or not the parent(s) displays such characteristics when the child maltreatment case comes before the dependency judge at the initial court hearing.

Child's Behavioral Problems: An estimated 19 percent of children in the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NCSAW) entered out-of-home placement even though they did not have obviously unfit parents, and this was suggested to have occurred due to the multitude of emotional and behavioral difficulties the child was dealing with, regardless of the presence of abuse (Barth et al. 2006). Additionally, children could actually be directed away from the institution of foster care and more towards mental institutions or group homes because of such characteristics. Child behavioral problems are dichotomized into a 0, 1 coding, signifying

whether or not the child displays such characteristics when the child maltreatment case comes before the dependency judge at the initial court hearing.

Demographic Controls

Child Characteristics: Both the gender and age of the child are controlled for in this analysis. Gender is an important factor to control for as females are often seen as more defenseless victims than males in our society. Gender is also highly correlated with some types of abuse, specifically sexual abuse, which females experience at a much higher rate than males (Widom and Maxfield 2001). In this case, gender will be dichotomized, with male coded as 0 for the reference category. The age of the child is just as significant. NCANDS data illustrate (Wulczyn 2009) that younger children may be at a higher risk for both the actual occurrence of maltreatment, as well as it being reported. This finding can be extrapolated to the placement of the child, in that younger children may be perceived as having a higher risk for subsequent victimization. Age is measured using a continuous variable.

Methods

The original data sample is restricted in three ways for this study's analyses. First, when looking at the selected variables for this analysis, the data completeness report shows that only one of the 877 treatment cases is missing. Therefore, this one individual will be dropped from the analysis. Second, those subjects falling into racial categories other than white and black are excluded. Finally, those subjects that aged out of the system between their maltreatment report and appearing before the judge at the initial dependency hearing are dropped from the analyses, as they are not eligible for a placement decision. These restrictions result in a total sample size of $n=789$.

First, I will examine descriptive statistics focusing on differences between black and white children on the dependent variable and important risk factors. Second, I will use logistic regression to examine the differences for placement outcomes of the maltreated children. In a series of nested models, I will analyze what relevant risk and demographic factors are associated with placement decisions and the extent to which they account for any black-white differences.

While prior research has sometimes trichotomized placement with in-home placement, relative care and out-of-home placement categories, preliminary multinomial results indicated no significant differences between foster care placement and relative care. Therefore, collapsing relative care with all other out-of-home placement categories and performing logistic regression is both an appropriate and sufficient way to analyze whether racial differences exist in the out-of-home placement decisions of maltreated children.

In the first set of analyses, a total of five nested logistic regression models will be used. The first model will regress the placement decision on the key independent variable, race, represented by a dummy variable with white as the reference category, to analyze the differences in placement based on this single predictor. The demographic controls for the child, which are gender and age, will be entered in the second model to see whether or not these basic controls account for any of the racial disparity in out-of-home placement. Following previous literature in this arena, the third model will include the variable AFDC, a proxy for the subject's socioeconomic status, in order to try and disentangle the relationship between race and poverty. Model 4 will include those relevant risk factors that are directly related to either the child or parents, above and beyond the maltreatment situation, to analyze what effects deleterious familial characteristics have on the likelihood of being ordered out of the home. Finally, the fifth

model will include all those factors directly related to the maltreatment situation, such as the maltreatment type, and whether other children are being victimized in the home.

In the second set of analyses, the full model will then be partitioned into two separate models by race. Z-tests for coefficient differences will be performed to examine if the risk factors have different effects for black and white children within the child welfare process.

CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Descriptives

In Table 1, I provide descriptive statistics for all variables in the analysis. I show the characteristics of the total sample (n = 789), and for the separate white (n = 598) and black (n = 191) samples. Also, I provide results of χ^2 and t-tests to denote characteristics where white and black youth differ. Most notably is the statistically significant difference in the dependent variable, placement. About 74 percent of black children are ordered out of the home, compared to only about 46 percent of white children. However, black and white children vary little on many relevant placement characteristics, including gender, age, parental substance abuse and parental mental illness, childhood behavioral problems and physical abuse as the maltreatment type.

Risk factors that are more common among black children include percentage of families receiving AFDC within the child's census tract (15.0% versus 7.0%), and maltreatment types of neglect and emotional abuse (39.3% versus 30.4%, and 16.8% versus 6.9%, respectively).

Relevant risk factors that are more prevalent among white children, on the other hand, include sibling victimization (17.4% versus 1.6%), and sexual and multiple abuse as the documented forms of maltreatment (10.9% versus 4.7% and 42.8% versus 29.8%, respectively).

Ordered Placement for All Maltreated Children

In the next part of the analysis, I examine whether the racial disparity in the likelihood of receiving an out-of-home placement can be explained by those risk factors that black youth are more likely to experience than their white counterparts. Table 2 examines the relationship between race and placement for the full sample of maltreated children in a series of nested

models, controlling for demographic characteristics, family risk factors and maltreatment characteristics.

In Model 1, placement is regressed only on the main independent variable, race. The odds of receiving an out-of-home placement are 3.335 times higher for black children than for white children. In Model 2, the age and gender of the maltreated child are entered into the equation to see whether basic demographic factors can account for any of the racial differences. While the effect of age is not statistically significant, the effect of gender is. The odds of being ordered out of the home are 32% lower for girls than for boys. However, controlling for age and gender do not appear to substantially reduce the higher risk of black children being removed from the home compared to white children.

In Model 3, I control for the percentage of families receiving AFDC in the subject's census tract to examine whether socioeconomic status accounts for any of the differences between black and white children in out-of-home placement. Consistent with findings in prior research, the effect of AFDC is statistically significant. For every percentage increase in the families receiving AFDC payments in the subject's census tract, the odds of out-of-home placement increase by about 3 percent. Furthermore, the inclusion of this variable substantially reduces the disparity between black and white children in the odds of being ordered out of the home, from 3.28 in Model 2 to 2.616 in Model 3, a reduction of about 20 percent. However, the effect of race is still statistically significant.

Model 4 adds familial instability characteristics that may contribute to the racial differences between blacks and whites in out-of-home placement, as they illustrate relevant risk factors separate from the child maltreatment situation that may be detrimental to the subject's well-being. All three characteristics, parental substance abuse, parental mental illness, and prior

childhood behavioral problems, are significantly related to being removed from the home. For those children who have a parent(s) with a substance abuse problem, the odds of being removed from the home are 46.5% higher than for those children whose parents do not have substance abuse issues, net of other factors.

Similarly, for those children who have a parent(s) with mental health issues, the odds of out-of-home placement are 64.5% higher than the odds for children whose parents have no such issues. Finally, prior child behavioral problems are a strong predictor of placement for the maltreated child at the initial dependency hearing. The odds of out-of-home placement for those children who exhibit behavioral problems prior to the reported maltreatment, net of other factors, are 4.618 times greater than those of children who display no such behavioral problems.

In Model 4, the inclusion of this additional block of variables reduces the effect of female to insignificance. Entering the variables in this block individually shows that it is the addition of prior childhood behavioral problems that has this effect, as males are more likely to exhibit such behaviors in comparison to females. Including these three variables also slightly increases the racial disparity in out-of-home placement. Whereas in Model 3, the odds of being ordered out of the home were 2.616 higher for black children compared to white children, net of other factors, this likelihood increases to 2.822 in Model 4. Again, this is due to the inclusion of prior childhood behavioral problems to the model. Adding the block of variables individually illustrates that parental mental illness and parental substance abuse affect the coefficient for black by less than 1 percent from Model 3, whereas prior childhood behavioral problems leads to an increase of approximately 8 percent in the race coefficient in Model 4. This difference can also be seen in examining the bivariate results, which indicate that while 15.2% of white children are documented as having prior childhood behavioral problems at the initial dependency hearing,

only 11% of black youth are. Put simply, despite having fewer documented behavioral problems, black children are still more likely to be removed from the home than whites, net of other factors.

The final model (Model 5) includes all those relevant factors that are presumed to affect the likelihood of being removed from the home specific to the maltreatment situation itself. These factors include whether or not a sibling of the subject has also been victimized and the maltreatment type which the subject experiences.

Model 5 illustrates that the type of maltreatment the child experiences is a significant predictor of out-of-home placement, with children experiencing physical abuse, sexual abuse, and multiple abuse types having significantly different odds of being removed from the home when compared to neglect. Interestingly, these three types of maltreatment actually decrease the odds of out-of-home placement in comparison to neglect, net of other factors. There is no difference in the likelihood of being removed from the home for those children experiencing emotional abuse rather than neglect. Similarly, for those maltreated children who have a sibling that has also been victimized in some form, the odds of out-of-home placement are about 45% lower than the odds for those children who do not have a sibling that has suffered from victimization, net of all factors in the model.

The significant reduction in the odds of being removed from the home for those children who experience physical, sexual and multiple abuse types, illustrates that the child welfare system may not aim to remove children from an abusive home, but rather to remove children from homes in which there is a general inability to care. This may be due to the perception that abuse is an infrequent, rectifiable form of maltreatment, whereas neglect implies continuous and accumulating negative circumstances that cannot be remedied through the provision of in-home

services. This would also explain why there are no significant differences in the odds of out-of-home placement between those children who experience neglect and those who are emotionally abused. While emotional abuse encompasses a wide range of behaviors, bivariate analyses indicate that the most common form of emotional abuse experienced by children removed from the home is being abandoned for 24 hours or more. Therefore, emotional abuse, at least according to the Maltreatment Coding Scheme used for the present data collection, is actually a very specific form of what is traditionally thought of as neglect, and thus also represents a more enduring form of maltreatment in comparison to sexual, physical and multiple abuse types. This possible explanation is consistent with national data. For instance, in fiscal year 2007, of the 1,760 children who died due to child abuse or neglect, 34.1 percent of child fatalities were attributed to neglect only, this percentage not including those children who suffered from multiple forms of maltreatment which also included neglect, and thus may far underestimate the true severity of maltreatment in regards to neglect (U.S. Dept. 2009). Moreover, of the approximately 265,000 children who were removed from their homes during the same fiscal year, 69.2 percent were victims of neglect, whereas 8.6 percent suffered from physical abuse, 14.2 percent from multiple forms of maltreatment, and only 3.2 percent from sexual abuse (U.S. Dept. 2009).

A second possible explanation for the seemingly counter-intuitive finding that sexual, physical and multiple maltreatment types reduce the odds of out-of-home placement in comparison to neglect is that perpetrators of neglect are more likely to be the parents of child neglect victims. Therefore, out-of-home placement is the most reasonable solution for children who are neglected, as their offenders are their parents and usually reside in the same household. For other types of maltreatment, though, parents may not be the perpetrators, and thus the child

can be removed from the dangers of such abuse without being removed from the home. This second explanation is also supported by 2007 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data where the percentage of perpetrators of sexual abuse was highest among friends or neighbors at 57.7 percent and child daycare providers at 23.9 percent, compared to only 2.4 percent of such perpetrators being parents. For physical abuse, child daycare providers constituted 14.1 percent of perpetrators, and friends and neighbors constituted another 14.4 percent, compared to only 9.7 percent whom were parents. For neglect cases, on the other hand, 66.1 percent of perpetrators were the parents of the victim (U.S. Dept. 2009).

However, the finding that having a sibling who has also been victimized in some form reduces the odds of out-of-home placement, net of all factors in the model, is still unclear. While sibling victimization is significantly negatively correlated with being black and significantly positively correlated with being female, as can be seen in the correlation matrix in the appendix and which may account for some of the association, further research is still needed to understand the processes that may be at play in understanding this relationship.

The inclusion of these five variables in Model 5, related specifically to the maltreatment situation, reduce the racial disparity in out-of-home placement from black children having 2.822 higher odds of being removed from the home compared to white children in Model 4, to black children having increased odds of 2.404 in Model 5, net of other factors. Additionally, the variables added to the regression in Model 5 reduce the effects of both parental substance abuse and parental mental illness to insignificance, indicating a possible mediation effect. For instance, parents experiencing substance abuse and mental health issues may unintentionally emotionally abuse or neglect their children as a result of such illnesses, and these two types of maltreatment are the forms most likely to result in out-of-home placements among maltreated youth.

Importantly, while the effect of race remains statistically significant in all models, about 28% of the racial disparity is explained with the inclusion of the additional variables from the first to the final model in the series of regressions.

Ordered Placement by Race

In the analyses that follow, the full sample is partitioned by race to see what, if any, factors matter differently for white and black maltreated children in predicting the likelihood of out-of-home placement. Relevant risk and other factors are entered into the regression in the same order for the partitioned models as was the case for the full sample, and differences in coefficients between the two models are compared using z-tests. Although all nested regressions were performed, only the final models are provided here, which can be found in Table 3.

It is also important to note that due to the small size of the black sample, there is a reduction in statistical power in the partitioned models, rendering it more difficult to find significant effects within the black model, as well as significant differences between the black and white models.

For the model including only black children, the percent of the population receiving AFDC payments within the subject's census tract and emotional abuse, in comparison to neglect, are the only variables which aid in the prediction of whether or not the maltreated child will be removed from the home. For the model including only white children, on the other hand, parental mental illness, prior child behavioral problems, sibling victimization, and sexual abuse are the significant factors in the regression of out-of-home placement on relevant risk and other factors. However, z-tests indicate that the only differences across race are for parental mental illness and emotional abuse as the maltreatment type.

For white children, parental mental illness increases the odds of being removed from the home by about 81 percent, while for black children there is no significant effect. Emotional abuse, on the other hand, increases the odds of out-of-home placement by a factor of 6.213 for black children, while there is no significant effect of emotional abuse among white children. While examining these effects separately may not provide much understanding in regards to the racial differences within the child welfare system, two propositions can be made upon examining such differential effects simultaneously, based on prior research within both the juvenile justice and child maltreatment literatures.

Bivariate results in Table 1 indicate that there is no significant difference in the number of parents suffering from mental illness among white and black children. Additionally, parental mental illness and emotional abuse are positively correlated to a statistically significant degree, which can be found in the correlation matrix provided in the appendix. Yet parental mental illness is a significant predictor of out-of-home placement only for whites, while emotional abuse is significant only for blacks.

One possible explanation for these differing processes can be understood through the work of Bridges and Steen (1998), where they find that while the offenses of minority youth are often seen as individual failings in the form of negative attitudinal and personality traits, these same offenses are often portrayed as being a result of negative environmental factors for white adolescents. Extrapolating these findings to the arena of child maltreatment and adult offenders, then, allows for the hypothesis that among parents who maltreat their children, black parents will be seen as personally responsible for the abuse and neglect their children suffer, while factors beyond the individuals' control will be used to remove accountability from white parents. Thus, white parents victimize children as a result of mental illnesses, medical conditions beyond their

control which cause them to be neglectful, aggressive, impulsive, and so on. Black parents, on the other hand, despite having a diagnosed mental illness still choose to maltreat their children, according to this perspective. Whether this is because they have chosen not to seek treatment for their illness, or because it is believed the maltreatment would occur regardless of the presence of illness, black parents are seen as solely responsible for maltreating their children.

A second possible explanation, related to the first, is the effect of socioeconomic status in the acceptance of a mentally ill label. Bivariate analyses indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in approximate socioeconomic status between white and black maltreated children. Moreover, the partitioned models illustrate that while the percent of families receiving AFDC payments within the subject's census tract is a significant predictor in being removed from the home for black children, there is no significant effect for white children. As illustrated by Brown (2008) black children may be at an increased risk for out-of-home placement due to living in impoverished neighborhoods where access to the kinds of support and services needed to both prevent and rectify child maltreatment, according to child welfare practitioners, is limited. One of these suggested services is mental health and family counseling. Thus, even for black parents who are diagnosed as having a mental illness, having limited access to treatment and support services implies a lower likelihood of treatment seeking behaviors, and thus mental illness among blacks may be seen as less serious among both mental health and child welfare officials.

Also notable is the fact that when the full model is partitioned by race, the predictive efficacy for out-of-home placement in the black model is 14 percent, but only 9 percent in the white model. This finding illustrates that regardless of any underlying racial bias which may

exist within the child welfare system, it appears that different placement processes exist for black and white children when deciding whether to remove a maltreated child from the home.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to answer two questions: First, does a maltreated child's race affect their likelihood of receiving an out-of-home placement? Second, do different factors matter for black and white children within the decision making process?

In reference to the first question, two competing explanations have been posited in previous literature for the greater likelihood of black children being removed from the home following a substantiated case of maltreatment. The first is that black children experience more serious forms of maltreatment and have fewer resources to remedy the maltreatment situation through informal means than do white children. The second is that there is an underlying bias within the child welfare system, where discriminatory beliefs about the perceived threat and dangerousness of certain groups and their abilities to care for their children may contribute to black children being disproportionately removed from their homes. While this study finds evidence supportive of the first explanation, the results are also consistent with the possibility of an underlying racial bias within the system. The inclusion of a variety of maltreatment, demographic, familial and other risk factors accounted for approximately 28% of the racial disparity in out-of-home placements. But, there remains a large amount of such disparity left to be explained. While there always exists the possibility that some variables with predictive power are not available in the data and are thus left unexamined, that black children continue to experience odds 2.404 times of white children in the full regression examined here lends support to the possibility of an underlying racial bias within the child welfare system.

In reference to the second question, the findings in the present study illustrate that while few factors seem to matter differently for black and white children to a statistically significant degree, there are two differences that stand out. These are the differential effects of parental

mental illness and emotional abuse, in comparison to neglect, by race, where parental mental illness is a significant predictor for white children being removed from the home but not black children, while emotional abuse matters for blacks but not whites. These findings seem to support the conclusions made in previous research that black families may be held to different standards by those within the child welfare system, particularly by being held more personally accountable for child maltreatment, as well as by having a different threshold for placement provisions. However, some caution may be necessary in the interpretation of these findings. This study was unable to account for factors such as parental awareness of the maltreatment of their children or their amenability toward resolving the situation in interviews with social workers, which may be key in determining aspects of parent's mental and emotional state.

Perhaps more important are those significant factors within the partitioned models than those significantly different across the models by race. For black children, the only predictive factors for the variation in out-of-home placement are the percentage of the population within the subject's census tract receiving AFDC payments and emotional abuse as the maltreatment type. However, for white children, parental mental illness, prior childhood behavioral problems, sibling victimization and sexual abuse matter to a statistically significant degree in deciding whether out-of-home placement is warranted. Furthermore, while the predictive efficacy for the model including only black children was 14 percent, this same model had a predictive efficacy of only 9 percent for white children.

It appears that for at least black children, then, the child welfare system operates less on the premise of removing a child from a home on the basis of maltreatment, or more specifically in reference to specific forms of abuse, than it does on the basis of what it sees as long-term neglect or an inability to care for the child. This is further supported by the fact that contrary to

intuition, emotional abuse is actually a very specific form of neglect, where among those children who are removed from the home, those classified as being emotionally abused are defined as having been “abandoned for 24 hours or more.” Thus, even though abuse type may seem significant among black children, in actuality it represents another factor in the ability to care. Among white children, on the other hand, deleterious parental characteristics and abuse seem to play a bigger role in deciding whether or not a maltreated child will be removed from the home. This is counter to the present study’s hypothesis that familial risk factors would exert a stronger effect among blacks than whites. A possible explanation for these contradicting findings is that black families are often assumed to possess these deleterious characteristics, and thus, when such characteristics are actually confirmed in a maltreatment case, they add little weight to the placement decision. However, these same characteristics, if viewed as less common among whites, would illustrate an even more problematic living situation, and would make out-of-home placement appear as a more viable solution to the maltreatment at hand. Even these characteristics, though, seem to predict only a small portion of the variability in out-of-home placements among white children, leaving it somewhat unclear what factors are important in such a prediction for whites, or leading to the possible explanation that the decision to remove white children from the home is made on a much more individual-level basis than is the case for black families.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations in the present study. One limitation is that the sample is regional in nature, being limited to a large urban county in the Northwest United States. Although the sample is moderate in size, being comprised of 877 treatment cases, it is hard to generalize these findings beyond the Northwest United States to a national level without

compromising their validity, reliability and statistical significance. Additionally, although various ages, genders and socioeconomic statuses are taken into account, the county in which the study is performed is never stated. This makes it impossible to determine whether the protective service agency and court system within this particular county is the same as other counties throughout the United States in determining maltreatment cases, and thus adds further difficulty in generalizing the results on a national level.

Another possible issue, as with any official agency data sources, is the accuracy of the files. Many courthouse officials and social workers who document these child maltreatment cases are often overworked and may accidentally or intentionally misreport the incidents of the child maltreatment cases they are responsible for. Also problematic is the fact that only those cases which became dependents of the court are included in this study. Therefore, it is impossible to know if any racial disparity in out-of-home placements can be accounted for, either completely or partially, by a similarly large racial disparity in reporting, where the cases were either substantiated or dismissed by the case workers. Similarly, since only those child maltreatment cases that are reported to social services or police departments are included in the dataset, this study does not account for those incidents that may be experienced by children but which there are no records for. This would also bias the data in that only those cases which are severe enough to warrant attention would be reported. However, by taking only those more serious cases into account, we can be more confident that maltreatment had in fact taken place, and any changes in definitions of child maltreatment over time would still include these selected cases.

Lastly, a more precise measurement of the subjects' socioeconomic status than what is available in these data would be useful in further teasing out the effect of poverty from race.

However, census tract measurements similar to the one used here have been widely used in other studies analyzing child maltreatment (DeGue and Widom 2009; Jenkins and Diamond 1985; Makarios 2007; Maxfield et al. 2000; Schuck 2005; Widom 1996).

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Black children are at an increased risk of out-of-home placement compared to white children. This has been largely demonstrated in previous literatures and is supported by the present study. What appears to be the explanation behind this phenomenon, at least as shown here, is that child protective services may not be deciding to remove a child from the home based on a level of maltreatment severity and dangerousness, which is what is oftentimes largely assumed by the public, but rather makes such a decision based on instances of neglect and the ability for parents to care for their children's basic and essential needs. A possible explanation for this is that abuse, even in its more severe forms, may be seen as a short-term problem, secondary and reactionary to other deleterious factors within the home. In such a case, child protective agencies may seek out certain forms of in-home services for the family, such as anger management and family counseling, mental illness and drug abuse services, or home visits with a social worker. Neglect, on the other hand, may be seen as a more long-term situation, where due to either a lack of financial or supervision resources the maltreatment situation cannot be resolved through similar or less-costly avenues which the state is able to provide. Additionally, in the case of neglect, parents are more likely to be the perpetrators of the maltreatment, implying that they are also more likely to reside in the same household as the child victim, and thus, out-of-home placement is the most reasonable solution for these cases. Nevertheless, that so much of the racial disparity remains unexplained by relevant risk factors is troubling.

Furthermore, there does seem to be two separate processes at play for black and white children in deciding whether they should be removed from a home in which maltreatment is present. In light of these findings, child protective agencies should consider initiating programs for social workers to be culturally aware and sensitive to the specific issues that minority

families, specifically black families, face, such as single-parenthood and lower socioeconomic status. It may also be in the best interest of these children for CPS to lobby local, state and federal governments in gaining further funding in order to provide not only for such things as mental counseling and drug abuse services, but also for job placement and child care services. Black families would then not be separated simply because parents do not have the financial resources to provide for their children according to the specific standards set by CPS or other government officials. As much prior literature on out-of-home placement and childhood outcomes has shown, removing a child from the home can have long-term effects in many areas of their lives, such as their abilities to form attachments with others, their educational attainment and long-term economic well-being (Bailey et al. 2007; Currie and Widom 2010; Hall 2000; Zielinski 2009). Out-of-home placement may also increase such children's propensities toward later juvenile delinquency and adult criminality (DeGue and Widom 2009; McMahon and Clay-Warner 2002; Pecora et al. 2006; Ryan and Testa 2005; Ryan et al. 2008). Thus, whenever possible and in the best interest of the child, the goal for CPS should be to seek whatever avenues necessary to keep a child with their family.

Future research analyzing the racial disparity in out-of-home placements should examine to what extent these results can be generalized to the entire population of maltreated children. Additionally, more qualitative and survey-oriented research may be helpful in understanding exactly what processes are at play to make such factors as parental mental illness and parental substance abuse operate differently among black and white maltreated youth. While 28% of the racial disparity in out-of-home placements was explained in the present study, a significant proportion of variation remains.

This study was not able to account for the possible existence of reporting differentials at the very frontend of the system when the maltreatment case first comes to the attention of child welfare officials, which may result in a possible selection effect when analyzing just those cases which make it to the official processing stage. Similarly, reporting differentials may exist among caseworkers themselves in the amount of documentation they provide on the maltreatment situation for each of their cases. Finally, a number of key variables which may further explain the racial-disparity in out-of-home placement, but which were not available in the present data, are family structure, a better measure of maltreatment severity beyond the separation of maltreatment types, and a more precise individual-level measure of socioeconomic status. Thus, it is imperative for researchers in the child welfare arena to identify what additional factors contribute to the placement decision among maltreated children, and if such characteristics can lead to a better understanding of the seemingly differential processes for blacks and whites within the child welfare system.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for White and Black Maltreated Children

Measure	Total Mean	White Mean	Black Mean	X ² and Ttest for Differences
Out-of-home placement	52.6%	45.8%	73.8%	45.5290***
Female	52.9%	54.5%	47.6%	2.7427
Age	7.00	6.98	7.07	0.4074
% AFDC in census tract	8.92	6.99	14.98	13.5239***
Parental substance abuse	24.8%	24.1%	27.2%	0.7668
Parental mental illness	16.9%	16.4%	18.3%	0.3874
Prior childhood behavioral problems	14.2%	15.2%	11.0%	2.1192
Sibling victimization	13.6%	17.4%	1.6%	30.9094***
Neglect	32.6%	30.4%	39.3%	5.1417*
Emotional abuse	9.3%	6.9%	16.8%	16.8907***
Physical abuse	9.1%	9.0%	9.4%	0.0271
Sexual abuse	9.4%	10.9%	4.7%	6.4578*
Multiple abuse types	39.7%	42.8%	29.8%	10.1695***
<i>N</i>	789	598	191	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2: Ordered Placement for All Maltreated Children

Regressor	Model 1	Odds	Model 2	Odds	Model 3	Odds	Model 4	Odds	Model 5	Odds
Intercept	-0.168*		-0.055		-0.220		-0.526*		-0.132	
	(0.082)		(0.216)		(0.225)		(0.240)		(0.278)	
Black	1.204***	3.335	1.187***	3.279	0.962***	2.616	1.037***	2.822	0.877***	2.404
	(0.184)		(0.185)		(0.201)		(0.205)		(0.212)	
Female			-0.386**	0.680	-0.416**	0.659	-0.179	0.836	-0.089	0.915
			(0.148)		(0.149)		(0.158)		(0.163)	
Age			-0.014	1.014	-0.010	1.010	-0.027	0.974	-0.022	0.978
			(0.027)		(0.027)		(0.029)		(0.029)	
% AFDC in census tract					0.030*	1.031	0.035**	1.035	0.032**	1.033
					(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.012)	
Parental substance abuse							0.382*	1.465	0.315	1.370
							(0.178)		(0.181)	
Parental mental illness							0.497*	1.645	0.310	1.363
							(0.209)		(0.214)	
Prior childhood behavioral problems							1.530***	4.618	1.416***	4.120
							(0.258)		(0.261)	
Sibling victimization									-0.591*	0.554
									(0.242)	
Emotional abuse									0.259	1.295
									(0.305)	
Physical abuse									-0.628*	0.534
									(0.291)	
Sexual abuse									-0.860**	0.423
									(0.309)	
Multiple abuse types									-0.392*	0.675
									(0.278)	
χ^2	47.22***		54.18***		62.07***		110.74***		132.60***	
Pseudo R²	0.0433		0.0496		0.0569		0.1014		0.1215	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

N = 789

Table 3: Ordered Placement by Race, Partitioned Models

Regressor	White Model		Black Model		Z-tests for Coefficient Differences (where $z = b_{kblack} - b_{kwhite}$)
		Odds		Odds	
Intercept	-0.233 (0.317)		0.992 (0.623)		
Female	-0.013 (0.184)	0.987	-0.463 (0.384)	0.629	1.06
Age	-0.009 (0.033)	0.991	-0.073 (0.068)	0.929	0.85
% AFDC in census tract	0.025 (0.013)	1.026	0.054* (0.025)	1.055	1.03
Parental substance abuse	0.291 (0.205)	1.338	0.492 (0.416)	1.636	0.43
Parental mental illness	0.595* (0.240)	1.813	-0.913 (0.481)	0.401	2.81**
Child behavioral problems	1.417*** (0.276)	4.125	1.434 (0.821)	4.195	0.02
Sibling victimization	-0.546* (0.246)	0.579	-0.969 (1.273)	0.380	0.33
Emotional abuse	-0.236 (0.366)	0.790	1.827* (0.811)	6.213	2.32*
Physical abuse	-0.523 (0.335)	0.592	-0.841 (0.605)	0.431	0.46
Sexual abuse	-0.924** (0.340)	0.397	-0.457 (0.801)	0.633	0.54
Multiple abuse types	-0.403 (0.208)	0.668	-0.269 (0.431)	0.764	0.28
χ^2	71.35***		30.54***		
Pseudo R²	0.0865		0.1391		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

$N_w = 598$ $N_b = 191$ **Total N = 789**

Correlation Matrix

	Black	Female	Age	AFDC	Parental Substance Abuse	Parental Mental Illness	Childhood Behavioral Problems	Sibling Victimization	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Multiple Abuse	Neglect
Black	1.000												
Female	-0.059	1.000											
Age	0.015	0.0433	1.000										
AFDC	0.434***	0.0263	0.068	1.000									
Parental Substance Abuse	0.031	0.008	0.014	0.001	1.000								
Parental Mental Illness	0.022	-0.104**	-0.045	0.021	0.047	1.000							
Childhood Behavioral Problems	-0.052	-0.212***	0.187***	-0.045	-0.066	-0.028	1.000						
Sibling Victimization	-0.198***	0.100**	0.027	-0.051	-0.099**	-0.089*	-0.066	1.000					
Emotional Abuse	0.146***	-0.093*	-0.026	-0.056	-0.042	0.148***	-0.067	-0.063	1.000				
Physical Abuse	0.006	-0.062	-0.066	-0.082*	-0.029	-0.060	-0.015	-0.126***	-0.101**	1.000			
Sexual Abuse	-0.091*	0.138***	0.061	-0.072*	-0.105**	-0.110**	-0.069	0.165***	-0.103**	-0.102**	1.000		
Multiple Abuse	-0.114**	0.091*	-0.021	-0.052	0.091*	-0.047	-0.085*	0.034	-0.259***	-0.257***	-0.261***	1.000	
Neglect	-0.057	-0.001	-0.071*	-0.029	0.112**	0.020	-0.070*	-0.015	-0.214***	-0.212***	-0.216***	0.337***	1.000

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

$N = 789$

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August 27, 2010

TO: Angela Kaufman
Sociology

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Application

TITLE: *Keeping the White Family Together: Racial Disparities in the Out-of-Home Placements of Maltreated Children*

This is to inform you that the information you provided to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) for your project identified above has been placed on file. Thank you for taking the time to provide us with this information. Upon review, it was determined that this project does not require HSRB approval as it is not classifiable as research involving human subjects as defined by the federal regulations.

We encourage you to continue to confirm with the Board whether future projects of this nature require review. You can contact either me or the Chair of the HSRB to discuss proposed projects.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your study proceeds.

Comments: This determination is based on the researcher not being able to ascertain the identities of the individuals from which the data were collected.

C: Stephen Demuth