The disproportionate representation of blacks in the child welfare system of the County of Los Angeles and decision-making practices of child welfare workers

Flora Mae Jones

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project
Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
Jones, Flora Mae, "The disproportionate representation of blacks in the child welfare system of the County of Los Angeles and decision-making practices of child welfare workers" (2007). Theses Digitization Project. 3226.
https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/3226

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
THE DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF BLACKS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES AND DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES OF CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

A Project
Presented to the Faculty of California State University, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Social Work

by Flora Mae Jones
June 2007
THE DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF BLACKS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES AND DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES OF CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Flora Mae Jones
June 2007

Approved by:

Dr. Martha Bragin, Faculty Supervisor Social Work

Sandra Book, MSW, Supervisor, County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services

Dr. Rosemary McCaslik, M.S.W. Research Coordinator
ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the significant and widespread overrepresentation of Blacks in the child welfare system. The study specifically addresses the issue in the context of its association with decision-making practices of child welfare workers in the County of Los Angeles.

The study notes the historical roots of disparate treatment of Blacks by the child welfare system at the inception of the institution when Blacks were excluded from the services it provided. Findings of previous research that discuss the eventual admission of Blacks into the system, access to services, and current overrepresentation, indicate that race may continue to dictate the experience of children who are referred into the system.

Statistical analyses of relevant data comparing the results of evaluations made by child welfare workers for Black versus White non-Hispanic children were utilized for this study. Paired sample T-tests were used to explore the association between race and experience within the system. All Black and White non-Hispanic children referred to Los Angeles County Department of
Children and Family Services (DCFS) during the years 2000-2006 were eligible for inclusion in the sample.

The study also considered the California Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636) and the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment Tool in the framework of the overrepresentation of Blacks in the system.

Results of this study indicate an association between caseworker decision-making for substantiated referrals and over-representation of Black children and families in the Child Welfare System in Los Angeles County. The study also indicates a new and significant finding: the disproportionate referral of Black children and families to the Child Welfare System in Los Angeles County by mandated reporters. The study discusses the implication of these findings taken together for further research and action.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who have helped me to bring this project to a completion:

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin for approving my project, Dr. Martha Bragin for joining the faculty of CSUSB just in time to guide me through this project. Without her tremendous support, encouragement, enthusiastic and knowledgeable assistance the process would have been much more difficult.

My supervisor and the staff at Medical Placement Unit, Covina, for being a source of support and encouragement. Also, Mr. John Langstaff, Head of DCFS Statistics Section, County of Los Angeles, for granting me permission to use available statistical data for analysis, and his assistant, Mr. Nguyen, for providing me with additional data.

Lastly, I would like to thank all my professors at CSUSB, both in the undergraduate and graduate disciplines, whose instruction I truly value.
DEDICATION

To my loving family—daughter Jennifer for her encouragement and support although she was busy working on her own master’s thesis, son Jeffrey for his tremendous help and support, daughter Faith and son Tim, whose happy faces always lifted my spirits, and husband Martin who patiently accepted my altered schedule.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...................................................... v

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement ...................................................... 1

Purpose of the Study .................................................. 7

Significance of the Project for Social Work ................. 11

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction .............................................................. 14

Definition of the Terms “Disproportionality”
and “Overrepresentation” ........................................... 14

Disproportionate Representation of Blacks in
the Child Welfare System .......................................... 15

Cultural Competence and Cultural Competence
Training ................................................................. 24

Cultural Competency of Child Welfare Workers .... 26

Theories Guiding Conceptualization ......................... 29

Summary ................................................................. 34

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction ............................................................... 36

Study Design ............................................................ 36

Sampling ................................................................. 39

Data Collection and Instruments ............................... 40

Procedures .............................................................. 42

Protection of Human Subjects ..................................... 43
Data Analysis ......................................................... 43
Summary ............................................................... 44

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS
Introduction ......................................................... 45
Presentation of Findings ............................................ 45
Summary ............................................................... 50

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION
Introduction ......................................................... 52
Discussion ............................................................ 52
Limitations ............................................................ 54
Recommendations for Social Work Practice,
Policy, and Research ............................................. 56
Conclusion ............................................................ 57

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE ................................. 60
APPENDIX B: STATISTICAL ANALYSES ....................... 62
APPENDIX C: AUTHORIZATION LETTER ....................... 73
REFERENCES ........................................................ 75
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The history of institutional racism toward African-Americans is reflected in their treatment by the Child Welfare System (CWS) since its inception in 1874 (Popple & Leighninger, 2005). Although CWS was preceded by, and patterned after, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Black children were not deemed worthy to be granted the rights accorded to animals and were not recognized by early child welfare workers. Efforts to protect children from abusive caregivers went through many phases. However, one effort that stands out is the effort by pioneers such as the organizers of the Charity Organization Society (COS) and Settlement Houses to protect children from abuse by means other than removing them from their families. President Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation of 1935 included federal aid to dependent children and one of its goals was to prevent removal of children from their homes. This aid was referred to as social insurance and recipients were not stigmatized (Popple & Leighninger, 2005; Roberts, 2002).
President's Johnson's War on Poverty took a different twist. This program coincided with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Blacks were finally recognized as people who also had rights. It is conceivable that in the same manner that the needs of Blacks had been ignored because of marginalization, other needs such as education, employment, healthcare, and housing were also unmet. As poor Blacks began streaming onto the welfare rolls, their involvement with CWS began and continued to escalate. Allegedly, while family preservation practices such as in-home services and access to numerous resources were made available to Whites in CWS, Blacks were treated punitively, and their children were removed from their homes (Roberts, 2002). The National Association of Social Workers [NASW] (2005) asserts that giant strides have been made in CWS, for example, "the civil rights of all people regardless of gender, race, faith, or sexual orientation are protected" (p. 3). However, although the rights of Blacks are "protected," equal treatment with other races is not guaranteed.

Research has not shown any racial difference in child maltreatment (Center for the Study of Social
Policy, 2004). Nevertheless, Blacks are more likely than Whites to be placed in out-of-home supervised care, are more likely to be removed from their biological parents as infants, enter foster care at higher rates, remain in foster care longer, receive fewer services, and reunify with their parents at lower rates than Whites (National Adoption and Foster Care Statistics, 2002). In the year 2000, forty-six states reported disproportionate representation of Blacks in their child welfare systems. California was among the six states with the highest Black disproportional ratios (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2004).

Currently, Black children compose only seven percent of the total child population nationally, yet they account for 16% of referrals to the child welfare system (Needell & Patterson, 2005). Blacks represent seven percent of the population in the state of California, yet over 30% of children in foster care are Black. In the year 2004, the County of Los Angeles had a Black population of 9.9% and a representation of Blacks in the foster care system of 32% (County of Los Angeles, DCFS, LAKids, 2005; Needell & Patterson, 2005).
The disproportionate representation of Blacks in the Child Welfare System (CWS) has come to the attention of federal, state, and local governments as an issue of major concern. It is very important that institutional racism against Blacks not be perpetuated by CWS, an agency whose ethical standards include social justice and social diversity. Other areas of focus for social workers are fairness and equity (Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 2005). These two values are defined in the social work arena as assurance that all children and families have equal access to services and resources provided by the child welfare department, irrespective of the community in which they live or their race or gender.

Cultural awareness training sessions are administered to child welfare workers by professionals hired by the social work agencies where they are employed. Training sessions have been offered regularly and various departments have attempted to improve policies, practices, and procedures in order to ensure that ethnic sensitivity is practiced (Needell & Patterson, 2005). However, in addition to clear guidelines for practice, it would clearly be beneficial for the determinations made by each social worker to be
reviewed regularly by supervisors in order to monitor possible inconsistencies in assessments made by Emergency Response workers and others who must make subjective decisions, and whose judgments are critical to the wellbeing of children who are referred to the system. Legislat ing fairness and equity and providing training in cultural awareness may have no impact on the subjective decisions made by child welfare workers. However, monitoring their individual performance in order to identify possible partiality would, without a doubt, result in more balanced decisions (McRoy, 2006).

McRoy (2006) declared that there is a need to examine institutional racism, policies, procedures, and practices of workers along with individual child and family factors affecting risk for foster placement. McRoy (2006) also noted that there is a need to examine the pattern reflected in decisions made by child welfare workers in identification, investigation, placement decisions, provision of services, and reunification with biological parents.

It is indeed disheartening that social workers, whose mission is to empower the vulnerable, advocate for social justice, and seek to enhance the life chances of
the poor, are considered by many to be part of a bureaucracy whose aim is to keep marginalized citizens locked in their underprivileged status. In fact, some consider race to be a litmus test in predicting the outcome of children who are referred into the child welfare system (Jansson, 2003).

According to Patti (2000), social service agencies are known to simply perpetuate many of the tensions, conflicts, and biases that are systemic in society. Since organizations such as the Department of Children’s Services are subsystems of the larger social system, societal values, ideologies, and principles are brought into the organizations and are manifested in the attitudes and behaviors of the staff they employ and the organizational culture they create.

This study was designed to present findings regarding the trajectory of Black children through the child welfare system as compared to the experience of their White counterparts. Findings of the study highlighted the need for measures to be taken to hold child welfare workers accountable for the decisions they make at each stage of a child’s involvement with the system, from referral to eventual permanent placement,
family reunification, or other outcome. This study posed the question, "Is there a relationship between the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system and the determinations made by child welfare workers?"

Purpose of the Study

The focal point of this study was to examine the overrepresentation of Blacks in the child welfare system in the County of Los Angeles by assessing the trajectory of Black children in comparison with that of their White counterparts. Hill (as cited in McRoy, 2006) suggested that many caseworkers do their best to be impartial, but it is possible that many make assessments reflecting cultural insensitivity to minority groups.

The State of California has instituted several programs designed to enhance child welfare outcomes and meet the standards of the federal government. Improving the outcomes for Blacks is an area that has been identified as being in need of improvement. The California Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636) was passed in 2001. The focus of this Act was to identify and replicate best practices
to improve child welfare service outcomes through county-level review processes.

The new policies, procedures, and practices instituted by DCFS in the State of California are aimed at satisfying the requirements of AB 636. Its focus is to attain the best possible outcome for all children who enter the child protective system. A new process for assessing results was put into place in 2004, and requires quarterly reports from each county regarding efforts to improve outcomes for each child in the system. As a result, each county has been working on self-assessments, and identifying strengths and needs.

A standardized assessment tool called the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment Tool was also incorporated as a mandatory part of the assessment process in the State of California in the year 2004. One of the goals for instituting a standardized assessment tool was to increase consistency in case assessment and case management irrespective of race, culture, or socioeconomic status (LAKids, 2004).

The federal government, which incidentally provides funding for a large part of each state's child welfare expenditures has also, within the past few years,
instituted more stringent measures to assess the performance of each state's child welfare system. Formal reviews of each state's child welfare program and resulting outcomes are conducted every three years and states are liable to lose federal funding if their performance is repeatedly judged to be below federal standards. Unfortunately, California did not do well in the 2002 federal review and faced $18 million in fines if the 2005 review did not demonstrate major improvements (Needell & Patterson, 2005; Shiner, 2006). Reports for the 2005 review have not yet been published. However, every county is doing its best to demonstrate improvements in its practices.

McRoy (2006) reported that in order to improve the outcome for Blacks, it would be advantageous to have agencies that specialize in minority adoptions. She noted, however, that few agencies have used, or established, such programs. McRoy (2006) also noted that there is lack of sufficient minority and trained staff in recruitment and retention strategies (41% of supervisors in LA County CWS are White, compared to 31% Black). McRoy (2006) suggested that process/bias should be checked and screened out.
This study was conducted in order to make clear the strengths and weaknesses of the department as they relate to fairness and equity when making assessments and delivering services to Black families as well as White families.

A quantitative research design was chosen for this exploratory study that examined the experiences of children who are referred to the child protective system, comparing the trajectory of those who are categorized as Black with those who are categorized as White. A study from this perspective has not been conducted in Los Angeles County. Statistical data were retrieved from the Los Angeles County DCFS database, and methods and measurement procedures were utilized which have provided accurate results for other such studies. Paired sample T-tests were administered in order to analyze secondary statistical data retrieved from LA-Kids database of Los Angeles County regarding relationship between race and referrals to the system, substantiation of cases, out-of-home placements, and family maintenance. Charts and graphs were produced to reflect the experiences of Black children as compared with their White counterparts.
The County of Los Angeles DCFS regards the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the system as an issue of major concern, as do child welfare departments nationwide. DCFS of Los Angeles County is doing its utmost to improve performance of its workers, not only to satisfy the requirements of the state and federal governments, and specifically the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636), but as a conscientious effort to provide the best possible outcome for all children that enter the system.

Findings of this study pinpointed areas of strengths and weaknesses regarding the experiences of Blacks who are referred into the system, and suggestions for further research were made. Suggestions were also made regarding amendments to practices, policies, and procedures now in place at DCFS, Los Angeles County that, it is anticipated, will improve the performance of the department.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to efforts to achieve positive outcomes for children of all races who are referred to the child
welfare system. This study aimed at identifying inconsistencies in assessment processes that may have impeded positive outcomes for Black children due to cultural partiality on the part of child welfare workers. This study pointed out that written directives and guidelines for social work practice within the child welfare system mean absolutely nothing if there is no accountability as to whether or not they are followed. Becera and Brooks (as cited in McRoy, 2006) declared that there is a need for complete and accurate data on the race and ethnicity of all referrals and active cases, and analysis of that data, in order understand and interpret decision-making practices.

This study aimed to highlight the outcomes for Black children as compared with their White counterparts regarding substantiation of cases referred to the child protective system, out-of-home placements, adoptions, reunification with biological families, and other relevant outcomes. McRoy (2006) emphasized that culturally sensitive responses to Blacks in CWS is one aspect that may be of help in improving outcomes. This study hoped to contribute to other research by undertaking such an analysis, although limited because of
time constraints. It is hoped that findings of this study will result in amendments to policies, practices, and procedures that will effect more positive outcomes for the most vulnerable citizens of our society.

One of the focal points of child welfare practice is to promote the wellbeing of all children that are referred to the system. This study is relevant to child welfare practice in that it examined whether the decisions made by child welfare workers are designed to promote the wellbeing of Black children on an equal basis with children categorized as White children, or whether imbalanced assessments by child welfare workers have resulted in more negative outcomes for Blacks. The question posed by this study was, "Is there a relationship between the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system and the determinations made by child welfare workers?"
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature relevant to the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system and its relationship to possible institutional and individual racial bias practiced by child welfare workers. The terms "disproportionality" and "overrepresentation" are defined in this chapter, and the use of the terms "cultural competence" and "cultural competence training" are also explained. The chapter concludes with a description of theories that were used to guide this study.

Definition of the Terms "Disproportionality" and "Overrepresentation"

The term "disproportionality" is defined by CWS as a situation in which a particular racial/ethnic group of children is represented in the system at higher percentage rates than other racial/ethnic groups. The term "overrepresentation" is defined as children being represented in the system at higher percentage rates than
their representation in the general population (McRoy, 2006).

However, national studies label both disproportionality and racial disparity under the umbrella of “overrepresentation.” A situation where children are represented in child welfare at higher rates than they are represented in the general population is termed “racial disproportionality,” and where the rate of disproportionality of one racial group is greater than that of a comparison racial/ethnic group, the situation is referred to as “racial disparity.” Indices of overrepresentation are derived from the proportion of Black children in the system for a particular year divided by the proportion of Black children in the total population aged 0-17 years, based on census data for that year (McRoy, 2006).

Disproportionate Representation of Blacks in the Child Welfare System

Research conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom (UK) have specifically examined the issue of the overrepresentation of Blacks in the child welfare system (Chand, 2000; CWLA, 2005; Needell & Patterson, 2005; Roberts, 2002; NC Division of Social Services, 2006).
An extensive study was conducted in the United Kingdom by Chand (2000) which addressed the possible causes, consequences, and solutions to the problem of the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child protective system in the United Kingdom. The study explored the issues of possible racial bias in social work assessments, language and interpreting services, child-rearing differences, and issues related to poverty.

The study concluded that racial bias—both institutional and individual—is the root cause for the plight of the Black children and their involvement and experience with the child welfare system. Even when individual deviant behavior or family dysfunction was detected, the behaviors were deemed to be the fruit of centuries of oppression by the dominant culture in the form of marginalization, stigmatization, and pathologization. According to Chand (2000), the psychological prison in which the oppressed find themselves breeds a culture of economic, cultural, and moral poverty which may be perpetuated by agencies that are deemed benevolent in nature such as the child welfare system.
Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, and Barth (2006) found that lack of staff training in working with different racial/ethnic groups is a problem faced by the child protective system (CPS). They acknowledged that any risk assessment matrix is only as valid and reliable as the proficiency and impartiality of the person responsible for collecting the information used in the assessment rating and analysis. Pecora et al (2006) went on to explain that availability of risk assessment tools cannot be a substitute for adequate cultural competency on the part of the user of those tools. McRoy (2006) concurred with this position and declared that training in cultural awareness and emphasis on fairness and equity do not necessarily translate into unbiased judgments on the part of child welfare workers. Inherent biases and prejudices may predominate and result in unequal treatment of Blacks.

Researchers in the United States and United Kingdom also addressed the assessment process with regards to the provision of services to Black families. It was concluded that the pathologization of Black families by child welfare workers may contribute to unnecessary interventions by the child welfare department and less
favorable outcomes for Blacks (Chand, 2000; McRoy, 2006; Roberts, 2002).

Decisions made by culturally insensitive workers had an impact on Black families as far back as the mid-1960s. Eight-one percent of the children in out-of-home care had been detained because parents were unmarried or because they came from broken homes. Most of those children were Black. Assessments may have been made on the basis of high risk for poverty, not on high risk for maltreatment (McRoy, 2006; Roberts, 2002).

CWLA (2005) reports that no significant or marginal race differences in the incidence of child maltreatment have been found within the National Incidence Study. Studies conducted by Sedlak and Shultz, 2001, and Ards et al, 1999 (as cited in CWLA, 1999) also maintain that the average African-American child is not at any greater risk for abuse and neglect than the average Caucasian child, yet Black children continue to be dramatically overrepresented in the child welfare system.

Studies have shown that Blacks receive much fewer preventive or reunification services than their White counterparts. In addition, during the first three months after placement of their children, White parents had
twice as many contacts with the agency as did Black parents (Hollingsworth, 1998; Jackson, 2001). Other studies have also shown that Black families are treated more punitively than Whites in the child welfare system and such exhibition of racial bias transfers into quicker admittance into the system, longer stays, and less favorable outcomes.

Regarding longer stays in foster care, these studies conclude that Blacks are more likely to be shifted from one foster home to the next. The children therefore cannot develop trust in a primary caregiver, and trust is a fundamental predictor of healthy adult functioning (Rathus, 2003; Roberts, 2002). This is indeed an upsetting dilemma, because recent studies conducted by the medical profession have shown that instability, such as multiple moves in foster care, have the same impact on the brain of a child as neglect that involves inadequate food, clothing, shelter, or nurture (Rathus, 2003).

The matters of unfairness and incompetence in child protective services have been regarded as issues of such serious dimension in the state of Tennessee as to warrant intervention by the court system. A class action lawsuit was filed against the state of Tennessee in the year 2000.
on behalf of plaintiffs which included Black children, Brian, age 9, who had been in foster care for four years and Tracy, age 13, who had been in 15 foster homes during a one-year period. The defendants in the case were the governor of the State and the commissioner of DCS. The focus of the case was the treatment of children in the foster care system. Lawyers for defendants requested that the case be dismissed and DCS workers be blocked from questioning; however, the judge rejected both requests. Lawyers for plaintiffs were permitted to question DCS workers and officials regarding the structural organization of DCS, assessment processes, placement processes, and also the process for developing and implementing service and permanency plans for foster children in DCS custody. The case may still be ongoing since results have not yet been published (CAL, 2000; McRoy, 2006).

Barth (cited in North Carolina School of Social Work newsletter, 2005) challenges the assumption that the overrepresentation of Blacks in the system is due to punitive treatment by the child welfare department. Instead, the study attributes this phenomenon to a combination of factors. These include substantially
greater risks of child abuse and neglect for African-American children, a higher incidence of abuse and neglect among African Americans, and other socially deviant practices and unfortunate experiences of Black families such as substance abuse, incarceration, and higher mortality rates for African-American parents. The study further claims that the services provided by the child welfare system are extremely beneficial to Black families. Longer stays of Black children in foster care are regarded as partially due to more African American children living with relatives which, the study claims, is often considered to be a culturally-responsive placement.

Other studies support the findings of Barth that more Blacks are placed in kinship care than their White counterparts. However, they disagree with the conclusion that the treatment of Blacks by the child welfare system is fair, equitable, and beneficial (CWLA, 2005; Roberts, 2002). Courtney (as cited in Roberts, 2002) stated that a study of out-of-home-care placements in California concluded that Black children were more frequently placed in a psychiatric facility which is referred to as "treatment" foster care, by their caseworkers, rather than in kinship care or foster family. Many children are
therefore stigmatized as problem children upon their initial contact with the child welfare system.

Roberts (2002) declares that one reason why Black children are overrepresented in the child welfare system is that, in a secondary way, maltreatment may be caused by parental poverty, detected because of parental poverty, or defined by parental poverty. Chand (2000) concurred with that position and questions whether some referrals for neglect would be better classified as 'children in need' because the circumstances clearly involve need instead of blatant neglect.

Unlike the study conducted by Chand (2000) which includes language as a contributing factor to the disparity between the experience of Blacks and Whites in the child welfare system, studies in the U.S. generally do not include cultures whose native language is other than English in the Black race. Therefore, no studies have been found that list language as a contributor to the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system.

A somewhat related issue to language which has been addressed by Proctor and Davis (1989) is the body language of the caseworker. These researchers stress that
cross-racial and cross-cultural relationships between practitioner and client may produce tension if the practitioner is not culture-sensitive. Their study explained that many White practitioners have virtually no meaningful contact with Blacks before seeing them as clients. Likewise many Blacks have had no significant interaction with Whites and do not trust them. They are therefore quick to presume or discern negative feelings or attitudes. The body language of the practitioner can help to convey warmth and establish a trusting relationship. The professional needs to develop a trusting relationship with the client in order to experience positive and meaningful interaction.

Studies in the United Kingdom and the U.S. maintain that social welfare programs have historically been prejudicial to Blacks. For example, assessment processes are often Eurocentric and Blacks are judged by elitist standards. Studies conducted in the US acknowledge that Black recipients of welfare benefits have consistently been stereotyped as parasitic and not willing to work. Academic circles have been the principal avenues for dispelling these myths, however, the general public
continues to hold negative attitudes of Blacks who are in the system (Bell, 1987; Chand, 2000; Jewell, 1988).

Thomas and Sillen (1991) assert that although blatant forms of racism should have been long buried, institutional racism still exists, and oppression of Blacks is built into every social substructure in the United States. They claim that the social service professions have been undergoing "a painful reassessment of their role in perpetuating and reinforcing racist attitudes and practices" (p. 89). Furthermore, many social workers believe that cultural awareness training and their humanitarian philosophy have made them immune to bias and prejudice, but inherent values, beliefs, and practices are hard to change, and Blacks have been viewed in terms of their deficits and not their strengths, persistence, and resilience.

Cultural Competence and Cultural Competence Training

NASW (1996) lists cultural competence as one of the ethical responsibilities social workers have towards their clients. Cultural competence is described as looking for strengths in the cultural values and practices of clients,
respecting those values and practices, and incorporating them into interventions (Pecora et al., 2006).

Pecora et al. (2006) assert that "a culturally competent child welfare system is one that develops behaviors, attitudes, and policies to promote effective cross-cultural work"(p.6). The study further stated that an agency that fosters cultural competence engages in a cultural self-assessment process (cultural awareness training) in order that the organization and individual workers may identify innate racial prejudices and biases and clarify their cultural values. The study explained that social workers must also understand how their personal values and beliefs can affect their performance when serving clients of other cultures. They are expected to be sensitive to the ideals of their clients and recognize that differences do not have to be negative.

Regarding training, the study maintained that social workers must receive education about the nature and possible results of oppression and other issues that affect marginalized citizens.

Green (1992) stressed that in order to develop cultural competency, a social worker must become familiar with literature on cultural differences, and not only
depend on training offered by the agency, but move beyond the agency and learn through direct observation and participation in daily routines.

Cultural Competency of Child Welfare Workers

Studies conducted in the United States have addressed the issue of cultural sensitivity on the part of social workers. In fact, cultural competence and social diversity are listed in the NASW Code of Ethics (1996) as ethical standards that social workers must adhere to in order to serve their clients well. Kahn (1991) stated that "historically, social workers have been concerned about those who suffer from any form of oppression, have espoused the value of self-determination, mutual aid...and are committed to social reform" (pp. 2, 3). Without a doubt, Blacks in the U.S. have historically been oppressed and would greatly benefit from social reform.

A study conducted by Popple and Leighninger (2005) reviewed the history of the oppression of Blacks and expressed disillusionment regarding the infinitesimal advances that have been made in the treatment of Blacks in agencies such as those incorporated in the child welfare system. Their study acknowledged that the relationship
between Blacks and the child welfare system is quite complex. It is divided into two-parts--institutional racism which is the result of lack of ethnic sensitivity--and cultural competence on the part of child welfare workers.

Cultural competence is important, not only for caseworkers in the child welfare system, but also for management. Patti (2005) declares that the lack of training for management is a void that needs to be filled. Patti (2005) further affirms that diversity is here to stay and managers must be trained in order to produce positive outcomes for all who enter the system. However, no studies have been found that address the relationship between ethnicity and the decisions that managers make.

The focus on cultural awareness training for child welfare workers has been included as an essential component for the preparation of direct service child welfare workers to fulfill their roles, and as continuing education while employed in the system for several years. The focus on ethnic sensitivity training for direct service providers has continued to grow, and empirical research on the topic has burgeoned during the last decade (Voorhiss & Morrison, 1998; Proctor & Davis, 1989).
Pecora et al. (2006) recommended that risk assessment approaches, and matrix-based instruments used by CWS should however be redesigned in order to recognize cultural values and principles of child development. Also child rearing practices and child caring norms unique to various cultures should be recognized. Pecora et al. (2006) also recommended that specific multicultural guidelines should be considered, each risk factor should be addressed in the cultural context of the family, and family strengths should be emphasized. Also, social workers should differentiate between the results of poverty and environment and its effects on child, parent, or family, and the dysfunction caused by uncharacteristic functioning or behaviors. Parsons (2005) declared that perhaps the biggest change needed in social work practice is a change of vision. Social work agencies must cease to work from a deficit model and apply the strengths perspective with all client groups, including Black families.

Most studies that have addressed the overrepresentation of minorities in the child welfare system have been qualitative studies that focus on the cultural competence or ethnic sensitivity of social
workers (Chand, 2000, Popple & Leighninger, 2005; Roberts, 2002). A quantitative study such as the one conducted by this researcher is needed in order to examine whether there have been any improvements in child welfare outcome for Blacks as a result of the increased attention to cultural awareness in the child welfare system.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

One of the theories used to guide this study was the culture-sensitive theory. During the 1970s, several therapists and scholars, mainly minorities, recognized the importance of including cultural factors in the therapeutic process. These scholars pointed out the possible harm to minority clients which resulted from ethnocentric biases in treatment. The culture-sensitive model of practice was not developed by one specific person. However, those who can be credited for advancing the theory are Monica McGoldrick (an Irish American) and her colleagues, Kenneth Hardy (an African-American), and Celia Falicov (an Argentinian-born Jew). The goal of culture-sensitive practice is to assist families by gaining an understanding of their socio-cultural context,
identifying their strengths, and using those strengths to improve family functioning.

Beginning in the 1990s cultural diversity workshops became a part of the training process in various agencies and organizations. Some issues addressed in these workshops were cultural links to problems, probing for more cultural knowledge, links to oppression, and affirming strengths (Carlson & Kjos, 2002).

Since the cultural-sensitive theory looks at problems minorities face within a cultural context, takes into consideration the history of oppression, and acknowledges that institutional racism, both overt and disguised, still exist, it is a useful tool to guide this study.

To a lesser degree, this study was also influenced by the field theory. Drawing from the fields of chemistry, physics, and biology, Eleanor Wheatley developed this theory in 1999. She described organizational culture as a field with invisible forces that impact the actions of members within an organization. Wheatley (as cited in Proehl, 2001) asserted that, "The only way to learn what is in the culture [of an organization] is to look at what the members are doing. Have they picked up the messages, recognized what is truly valued and changed their behavior
accordingly?" When conflicting messages are given within a field, or an organization, the behavior of individuals will be "inconsistent and scattered" (p. 15). This study aims to analyze whether determinations made by child welfare workers are consistent, and therefore the field theory is a useful pilot for arriving at valid findings.

The design of the ethnic-minority experience is multifaceted, therefore theories may be applicable on several levels. For example, the conflict theory which is a Marxist-based social theory, addresses the control of the "haves" over the "have-nots" (Lum, 1986). This theory views inequality as resulting from a struggle or competition for scarce resources, privileges, and rewards. The theory posits that the groups in power control resources and get what they want, while keeping those with less power in subordinate positions. Blacks have historically been marginalized and kept in a subordinate position. In view of the secondary position of Blacks in the broader society, the conflict theory was also used to guide this study.

Rolheiser (2005) stated that every community or society has a certain visible life that can be seen and whose overt interconnections can be grasped and charted,
to an extent. However, just as with the human body, most of the deep things that affect an individual or a community within a social system are under the surface and not easily detectible.

The systems theory can explain the individual within the family social system. A social system is a compilation of acknowledged subsystems with stipulated roles and functions. A study conducted by Lum (1986) addressed the psychohistorical experience of Blacks in the context of the systems theory. The study explained that the principal focus of psychohistory is cultural intrusion, which has disrupted family systems. The study acknowledged that Black families have historically suffered cultural family intrusion and experienced a series of stresses that have hindered ethnic group development. It intimated that the intrusion of the child welfare department into Black families may have hindered rather than helped ethnic group development for Blacks. The systems theory, with a focus on the psychohistorical experience of Blacks, was also used to guide this study.

Finally, the concepts advanced by the social constructivist theory also proved to be useful guides for this study. The pathologization of Blacks is a socially
constructed phenomenon which may be a contributing factor to their overrepresentation in the child welfare system. The social constructivist theory posits that reality is constructed by the perception of society rather than by objective fact. The theory also examines internal perceptions and social causes and seeks to assist people to see through these constructions in order to create new life stories and better understand the dynamics of stigmatized groups (McRoy, 2006).

The focus of this study is whether the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system is influenced by the decision-making practices of child welfare workers. If the culture of an organization promotes equal treatment for all, without a doubt, changes will be effected. This study therefore questions whether the many cultural awareness training sessions and the legislated principles on ethnic sensitivity have had any impact on the culture of the child welfare system. The culture of any agency is very hard to change despite legislation and training (Patti, 2000). If the practices of social justice and fairness and equity have not truly been integrated into the culture of
the child welfare department, improvement in assessments of Blacks is unlikely.

Summary

This chapter explained the meanings of terms such as "disproportionate representation," "overrepresentation," and "cultural awareness." Literature addressing the social problem of the disproportionate representation of Black children in the child welfare system, which were conducted in the United States and United Kingdom were also reviewed and compared. The overarching theme for most of these studies was that racial bias, both institutional and individual, resulted in more punitive treatment of Blacks by child welfare workers, which has led to the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the system. The only dissenting study was that of Barth (as cited in North Carolina School of Social Work newsletter, 2005) which concluded that the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system was the result of greater risks for child maltreatment among Blacks, and higher incidence of child maltreatment. Regarding ethnic sensitivity of child welfare workers, review of literature suggests that despite the recent and continuing emphasis
on cultural competence and ethnic sensitivity, racial bias may still be a problem in various branches of the child welfare department.

The chapter concluded with a review of theories which were used to guide this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the type of design that was implemented in the study, the sampling method, and the criteria for inclusion in the sample. Information regarding data collection, specific measuring instruments that were used, and procedures that were followed will also be presented. The protection of human subjects is addressed, and the chapter concludes with information regarding how data were analyzed.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the racial classification of children who are introduced into the child welfare system and their experience within the system regarding stability and permanency. The study followed the trajectory of a sample of children from referral to child protective services to the disposition of their cases. The specific focus of the study was to identify if and where disparity exists that eventually leads to the disproportionate representation of Blacks within the system.
The type of research that best addressed this project was the analysis of relevant statistical data regarding number of children referred to the system, number of cases substantiated, number of children placed in out-of-home and in-home placements, reunited with biological families, or adopted. This study therefore utilized a quantitative methodology that allowed the researcher to collect data using a non-interactive, objective approach when following the trajectory of cases from referral to child protective services to the eventual disposition of the cases. Statistical data in child protective services reflect the results of critical judgments and determinations made by child welfare workers.

Although risk assessment matrixes are utilized by the child welfare system, their validity and reliability are only as good as the proficiency and impartiality of the person responsible for collecting the information used in the assessment rating and analysis. The efficient use of risk assessment tools is dependent on the cultural competency on the part of the user of those tools. Social workers use their individual discretion which is influenced by their intrinsic values, when making responses to close-ended questions and their responses
reflect their values and judgments (McRoy, 2006; Pecora et al., 2006). It is anticipated that the findings of this study have highlighted areas of interest that may be further analyzed in order to improve the outcome for Blacks in the child welfare system.

Without a doubt, there are many contributing factors that together result in the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system. This study only addressed one possible contributing factor, discriminatory practices by child welfare workers in assessments and placements. One limitation of this study is therefore the lack of analysis of other factors such as family history, family structure, socioeconomic status, and environment. Other relevant information also not covered in this study are dynamics of the families involved with child protective services such as social cohesion within the family unit and social supports within the community.

Another limitation of this study is unawareness of the racial categorization of the social workers making critical evaluations. Although Blacks are underrepresented in supervisory positions in the county of Los Angeles, their representation in case management is equal to that
of Whites. It would be interesting to know the results of assessments made by Black social workers as compared with White social workers, since the preponderance of empirical research posits that institutional racism in the child welfare system is propagated by social workers whose racial categorization is that of the dominant culture (Chand, 2000; Needell & Patterson, 2005; Popple & Leighninger, 2005; Roberts, 2002).

A positivist approach was utilized for this study whereby research subjects were inactive and researcher’s values did not impact the conclusion. The main research question posed by the study was: "Is there a relationship between the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system and the determinations made by child welfare workers?"

**Sampling**

Secondary data were obtained and aggregated from the DCFS data system of the County of Los Angeles. All case referrals for children categorized as Black or non-Hispanic White for the past seven years were included in the study. This sampling method was chosen because of the accessibility of the data, the comprehensive
information that it offered, and the non-interactive nature of the study that did not allow for bias or conjecture on the part of researcher.

Data Collection and Instruments

Researcher extracted secondary data from LAKids database which is provided by the County of Los Angeles DCFS. Data was downloaded and transmitted to researcher for analysis. The research consultant for DCFS, County of Los Angeles, supplied additional data, as needed, to researcher. The sample for this study was selected by screening for all cases of Black and White children who were referred to the child welfare system during the past seven years. Referrals for children of other races were not included in the study.

The Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment Tool became an obligatory part of the assessment process in Los Angeles County DCFS in the year 2004, therefore, statistical data for the three consecutive years 2004-2006 were utilized for comparison purposes, in order to test for any changes which may reflect the use of a standardized assessment process. Child welfare statistical information utilized for this
study included the following: (1) Referrals received for Blacks and Whites, (2) cases substantiated, (3) children placed in out-of-home residencies (e.g. foster care, foster family home, kinship care), and children receiving in-home services, (e.g. family maintenance, family reunification, adoption, and permanent placement)(See Appendix A). The study also compared statistical data for the years 2000-2006 in order to test for any changes that may have resulted as a result of the passage of California Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636).

All Black and White cases in the sample were analyzed to compare the percentage of Blacks vs. Whites in the general population, referrals to the child welfare system, and served by the child welfare system. Results of analyses are illustrated by charts and graphs provided by the SPSS and EXCEL programs. U.S. census statistical data for Los Angeles County were retrieved from the online database of the U.S. Census Bureau which includes actual and projected statistics.

Since this was a non-interactive, unobtrusive form of data collection, and no identifying data were attached to
participants in the study, no ethical issues were presented that involved the confidentiality of applicants.

Procedures

Secondary data for this research project were retrieved from LAKids database provided by DCFS of the County of Los Angeles. The researcher received permission from the Supervisor of Research for the County of Los Angeles to utilize data in the LAKids database. This data is accessible to the public; however the supervisor also agreed to provide supplementary data as needed for the project. Researcher retrieved and analyzed data regarding case referrals to child protective services for Black and White children for the years 2000-2006.

The trajectory of the participants was followed beginning at referral into the system until disposition of cases. This procedure was chosen because of the availability of the data and the willingness of LA county employees to guide researcher to other relevant data for the study. Since this data collection was non-interactive and research subjects were unknown, objectivity was assured.
Protection of Human Subjects

This study was performed in a non-interactive, unobtrusive manner. Sampled subjects were retrieved from secondary statistical data that had no identifying records of cases or individuals. No case files were reviewed and participants were not identifiable in any way.

Data Analysis

Various comparison of means tests were utilized for this study. These inferential statistical tests determined the strength of association between independent and dependent variables such as racial categorization and the various levels of child outcome for case referrals to child protective services (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2007). Child outcome for referrals to child protective services were analyzed using frequency distribution charts and graphs comparing case referrals, substantiation of cases, out-of-home placements, in-home services, adoptions, and family reunification for Black and White children. A separate bar graph was produced to reflect the number of Blacks and Whites in the general population, comparing their representation in each category of association with the child welfare system.
Paired sample T-tests were used to analyze the statistical significance between race and the numbers of referrals, substantiation of cases, out-of-home placements, and family maintenance.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to explore whether racial categorization is a determinant of experience in the child welfare system, with Blacks receiving more negative assessments than Whites as reflected in substantiation of referrals, out-of-home placements, in-home placements, and eventual outcome. The research posited that cultural awareness training sessions and the advocacy of ethnic sensitivity in child welfare agencies are not reflected in the assessments made by child welfare workers. Differential treatment of Blacks still exists and that practice translates into the disproportionate representation of Blacks in the child welfare system. It is hoped that the findings of this study will result in necessary amendments to practices, policies, and procedures in the child welfare system in order to effect more positive outcomes for children of all races, including Black children.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents findings regarding the trajectory of Black children through the child welfare system as compared to the experience of their White counterparts. First, is a presentation of the statistical data which demonstrate a comparison of the outcome for Black versus White children who are referred to the child welfare system, followed by a statistical analysis of the significance of the data. The chapter also addresses the impact of the California Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636) and the use of the SDM Safety Assessment Tool on the disproportionate ratio of Blacks in the system. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings of the study.

Presentation of Findings

With regards to the independent variable in this study which was race (Black vs. White), population estimate in the county of Los Angeles for the year 2005 was 9.7% (N = 963,670) for Blacks, and 29.5% (N = 2,930,965) for Whites. Regarding referrals to the
child welfare system, 3.1% (N = 29,874) children from the Black population received referrals, compared to 0.7% (N = 20,517) children from the White population. Twenty-two percent (N = 6,572) referrals for Blacks were substantiated, compared to 21% (N = 4,309) for Whites (See Appendix B, Table 1).

In addition to referrals to the child welfare system and substantiation of cases, the design of this study also considered placements of children as a significant factor in identifying possible selective judgments made by child welfare workers. The study found that at end-of-month December 2006, 35% (N = 7,154) of children in out-of-home placements were Black, compared to 14% (N = 2,808) Whites. 16% (N = 1,880) of Black children in the system received in-home family maintenance services, compared to 25% (N = 1,262) for White children (See Appendix B, Tables 2 and 3).

Paired-samples T-Tests were used to analyze the statistical significance of the relationship between the independent variable (race) and the dependent variables (referrals, substantiation of referrals, out-of-home placements, and family maintenance) (See Appendix B, Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7). These analyses were designed to
test the null hypothesis and were measured at a 95% confidence interval of the difference. Results for paired-samples T-Tests analyzing race and referrals indicated that the disproportionate ratio for referrals is statistically significant (2-tailed sig. = .019). Tests analyzing race and substantiation of referrals did not reject the null hypothesis, indicating that the difference for Blacks and Whites in substantiation of referrals is not statistically significant (2-tailed sig. = .118). Regarding out-of-home placements, paired-samples T-Tests indicated that there is a statistically significant basis for stating that race is a factor in out-of-home placements (2-tailed sig. = .016). Paired sample tests analyzing race and family maintenance also indicated that there is a statistically significant basis for regarding race as a determinant for receiving family maintenance (2-tailed sig. = .010).

This study also focused on whether there has been any reduction in the disproportionate ratio of Blacks vs. Whites in the child welfare system since the passage of The California Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636) in 2001. The study found that
in the year 2000, although the White population in Los Angeles County was 48.7% \( (N = 4,637,062) \) and the Black population 9.8% \( (N = 930,957) \) (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000), 40.2% \( (N = 21,984) \) of children served by the child welfare system were Black, compared to 16.1% \( (N = 8,786) \) White.

Since the passage of AB 636 in the year 2001, there has been a steady decline in both Blacks and Whites served by the child welfare system, which has resulted in the narrowing of the gap between Blacks and Whites served. The study found that in the year 2001, 39.5% \( (N = 19,641) \) of the children served by child welfare were Black, compared to 15% \( (N = 7,476) \) White. The year 2002 did not see a reduction in the percentage of Blacks served. 39.5% \( (16,740) \) of children served were Blacks, compared to 14.6% \( (N = 6,169) \) Whites. In the year 2003, 38.0% \( (15,271) \) of children served were Black, compared to 14.3% \( (N = 5,931) \) Whites. In the year 2004, 36.7% \( (N = 13,892) \) of children served were Blacks, compared to 14.3% \( (5,402) \) Whites. In the year, 2005, 33.6% \( (N = 13,218) \) of those served were Blacks, compared to 14.0% \( (N = 5,504) \) Whites. In the year 2006, 32.0% \( (N = 12,277) \) of those served were Blacks, compared to
13.4\% (N = 5,139) Whites. Therefore, from the year 2000, before the passage of AB 636 until the year 2006, there has been an 8.2\% (N = 9,207) reduction for Blacks and a 2.7\% (N = 3,647) reduction for Whites served by the child welfare system. The gap between Blacks and Whites who are served by child welfare has therefore narrowed from 24.1\% to 18.6\% since the passage of AB 636 (See Appendix B, Table 8).

Regarding the Structured Decision (SDM) Safety Assessment tool which became an obligatory part of the assessment process in the year 2004, and is used as an element of the investigation process for all referrals and subsequent reassessments whenever there is a change of conditions within a family that is in the system, this study concluded that the SDM safety assessment tool was not a contributing factor to the narrowing of the gap between Blacks and Whites in the system. In the year 2003, 22\% (N = 6,785) of Black referrals to child welfare were substantiated, compared to an equal percentage of 22\% (N = 5,263)) for Whites. In the year 2004, 22\% (N = 7,112) of Black referrals were substantiated, compared to 21\% (N = 4,803) for Whites. In the year 2005, 22\% (N = 6,629) of Black referrals were substantiated,
compared to 21% (N = 4,532) for Whites (See Appendix B, Table 9).

The use of the SDM safety assessment tool has so far been slightly more favorable in reducing the number of substantiation of referrals for White children, as compared to Black children, which has remained at a constant 22% since 2003.

Summary

Chapter Four presented an overview of the results of this research project. Significant conclusions derived from review of statistical data include:

- Blacks are referred to the child welfare system of the County of Los Angeles at a ratio of 4:1 as compared with Whites.

- There is no significant difference between Blacks and Whites in substantiation of referrals.

- Blacks are more likely to be placed in out-of-home placements than Whites.

- Whites are more likely to receive in-home family maintenance services than Blacks.

- There has been a steady reduction in the gap
between Blacks and Whites in the system since the passage of AB 636 in the year 2001.

- The use of the SDM safety assessment tool has not been effective in reducing substantiation of cases for Black referrals in Los Angeles County DCFS.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter describes the purpose of the study, presents its findings, and a discussion of those findings. The chapter also includes possible limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the association between the overrepresentation of Blacks in Los Angeles County DCFS and the critical judgments made by child welfare workers. The research questioned whether differential treatment of Blacks is a factor in their excessive representation in the child welfare system.

Child outcomes that reflect evaluations and decisions made by child welfare workers were analyzed in order to identify any disparity in the services offered Blacks as compared with Whites. In addition, the effectiveness of recent modifications to the delivery of services by Los Angeles County DCFS such as amendments to policies and procedures enacted in order to satisfy the
requirements of the California Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636) were evaluated in the context of equality in outcomes for Black and White children. Likewise, the effectiveness of the SDM Safety Assessment Tool which was constructed, in part, to promote consistency with regards to assessments and reassessments of families who are in the system was evaluated.

Findings of the study revealed that Black children are four times more likely to be referred to child protective services than White children. Although the study found no marked disparity regarding substantiation of referrals for Black children as compared with White children, the numbers of Black children entering the system are inflated at the outset because of the staggering numbers of referrals.

With regards to services offered children once they enter the system, findings of this study concurred with other studies which conclude that White children are more likely to receive services in their homes while Black children are regularly removed from their homes. White children who are removed from their homes are also more likely to be placed with relatives than are Black
children, and are more likely to be eventually reunited with their families than are Black children.

Regarding the usefulness of AB 636 in improving the outcome for Black children, the study found that since the institution of the Act in the year 2001, the gap between Blacks and Whites served by the system has steadily narrowed. However, this may be due to cases being closed and clients aging out of the system, since the numbers of referrals received for Black children and the percentage of referrals being substantiated have not declined in equivalent proportion to their decreased representation in the system.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include comprehensive analysis of the underlying cause for the disproportionate numbers of referrals for Black children, as compared with White children, to the child welfare system. National studies concur that Black children are no more at risk for abuse or neglect than children of other races, however disproportionate referrals for Black children to child protective services persist. Since this was a quantitative study utilizing secondary data, no mandated
reporters were interviewed. A qualitative study whereby a representative sample of mandated reporters are interviewed would likely elicit a more comprehensive understanding of the problem.

The study was also too brief to analyze the multi-faceted, layered, and complex issues social workers must consider when making discretionary choices and devising solutions to difficult problems.

Another limitation of this study was that researcher had no access to files—either client files or worker personnel files—in order to assess the uniformity of decisions made on a case-by-case or worker-by-worker basis. The study evaluated the statistical data which were the results of determinations made by social workers. However, it was not able to definitively evaluate the appropriateness of those decisions. A worker’s responses to clients are inevitably the result of a network of influences which include personal and professional values, life experience, training, competence, and inherent biases. The study also did not examine for differences between those workers with professional education in social work, and those whose
training was in a related discipline. The study focused only on inconsistencies in determinations based on race.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the association between judgments made by child welfare workers in Los Angeles County DCFS and the disproportionate representation of Black children in the child welfare system. Recommendations include an enhanced screening and accountability process in order to evaluate decisions made by child welfare workers, and unplanned audits on a case-by-case, worker-by-worker basis to analyze the appropriateness and consistency of decisions made.

Findings also recommend a careful analysis of closed cases that have contributed to the narrowing of the gap between Blacks and Whites in the child welfare system in order to assess whether all goals regarding safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children involved were met.

Another recommendation for further study is the cultural competence and ethnic sensitivity of mandated reporters. If it is found that training in these areas is needed, policies and procedures can be amended or enacted
in order to provide adequate training and guidelines for mandated reporters so that impartial decision-making regarding referrals to child protective services may be enhanced. Currently, there are 35 categories of mandated reporters, and only those who are child welfare workers receive specialized training and comprehensive guidelines for properly identifying the various forms of child abuse and neglect.

Findings of this study also highlighted the need for future qualitative research to be conducted to assess the benefits of cultural sensitivity training as a tool to enhance impartiality in treatment of all races of vulnerable children. Such research is recommended in order to assess whether cultural sensitivity training is effective in altering long standing and ingrained perceptions and attitudes of child welfare workers and mandated reporters regarding racial issues.

Conclusion

Prior research addressing the disproportionate number of Blacks in the child welfare system focused mainly on the role of child welfare workers. Although the primary focus of this study was also on the
decision-making practices of child welfare workers, findings highlighted and underscored the significant role of mandated reporters. A noteworthy conclusion of this study is that child welfare workers may, in fact, be a cadre of those who determine the fate of children who have interaction with the child welfare system, while mandated reporters are behind the scenes decision-makers who play a larger role in influencing the composition of the Department of Children and Family Services.

This study found that the disparity regarding substantiation of referrals for Black children as compared with White children, which reflect decision-making by child welfare workers, was insignificant. The disparity regarding delivery of services to Black children as compared with White children who enter the system is cause for concern and remediation since Black children continue to receive services that predict more negative outcomes, such as being removed from their homes, while White children are more likely to receive in-home maintenance services. However, the glaring disparity in number of referrals to the child welfare system for Blacks as compared with Whites cannot be overlooked. Blacks who represent a small
percentage of the population of Los Angeles County receive referrals far in excess to their representation in the general population. This trend, in turn, results in their disproportionate representation in the child welfare system.

Notably, most of the referrals to Los Angeles County DCFS are for "neglect" and "at risk for abuse" (See Table 10). These categories are subjectively defined. It is indeed the responsibility of society to protect its children at all costs and mandated reporters must not be hindered from performing their duties. However, conscious and unconscious biases may be reflected in the referral process, therefore assessment of mandated reporters in order to determine the degree to which they express competency regarding cultural awareness and ethnic sensitivity is essential. Evaluations made by mandated reporters are as relevant to fairness and equity as are the determinations made by child welfare workers.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
DATA COLLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **Independent Variables**
   Race: Black (1)  White (2)

2. **Dependent Variables**
   A. Number of referrals _____________
   B. Number of cases substantiated _____________
   C. Number of out-of-home placements _________
      1. Total placements _________
      2. Kinship care _________
      3. Foster Family Home _________
      4. Foster Family Agency Certified Home _________
      5. Group home _________
      6. Adoption not finalized _________
      7. Guardian home _________
      8. Other ______________________
   D. Number of in-home placements ______________
      1. Total placements _________
      2. Family maintenance _________
      3. Family reunification _________
      4. Adoption _________
      5. Permanent placement _________
APPENDIX B

STATISTICAL ANALYSES
TABLE 1

PERCENT OF BLACKS VS. WHITES IN THE GENERAL POPULATION, REFERRALS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES, AND DISPOSITION OF REFERRALS FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALENDAR YEAR 2005
## TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF BLACK VS. WHITE CHILDREN RECEIVING IN-HOME SERVICES IN THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DCFS AT END-OF-YEAR, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Reunification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Family Maintenance
- White: 3,000
- Black: 2,500

### Family Reunification
- White: 2,000
- Black: 1,500

### Permanent Placement
- White: 1,000
- Black: 500

### Total
- White: 6,500
- Black: 5,500
### TABLE 3
COMPARISON OF BLACK VS. WHITE CHILDREN RECEIVING OUT-OF-HOME SERVICES IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY DCFS AT END OF YEAR, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Type</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Family Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Family Agency Cer...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Family Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Out-of-Home Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Foster Care Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Relative Home**: White 65, Black 0
- **Foster Family Home**: White 0, Black 0
- **Foster Family Agency Cer...**: White 0, Black 0
- **Small Family Home**: White 0, Black 0
- **Group Home**: White 0, Black 0
- **Total Out-of-Home Placement**: White 0, Black 0
- **Non-Foster Care Placement**: White 0, Black 0
- **Adoptive Home**: White 0, Black 0
- **Guardian Home**: White 0, Black 0
- **Total Placement**: White 0, Black 0
### TABLE 4

**T-Test**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1</th>
<th>Family Maintenance</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.4866</td>
<td>1.31708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paired Samples Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1</th>
<th>Family Maintenance &amp; Race</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.665</td>
<td>.103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paired Samples Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1</th>
<th>Family Maintenance - Race</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>3.15474</td>
<td>1.19238</td>
<td>1.51092</td>
<td>7.34622</td>
<td>3.714</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Paired Samples Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Out-of-home</td>
<td>1131.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>772.364</td>
<td>315.316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paired Samples Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Out-of-home &amp; Race</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-.851</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paired Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Out-of-home - Race</td>
<td>1129.50</td>
<td>772.830</td>
<td>315.507</td>
<td>318.464</td>
<td>1940.536</td>
<td>3.580</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 6

T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Race</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.707</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantiated</td>
<td>5,580.50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,482.803</td>
<td>1,048.500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paired Samples Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Race &amp; Substantiated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paired Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Race - Substantiated</td>
<td>-5,579.000</td>
<td>1,483.510</td>
<td>1,049.000</td>
<td>-18,907.809</td>
<td>7,749.809</td>
<td>-5.318</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 7

**T-Test**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Race</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals</td>
<td>6,418.38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5,977.804</td>
<td>2,113.473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paired Samples Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Race &amp; Referrals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-.189</td>
<td>.655</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paired Samples Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Race - Referrals</td>
<td>-6,416.875</td>
<td>5,977.904</td>
<td>2,113.508</td>
<td>-11,414.528 -1,419.222</td>
<td>-3.036</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 8
COMPARISON OF BLACK VS. WHITE CHILDREN SERVED BY LOS ANGELES COUNTY DCFS 2001 - 2006
TABLE 9
REFERRALS SUSBTANTIATED BY LOS ANGELES COUNTY DCFS FOR BLACK AND WHITE CHILDREN 2003 - 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:...

Diagrams show the trend of referrals for Black and White children from 2003 to 2005.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allegation Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial Risk</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Risk, Sibling</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Neglect</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 10
REFERRALS RECEIVED BY LOS ANGELES COUNTY DCFS ALLEGATION TYPE
CALENDAR YEAR, 2006
APPENDIX C

AUTHORIZATION LETTER
January 18, 2007

Dr. Teresa Morris
Department of Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, Ca 92407-2397

Dear Dr. Morris:

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work of California State University, San Bernardino, that the Los Angeles County Department of Children’s Services, is giving approval for Flora Jones to utilize statistical data supplied and published by the Department of Children’s Services of Los Angeles County for her research project. The department is not responsible for the opinions and/or conclusions reached by Ms. Jones in her research project.

Please feel free to contact me regarding any questions you may have regarding this letter of approval.

Sincerely,

John E. Langstaff, M.S.
Children’s Services Administrator II
Bureau of Information Services
Head, DCFS Statistics Section
582-345-8714
REFERENCES


McRoy, R. (2006). School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin (Lecture, County of Los Angeles, DCFS training). LAKids database, LA County DCFS.


Shiner, L. (California State University, San Bernardino, SW 638, lecture notes, April, 2006).


