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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Outcomes After Child Welfare Services? What Can They Tell us About CWS Reform or Abolition

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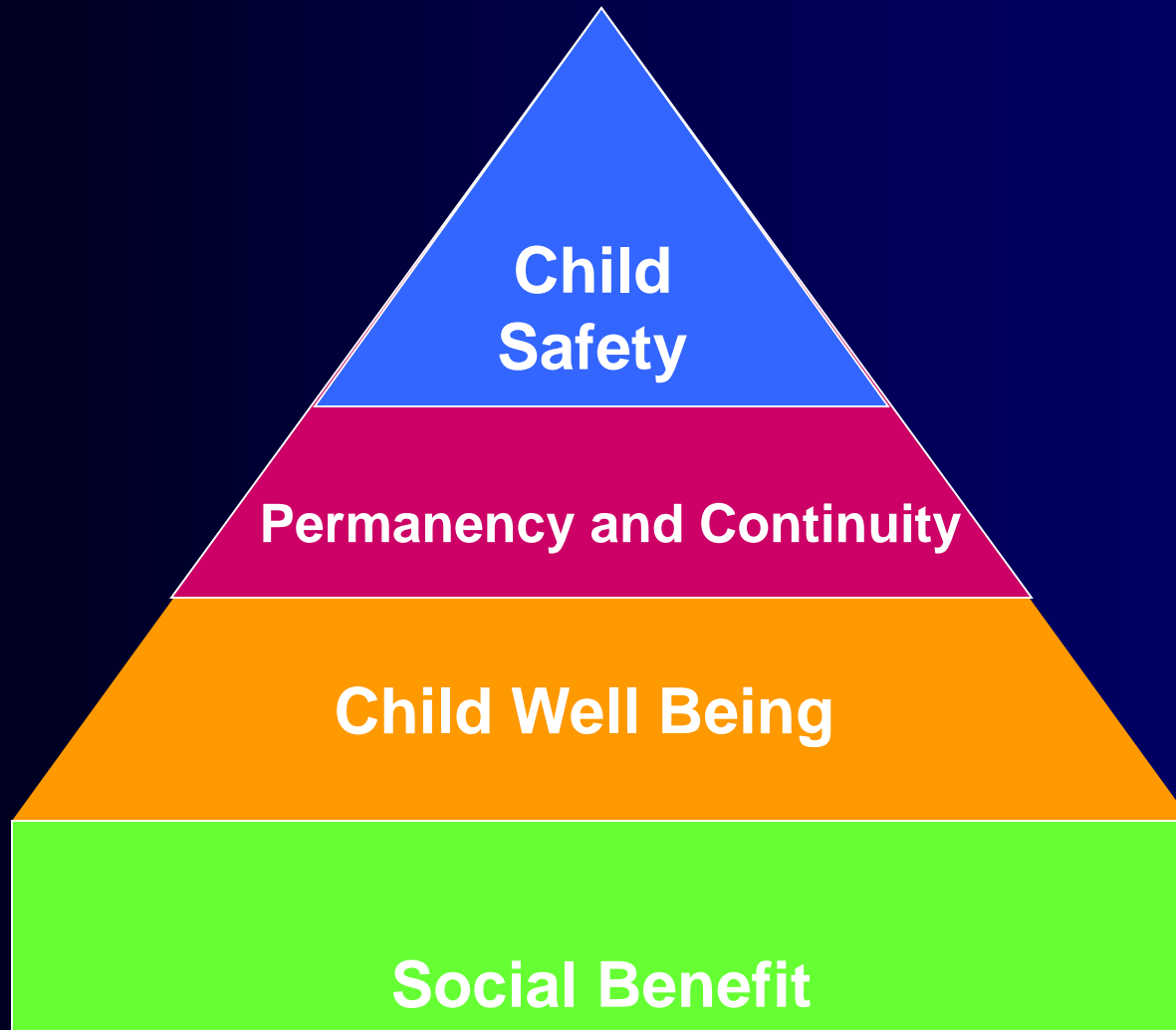
Goals for Today

Goals for today:

- To clarify outcomes of CWS for children
- To dispel the misstatements of the “upend child welfare” and “CWS abolition” movements
- To encourage the evolution of new and better ways of helping.



Purposes of Child Welfare Services



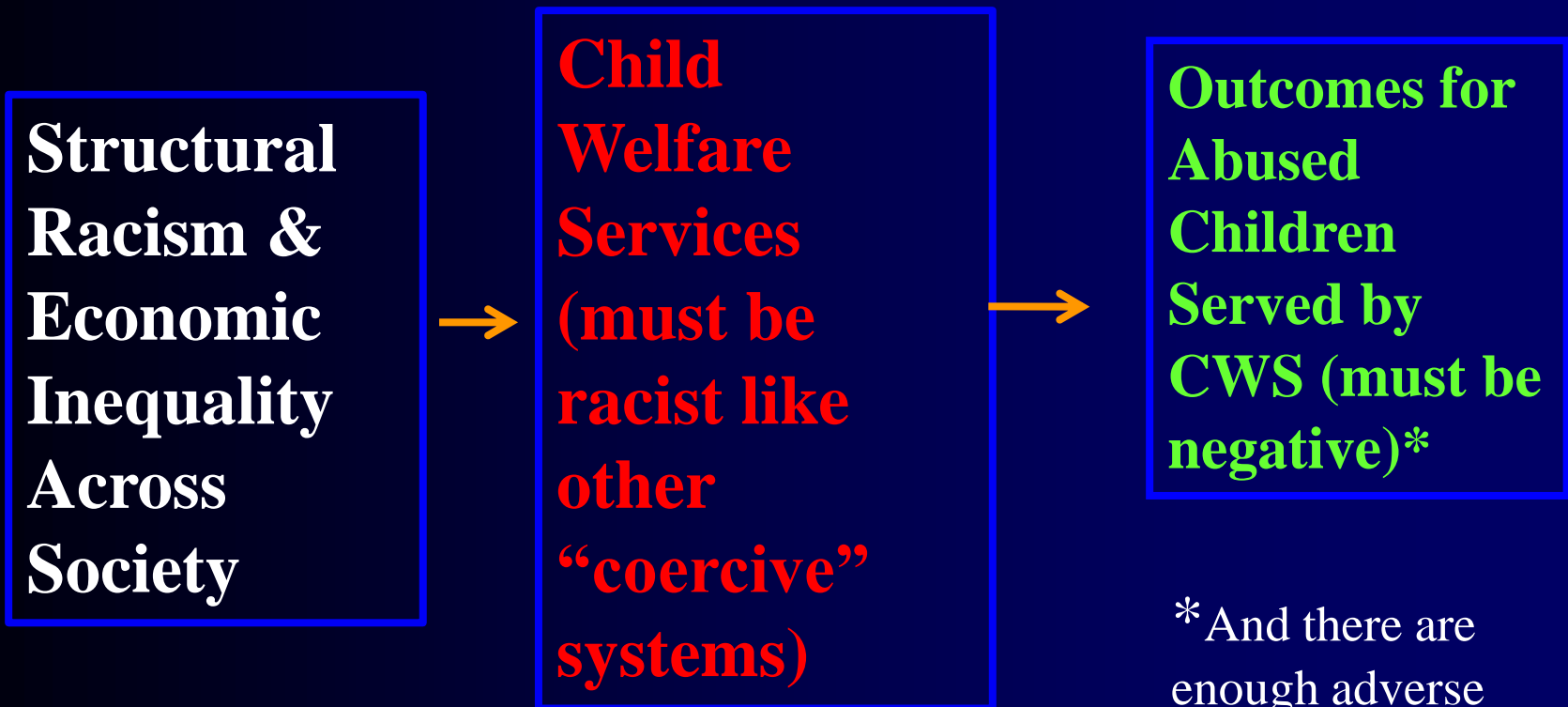
The CW Abolition Back Story

- The visibly egregious conduct of police involved in the murder of Black Americans has raised the issue of “Abolition” for all systems that use coercive means.
- Alan Dettlaff, who has long advocated that the CWS is racist, calls for abolition of CWS via an initiative called upEND.
- Dettlaff is invited to write a commentary for the *Journal of Public Child Welfare* (JPCW).
- I raised the concern with the Editor-in-Chief that such a commentary should not be without a balancing piece.
- She agreed and invited a response.

Back Story: Long History of Concern about Racism in CWS

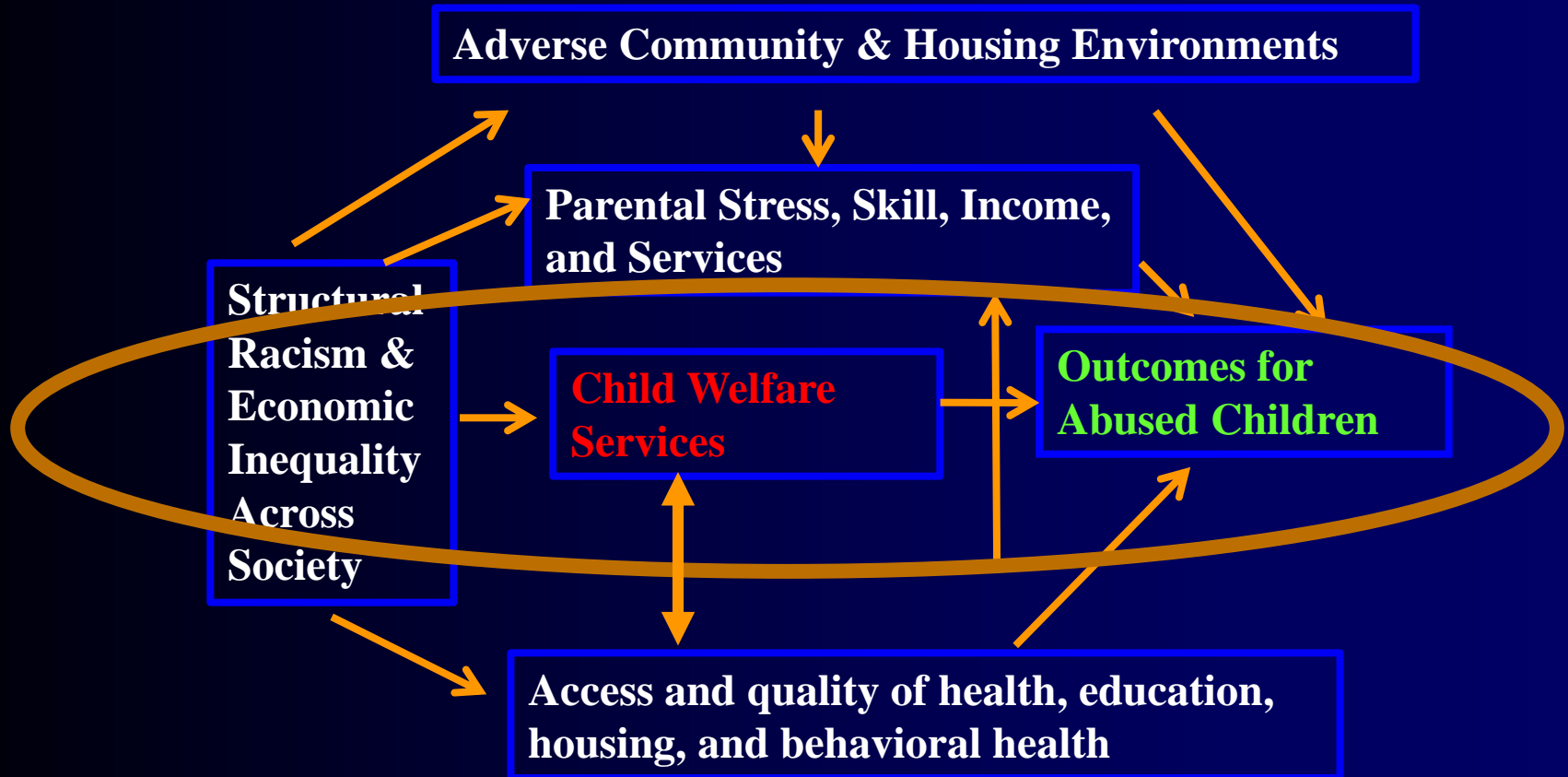
- Children of the Storm (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972)
- [Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978]
- National Association of Black Social Workers statement against inter-racial adoption (1969)
- State policies limiting transracial placements
- MEPA and IEPA passed to limit the use of race in foster care/adoption decision making
- NIS 3 confusion... only partly cleared up with NIS 4
- People's Institute, Annie E Casey, CSSP Efforts, Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare
- Dorothy Roberts, *Color of Child Welfare*, impact
- Racial Bias in administrative data discussion

Paths to CWS Outcomes: Abolitionist Assumptions

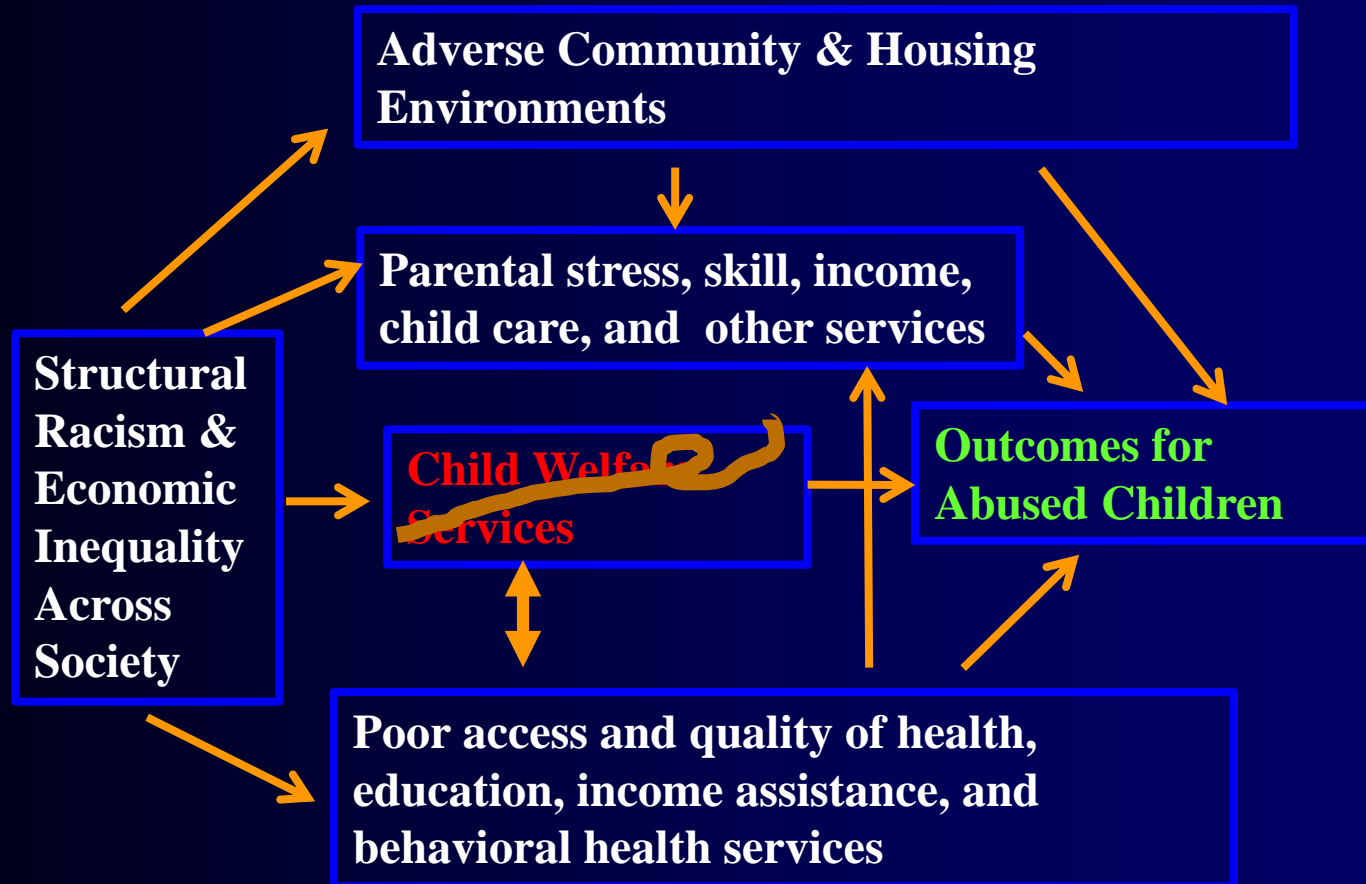


*And there are enough adverse outcomes to feed this narrative

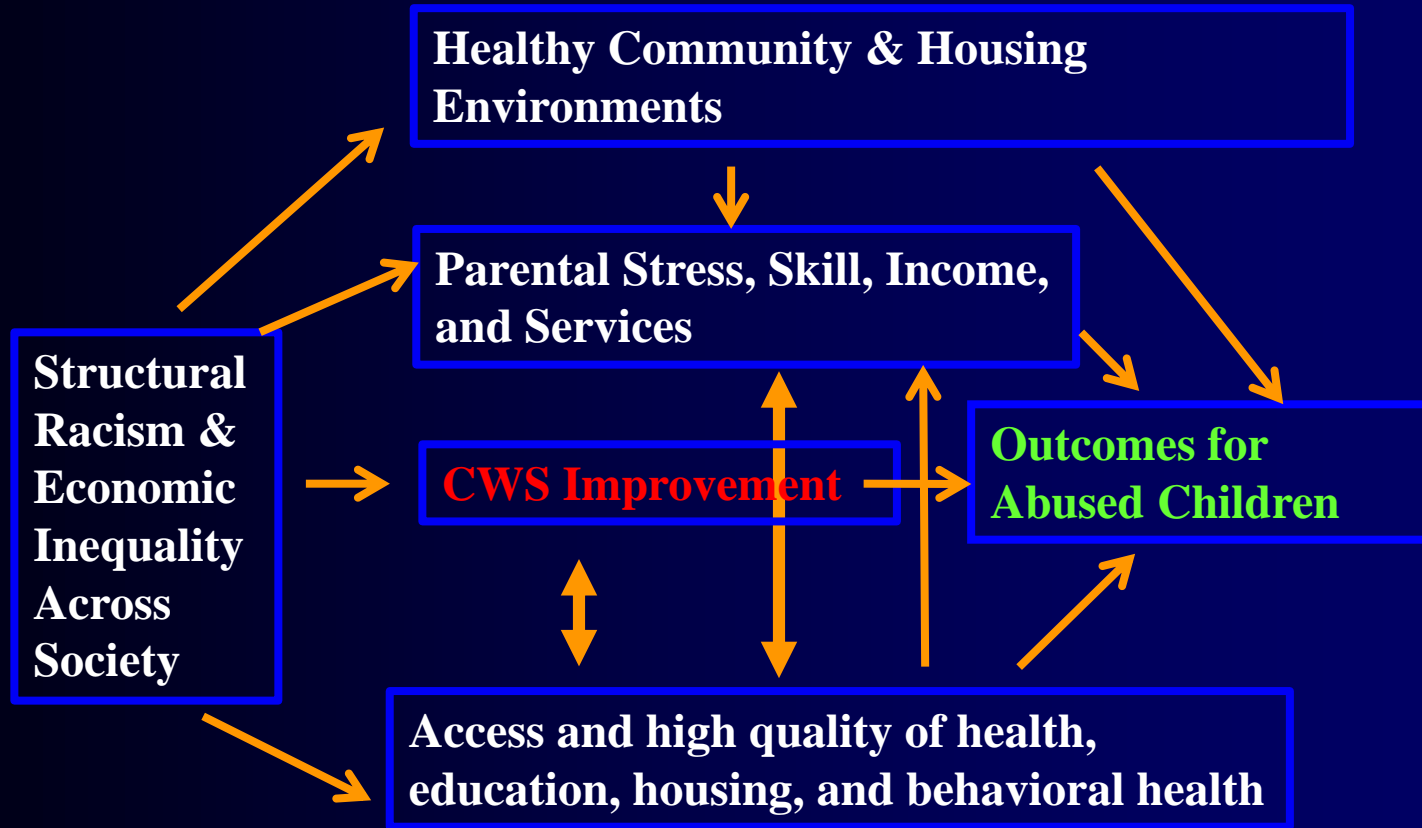
Paths to CWS Outcomes



Paths to Poor (and Positive) Outcomes



Paths to Positive Outcomes



Dettlaff Clarifications

- He does not want to end CWS any time, soon
- “Abolition” is really a code word for seeking a society in which CPS/CWS is no longer needed
- More effective income assistance programs may be a path forward
 - Giving birth families the funds that now go to foster families might be a starting point, says Dettlaff

Risky Assumptions About CWS Reform

- Individual foster care alumni speak for the general population
 - “Counterfactuals” (what would have happened if a different path was followed) are easy to identify
- Older youth understand what is best for younger children
- Parents understand what is best for children
- Only parents are oppressed by structural racism

Read with Discernment



Angela Quijada Banks
Author of *“The Black
Foster Youth Handbook”*

Editor’s title of blog story about her “She Wrote the Book on Surviving Foster Care as a Black Kid”

Abolitionist Tweet “There wouldn’t have to be books on surviving foster care if it was good for Black children”

Quote from Banks, The only reason I even got placed into foster care [at age 16] and out of the toxic situation I was in, where there was abuse and neglect, was through a teacher and a school counselor.

Barth (And Colleagues) Clarifications

- We agree that racism in American society impacts the quality of life for Black people and dehumanizes all of us. Because of historical systems of oppression and systemic racism, Black children (and Native American children) in the U.S. are among the most vulnerable.
- More effective programs to address housing, financial, and behavioral health challenges are urgently needed—and to the degree that they address poverty and access to quality services will especially benefit Black children.

Abolition Of CW Services?

- **WHAT WE DID AND DID NOT DO**
 - We did not address the usual questions of (1) the reasons for disproportionality in foster Care or (2) whether CPS delivers equitable decision making regarding substantiation and placement—we believe that those have been well addressed in prior research.
 - We did not cherry pick a few studies—we took everything we could find.
 - We did not exhaust every possibility in our review.

WHAT WE FOUND I

- There is not any significant evidence to support the claim that the outcomes of CPS and CWS are worse for African American children than other children or that current CPS and CWS systems make things worse, in general for children.

What We Found II

- There are some areas where CPS/CWS appears to be especially protective of African American children—educational outcomes, less juvenile justice involvement, fatalities, and reducing early pregnancy are all areas where there is some evidence of particular protective benefits.
 - This needs confirmation so we do not make any broad claims about this.
- We simply say that the claims that outcomes following CWS involvement are worse than for comparison children and that outcomes for Black children are worse than for other children currently have no support in the research evidence.

What We Found III

- We added consumer satisfaction data to address the claims that families and children are generally dissatisfied with the services they receive—they are not. The large preponderance of respondents are positive.
- More than 60% of foster care alumni indicate that they felt fortunate to have had CWS involved in their lives
- Black children and parents are no less positive than other children and parents.

Limitations

- There are not many very rigorous studies of what happens to children who receive no or less child welfare services.
- We always have to worry about biases in data although the survey data was collected from parents and children and the administrative data does not include data from the systems most known to be biased (i.e., corrections).
- The paper only claims not to find evidence in support of the abolitionists argument—not that such an argument is impossible or definitively untrue.

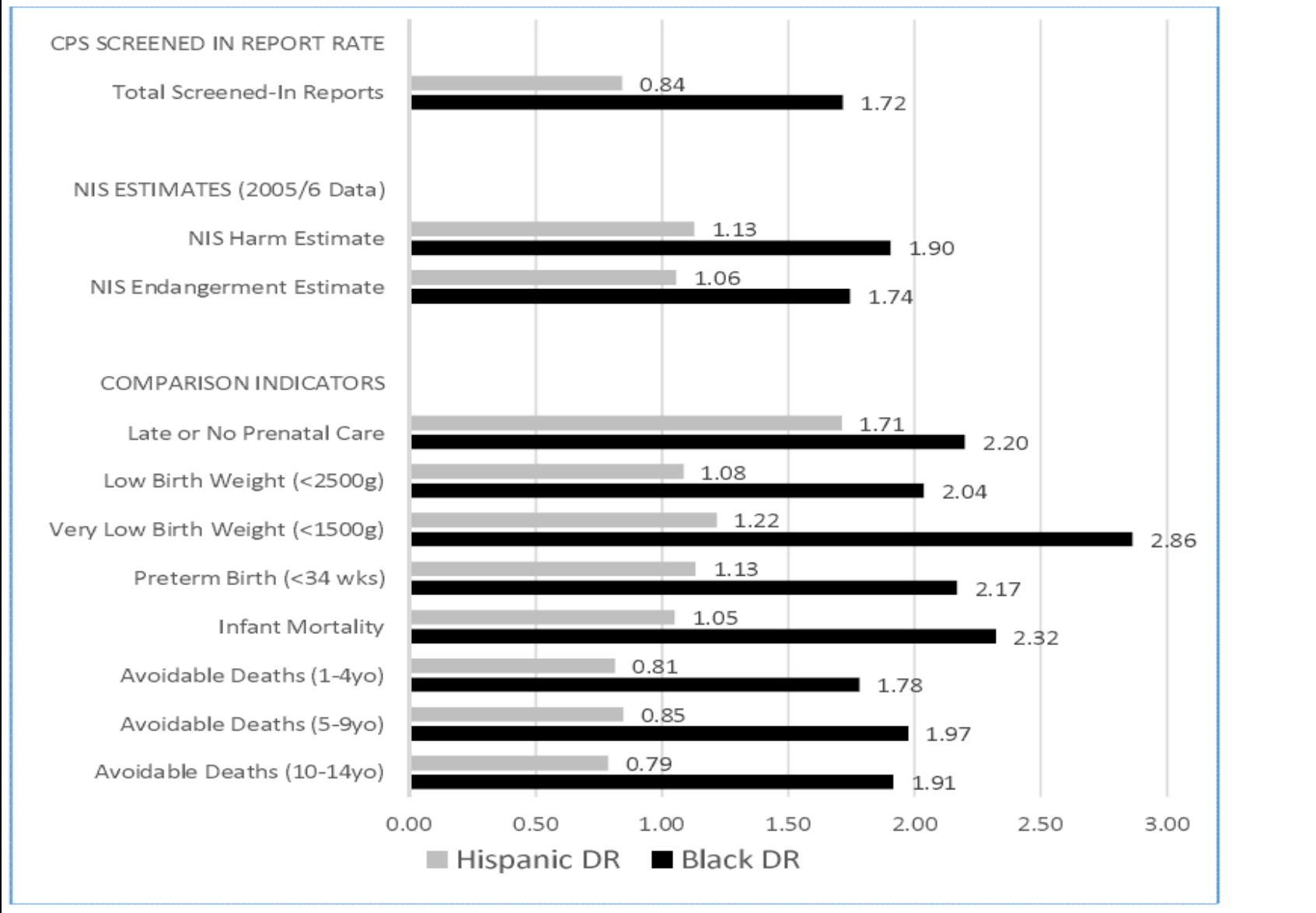
What We Concluded

- Research should continue to explore the outcomes of CWS for all children, for Black children, and for Black youth and gender intersections.
- The research does not provide a convincing reason to focus future innovation development and CPS and CWS reform on racial outcomes.
- Improvement, or worsening, of the performance of CPS and CWS seems that it would change outcomes, for all children, consistently.

One of the Biggest Questions

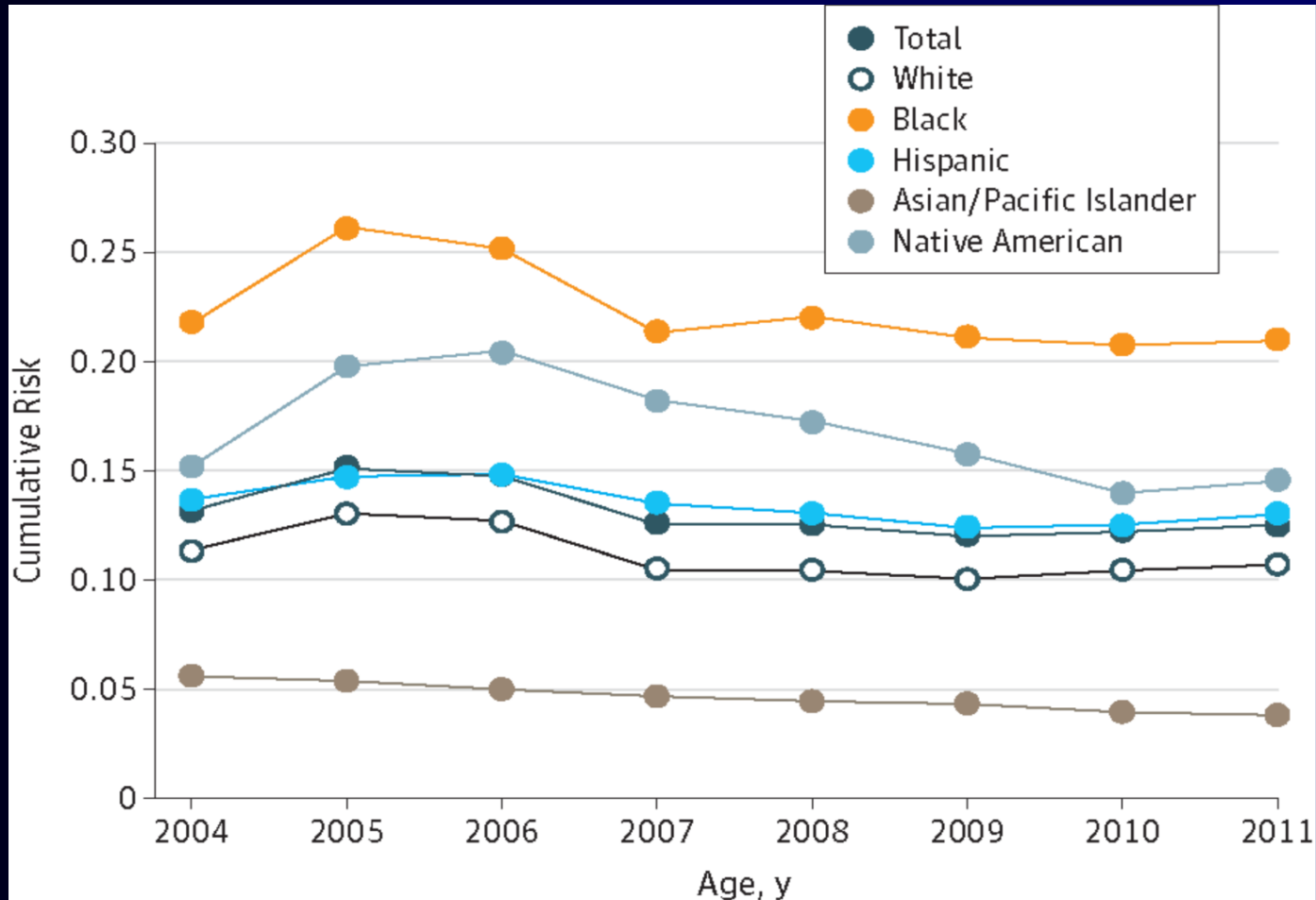
- If we agree that all major American institutions incorporate structural racism can we expect that CWS involvement is not followed by worse outcomes for Black children?
- Is it possible that we under-surveil and under-serve Black children, given the societal and family risks?

Figure 1: Disparity Ratios from Child Welfare, the NIS-4 and Objective Comparison Sources



Note: Disparity Ratios (DR) represent the rate for Black or Hispanic populations divided into the rate for the White population.. Source, Drake et al, 2011.

The Prevalence of Confirmed Maltreatment Among US Children, 2004 to 2011 (Wildeman et al, 2014)

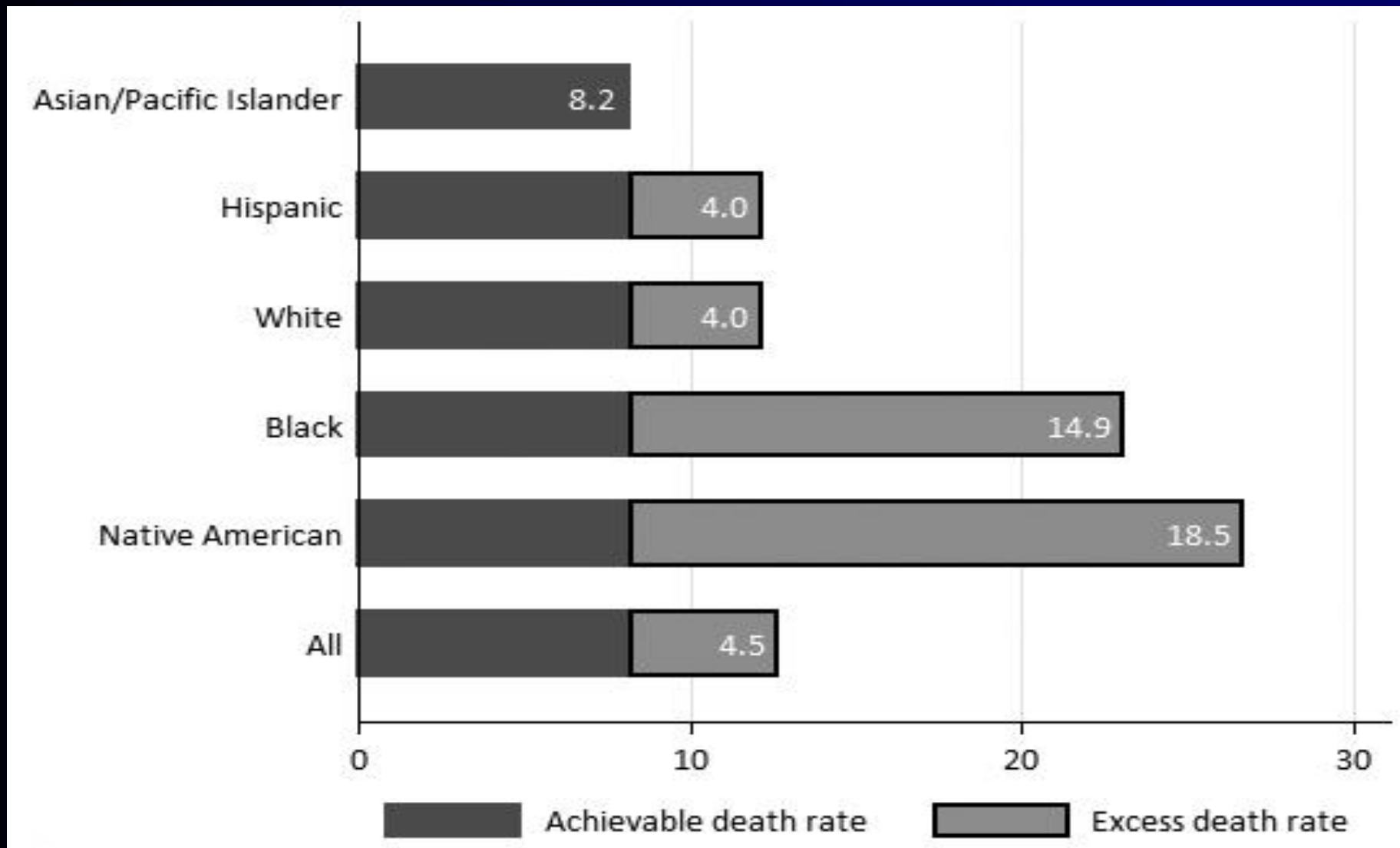


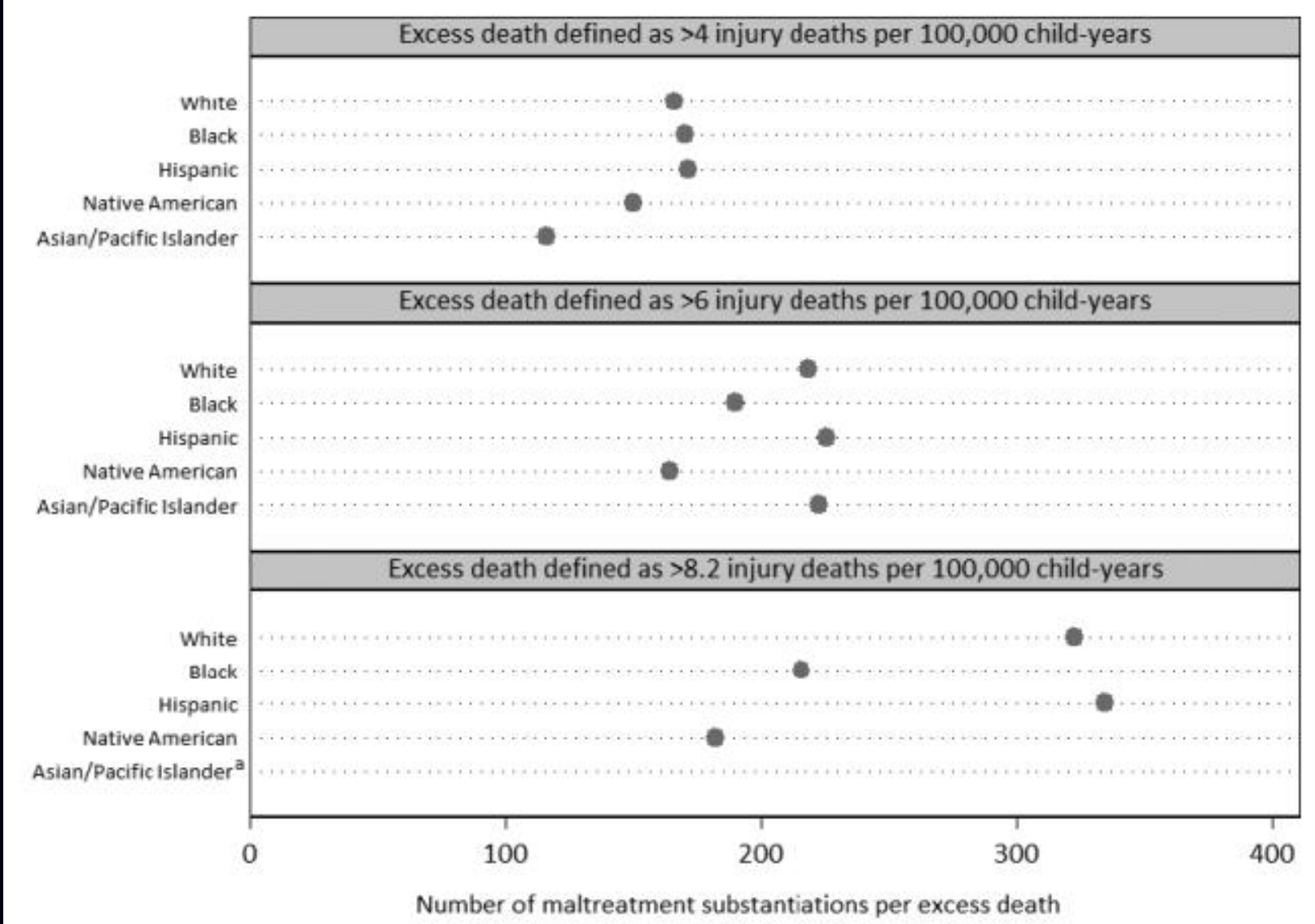
Cumulative Risk of Confirmed Maltreatment by 18 Years of Age During the Study Period Cumulative risk differed significantly across the study period ($P < .001$). Prevalence was high even in the lowest years, with similar patterns among racial/ethnic groups.

Child Maltreatment: Summary

- High rates of officially confirmed and self-reported child maltreatment indicate that the US lacks an effective public health campaign to prevent child maltreatment
- Rates are highest for very young children, African American children, and for American Indian children: no differences were observed by gender of the child
- CWSs do not seem to be markedly reducing rates of re-abuse among families who continue to care for their children at home

Excess Injury Deaths in CA (Putnam-Hornstein, 2012)





For each white or Hispanic death in excess of the 8.2 baseline, there were 340 and 352 substantiated cases of maltreatment in the broader community of white and Hispanic people, respectively. Meanwhile, every excess death of a black child corresponded to only 218 substantiations, while each excess death of a Native American child was associated with only 184 substantiations.

Summary of Young Child CWS and Mortality Studies

- Young children are most likely to die from child maltreatment (and to suffer other morbidities), especially Black and American Indian (AI) children
- CWS, and possibly other non-CWS services, underserve these children—especially Black and AI children who die at rates far higher than other children and get less identification from CWS (at least in the form of substantiations--which typically unlock the door to services)

Mortality and Child Abuse in CA (For Children 0-5: Putnam-Hornstein, 2012)

- **Methods:** Injury fatality and maltreatment data from California were compiled for the years 1998-2007 to compute substantiations per excess injury deaths
- **Results:** Compared to White children, Black children faced a risk of substantiated maltreatment that was over twice as great (Black RR: 2.39, 95% CI [2.37-2.42]) and were fatally injured at nearly twice the rate (Black RR: 1.89, 95% CI [1.68-2.12]). Per excess death, however, Black children had rates of substantiated maltreatment allegations that were equivalent to or lower than White children.
- **Conclusions:** Black-White racial disparities observed in maltreatment rates reflect real group differences in risk. Black children appear to be overrepresented among maltreated children identified by CWS, because they are also overrepresented among maltreated children in the population.
- **Implications:** To date, efforts to reduce racial disparities have included the belief that the overrepresentation of Black children among victims of maltreatment originated from CWS system and worker bias. This analysis, however, suggest that efforts to reduce racial disparities will continue to fall short if intervention strategies ignore the social and economic factors that place some children at far greater risk of abuse or neglect than others.

What it Might Mean

- We can celebrate our success in developing a CWS that does not result in evidence of biased outcomes. This has long been an aspiration of CWS and it appears that it is, largely, realized.
 - CWS has a diverse workforce
 - CWS has been in conversation about race equity for 50 years
 - Additional diversity training of the CWS workforce may not be needed.
- We can, instead, focus attention on reducing the dual ACES (Adverse Community Experiences and Adverse Childhood Experiences) that result in disproportionate involvement with CWS.
 - Reducing the “need” for CWS through better social service, education, and behavioral health training would help address disproportionality

Narrow CWS Remedies

- Continued research on which children are at greatest ongoing risk
- Expansion of evidence-based practices (under FFPSA)
- Continued progress on child welfare professional education and training
- Focus on most troubled families to reduce re-abuse and re-entry
- Greater collaboration with financial stability and asset building efforts

What Do Black Parents & Children Need?

- Are there some CWS-interventions that would be especially helpful to Black children and families
- Does CWS need to be so involved with the courts?
- How can we boost our non-coercive responses to personal drug possession and IPV, respectively?
- Can we embrace evidence-based drug treatment (especially MAT)?

Broader Human Service Remedies

- Should we offer foster care (under Title IVE) \$ to birth parents and did not require that children be removed before Title IVE was used?
 - Shared Family Care
- Should we provide material benefits to those getting TANF, SNAP, or CWS, in addition to other services
- What about more universal policies like IDA or EITC
- ?

Summary

- Children entering CWS are faring poorly BUT the evidence indicates that they need, and benefit from, CWS, on average.
- **Nonetheless, justification for intervening in families must be balanced by a wholehearted commitment to improve child welfare and allied services so that families get more benefit from CWS involvement.**
- Improved services are likely to arise from a well-trained, professional, retained workforce, referring families to an array of evidence-based interventions and material resources.

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THANK YOU
(You are Helping!)





PEACE IN

And Stay Safe