

**FACTORS IN THE
OVERREPRESENTATION OF
AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

Fairness and Equity in Child Welfare: Definitions and Historical Perspectives

Module I

Welcome!

- The topic of this presentation is “Overrepresentation of African Americans in the Child Welfare System.”
- This presentation is designed for you to learn on your own. There will be links to readings and other internet sites and there will be short interactive quizzes. Plan on 2-3 hours to complete this module.

Learning Objectives

- By the end of this presentation, you will:
 - Be familiar with the history of child welfare services to African American families,
 - Know the definition of “overrepresentation” and similar terms as they apply to minorities in child welfare, and
 - Understand the different intervention points at which overrepresentation occurs.

Learning Objectives

- You will also:
 - Become aware of statistics and trends on overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare in the U.S. and California, and know where to get reliable statistics, and
 - Know the main theoretical perspectives used to explain overrepresentation.

Historical Treatment of African Americans in Child Welfare

- Early child welfare services reflected the prejudices and discriminatory practices of American society.
- Service providers in the 1800s to 1920s either did not assist African American families or provided segregated services (Roberts, 2003).

Suggested Reading

- Read a short excerpt from Dorothy Robert's book, *Shattered Bonds*. Chapter 1, "The Color of Child Welfare Services" (pages 7-10), which summarizes the historical trends just noted.
- *To read the excerpt, click [HERE](#)*

Additional Reading Assignment

- For those who would like additional reading on the history and current trends for African Americans in the child welfare system, the following article is recommended (short excerpts follow this slide):

African American Children in the Child Welfare and Kinship System: From Exclusion to Over Inclusion.

Smith, C. J., & Devore, W. (2004). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(5), 427-446.

Excerpt From Smith & Devore:

- “The formal child welfare system in America may be viewed beginning in the mid-19th century through the early 20th century (Trattner, 1999a). However, the roots of the relationship between African American children and families and the exclusion of African American children from the child welfare system are found in the institution of slavery and through the progressive era.

Excerpt From Smith & Devore:

- Historically, African American children and their families have not been endorsed by the child welfare system as children needing services, or as families capable of caring for their young members. The institution of slavery, allowed the child welfare system to develop with little regard for African American children (Chipungu, 1991). Called the 'peculiar institution', slavery performed many social welfare functions for African Americans, and thus, was the first method of child welfare for African American children in the Southern United States.

Excerpt From Smith & Devore (cont'd):

Slave parents had no legal responsibility for, or rights to their children (McRoy, 1990). Adults and children were held in perpetuity, as property to be used or disposed of at the owners' will (Lacy, 1972). Once separated from their parents and siblings, children had little hope of reuniting with their families. Children who were orphaned by the death, auction or incapacitation of their parents were absorbed into the slave community by other adult slaves who took over the parenting role in keeping with kinship care patterns familiar in their African cultures (Gutman, 1976)."

Excerpt From Smith & Devore (cont'd):

“In the North, which was relatively free from the institution of slavery, African children fared only slightly better than children in the South and the theme of exclusion was present there as well. As early as the 1700s, a few, free African children were placed in almshouses or bonded into indentured servitude. Billingsley & Giovannoni (1972) indicate that as a group, these children were treated more harshly than were white children who found themselves in the same situation. There is evidence that even when African Americans were included it was a more hostile inclusion.”

Excerpt From Smith & Devore (cont'd):

“Many religious organizations stepped in to fill the gap for children needing placement, but many were not very successful in addressing the child welfare needs of African Americans. For example, the women of the Society of Friends attempted to respond to the needs of orphaned African American children with the establishment of the Philadelphia Association for the Care of Colored Children in 1822. Initially, housing ‘only 12 children, ranging in age from 18 months to 8 years...the shelter so angered whites that a mob destroyed it in 1837’ (Ashby, 1997, p. 32).”

The Era of Overrepresentation

- After the earlier era where child welfare services to African American families were denied or segregated, the opposite trend began to emerge.

Current Statistics on African Americans in Child Welfare

- The total percentage of African American children in the U.S. is approximately **15%**.
- However, African American children comprise nearly **37%** of out-of-home placements.

(Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2004: Based on 2000 Census and AFCARS data)

Current Statistics on African Americans in Child Welfare

- In California, the situation is more severe.
 - African Americans constitute **7.5%** of the general population, but account for **31%** of the foster care population.

(Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2004: Based on 2000 Census and AFCARS data)

Overrepresentation

- In both the U.S. and California, African Americans are overrepresented in foster care.
- That is, the percentage of African Americans in the foster care population far exceeds their percentage in the general population.

Overrepresentation and Growth

- Along with the increased percentage of African Americans in the system, there has also been dramatic growth of the entire foster care system from the 1980s to the present time.
- In the last two decades, the system has grown from about a quarter million children in care to over a half million children in care. This magnifies the impact of the overrepresentation.

Interactive Quiz

- Early child welfare services were equally available to African American and White families.
 - True?
 - False?

Interactive Quiz

- Early child welfare services were equally available to African American and White families.
 - True?
 - False?
 - ***The answer is false. Early child welfare services often did not permit African American families and children to use their services.***

Interactive Quiz

- True or False: According to Smith & Devore (2004), the institution of slavery and African cultural norms contributed to children being parented by others in the community when biological parents were not present.

Interactive Quiz

- True or False: According to Smith & Devore (2004), the institution of slavery and African cultural norms contributed to children being parented by others in the community when biological parents were not present.
 - ***The answer is true. The culture of origin for slaves had a more communal orientation in child rearing. The lack of legal rights between parent and child under slavery meant that they were often separated-leaving the role of child raising to others in the slave community.***

Interactive Quiz

- True or False: Since the 1980s the percentage of African American children in foster care has risen, but the total number of children in care has fallen.

Interactive Quiz

- True or False: Since the 1980s the percentage of African American children in foster care has risen, but the total number of children in care has fallen.
 - ***False. While the first part is true, the percentage of African American children in foster care has risen, the total number of children in care has also increased greatly—from a quarter million to a half million.***

Success!

- You now have succeeded in the first learning objectives of this module:
 - To become familiar with the history of African American families and children in child welfare services.
 - To begin to understand the issue of overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.

Overrepresentation and Other Terms

- The next slide will introduce some terms that also are used when examining patterns of service use, particularly examining whether services are fair and equitable to all groups.
- After that, there will be links to well-known organizations and agencies that have information about overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.

Terms Related to Overrepresentation

- **Disproportionality:** This term is sometimes used the same as overrepresentation. However, rather than comparing the percentage in care to the percentage in the population this term may be used to compare the proportion of children of one ethnic group in care to the proportion of another ethnic group in care.
- **Disparity:** This term is most often used to indicate inferior care or services. An example would be that a higher percentage of white children receive mental health services than African American children.

Terms Related to Overrepresentation (cont'd)

- Note that while overrepresentation means that a group is represented in something in greater proportion than in the general population, disproportionality and disparity are terms that could mean either overrepresentation or underrepresentation.

Fairness and Equity

- Whether you call it overrepresentation, disproportionality, or disparity, there is clear evidence that African Americans fare worse in the child welfare system. This leads to questions of whether the child welfare system is “fair” and “equitable” for all. Later we will get to theories to explain overrepresentation.
- We will now visit some internet sites that provide more statistics on this issue and illustrate more aspects of the problem.

Organizations Concerned with Child Welfare and Overrepresentation

- Administration for Families and Children (AFC) & the Children's Bureau of the U.S. government's Health and Human Services Department (HHS)
- Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- CaISWEC

Each of these organization's websites will be presented in the following slides.

Administration for Families & Children (ACF)

- **ACF** is the main federal agency concerned with the well-being of children and families. Take a look at their home page: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/>
- The **Children's Bureau** is located within ACF. The Children's Bureau <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb> sponsors the ***Child Welfare Information Gateway*** <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>
- ACF collects nationwide data on child welfare. **The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)** collects case-level information on all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility.”

ACF & The Children's Bureau

- The **AFCARS** data is one of the main sources used to identify patterns of overrepresentation. Take a look at the website for the AFCARS:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#acfars

ACF & The Children's Bureau

- The Child Welfare Information Gateway <http://www.childwelfare.gov/> is a clearinghouse of information related to child welfare.
- Their overrepresentation information can be found by clicking on *Systemwide* (left side), then on *Cultural Competence*, then on *Disproportionality*.

Summary of Government Sites

- ACF is a division of Health and Human Services (HHS) and houses the Children's Bureau, which in turn sponsors the Child Welfare Gateway (a clearinghouse of information gathered from numerous sources).
- ACF is also a source for national and state statistics and programs for child welfare.
- Whether you want more information on overrepresentation or other critical child welfare issues, these are important sources for information.

Non-Governmental Agencies

- A non-profit agency concerned with overrepresentation/fairness and equity is the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
<http://www.cwla.org/>
- Click on <http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/disproportionatestatement.pdf> and pay particular attention to 1 and 2 on “The Issue.”

Non-Profit Agencies

- Another non-profit very concerned with the issue of overrepresentation/fairness and equity is the Annie E. Casey Foundation
<http://www.aecf.org/>
- *The Casey Foundation also sponsors the **Kids Count** database of indicators of child well-being on a state-by-state basis.*
<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Click on the following link to read about *Reducing Disparities* <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/ChildWelfarePermanence/ReducingDisparities.aspx>

- There you will find the major assigned reading for this module: *Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update* (Robert Hill, 2006; approximately 30 pages).
- A direct link and more instructions are on the next slide.

Links

Direct link:

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Child%20Welfare%20Permanence/Other/SynthesisofResearchonDisproportionalityinChild/CW3622H1148.pdf>

- The next 7 slides have questions that you should be able to answer after completing your reading. Use them to guide your reading. There will be quizzes based on these questions.

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- Which five of the six decision-making points in child welfare services researchers found have differences by race?
- What are examples of disparities in services based on racial or ethnic group?

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- What are the three types of factors that are hypothesized to explain disproportionality?
- What is the difference between NIS data and NCANDS data?
- What were the major findings of the NIS data in regard to race as a risk factor for abuse or neglect? Which type of factor to explain disproportionality does this NOT support?

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- What have researchers found regarding race/ethnicity and reports to child welfare?
- What have researchers found regarding race/ethnicity and investigations of reports to child welfare?
- What have researchers found regarding race/ethnicity and substantiation of reports to child welfare?

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- What have researchers found regarding race/ethnicity and placement in foster care?
- What have researchers found regarding race/ethnicity and exiting foster care?
- What have researchers found regarding race/ethnicity and re-entering foster care?

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- What community factors are hypothesized to explain the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system?
- What does Roberts (excerpted in Hill) say about how high rates of child welfare intervention affect a community? Do you agree or disagree?

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- How does the visibility hypothesis explain the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system?
- What are some of the child welfare-related services in which researchers have found race/ethnicity disparities?

Questions Based on the Hill Reading

- What organizational and system (e.g., policy) factors, such as decision-making processes of CPS agencies, cultural insensitivity and biases of workers, governmental policies, and institutional or structural racism, explain the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system?

One More Internet Resource

- There are many county and state governmental agencies concerned with overrepresentation, however the state-focused website we direct you to is that of the **California Social Work Education Center – CaISWEC.**

<http://calswec.berkeley.edu/>

CaISWEC

- CaISWEC members are social work programs in California and county social service departments. Together they attract resources such as Title IV-E funding to support student training in child welfare. Their site has much California-specific information and training.
- They also address issues that are timely and important in child welfare. See their Fairness and Equity symposiums held annually.
<http://calswec.berkeley.edu/CaISWEC/FESymposium.html>

Quiz Questions

- Name one governmental agency and one nonprofit agency that has reliable information on overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare.
- What is the difference between overrepresentation and disparity in services?
- Name the five decision points in child welfare where African Americans are overrepresented and the one decision point in which they are not overrepresented.

Quiz Questions

- Where can you find AFCARS data?
- Where can you find Kids Count data?
- What are the three theoretical explanations for the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system? Be able to describe each factor.

In This Presentation You Learned:

- About the history of child welfare services to African American families;
- The definition of *overrepresentation* and similar terms, as they apply to minorities in child welfare; and
- Statistics and trends on overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare in the U.S. and California, and where to get reliable statistics and other information.

In This Presentation You Learned

(cont'd):

- The different intervention points at which overrepresentation occurs, and
- The main theoretical perspectives used to explain overrepresentation.

Looking Ahead

- If you go on to Module II, you will learn about a recent study that investigated one theory about overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system: worker biases.

A Study on Worker Factors in the Overrepresentation of African Americans in Child Welfare

Module II

Welcome!

- For those of you who completed the first module, you already know about the issue of overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.
- For example, you know that while African Americans make up about 15% of the general population, they make up about 37% of the children in foster care.

About this Module

- This presentation will focus on theories to explain overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare and will describe and give the results of one study done in California to examine the possible effect of worker factors in decision making.

Learning Objectives

- By the end of this presentation, students should:
 - Know the theoretical perspective used for this study,
 - Know the research questions from this study,
 - Be familiar with the method used for this study, and
 - Know the findings from this study and their implications.

Theories to Explain Overrepresentation

- As you may recall, national incidence studies indicate that abuse and neglect are not more common in African American families, thus this explanation for the overrepresentation is not promising.

Theories to Explain Overrepresentation

- Two other the explanations for overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare are:
 - **Community factors** such as poverty, high unemployment, and lack of services lead to higher need and/or reduced capacity to meet needs.
 - **System factors** such as laws, policies, and worker biases (e.g., lack of financial support for kin care-givers, lack of cultural competency, or organizations that do not address cultural competency).

Community & Agency Factors

- Disproportionality rates differ from state to state and within regions of a state, suggesting that community and policy factors do contribute to the problem (Fluke, Yuan, Hedderson, & Curtis, 2003).
- Brown and Bailey-Etta (1997) argue that impoverished communities in particular contribute to overrepresentation.
- Nybell and Gray (2004) found that race/ethnicity issues covertly permeated the three social service agencies they studied, and stated that agencies needed to break the “silence about the dynamics of race and culture within social work agencies.”

Policy Factors

- In 2007, the federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report which noted two policies that may contribute to overrepresentation:
 - “Inability to use federal funds to provide subsidies to legal guardians” (p. 1; providing this would help children exit foster care), and
 - “Lack of flexibility to use federal foster care funds to provide services for families” (p. 1).

Worker Factors

- Eckenrode, Powers, Munsch, and Bolger (1989) found that only race could explain greater physical abuse substantiations for African Americans, implying racial bias.
- Fletcher (1997), studying only African American workers, found that worker expectations for clients did differ by the race, gender, and age of the clients.

Worker Factors

- Zellman (1992) did not find that race was a deciding factor for filing a report when workers were given 5 hypothetical vignettes that varied by client race.
- However, in 2006 a pilot study found that child welfare workers assessed risk in an African American family as higher than in an identical vignette where the family was White (Owens & Roushion, 2006).

Worker Factors

- Although the sample in the pilot study was small (47), the findings raised questions about the role of worker perceptions in child welfare decision making.
- In 2008, a larger study of this effect was conducted in California. Specific counties where the research was conducted will not be discussed per their request.

2008 Study in California

- The California study which will be described in this module investigated the possible effect of worker bias as a factor in the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.

Research Questions

- If all else is identical, will workers rate the risk of an African American family as higher than a White family?
- Will ethnicity be a factor in what services workers would offer and how soon they would be offered?
- Does race influence worker opinions of parental behavior?

Research Questions

- Are there any other worker factors associated with assigning higher risk to African American families, such as education, gender, years in practice, or opinions on issues such as cultural competency?

Method: Participants

- Workers were recruited for participation from two California counties.
- Any active social worker was eligible, but primarily units that actually do intake were surveyed.
- Researchers went to agency team meetings to conduct data collection.

Method: Procedures

- Workers were given a written explanation that the study was about worker factors influencing decision making and that their participation was anonymous and voluntary.
- Race bias factors were not specifically mentioned. The study had IRB approval.
- Participants were randomly given either the scenario with the African American family or the White family.

Method: Procedures

- Participants were asked to fill out the survey on their own. A snack of a candy bar or an energy bar was offered to all potential participants.
- The survey took most participants about 10 minutes to complete.

Method: Survey Instrument

- The survey instrument (which is available as a separate online document) had two parts, labeled “A” and “B”.
- Part “A” presented the scenario of a family that is on the next slide and closed-ended questions to rate their level of concern about risk or abuse in the family and what services they would recommend.
- Participants randomly received the African American or White family scenario survey.

Assessment Scenario

- “The family lived in a small 1-bedroom apartment. The living room of the house was cluttered, and there was minimal furniture. The kitchen was also messy, with several dishes in the sink. The mother showed you the food supply and you noted that the food supply was minimal, but the mother did have formula for the baby and some food for the family. You notice that the mother did not respond to the 10-month-old baby when she cried and the baby stayed in the playpen during the entire contact. The 4-year-old has a visible bruise on his right forearm, but the bruise did not appear to be new. The mother acknowledged that she does “spank the 4-year-old sometimes.” You interview the father about the allegations of alcohol abuse and the father seemed very defensive. Father stated that he “has a beer when he feels like it,” but denied that he is an alcoholic.”

Method: Instrument

- When participants completed part “A”, (the scenario and what they would do) printed instructions told them to place part “A” in an envelope and fill out part “B”.
- Part “B” consisted of demographic questions (age, gender, education, ethnicity), opinions on issues in child welfare, and some questions about cultural competency.

Method: Instrument

- The issues to rate in terms of their importance were both general (e.g., salary, caseload) and ethnicity-related (e.g., cultural competency, overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system).
- Part “B” was separate from “A” so that the content of “B” (e.g., questions on cultural competency) did not influence the responses to the scenario.

Findings:

Participation & Demographics

- Participation was very high. Although participation was voluntary, only 3-4 blank forms were returned.
- Total number of participants = 218
- 83% female, 17% male
- Average age = 40,
Average years of experience = 10.5
- 2/3 held a Master's degree

Findings

When asked if they were Latino, 28% indicated they were.

When asked their “race”, 13% said African American, 6% said Asian/Pacific Islander, and 22% said mixed or other race. Since Latino is not a “race” Latino participants may have listed themselves as “other” or with the 59% who said their race was “white.” *

*The project’s funder required separate ethnicity and race questions.

Findings: Vignette Assessment

- Overall Response

- 59% said they would respond within 10 days,
- 23% said they would respond within 3 days,
- 17% would respond immediately, and
- 4% would “evaluate [them] out”.

Findings: Vignette Assessment

- Response differences by family ethnicity
 - Participants were more likely to use a longer time frame in which to respond to the African American family (63%) versus the White family (49%).
 - Conversely, participants were more likely to intervene within 3 days with the White family (30%) versus the African American family (15%).

Findings: Vignette Assessment

- Although there appears to be an ethnicity difference in response time frame, these findings were not statistically significant.
- There was a statistically significant association between the ethnicity of the worker and the response time. African American workers were more likely to say they would respond in a longer time frame with the African American vignette versus the White workers.

Vignette Findings: Perceptions of the Parents

- The largest number of participants (34%) indicated the father was “negligent” and 16% thought he was “inappropriate.” Less than 5% thought the father was abusive or unfit.
- The largest number of participants (38%) indicated the mother was “negligent,” another 33% thought she was “inappropriate,” and 13% labeled her “simply inappropriate.”
- No statistically significant differences of the perceptions of the parent by family ethnicity emerged.

Vignette Findings: Neglect Risk Level

- Overall, participants rated the children's risk for neglect as slightly more than moderate (6.4 on a 10-point scale).
- Overall, participants rated the children's risk for abuse similarly (5.97).
- Risk ratings for neglect and abuse were not different by family ethnicity.

Vignette: Type of Services

- Most participants (57%) thought that “voluntary family maintenance” services were most appropriate.
- Fewer (12%) thought that court-ordered services were most appropriate.
- 14% selected “other” services such as parenting classes or referrals to other community resources.

Vignette: Type of Services

- Although there was a trend for workers to select family maintenance services for White families and “other” services for African American families, these differences were not statistically significant.

Vignette: Main Concerns

- For both the African American and the White families, the main concern noted was the “overall safety and well-being of the family” (55% of the respondents).
- The next most frequent concerns were “attachment issues” (14%). A number of respondents selected more than one main concern.
- No statistically significant differences in the concerns by family type emerged.

Relative Importance of Child Welfare Issues (10 is maximum)

Increasing community resources	8.93
Decreasing worker turnover	8.83
Increasing salary/compensation	8.65
Decreasing caseloads	8.43
Improving the public image of social workers	8.32
Increasing training in cultural competence	7.5
Improving supervision	7.35
Decreasing the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system	7.12
Improving worker-to-worker relationships within a multicultural work force	7.02

Ratings of Cultural Competency Questions: (1 = minimum, 10 = maximum)

Worker's own cultural competency	8.18
Perceived emphasis on cultural competency in participant's educational program	7.37
Perceived emphasis on cultural competency in participant's agency	6.96

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- The population surveyed included most workers in the counties studied.
- Workers were primarily female, most had MSW degrees, and most had many years of experience.

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- The hypothesis that family ethnicity would influence worker decisions in the following areas was not supported by the data:
 - perception of risk of neglect or abuse,
 - perception of parents, or
 - type of services offered.

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- The one statistically significant finding was that the ethnicity of the worker made a difference in the response time.
- African American workers were willing to respond to the family in a longer time frame, indicating they perceived less risk.

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- Some variation was found in the rating of issues of concern.
- Although not rated as inconsequential, workers felt that the issue of overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare and worker relationships in a multicultural workforce were of least concern among the issues rated.

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- Also of interest was that workers rated their cultural competence more “of higher importance” than the emphasis their educational programs or agencies placed on cultural competence.

Implications

- While the participants as a group did not show bias in regard to the family ethnicity, there was evidence that African American workers saw the scenario as less risky.
- While it is not always possible to match the ethnicity of the worker to clients, the degree to which the workforce is ethnically similar to the clientele should be examined.

Implications

- Workers regarded overrepresentation as one of their least concerns and also perceived only moderate emphasis of agencies on cultural competence. They also felt their educational programs had only a moderate emphasis on cultural competency.
- In arranging data collection, the administrators at the participating counties were very concerned about these issues and had recently held trainings on them. There may still be some perceptual gap between the emphasis that administrators are giving this issue and what the workers perceived as the emphasis. Perhaps it needs more highlighting.

Limitations of the Study and Explanations for the Findings

- As the study was not conducted in all California counties, generalization is limited.
- Perhaps there are more subtle worker factors than what this study found.
- The study took place during the 2008 presidential campaign where workers were likely to often see positive images of an African American family.
- Recent trainings on cultural competence in at least one of the counties may have reduced bias.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- It was encouraging that our hypotheses were not confirmed.
- Recent trainings may have had a positive effect, however, it will be a challenge to continue to emphasize cultural competence when workers feel well skilled.
- Agencies as well as educational programs need to question how strong their emphasis on cultural competency is perceived by students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- While not a focus of this study, workers ranked a lack of community resources as their main concern.
- This is, however, consistent with the theory that resource-poor communities contribute to the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.
- To what degree are agencies able to assess services in communities and advocate for more services in the poorest communities?

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Research should continue in the areas of agency, community, and policy factors that contribute to overrepresentation.
- Agencies should continue their cultural competency efforts, highlighting their importance to engage workers.

Final Thoughts

- The next two modules are going to focus on increasing cultural competency and decreasing biases.
- Module III will focus on the strengths of African American families; Module IV will focus on cultural competency and anti-racism.

African American Family Life

Module III

The learning objectives for this module are:

- To learn about values, customs, norms, strengths, and diversity within African American families,
- To learn how experiences of racism affect African Americans, and
- To take the “Implicit Associations Test” and interactive tool to identify implicit associations with ethnic groups.
 - Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. K. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The Implicit Association Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1464-1480.

What you'll do in this module

- The first part consists of two required readings. The first is on how to use a “strengths-based” perspective in working with African American families to reduce overrepresentation. The second is a short reading on African American family reunions.
- The second part is a list of websites that highlight African American family and cultural strengths.

What You'll Do in This Module

- In the third part you will take an interactive (anonymous) test called the “Implicit Associations Test”.

First Required Reading

- <http://archive.leg.state.mn.us/docs/pre2003/mandated/020299.pdf>
- This is an article from Minnesota on how to reduce disproportionality by focusing on African American family strengths. It notes the dearth of strengths-based literature on AA families.

Questions After the Reading

- Are you already using a strengths-based approach in your practice?
- Why or why not?
- What, if anything, would you like to do differently after reading the article?

African American Family Reunions: Second Required Reading

- The following website has a short article on the tradition of large family reunions among some African American families.
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/06/AR2006010600503.html>

Also Look at the Reunions These Cities Sponsor

- [http://consumer.discoverohio.com/
multicultural/family-reunion.aspx](http://consumer.discoverohio.com/multicultural/family-reunion.aspx) (Ohio)
- [http://www.umojafamilyfest.com/website/
familyreunion.php](http://www.umojafamilyfest.com/website/familyreunion.php) (Seattle)

Questions After the Reading

- Were you aware of the tradition of African American Family Reunions?
- What values did you see demonstrated in the reading?
- You may want to search the web for more examples of family reunions.

Additional Web-Based Reading

- The additional websites we present here are for you to have fun exploring. Whatever your background may be, we hope you find some interesting. We suggest you look at at least three and write a one-page summary on what you learned.
- We will present one site per page with a short description.

African American Grandparents Strengths

- <http://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2006/techprogram/P4371.HTM>
- A short (one page) article from UMN on the strengths of African American Grandparents by Priscilla A. Gibson, PhD, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities from the Society for Social Work and Research Conference, 2006.

News, Entertainment, Health, Music, and More

www.blackamericans.com

- Covers African American news issues, arts, entertainment, and business with featured stories and weekly editorials.
- See list toward the bottom of the page for links to information on topics including hair, health, and hip hop!

African American Global Network

- Links to newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and other web sites covering African American issues.
- www.edonline.com/aanetwork/news.htm

Diversity Among African Americans

- Short newspaper article on the diversity in the “Black” population in America
- http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2003-02-16-black-america-diversity-usat_x.htm

Religious Diversity Among African Americans

- This 8-minute National Public Radio Internet audio clip discusses Religious Diversity Among African Americans
- <http://www.npr.org/templates/player/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=98202735&m=98202720>

For More In-Depth Reading

- *The Strengths of African American Families: Twenty-Five Years Later* by Robert B. Hill (1999)
- *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity* by McLoyd, Hill, and Dodge (Eds.; 2005)

Suggested Reading on the Effects of Racism

- In Module I, we recommended you read pages 7-10 of Dorothy Robert's book, *Shattered Bonds*.
- While there are many resources on racism in general, we recommend reading pages 3-6 of *Shattered Bonds* at this time.
- *Click this [LINK](#) to read the excerpt.*

Final Assignment

- The final assignment for this module is to take an interactive (anonymous) test called the Implicit Association Test. You will learn about and reflect on implicit associations as they pertain to racial or ethnic groups. Follow the link below: indicate you want to “go to the demonstration”, then that you “wish to proceed”. Then take the Race IAT.
- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>

Final Reflections

- What did you think of the results of your IAT?
- Was it what you expected?
- How do you account for the results?
- Feel free to do more exploration of the IAT's scientific basis.

Cultural Competency and Anti-Racism

Module IV

Learning Objectives

- To understand the definition of and responsibility for being culturally competent
- To understand and be able to implement the action steps at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice with clients
- To create a personal and organizational multiculturalistic, anti-racism plan
- To implement on-going analyses of agency practices and agency data in order to ensure social and cultural justice

What Constitutes Cultural Competency?

Stop for a moment and define for yourself the definition of culture. Okay, what is cultural competence? If you are culturally competent, how would that be defined? Well, for several decades scholars in social work and psychology have researched these questions and come up with several terms/definitions that we should know and be adept at using in our cross-cultural and in-cultural interactions with clients. We are obligated to study and use such knowledge and skills in order to be fair and consistent and competent service providers to our clients.

What Constitutes Cultural Competency? (cont'd)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's [SAMHSA] (1997) definition of cultural competence is perhaps one of the most comprehensive: "A set of congruent practice skills, behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It is the ability to demonstrate skills and knowledge which enable a person to work effectively across cultures: the ability to provide mental health treatment within the cultural framework of the consumer: the ability to provide effective services to people of a specific cultural background, including one different from the provider" (p. 27).

Cultural Competency: NASW

The National Association of Social Workers (2009) speaks to cultural competence in their Code of Ethics. The following is from the “Social Workers’ Ethical Responsibilities to Clients” section, subsection 1.05 on “Cultural Competence and Social Diversity.”

“(a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.

(b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients’ cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients’ cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.

Cultural Competency NASW (cont'd)

(c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.”

•An online version of the NASW Code of Ethics may be found at: <http://www.naswdc.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

Cultural Competence: NASW

The NASW (2001) Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice has as its goals:

- to maintain and improve the quality of culturally competent services provided by social workers, and programs delivered by social service agencies,
- to establish professional expectations so social workers can monitor and evaluate their culturally competent practice, and
- to provide a framework for social workers to assess culturally competent practice.

Cultural Competence: NASW

The NASW (2001) Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice has as its goals (cont'd):

- to inform consumers, governmental regulatory bodies, and others, such as insurance carriers, about the profession's standards for culturally competent practice,
- to establish specific ethical guidelines for culturally competent social work practice in agency or private practice settings, and
- to provide documentation of professional expectations for agencies, peer review committees, state regulatory bodies, insurance carriers, and others.

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

Standard 1: Ethics and Values

Social workers shall function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the profession, recognizing how personal and professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of diverse clients.

Standard 2: Self-Awareness

Social workers shall seek to develop an understanding of their own personal cultural values and beliefs as one way of appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people.

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

Standard 3: Cross-Cultural Knowledge

Social workers shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions of major client groups that they serve.

Standard 4: Cross-Cultural Skills

Social workers shall use appropriate methodological approaches, skills, and techniques that reflect the workers' understanding of the role of culture in the helping process.

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

Standard 5: Service Delivery

Social workers shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients.

Standard 6: Empowerment and Advocacy

Social workers shall be aware of the effect of social policies and programs on diverse client populations, advocating for and with clients whenever appropriate.

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

Standard 7: Diverse Workforce

Social workers shall support and advocate for recruitment, admissions and hiring, and retention efforts in social work programs and agencies that ensure diversity within the profession.

Standard 8: Professional Education

Social workers shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

Standard 9. Language Diversity

Social workers shall seek to provide or advocate for the provision of information, referrals, and services in the language appropriate to the client, which may include use of interpreters.

Standard 10. Cross-Cultural Leadership

Social workers shall be able to communicate information about diverse client groups to other professionals.

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

- Take a few minutes now to jot down as many ideas as you can on how you think you can operationalize (ie., put into actual practice) each of the 10 above standards.
- Now, click on the following link to NASW's 10 Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice to read a fuller discussion of the standards and how they operationalize each:

[PDF version which you can save to your computer](#)

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

The following four competencies were assembled by psychologist Derald W. Sue (2006), which were informed by NASW, the American Counseling Association, and the American Psychological Association. After reading each, please take a few moments to reflect on how you would answer Dr. Sue's questions and comments.

Competency One: Becoming aware of one's own assumptions, values, and biases about human behavior

Sue (2006, p. 25) asks you to consider the following important questions:

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

“What stereotypes, perceptions, and beliefs do you personally and professionally hold about culturally diverse groups that may hinder your ability to form a helpful and effective relationship?”

“What are the worldviews you bring to the interpersonal encounter, and how do you define problem solving?”

“What value systems are inherent in your professional theory of helping, community work, educating, administrating, and what values underlie the strategies and techniques used in these situations?”

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

“Without an awareness and understanding of your worldview, you may inadvertently assume that all groups share it. When this happens, you may become guilty of cultural oppression, inadvertently imposing your definitions of reality, right and wrong, good and bad, or normal and abnormal on your culturally diverse clients” (p. 25).

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

Competency Two: Understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients

“How do race, gender, and sexual orientation influence worldviews?”

“Do women see the world differently than men?”

“Do gays/lesbians see the world differently than straights?”

“Is there such a thing as an African American, Asian American, Latino (Latina)/Hispanic American, or American Indian worldview?”

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

- “While there are many commonalities shared by all groups, research strongly supports the contention that worldviews are strongly shaped by group membership.... Worldviews are highly correlated with a person’s cultural upbringing and life experiences...[and worldviews may be defined as] the way you frame the world and what it means to you...or how you think the world works” (p. 26).

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

Competency Three: Developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques

Sue gives social workers the charge of developing “appropriate and effective helping, teaching, communication, and intervention strategies in working with culturally diverse groups and individuals” and includes “prevention as well as remediation approaches, and systems intervention as well as traditional one-to-one relationships” (p. 27).

“Additionally, it is important that the social worker have the ability to make use of indigenous helping/healing approaches and structures that may already exist in the minority community....The concept here is to build on the strengths of a community and to empower them in their ability to help themselves” (p. 27).

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

Competency Four: Understanding organizational and institutional forces that enhance or negate cultural competence

“It does little good for social workers to be culturally competent when the very organization that employs them is filled with monocultural policies and practices. In many cases, organizational customs do not value or allow the use of cultural knowledge or skills. Some social service organizations may even actively discourage, negate, or punish multicultural expressions. Or client problems may be the result of institutions that oppress them. Thus, it is imperative to ask “What constitutes a culturally competent system of care” (p. 28)?

Four Groups of Cultural Competencies

So what constitutes a culturally competent system of care'?

- This is a very important question which will be answered by the following material from the National Center for Cultural Competence:

<http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/information/organizations.html>

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

The National Center for Cultural Competence [NCCC] (2004) defines cultural competence in systems and organization as “a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along the cultural competence continuum” (p. 1).

To read further, click

<http://nccc.georgetown.edu/foundations/frameworks.html>

Their framework provides a continuum and sets forth six stages that include:

1. cultural destructiveness
2. cultural incapacity
3. cultural blindness
4. cultural precompetence
5. cultural competency
6. cultural proficiency

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural destructiveness is characterized by attitudes, policies, structures, and practices within a system or organization that are destructive to a cultural group.

Cultural incapacity is the lack of capacity of systems and organizations to respond effectively to the needs, interests, and preferences of culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Characteristics include, but are not limited to: institutional or systemic bias; practices that may result in discrimination in hiring and promotion; disproportionate allocation of resources that may benefit one cultural group over another; subtle messages that some cultural groups are neither valued nor welcomed; and lower expectations for some cultural, ethnic, or racial groups. *(Continued on next slide)*

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural blindness is an expressed philosophy of viewing and treating all people as the same. Characteristics of such systems and organizations may include: policies that and personnel who encourage assimilation, approaches in the delivery of services and supports that ignore cultural strengths, institutional attitudes that blame consumers - individuals or families - for their circumstances, little value placed on training and resource development that facilitate cultural and linguistic competence, workforce and contract personnel that lack diversity (race, ethnicity, language, gender, age, etc.), and few structures and resources dedicated to acquiring cultural knowledge. *(Continued on next slide)*

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural precompetence is a level of awareness within systems or organizations of their strengths and areas for growth to respond effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Characteristics include but are not limited to: the system or organization expressly values the delivery of high quality services and supports to culturally and linguistically diverse populations; commitment to human and civil rights; hiring practices that support a diverse workforce; the capacity to conduct asset and needs assessments within diverse communities; concerted efforts to improve service delivery usually for a specific racial, ethnic, or cultural group; tendency for token representation on governing boards; and no clear plan for achieving organizational cultural competence. *(Continued on next slide)*

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural Competence: Systems and organizations that exemplify cultural competence demonstrate an acceptance and respect for cultural differences and they:

- Create a mission statement for your organization that articulates principles, rationale, and values for cultural and linguistic competence in all aspects of the organization;
- Implement specific policies and procedures that integrate cultural and linguistic competence into each core function of the organization;
- Identify, use, and/or adapt evidence-based and promising practices that are culturally and linguistically competent.

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural Competence (cont'd):

- Develop structures and strategies to ensure consumer and community participation in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the organization's core function;
- Implement policies and procedures to recruit, hire, and maintain a diverse and culturally and linguistically competent workforce; and
- Provide fiscal support, professional development, and incentives for the improvement of cultural and linguistic competence at the board, program, and faculty and/or staff levels.

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Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural Competence (cont'd):

- Dedicate resources for both individual and organizational self-assessment of cultural and linguistic competence.
- Develop the capacity to collect and analyze data using variables that have meaningful impact on culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Practice principles of community engagement that result in the reciprocal transfer of knowledge and skills between all collaborators, partners, and key stakeholders.

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural Proficiency: Systems and organizations hold culture in high esteem, use this [as] a foundation to guide all of their endeavors, and they:

- Continue to add to the knowledge base within the field of cultural and linguistic competence by conducting research and developing new treatments, interventions, and approaches for health and mental health care in policy, education, and the delivery of care.
- Develop organizational philosophy and practices that integrate health and mental health care.

(Continued on next slide)

Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

- Employ faculty and/or staff, consultants, and consumers with expertise in cultural and linguistic competence in health and mental health care practice, education, and research.
- Publish and disseminate promising and evidence-based health and mental health care practices, interventions, training, and education models.
- Support and mentor other organizations as they progress along the cultural competence continuum.

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Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

- Develop and disseminate health and mental health promotion materials that are adapted to the cultural and linguistic contexts of populations served.
- Actively pursue resource development to continually enhance and expand the organization's capacities in cultural and linguistic competence.
- Advocate with, and on behalf of, populations who are traditionally unserved & underserved.
- Establish and maintain partnerships with diverse constituency groups that span the boundaries of the traditional health & mental health care arenas, to eliminate racial & ethnic disparities in health & mental health.

Barriers to Cultural Competency

So, are there any barriers to moving towards cultural competence? Sue (2006) identifies four groups of such barriers.

Culture-bound values

“In simple terms, culture consists of all those things that people have learned in their history to do, believe, value, and enjoy. It is the totality of ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which each member of society is born” (p. 138).

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Barriers to Cultural Competency

For members of some diverse groups, their values may conflict with some mainstream American or western values. For example, “[m]ost forms of counseling and psychotherapy tend to be individual centered...based on our culture’s concept of individualism, autonomy, and the ability to become your own person may be our goals” (p. 139). However, members of diverse groups may instead more greatly value a group or family consciousness rather than an individual one.

- Verbal, emotional, and behavioral expressiveness may also differ by cultural group membership. For example, are members of some diverse groups more reticent about expressing their deep feelings to a non-family member?

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Barriers to Cultural Competency

- Do members of some groups somaticize their emotional or psychological distress as physical or bodily complaints?
- Do members of some diverse groups conceptualize their problems in ways that are inconsistent with our western conceptions? For example, do some people attribute poor health to bad karma or payback for a family member's past deeds?
- Do some people view some problems as shameful, stigmatizing, or causing a loss of face, thus discouraging them to seek formal help and services?

Barriers to Cultural Competency

- How might you work supportively with an individual who believes “just leave it to God” as the solution to her life’s problems?
- These are just some questions to ponder prior to working with some diverse populations.

Barriers to Cultural Competency

Class-bound values

- Does your own socioeconomic class/status ever get in the way of being able to empathize with those of a different class or status? For example, have you ever made a recommendation to an indigent client who because of his/her economic situation cannot realistically follow through with the recommendation in a timely manner?
- Do you make any assumptions about an indigent person's means of transportation? How about his or her intelligence, morals, work ethic, level of motivation, resourcefulness, values, beliefs, worldview, family history of poverty, level of education, fitness for parenthood, or anything else?

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Barriers to Cultural Competency

Language barriers

- Do you ever prejudge a member of a diverse group because of his/her lack of English language proficiency?
- Do you view people who are not proficient with English as less intelligent, knowledgeable, capable, etc. than one who is English proficient?
- How do you interact with members of some diverse groups that demonstrate differing norms regarding speech volume levels, degree of personal space, eye contact, verbal directness, etc.?

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Barriers to Cultural Competency

Generalizations and Stereotypes

Although knowing general characteristics of diverse groups is very important and useful, caution must be exercised to not generalize and stereotype individual members of each group. For example, members of some diverse groups may vary significantly by level of assimilation and acculturation—a recently arrived immigrant's ethnic identification may differ significantly from a like-ethnic individual whose family immigrated to the United States over 20 years ago, and is one generation removed from his/her immigrant generation family member.

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Barriers to Cultural Competency

Generalizations and Stereotypes (cont'd)

There may be Cubans, Mexicans, Jamaicans, and other culturally diverse individuals whose outward appearance (phenotype) may suggest that they are African American, yet their cultural influences and experiences in the United States may be significantly different from that of African Americans. Some immigrant individuals may share some of the same ethnic cultural values, beliefs, norms, and attitudes of their indigenous families, however they may have also internalized some American cultural values, beliefs, norms, and attitudes to varying degrees. Thus, try to never assume the cultural identifications, beliefs, and values of a client. Always discuss these with clients in order to provide the most appropriate services and referrals.

Subtle Racism

After completing the above reading, you may have discovered that you make some assumptions about other people based on culture, class, language, generalizations, stereotypes, or other factors discussed earlier herein. According to Professor Jack Dovidio of the University of Connecticut, everybody engages in some level of stereotyping or categorizing people if only in simple “like me” versus “not like me” camps (Fisher, 2005). “Dovidio says those who are subtly biased do not discriminate directly in ways that can be attributed to racism. They will discriminate, often unintentionally, when their behavior can be justified on the basis of some factor other than race, he says.

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Subtle Racism

For example, his research has shown that when a job applicant is clearly the best candidate for a position, discrimination against black applicants does not occur. However, when both candidates have the same credentials, with similar strengths and weaknesses, white candidates are given the benefit of the doubt while black candidates are not” ([Fisher, 2005](#)). He adds, “People need to be made aware of their unconscious biases in a non-threatening way,” Dovidio says. “We also need to recognize that groups of people with different histories and perspectives may experience the same events differently. They need to accept the validity of their different perspectives.”

Please click on [HERE](#) to read more about subtle racism and Professor Jack Dovidio.

Cultural Competence Videos

The following YouTube videos, which you may enjoy watching, summarize and reinforce some of the aforementioned key points and some interesting new ones about cultural competence. To view, click on each highlighted link.

[Video 1 of 3](#)

[Video 2 of 3](#)

[Video 3 of 3](#)

Self Assessment: Meeting the Learning Objectives

Knowing what you now know about cultural competency on the micro and macro levels, take some time to reflect on the following questions. Review this module's material if necessary, and provide responses to the following.

- Do you understand the definition of and responsibility for being a culturally competent professional? On what criteria would you base this?
- Assess where you and your agency are on the cultural competency continuum.

Self Assessment: Meeting the Learning Objectives

- Create a personal and organizational antiracism plan that would move you and your organization further along the cultural competency continuum.
- Develop a plan for on-going analyses of agency practices and agency data (cultural justice).

Overrepresentation of African Americans in the Child Welfare System: Overview

Module V

Learning Objectives

- The purpose of this presentation is to give a short overview of the contents of Modules I - IV:
 - The issue of overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system,
 - The findings of a study on overrepresentation recently concluded in California,
 - Internet sites that illustrate African American family and cultural strengths, and
 - Cultural competency and anti-racism.

Current Statistics on African Americans in Child Welfare

- The total percentage of children in the U.S. who are African American is approximately **15%**.
- However, African American children comprise nearly **37%** of out-of-home placements.

(Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2004: Based on 2000 Census and AFCARS data)

Current Statistics on African Americans in Child Welfare

- In California, the situation is more severe.
 - African Americans constitute **7.5%** of the general population, but **31%** of the foster care population.

(Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2004: Based on 2000 Census and AFCARS data)

Overrepresentation of African Americans in Child Welfare

- These statistics raise questions about the fairness and equity of the child welfare system.
- We would expect to see African Americans in the child welfare system in approximately equal proportion to their presence in the general population.
- Agencies and researchers are seeking theories that explain overrepresentation and policies to reduce it.

Historical Treatment of African Americans in Child Welfare

- Early child welfare services reflected the prejudices and discriminatory practices of American society.
- Service providers in the 1800s to 1920s either did not assist African American families or provided segregated services (Roberts, 2003).

Suggested Reading

- Read a short excerpt from Dorothy Robert's book, *Shattered Bonds*. Chapter 1, "The Color of Child Welfare Services" (pages 7-10), summarizes the historical trends just noted.
- Click [HERE](#) to read the excerpt.

The Era of Overrepresentation

- After the earlier era where child welfare services to African American families were denied or segregated, the opposite trend began to emerge.

Overrepresentation

- In both the U.S. and California, African Americans are overrepresented in foster care.
- That is, the percentage of African Americans in the foster care population far exceeds their percentage in the general population.

Fairness and Equity

- Whether you call it overrepresentation, disproportionality, or disparity, there is clear evidence that African Americans fare worse in the child welfare system.
- The following slide lists some Internet sites that provide more statistics and reports on this problem. Use the name as a search term.

Organizations Concerned With Child Welfare and Overrepresentation

- Administration for Families and Children (AFC) & the Children's Bureau of the US government's Health and Human Services Department (HHS)
- Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- CalSWEC

Theories to Explain Overrepresentation

- Explanations for overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare are:
 - **Community factors** such as poverty, high unemployment, and lack of services lead to higher need and/or reduced capacity to meet needs; and
 - **System factors** such as laws, policies, and worker biases (e.g., lack of financial support for kin caregivers, lack of cultural competency, or organizations that do not address cultural competency).

Community & Agency Factors

- Disproportionality rates differ from state to state and within regions of a state, suggesting that community and policy factors do contribute to the problem (Fluke, Yuan, Hedderson, & Curtis, 2003).
- Brown and Bailey-Etta (1997) argue that impoverished communities in particular contribute to overrepresentation.
- Nybell and Gray (2004) found that race/ethnicity issues covertly permeated the three social service agencies they studied, and stated that agencies needed to break the “silence about the dynamics of race and culture within social work agencies” (p. 25).

System/Policy Factors

- In 2007, the federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report which noted two policies that may contribute to overrepresentation:
 - “Inability to use federal child welfare funds to provide subsidies to legal guardians” (p. 1; providing this would help children exit foster care).
 - “Lack of flexibility to use federal foster care funds to provide services for families” (p. 1).

Worker Factors as an Explanation

- Eckenrode, Power, Munsch, and Bolger (1989) found only race could explain greater physical abuse substantiations for African Americans, implying racial bias.
- Fletcher (1997), studying only African American workers, found that worker expectations for clients did differ by the race, gender, and age of the clients.

Worker Factors

- Zellman (1992) did not find that race was a factor deciding whether to file a report when workers were given five hypothetical vignettes that varied by client race.
- However, in 2006 a pilot study found that child welfare workers assessed risk in an African American family as higher than in an identical vignette where the family was White (Owens & Roushion, 2006).

Worker Factors

- Although the sample in the pilot study was small (47), the findings raised questions about the role of worker perceptions in child welfare decision making.
- In 2008, a larger study of this effect was conducted in California. Specific counties where the research was conducted will not be discussed.

2008 Study in California

- The California study, which will be described in this module, investigated the possible effect of worker bias as a factor in the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.

Research Questions for 2008 California Study

- If all else is identical, will workers rate the risk of an African American family as higher than a White family?
- Will ethnicity be factor in what services workers would offer and how soon they would be offered?
- Does race influence worker opinions of parental behavior?

Research Questions for 2008 California Study

- Are there any other worker factors associated with assigning higher risk to African American families such as education, gender, years in practice, or opinions on issues such as cultural competency?

Method: Participants

- Workers were recruited for participation from two California counties.
- Any active social worker was eligible, but primarily units that actually do intake were surveyed.
- Researchers went to agency team meetings to conduct data collection.

Method: Procedures

- Workers were given a written explanation that the study was about worker factors in decision making and that their participation was anonymous and voluntary.
- Race bias factors were not specifically mentioned. The study had IRB approval.
- Participants were randomly given either the scenario with the African American family or the White family. Participants were asked to fill out the short survey on their own.

Findings:

Participation & Demographics

- Participation was very high. Although participation was voluntary, only 3-4 blank forms were turned back in.
- Total number of participants = 218
- 83% female, 17% male
- Average age = 40, Average years of experience = 10.5
- 2/3 held a Master's degree

Findings: Vignette Assessment

- Response differences by family ethnicity
 - Participants were more likely to use a longer time frame in which to respond to the African American family (63%) versus the White family (49%).
 - Conversely, participants were more likely to intervene within 3 days with the White family (30%) versus the African American family (15%).

Findings: Vignette Assessment

- Although there appears to be an ethnicity difference in response time frame, these findings were not statistically significant.
- There was a statistically significant association between the ethnicity of the worker and the response time. African American Workers were more likely to say they would respond in a longer time frame with the African American vignette versus the White workers.

Vignette Findings: Neglect Risk Level

- Overall, participants rated the children's risk for neglect as slightly more than moderate (6.4 on a scale of 1 to 10).
- Overall, participants rated the children's risk for abuse similarly (5.97).
- Risk ratings for neglect and abuse were not different by family ethnicity.

Vignette: Type of Services

- Although there was a trend for workers to select family maintenance services for White families and “other” services for African American families, these differences were not statistically significant.

Relative Importance of Child Welfare Issues: 10 is maximum

Increasing community resources	8.93
Decreasing worker turnover	8.83
Increasing salary/compensation	8.65
Decreasing caseloads	8.43
Improving the public image of social workers	8.32
Increasing training in cultural competence	7.5
Improving supervision	7.35
Decreasing the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system	7.12
Improving worker-to-worker relationships within a multicultural work force	7.02

Ratings of Cultural Competency (10 is maximum)

Worker's own cultural competency	8.18
Perceived emphasis on cultural competency in participant's educational program	7.37
Perceived emphasis on cultural competency in participant's agency	6.96

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- The hypothesis that family ethnicity would influence worker decisions in the following areas was not supported by the data:
 - perception of risk of neglect or abuse
 - perception of parents
 - type of services offered

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- The one statistically significant finding was that the ethnicity of the worker made a difference in the response time.
- African American workers were willing to respond to the family in a longer time frame, indicating they perceived less risk.

Discussion: Recap of the Data

- Some variation was found in the rating of issues of concern.
- Although not rated as inconsequential, workers felt that the issue of overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare and worker relationships in a multicultural workforce were of least concern among the issues rated.

Implications

- While the participants as a group did not show bias in regard to the family ethnicity, there was evidence that African American workers saw the scenario as less risky.
- While it is not always possible to match the ethnicity of the worker to clients, the degree to which the workforce is ethnically similar to the clientele should be examined.

Limitations of the Study and Explanations for the Findings

- The study was not conducted in all California counties, generalization is limited.
- Perhaps there are more subtle worker factors than what this study found.
- The study took place during the 2008 Presidential campaign where workers were likely to often see positive images of an African American family.
- Recent trainings on cultural competence in at least one of the counties may have reduced bias.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- While not a focus of this study, workers ranked a lack of community resources as their main concern.
- This is, however, consistent with the theory that resource-poor communities contribute to the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.
- To what degree are agencies able to assess services in communities and advocate for more services in the poorest communities?

Study Conclusions and Recommendations

- Research should continue in the areas of agency, community, and policy factors that contribute to overrepresentation.
- Agencies should continue their cultural competency efforts, highlighting their importance to engage workers.

African American Cultural and Family Strengths

- To cover this area very briefly, we recommend three readings and several websites in the following slides.

First Required Reading

- <http://archive.leg.state.mn.us/docs/pre2003/mandated/020299.pdf>
- This is an article from Minnesota on how to reduce disproportionality by focusing on African American family strengths. It notes the dearth of strengths-based literature on AA families.

African American Family Reunions: Second Recommended Reading

- The following website has a short article on the tradition of large family reunions among some African American families.
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/06/AR2006010600503.html>

Also Look at the Reunions These Cities Sponsor

- [Ohio](#)
- [Seattle](#)

Third Recommended Reading: African American Grandparent Strengths

- <http://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2006/techprogram/P4371.HTM>
- A one-page article from UMN on the strengths of African American Grandparents by Priscilla A. Gibson, PhD, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities from the Society for Social Work and Research Conference, 2006.

Additional Web-Based Reading

- The additional websites we present here are for you to have fun exploring. Whatever your background may be, we hope you find them interesting.

News, Entertainment, Health, Music, and More

- www.blackamericans.com
- Covers African American news issues, arts, entertainment, and business with featured stories and weekly editorials.
- See list toward the bottom of the page for links to information on topics including hair, health, and hip hop!

African American Global Network

- Links to newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and other websites covering African American issues.
- www.edonline.com/aanetwork/news.htm

Diversity Among African Americans

- Short newspaper article on the diversity in the “Black” population in America.
- http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2003-02-16-black-america-diversity-usat_x.htm

Religious Diversity Among African Americans

- This 8-minute National Public Radio Internet audio clip discusses Religious Diversity Among African Americans.
- <http://www.npr.org/templates/player/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=98202735&m=98202720>

For More In-Depth Reading

- *The Strengths of African American Families: Twenty-Five Years Later* by Robert B. Hill (1999)
- *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity* (McLoyd, Hill, & Dodge, 2005)

Cultural Competency

- WHAT IS CULTURAL COMPETENCE?
 - Definition(s)
 - Cultural Competence is an Ethical Responsibility of Social Workers
 - NASW Code of Ethics
 - NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

Cultural Competency (cont'd)

- Competency One: Becoming aware of one's own assumptions, values, and biases about human behavior
- Competency Two: Understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients
- Competency Three: Developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques

Cultural Competency (cont'd)

- Competency Four: Understanding organizational and institutional forces that enhance or negate cultural competence
- Measuring Cultural Competence in Systems and Organizations

Cultural Competency (cont'd)

- **BARRIERS TO CULTURAL COMPETENCY**
 - Culture-bound values
 - Class-bound values
 - Language barriers
 - Generalizations and stereotypes

Cultural Competency

- **SUBTLE RACISM**
- **CULTURAL COMPETENCE VIDEOS**–
YouTube: Click the hyperlinks to access videos)

[Video #1](#)

[Video #2](#)

[Video #3](#)