

***Racial Disproportionality in California's Child Welfare System:  
An Analysis of Blind Removal Meetings***

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## Executive Summary

Addressing racial disproportionality in the child welfare system continues to be an uphill endeavor for researchers, policymakers, and those hoping to improve the state of the child welfare system. Research shows children of color are removed from their homes at a much greater rate than White children. This has led to the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system.

Implicit bias, by child welfare workers, has been identified as the culprit for racial disproportionality. Implicit bias relates to the idea that human-decision making is subjective and relies on unconscious attitudes and beliefs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). Therefore, tackling implicit bias was a primary objective for researcher Jessica Pryce, Ph.D., when developing and implementing blind removal meetings.

Blind removal meetings were instituted in a pilot program in Nassau County, New York to address potential bias and subjectivity of child welfare workers responsible for decisions on child removal. During blind removal meetings, social workers would present the investigation (currently at risk of removal) to a committee while withholding personal information such as race, ethnicity, neighborhood, name, etc. In doing so, the committee can make a more objective decision related to the family's circumstance.

At the conclusion of the pilot program in Nassau County, blind removal meetings were named as the primary strategy that aided in the reduction of children of color in the child welfare system and consequently improving racial disproportionality in this county. Given the success of this method, California's child welfare system highly considers blind removal meetings a potential method to address racial disproportionality in the state.

This paper uncovers the depth of racial disproportionality in California's child welfare system by using the Racial Disproportionality Index (RDI) as a method for measuring the proportion of each race in the general population compared to their proportion in the child welfare system. An RDI was calculated for African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos in comparison to White Americans. Results showed that African American and Native American families are consistently overrepresented in the child welfare system, while Asian Americans were commonly underrepresented, and Latinos were equally represented in the child welfare system. This data was measured in all 58 counties in California.

Out of 58 counties, 29 of them (50%) showed disproportionate rates of children of African Americans in the system. Ten counties had less than 2 percent of African Americans in the system. Nineteen counties had no African Americans in their counties.

Given that 50% of counties in the state of California have disproportionate rates of African Americans in the child welfare system, blind removal meetings appear to be a promising solution. If blind removal meetings were successful in California, it would lead to a reduction in the number of children of color who enter the system at disproportionate rates thereby dismantling racial disproportionality in the California child welfare system.



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## Introduction

Racial disproportionality in the child welfare system continues to be a persistent problem for those committed to serving children and families. Uncovering the solution to this problem has been challenging for many reasons. The chief concern is the ongoing debate on the reason racial disparities exist. Many argue children of color are overrepresented in the child welfare system because they are disproportionately affected by poverty, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and lack of adequate health care, which put them at greater risk for their involvement in a child abuse investigation (Duva & Metzger, 2011). While research shows poverty is a risk factor to child maltreatment (Detlaff & Boyd, 2021), great disparities have led researchers to question the role of implicit bias by child welfare workers (Pryce, 2019). Implicit bias relates to the idea that human decision making is subjective and relies on unconscious attitudes and beliefs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). The role of implicit bias is a major focal point when discussing racial disproportionality.

Racial disparities in the child welfare system exist nationwide. To understand the scope of the problem, researchers use the Racial Disparity Index (RDI) to examine the proportion of children from different groups represented in the child welfare system in proportion to their representation in the base population (Braun & Chiu, 2017). For example, an RDI of 1.0 shows groups children are involved in the child welfare system at rates that are relative to their percentage of the general population. While an RDI over 1.0 shows children are represented in the child welfare system at a rate that is larger than their number in the general population.

Recent national data shows African American and Native American children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. Nationwide, in 2020, African American children accounted for 15.3 percent of the population of children ages 0 to 17;



however, they were 25.1 percent of children in the child welfare system. During this time period, Native American children were 1.0 percent of the population of children in the nation; however, they accounted for 2.7 percent of the population of children in the child welfare system. Both ethnic groups were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, indicated by an RDI of 1.65 and 2.3 respectively. Unfortunately, this number is even higher in multiple states, including California.

### **Understanding the Child Welfare System**

To understand racial disproportionality in the child welfare system, one has to comprehend how this system works. The child welfare system is governed by Child Protective Services (CPS), a government agency mandated to receive and respond to reports of child abuse and neglect. Involvement with CPS is initiated when someone calls to make a suspected child abuse report. According to the World Health Organization, child maltreatment refers to abuse or neglect occurring to a person under the age of 18. “It includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (WHO, 2022). CPS workers evaluate each child abuse report to ensure the concerns meet the legal definition of child abuse and neglect.

While many types of maltreatment exist, the majority of calls relate to child neglect. In the 29<sup>th</sup> Child Maltreatment Report, published by the Children’s Bureau at HHS' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), data from multiple child protective services agencies were analyzed for the year 2018. These data showed over 3.5 million children were subjects in child abuse investigations or an alternative response, and approximately 60 percent of these incidents

related to child neglect (Administration for Children & Families, 2020). Neglect includes, but is not limited to a parent's failure or inability to provide their child with adequate food, clothes or shelter, protection from danger or violence, or their failure to ensure medical or mental health care is provided to their child. The span of what constitutes neglect is substantial and often relates to environmental factors that affect the wellbeing of children.

If abuse or neglect is suspected, a mandated reporter or someone who notices the potential abuse can call to report the incident. CPS investigates the most serious incidents of child abuse, while other calls are documented and evaluated out when the details do not meet the requirements for a response. In the state of California, approximately 57 percent of calls lead to an open CPS investigation. According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System in 2018, professionals mandated to report child abuse submit 67.3 percent of the reports which successfully lead to CPS investigations (USDHHS, 2018).

The purpose of a CPS "investigation is twofold: (1) to determine whether the child was maltreated or is at-risk of maltreatment and (2) to determine if services are needed and which services to provide" (USDHHS, 2018). Emergency response social workers are responsible for investigating these concerns. This includes identifying protective capacities and assessing the risk of future maltreatment. It also includes an assessment of services and future next steps. Sometimes, determining the best way to stabilize the family can be cumbersome and can lead to the child being removed from their home if the child abuse allegations are substantiated.

The decision to remove a child from their home is complex. The CPS social worker is responsible for collecting evidence to understand the full extent of the child abuse allegations, and how these concerns impact the children. They must also assess the parents' ability to address

the concerns. Once the allegations are understood, CPS social workers take appropriate action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.

In situations where the CPS worker assesses for imminent risk and when the child is in immediate danger, the CPS worker may remove the child immediately. In these cases, CPS workers consult with internal and external partners. Internally, CPS workers consult with the supervisors and managers. Externally, CPS workers can consult with law enforcement, medical professionals, mental health professionals, educators, or non-offending family members. Collaborating with external partners is essential in understanding the scope of the problem being addressed.

Child removal also occurs when safety concerns are unable to be mitigated during the investigation and the safety concerns can't be remedied despite family preservation efforts. Family preservation refers to the strategies used to prevent removal and keep the child safely maintained in the home. These strategies can include connecting the family to a community agency to assist with their needs and improving the home environment (e.g. addressing unsanitary conditions or concerns with the physical safety). The decision to remove a child can occur during an investigation that typically takes 30 to 60 days – when the child is not in immediate danger. During this time, the CPS worker connects with various professional partners that provide information on the family's environment.

Blind removal is a strategy that could be utilized during the investigative stage to reduce disparities. During blind removal meetings, social workers provide information on the family as it pertains to the specific facts regarding the allegations. The social worker withholds demographic information such as race, region, and other ethnic identifiers such as names. The social worker would include pertinent information such as child welfare history, family

preservation strategies, and information from outside support networks such as mandated reporters, educators, counselors, medical professionals, and mental health providers. This information is used to decide the best next steps for the family which can include referrals to community agencies, safety plans, or removal. Blind removal meetings would serve as an additional effort towards preserving the family unit and preventing unwarranted removal of children.

During the investigation, the CPS worker can also schedule a Child Family Team (CFT) meeting to present evidence and present it to a team of people vested in the wellbeing of the child. The team consists of CPS professionals, family members, and external professionals. The team provides information and discusses the concerns, family strengths, and actions that should happen next. The goal of the meeting is to understand the family situation from multiple perspectives and understand how to best support the child and family.

If upon investigation, child maltreatment is substantiated, then CPS intervention continues long-term under the guidance of the Juvenile Court. The court system ensures intervention is in the best interest of the child and family. The court will recommend family reunification services to address the issues that led to the separation of the child and family. During this time, CPS provides status reports to keep the court updated on the parents' progress in services, the wellbeing of the child, and CPS's recommendations on how to proceed. If issues are not mitigated in the court provided time limit, the court will request the child be assessed for adoption.

### **Disproportionality at Decision Points**

CPS workers make a series of decisions regarding the safety and protection of children during various points in the child welfare system which include intake, investigation, family reunification, and adoption. The first decision point occurs when the initial maltreatment report is made to the intake department. At this stage, the intake worker receives a call and decides to utilize a differential response strategy, open an investigation, or provide no response when the information given does not meet the legal definition of abuse. The next decision point occurs during the investigation. During this stage, the CPS worker gathers evidence to determine what abuse took place and how to mitigate the concerns. Once all of the evidence is gathered, the CPS worker decides whether the situation was stabilized and the investigation should be closed, or if concerns require further CPS intervention. In the event CPS intervention is still required, the investigation transitions to an ongoing case monitored by a social worker who continues to assess the family's situation weekly, monthly, and/or biannually. These assessments include an evaluation of the family system and their ability to mitigate the safety concerns that led to CPS involvement.

Racial disparities exist at different points in the child welfare system and begin with the rate children are removed from their parent's home and subsequently enter the foster care system. Research shows that African American families are more likely to receive a maltreatment report and to have this report investigated (Detlaff & Boyd, 2020). This has led to a disproportionate number of African American families who are involved with the child welfare system. Blind removals are a possible remedy for errors in human decision making and an opportunity to lessen disproportionality for families of color.

### **Rate of Removal**

Research has established that children of color have a higher rate of removal than other races (Hill, R.B, 2006). The rate of removal refers to the likelihood of children being removed from their home and subsequently entering the foster care system. Foster care is also known as out of home care. When children are removed from their homes, they can live with relatives or unrelated caregivers. Children can reside in placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living (Child Information Gateway, n.d.).

Recent national data showed that White American, Asian American, and Latino children are removed from their homes at rates that are closely proportionate or much less than their rates in the general population. In 2020, White and Latino children entered the child welfare system at rates that were closely proportionate to the rates represented in the general population. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, White children had an RDI of 0.97 and Latino children had an RDI of 0.91. At this same time period, Asian children entered the child welfare system much less, indicated by an RDI of 0.16 (Puzzanchera, C., Taylor, M., Kang W., & Smith, J., 2022).

While African American youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system, Asian American youth are routinely underrepresented. A study on national racial disparities identified states in which non-White communities were overrepresented in the child welfare system. This study utilized data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System and state level population estimates. In this study, the findings show Asian Americans were underreported in 50 states for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Asian Americans were not overrepresented in any state for all maltreatment types (Luken, Nair & Fix, 2021).

The rate of removal for African American and Native American children are not proportionate to their presence in the general population indicated by their rate of removal in comparison to the rate in the general population. In 2020, African American children accounted for 22.7 percent of children who entered the foster care system and Native American children accounted for 2.6 percent. The Racial Disparity Index calculated the rate of disproportionality to be 1.48 for African American children and 2.64 for Native American children.

### **Racial Disparity in California**

Racial disparities in California are higher than the national average. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, African American children, ages 0 to 17 account for 6.2 percent of the population. However, they account for 19.9 percent of children who are removed from their homes and subsequently enter the child welfare system. These data show the number of African American children in the child welfare system is disproportionate to the percentage of African American children in the general population. In comparison to White, Latino, Native American, and Asian American children, the Racial Disparity Index showed the greatest racial disparities existed for African American families /African American children. As of 2020, African American children have an RDI of 2.86 which indicates this population is represented in the child welfare system at a rate that is much higher than that of the general population.

In the state of California in 2020, African American children made up 6.9 percent of the children ages 0 to 17; however, they accounted for 17.6 percent of children who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care. This shows their rate of removal is not proportionate to their rate in the general population.

To further understand racial disproportionality in California, this author, Dr. Joycelyn Wormley calculated racial disproportionality in each California county. Dr. Wormley utilized Kids Data to gather specific information as to the proportion of race and ethnicity in each county. These data were compared to the ethnic proportion of youth in each county in the child welfare system. The comparison of the California population to that of the child welfare system provided a number that represents the disproportionality of each ethnicity in each county of the California child welfare system. This author used the University of California, Berkley, Child Welfare Indicators Project (CWIP, 2022) to calculate the proportion of ethnicities in each county. Data from April 2021 to March 2022 were utilized. Information on racial disproportionality in California counties were calculated by this author.

Racial disproportionality is calculated by comparing the percentage of a particular race in the population to the percentage in the child welfare system. Racial disproportionality for African American youth in California was calculated and this data was displayed in Figure 1 and illustrated in Figure 2 in an effort to compare the percentage of African American youth in the population of each county compared to the percentage of African American youth in the child welfare system.

These data highlight issues of racial disproportionality in the state of California. Compared to other states across the nation, multiple counties in California have an overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system. Out of 58 counties, 29 of them have an RDI of 2.0 or higher. The highest rates of disproportionality were in San Francisco County with an RDI of 9.2, Yolo County with an RDI of 8.83, and Marin County with an RDI of 8.81.



These data also highlight the scarcity of African Americans in various communities which subsequently led to an absence of African Americans in the child welfare system in these areas. Out of 58 counties, there were 10 counties which had less than 2 percent of African American youth in the population and zero African American youth in the child welfare system of those counties. This included Alpine County, Amador County, Glenn County, Inyo County, Lassen County, Mendocino County, Modoc County, Mono County, San Benito County, Sierra County, and Trinity County.

Disproportionality could not be measured in 19 counties in California. Figure 1 shows the letter “M” for counties that have glaringly low number of African Americans in the child welfare system and disproportionality could not be measured.

While racial disproportionality exists at various points in the child welfare system, it begins at the time of intake when maltreatment reports are submitted. CWIP disparity indices were calculated for African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latino youth and compared to White youth. It was found that 85% of California counties had an RDI of greater than 2.0. According to CWIP data, San Francisco County had the highest disparity with an RDI of 13.62 as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 5. This means that non-White families were represented in the population 13 times more than those who identified as White. An RDI of 1.0 would have meant they were equally represented in the number of maltreatment reports received.

Consequently, youth of color are also more likely to be removed from their homes and enter the foster care system. When compared to White families, 65% of counties had an RDI of 2.0 or greater for non-White families. Marin County had the highest disparity with an RDI of 34.91 as shown in figure 7 and figure 8. This means, non-White families were 34 times more likely to enter foster care in Marin County in comparison to White families.

Overall, these data show non-White families are reported to Child Protective Services and enter the foster care system more often than White families. In most cases, Asian American families are underrepresented. However, in comparison to White families, they were more likely to enter the foster care system in Mariposa County, Nevada County, and San Benito County. In these counties, Asian American families had an RDI of 8.1 in Mariposa, 11.13 in Nevada, and 8.11 in San Benito. Non-White families are continually overrepresented at various stages in the system.

### **Consequences of Child Welfare Involvement**

Racial disproportionality has been studied for decades given the well-known consequences of how child welfare services impact the trajectory of the child's life. Longstanding research shows system involved youth are more likely to experience negative physical, behavioral, and mental health challenges. These issues are linked to trauma related to parental separation and various forms of instability throughout their time in the system. Extensive child welfare literature has established that children of color are more likely to have substantiated child maltreatment cases, experience more placement instability, and spend more time in foster care overall, in comparison to White children (Boyd, 2014).

Decades of research points to the disproportionate rate of behavioral and mental health issues in children placed in the foster care system in comparison to children in the larger population. Specifically, studies show, "behavioral and/or mental health issues occur in approximately half of foster care youth compared to one in five youth in the general population" (Ogg et al., 2015). Common behavioral health problems are displayed in a combination of externalized and internalized symptoms such as aggression, physical violence, property destruction, or internalized behavioral concerns such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic

stress disorder (McDonald, 2016). Mental health concerns are a growing concern for affecting children in foster care.

The consequences for children involved in the child welfare system have been well-established and have been the reason for heightened concerns for children of color. Uncovering the solutions for racial disparities is most crucial for African American and Native American families given the stark negative impact the system has on these families. Therefore, racial disproportionality continues to be a topic that sparks robust discourse among child welfare professionals. As such, multiple strategies have been implemented – locally and statewide – in efforts to address this problem. These strategies included deliberate changes to direct practice and legislative policies.

Local efforts to reduce racial disproportionality are implemented in agencies that provide direct practice to children, youth, and families. Over that last decade, child welfare professionals have taken bold steps towards reducing racial disparities in the child welfare system by prioritizing the need for action and utilizing data to inform decision making. Local efforts included use of agency task forces (Durate et al., 2012), innovative programs (Casey Family Programs), and interagency collaboration. In the last few years, agencies have improved culturally competent practices and service delivery. For instance, Child Protective Services uses culturally responsive services such as the cultural broker advocacy program and implementing an anti-racist framework that remedies the policies and practices that create racial disparities (Datlaff et al. 2021).

Legislative reform has also been a technique to address racial disproportionality. Child welfare policies that address systemic issues facing children and families are established by individual states as federal policies provide flexibility to states to meet the diverse and ethnic

backgrounds of children and families (Children’s Bureau, 2021). Efforts to address the unique needs of children and families include policies that support cross system collaboration, reunification services, and timely adoptions.

Legislative reform targets reunification and timely adoptions to decrease the length of time children spend in foster care given the research which shows the consequences of out of home placement. Studies have shown children of color are more likely to enter the child welfare system and are less likely to exit the system via reunification or adoption. Furthermore, children of color experience more placement instability, and spend a longer time in foster care than White children (Detlaff et. al, 2020). Knowing the lifelong negative consequences that stem from out of home placement, policy reform continues to address the cause of long-term placement and reduce the impact on children. As a result of racial disproportionality, these consequences affect children of color at a greater rate than White children. Therefore, scholars, legislators, and child welfare professionals continue to make concerted efforts to address racial disproportionality and improve the outcome for children of color.

### **Blind Removals in the United States**

Blind removals are another strategy for reducing racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. The purpose of blind removals is to address a disproportionate need for African American children to access child welfare services and points to the role of human decision-making in racial disproportionality and racial disparity (Pryce, 2019). Blind removals shift social work practices from “race-neutral” strategies to use of an anti-racist framework that intentionally addresses the call to action for a reduction in African American disproportionality by challenging racism embedded in the functioning of our society. This practice has been tested in various

counties including Nassau County, New York and Kent County, Michigan. As of July 2020, a blind removal pilot was approved for Los Angeles County, California.

### *Nassau County*

Blind removals were used in a pilot program in Nassau County, New York starting in 2010. When blind removals were implemented, racial disproportionality was reduced significantly. “In 2010, African American children were 15 times more likely to be placed in foster care compared to White children, whereas in 2013, the ratio decreased 11 to 1” (Pryce et. al, 2021). This reduction was not only due to blind removals. Between 2010 and 2014, blind removals were initiated in addition to multiple active efforts to reduce racial disparities in this community. These efforts included large stakeholder meetings in the community, improved case practice development to facilitate continued learning, and use of Differential Response (D.R.) strategies – also referred to as an alternative response to maltreatment reports. D.R. strategies encourage support from community agencies to support families with minor maltreatment concerns in lieu of a child abuse investigation which are used for more serious allegations (Child Information Gateway, 2020).

In Nassau County, there were a myriad of strategies used to address racial disproportionality in this community, however, blind removal meetings were identified as the main contributor to this reduction. Researchers utilized qualitative methods that consisted of focus groups and interviews to gather and analyze participants viewpoints on what contributed to reducing disproportionality in Nassau County from 2010 to 2014. Once participant narratives were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, there were several common themes that emerged from these data. The findings suggested participants named blind removal meetings and workforce diversity as the reasons for this success.

Blind removal meetings allowed caseworkers to critically consider the way their own perspectives contributed to the outcome of child welfare decisions. In order to implement blind removals, case workers were required to participate in training that helped them see their own biases, while also learning about how implicit bias was an unconscious mental process. Blind removal meetings appeared to be successful due to the attention that was placed on engagement practices with families and their communities, and critically assessing the role of implicit bias in casework decision. While blind removals were not solely responsible for reducing racial disparities in Nassau County, the practices that were implemented in concert with this practice were highly effective in reducing racial disproportionality.

#### *Kent County*

Kent County Child Welfare Services also implemented blind removals in efforts to tackle racial disparities in the area. Baron and colleagues conducted the first quantitative study examining the effectiveness of blind removals by examining how blind removals were effective in this county by achieving their intended goal of reducing racial disproportionality indicated by the over-representation of African American children in foster care systems. In this study, researchers examined the method of assignment for CPS investigations – referred to as quasi-random assignment. Additionally, researchers reviewed a comprehensive administrative dataset to understand the results of the investigation.

The findings suggest disproportionality was introduced at the time the maltreatment report was created. It was found that African American children were three times more likely to be victims of child maltreatment, but were removed at a rate that was similar to White children. In Kent County, out of all child abuse investigations that were conducted, White children were removed at a rate of 11.10 percent and African American children are removed at a rate of 12.08

percent as a result of substantiated allegations. This means, 88.9 percent of White families and 87.92 percent of African American families had substantiated allegations that did not result in removal. Therefore, blind removals did not reduce racial disparities in Kent County.

### *Los Angeles County*

Blind removals are being considered in Los Angeles (LA), California. A motion by Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell titled “*Toward a Color-Blind Child Welfare System: Pilot Program for Safeguarding Against Racial Bias*” was presented to the LA County Board of Supervisors on July 13, 2021, in efforts to implement a pilot program that would allow blind removals in Los Angeles, California. The motion stated blind removals can also inform the degree to which implicit bias may impact the well-meaning and diverse workforce that comprises Los Angeles County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services (DCFS). Finally, blind removals may aid the county in determining where its safety strategies can be improved. Blind removals were described as a bold step in addressing practices that may unnecessarily fracture families and disrupt a system that can impose unintentional, yet lasting, harm upon children and families.

### **Key Takeaways from the Blind Removal Program**

Through examining the study in Nassau County, it is clear that blind removal meetings can be effective. It is important to note that this model relies heavily on the critical assessment of the role of implicit bias in child welfare decisions. Counties who implement this process must commit to increased training and education on areas related to personal bias, systemic racism, and other institutional barriers that effect removal decisions. The case study in Nassau County showed there was an increase in staff awareness of institutional racism and implicit bias (Pryce

2019). Initiating blind removal meetings directly correlated with an improvement in the way caseworkers assessed child abuse investigations.

Blind removal meetings were effective when incorporated with other strategies that aimed to reduce racial disproportionality. While implementing this new model in Nassau County, administrators also improved workforce diversity, increased family engagement practices, allowed caseworkers opportunities to assess their personal biases, heightened community voices via stakeholder meetings, and utilized differential response strategies to reduce the number of families that entered into investigative processes.

Lastly, blind removal meetings are effective when there are large racial disparities at the entry point of the child welfare system. This model emphasizes the changes on the front end of the child welfare system. While evidence shows that racial disparities exist at every decision in the child welfare system, blind removals are an effective strategy at reducing disparities at the entry point to the child welfare system.

### **Impact on Children, Families, and Systems**

Data on blind removals in child welfare were first published in 2019 by Jessica Pryce, Ph.D. Since these data emerged, the success in reducing disproportionality in Nassau County led to intentional conversations on how others could address racial disproportionality in their communities. While some researchers agreed with blind removal meetings and others expressed their skepticism in this strategy, it nonetheless motivated child welfare professionals to actively pursue a solution to the problem.

Thus far, Nassau County, New York and Kent County, Michigan, have tested blind removal meetings. The data on how this practice directly affected families is limited. However,



extensive research exists on the impact of providing implicit bias training to child welfare workers that results in better outcomes for children and families.

Professionals have yet to agree on the most effective strategy to address these concerns; blind removal meetings galvanized social welfare advocates to continue finding methods to address this problem.

### **Could Blind Removals be a Solution in California**

Given the racial inequities in child removal cases, blind removal policies seem to be a potential solution for California. In California, African American children are represented at a rate of 3.2 which is three times their rate in the general population (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). This number is nearly double the national average. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, these racial disparities are the highest for Native American children. Native American children enter the child welfare system at a rate of 2.6, remain in the system at a rate of 2.7, and exit the system at a rate of 2.5.

In addition to African American youth, Native American children are also overrepresented in the child welfare system. Research shows Native American /Alaska Native (AI/AN) children are disproportionality represented in the child welfare system nationwide. Studies suggest overrepresentation of Native American youth is largely due to “systematic bias, where abuse has been reported AI/AN children are 2 times more likely to be investigated, 2 times more likely to have allegations of abuse substantiated, and 4 times more likely to be placed in foster care than White children” (Child Information Gateway, 2019). Similar to African American youth, Native American youth are disproportionality represented at multiple decision points in the child welfare system.

Despite previous efforts to reduce racial disparities, data show racial disproportionality continues to be a problem for child welfare professionals, researchers, and policymakers (Lambert, 2021). Literature speaks to blind removals as a promising strategy for those with large disparity rates. This practice utilizes an anti-racist framework, by emphasizing the role of institutional racism, implicit bias, and human decision making on removals. Additionally, it acknowledges the irreparable damage caused disproportionately to children of color due to child welfare involvement.

### **Blind Removal Skepticism**

Many believe implementing blind removal meetings comes with risks. In a quantitative review, Baron and colleagues questioned the methods used by Dr. Pryce to reduce disproportionality. They found that blind removals lengthen the time of child abuse investigations (Baron et al, 2021) and ultimately do not address the reasons African American families come in contact with the child welfare system at larger rates. Similarly, social work researchers made the assertion that blind removal meetings are ineffective due to the use of implicit bias trainings which places the responsibility of dismantling structural racism on individuals as opposed to agencies (Reddy et al, 2022). Researchers continually debate on what methods can effectively reduce racial disparities.

Many researchers have argued that blind removals do not address the root cause of child maltreatment given poverty related concerns that indirectly contribute to neglect. For example, research shows that many children living in poverty are at a greater risk of maltreatment due to health and safety hazards stemming from inadequate housing (Kim & Drake, 2014). While implementing blind removals can reduce racial disparities at the entry of the child welfare system, it may not be an effective strategy for addressing root causes of maltreatment.

## **Conclusion**

Growing concerns of racial disproportionality continue to be addressed by policymakers, researchers, scholars, and child welfare administrators. Blind removal is one of many strategies that have shown to have promising results. Counties with large racial disparities may benefit the most from blind removal strategies. If blind removal meetings are successful in California, it would lead to a reduction in children of color entering the system at disproportionate rates. Subsequently, this would reduce the number of youth placed in foster care.

Blind removals should occur in concert with current efforts such as use of culturally competent caseworkers and community engagement practices. Most importantly, blind removal meetings initiate critical conversations on the role of human decisions in the outcome of child welfare decisions.

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Figure 1

**Disproportionality Amongst African Americans in Foster Care**

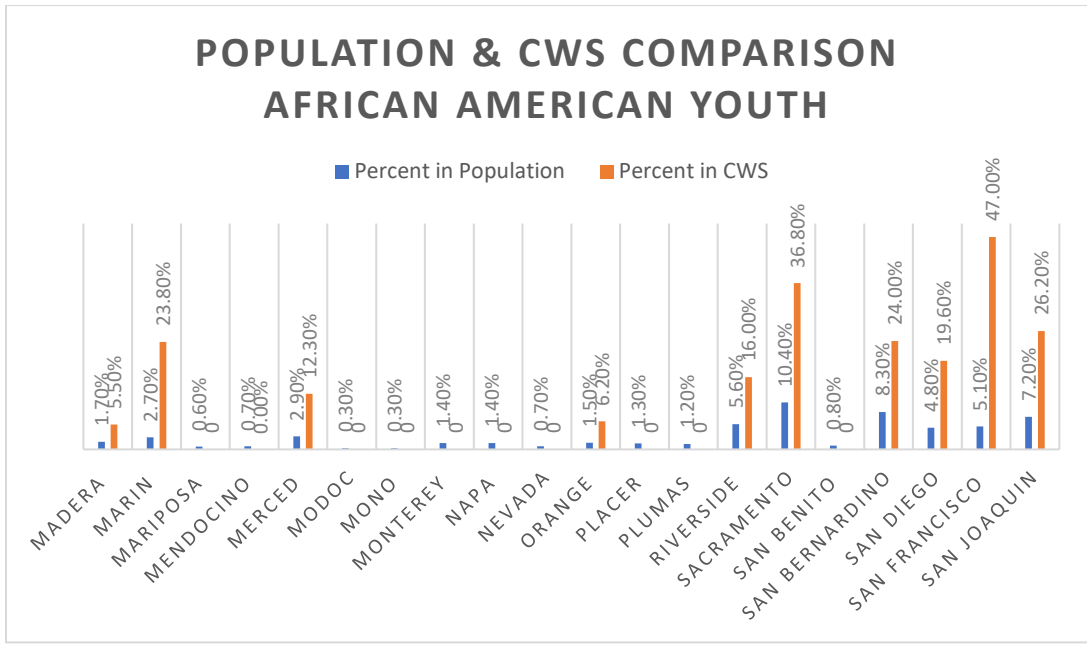
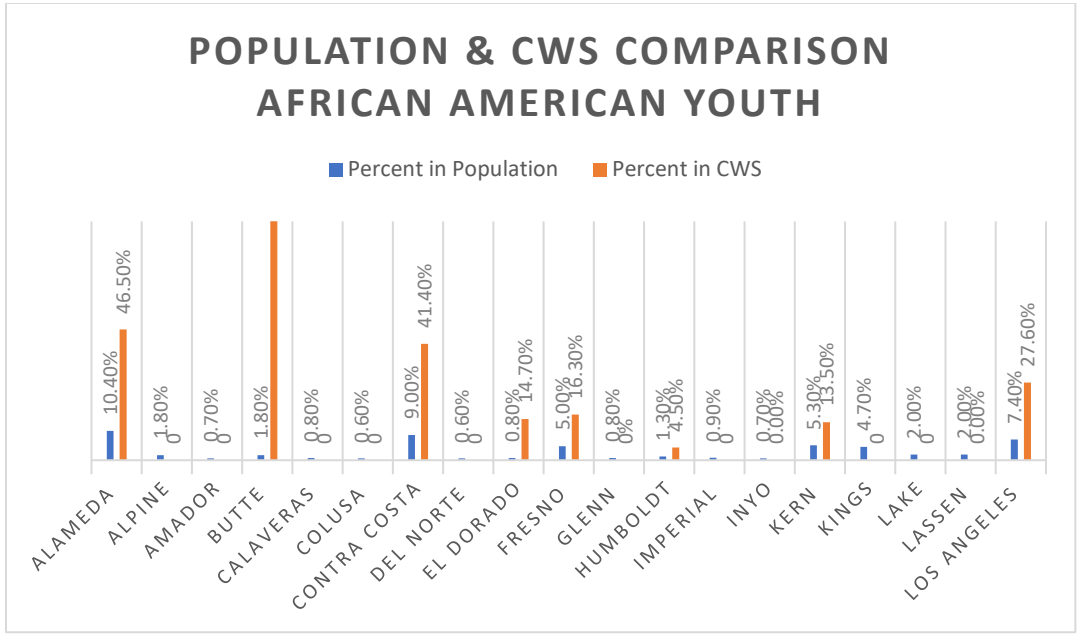
April 2021 to March 2022

CA Counties	Percent in Population	Percent in Foster Care	RDI
Alameda	10.40%	46.50%	4.47
Alpine	1.80%	0	0
Amador	0.70%	0	0
Butte	1.80%	4.8	2.60
Calaveras	0.80%	M	M
Colusa	0.60%	M	M
Contra Costa	9.00%	41.40%	4.6
Del Norte	0.60%	M	M
El Dorado	0.80%	14.70%	18
Fresno	5.00%	16.30%	3.26
Glenn	0.80%	0%	0
Humboldt	1.30%	4.50%	3.46
Imperial	0.90%	M	M
Inyo	0.70%	0.00%	0
Kern	5.30%	13.50%	2.5
Kings	4.70%	M	M
Lake	2.00%	M	M
Lassen	2.00%	0.00%	0
Los Angeles	7.40%	27.60%	3.79
Madera	1.70%	5.50%	3.2
Marin	2.70%	23.80%	8.81
Mariposa	0.60%	M	M
Mendocino	0.70%	0.00%	0
Merced	2.90%	12.30%	4.42
Modoc	0.30%	0	0
Mono	0.30%	0	0
Monterey	1.40%	M	M
Napa	1.40%	M	M
Nevada	0.70%	M	M
Orange	1.50%	6.20%	4.13
Placer	1.30%	M	M
Plumas	1.20%	M	M
Riverside	5.60%	16.00%	2.8
Sacramento	10.40%	36.80%	3.5



San Benito	0.80%	0	0
San Bernardino	8.30%	24.00%	2.89
San Diego	4.80%	19.60%	4.08
San Francisco	5.10%	47.00%	9.21
San Joaquin	7.20%	26.20%	3.6
San Luis Obispo	1.00%	4.50%	4.5
San Mateo	1.80%	M	M
Santa Barbara	1.30%	3.00%	2.3
Santa Clara	2.20%	9.10%	4.13
Santa Cruz	0.70%	M	M
Shasta	1.20%	M	M
Sierra	0.20%	0	0
Siskiyou	1.10%	M	M
Solano	13.20%	43.20%	3.27
Sonoma	1.50%	5.60%	3.73
Stanislaus	2.60%	11.40%	4.38
Sutter	1.80%	9.80%	5.4
Tehama	0.60%	M	M
Toulumne	0.40%	M	M
Trinity	1.10%	0	0
Tulare	0.80%	4.30%	5.37
Ventura	1.30%	3.50%	2.69
Yolo	2.40%	21.20%	8.83
Yuba	3.00%	11.80%	3.9

Figure 2



## POPULATION & CWS COMPARISON AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

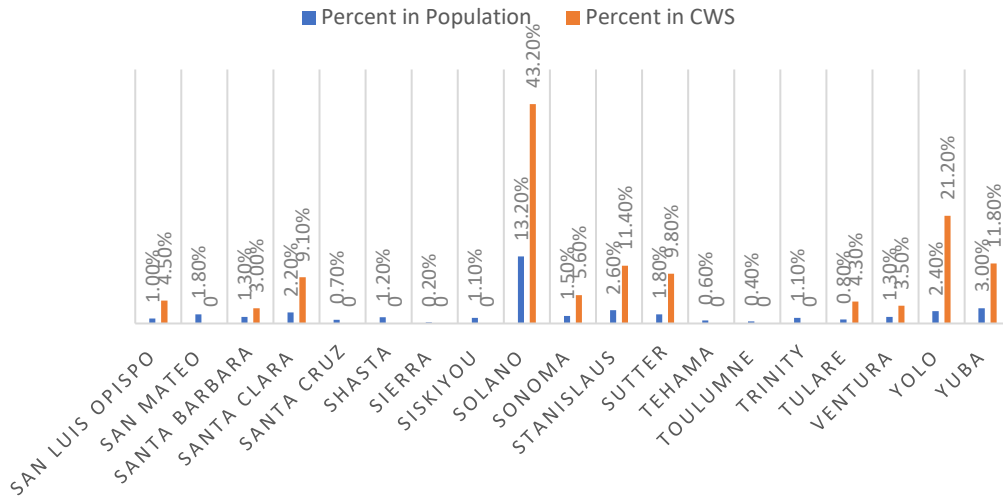


Figure 3

**Racial Disproportionality in Maltreatment Reports**

January 2021 to December 2021  
 Ethnicities measured in comparison to White

County	African American	Native	Latino	Asian
Alameda	4.53	3.42	1.88	0.81
Alpine	4.5	4.13	2.57	-
Amador	3.82	0.63	0.84	0.35
Butte	2.26	2.59	0.66	0.25
Calaveras	3.63	0.49	1.11	0.7
California	2.97	2.42	1.29	0.49
Colusa	5.15	2.36	0.77	0
Contra Costa	3.57	1.56	1.54	0.8
Del Norte	4.59	2.91	0.43	0.74
El Dorado	6.25	1.22	1.1	0.71
Fresno	2.8	1.38	1	0.47
Glenn	1.62	5.09	1.26	0.98
Humboldt	3.13	4.29	0.91	0.7
Imperial	1.16	1.17	0.36	0.12
Inyo	1.76	5.7	2.31	0
Kern	2.69	0.59	0.98	0.3
Kings	1.82	1.64	1.23	0.19
Lake	2.03	1.95	0.71	0.25
Lassen	2.45	3	0.59	2.65
Los Angeles	3.46	0.83	1.41	0.46
Madera	3.28	3.19	1.14	0.6
Marin	6.2	4.19	2.95	0.99
Mariposa	5.33	1.54	1.25	0.42
Mendocino	2.65	2.62	0.71	0.65
Merced	2.67	1.31	1.3	0.57
Modoc	1.86	2.63	1.94	0.83
Mono	2.59	5.91	0.66	0.5
Monterey	2.8	1.04	1.33	0.68
Napa	3.49	3.21	1	0.42
Nevada	3.03	0.57	0.8	1.38
Orange	3.63	0.78	1.78	0.64
Placer	5.46	3.59	1.16	0.77
Plumas	5.46	3.33	0.42	0
Riverside	2.38	1.96	0.91	0.53

Sacramento	3.28	2.14	1.21	0.59
San Benito	2.05	0.89	1.57	0.29
San Bernardino	2.49	1.19	1.19	0.43
San Diego	3.06	2.52	1.51	0.61
San Francisco	13.62	5.47	4.98	1.49
San Joaquin	2.61	1.07	1.07	0.55
San Luis Obispo	1.67	0.97	1.19	0.3
San Mateo	3.79	2.22	1.88	0.73
Santa Barbara	2.47	2.2	1.97	0.45
Santa Clara	5.09	2.23	3.19	0.93
Santa Cruz	3.18	1.62	1.22	0.41
Shasta	4.25	2.4	0.9	0.51
Sierra	0	0	1.1	0.51
Siskiyou	6.03	2.82	0.8	1.79
Solano	2.35	2.7	0.76	0.59
Sonoma	2.96	3.2	1.41	0.69
Stanislaus	2.74	1.14	1.09	0.5
Sutter	3.43	1.4	0.63	0.28
Tehama	5.05	2.29	0.86	1.63
Trinity	6.47	1.14	0.46	1.82
Tulare	1.56	0.92	0.68	0.29
Tuolumne	1.25	2.41	0.72	0.45
Ventura	2.38	0.59	1.66	0.44
Yolo	7.03	4.82	1.61	0.42
Yuba	2.78	1.52	0.61	0.42

Figure 4

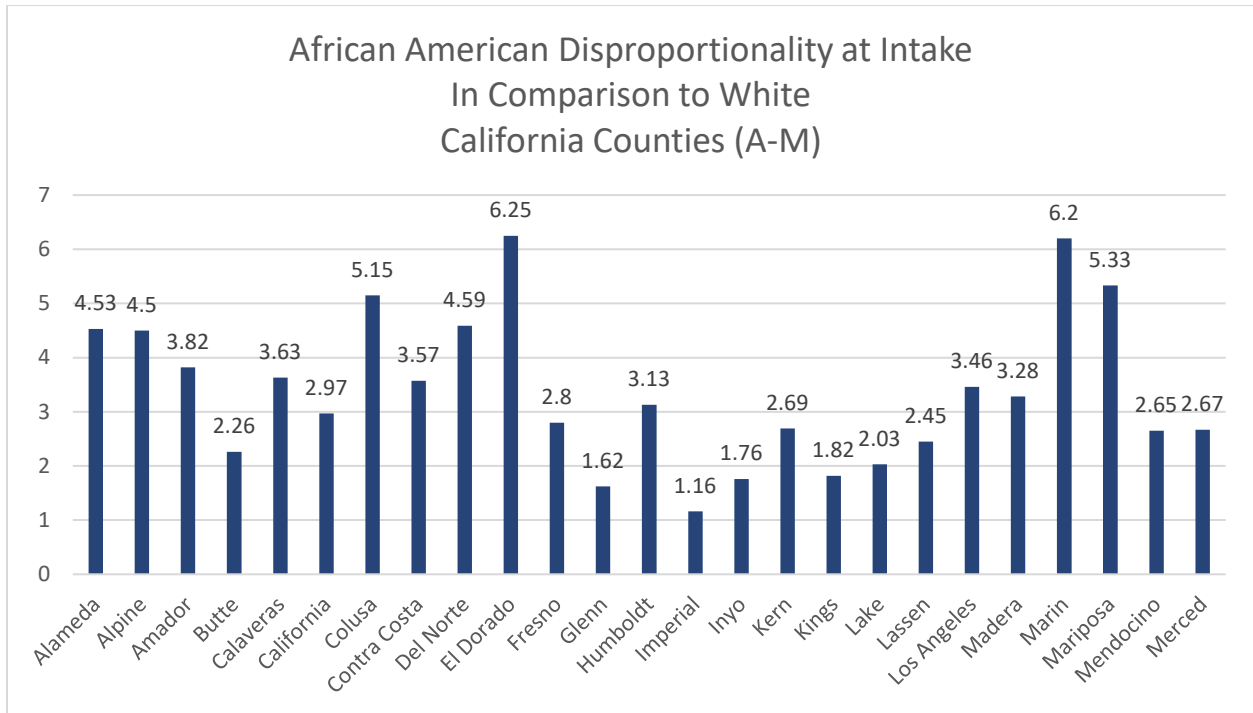


Figure 5

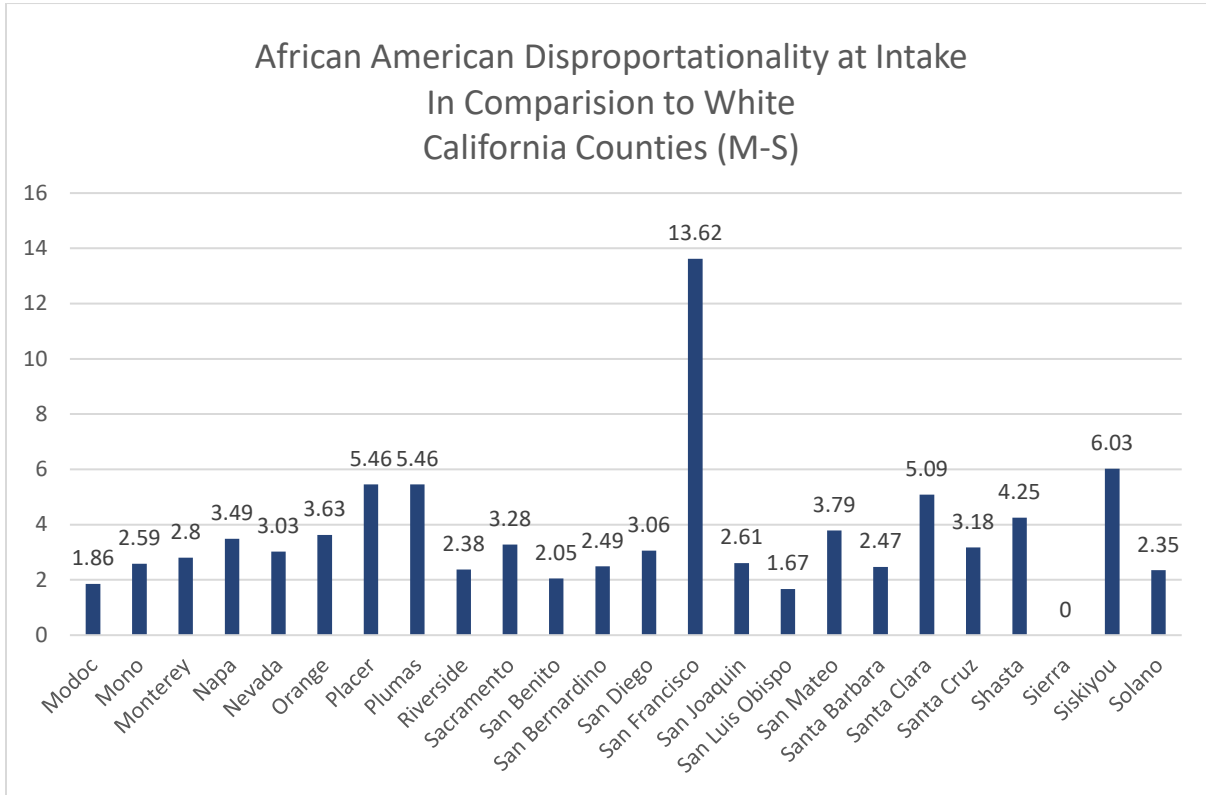


Figure 6

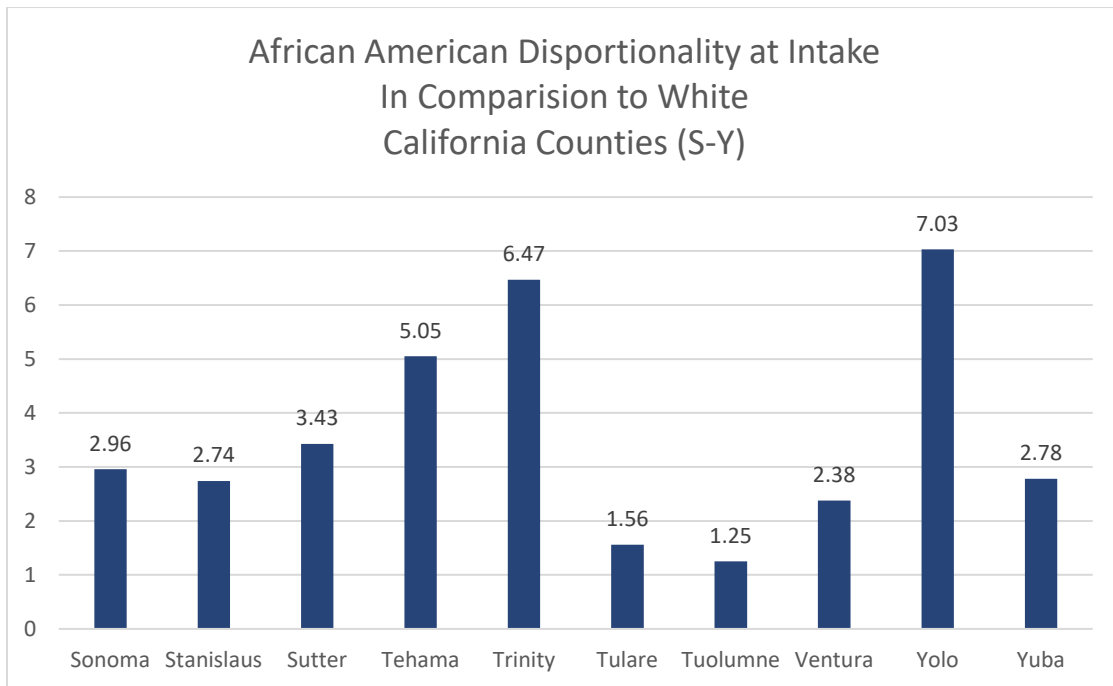




Figure 7

**Racial Disproportionality in Entries in the Child Welfare System**

January 2021 to December 2021  
 Ethnicities measured in comparison to White

County	African American	Native	Latino	Asian
Alameda	7.76	3.04	2.7	0.57
Alpine				
Amador	0	3.09	0.75	0
Butte	0.98	1.65	0.71	0.39
Calaveras	2.66	0	0.98	3.08
Colusa	13.49	0	0.63	0
Contra Costa	5.12	3.53	1.27	0.59
Del Norte	3.25	3.12	0.6	1.35
El Dorado	0	0	0.76	0.33
Fresno	4.08	3.8	1.2	0.56
Glenn	0	5.36	0.46	0
Humboldt	0.98	8.86	0.44	0
Imperial	1.17	0	0.88	0
Inyo	0	2.7	2.4	0
Kern	2.24	0.54	0.87	0.3
Kings	1.11	0.77	1.19	0.45
Lake	1.2	2.38	0.32	0
Lassen	0.83	2.38	0.56	0
Los Angeles	5.63	0.99	1.99	0.37
Madera	2.39	5.95	1.18	1.81
Marin	34.91	0	2.87	1.04
Mariposa	0	0	5.63	10.73
Mendocino	0	4.89	0.5	0
Merced	6.17	0	1.67	0.55
Modoc	0	0	2.47	0
Mono	0	0	1.1	0
Monterey	5.99	0	0.8	0
Napa	8.09	0	1.31	0.72
Nevada	8.57	3.22	1.21	11.13
Orange	5.26	0.51	1.83	0.33

Placer	10.44	12.63	1.14	0.76
Plumas	0	5.11	0.65	0
Riverside	2.49	2.62	1.02	0.17
Sacramento	4.77	1.69	1.4	0.5
San Benito	0	0	4.14	8.11
San Bernardino	3.02	1.69	1.37	0.52
San Diego	4.1	1.28	1.28	0.41
San Francisco	15.47	0	4.42	0.58
San Joaquin	3.93	1.36	1.34	0.29
San Luis Obispo	1.73	0	0.87	0
San Mateo	6.08	0	1.6	0.38
Santa Barbara	3.41	2.33	1.94	0.36
Santa Clara	10.68	7.57	5.3	0.46
Santa Cruz	6.5	5.69	0.93	0
Shasta	2.96	3.67	0.77	0.42
Sierra	0	0	0	0
Siskiyou	4.7	0.79	0.35	0
Solano	2.47	3.28	0.86	0.48
Sonoma	6.4	4.14	1.3	0.44
Stanislaus	3.4	0	0.93	0.48
Sutter	3.15	0	0.76	0.16
Tehama	8.4	2.72	0.5	2.28
Trinity	8.45	0	0.24	0
Tulare	0.77	2.25	0.67	0.13
Tuolumne	3.5	2.24	1.68	1.68
Ventura	4.38	0	1.87	0.21
Yolo	16.4	3.73	2.19	0.08
Yuba	3.39	1.01	0.87	0.87

Figure 8

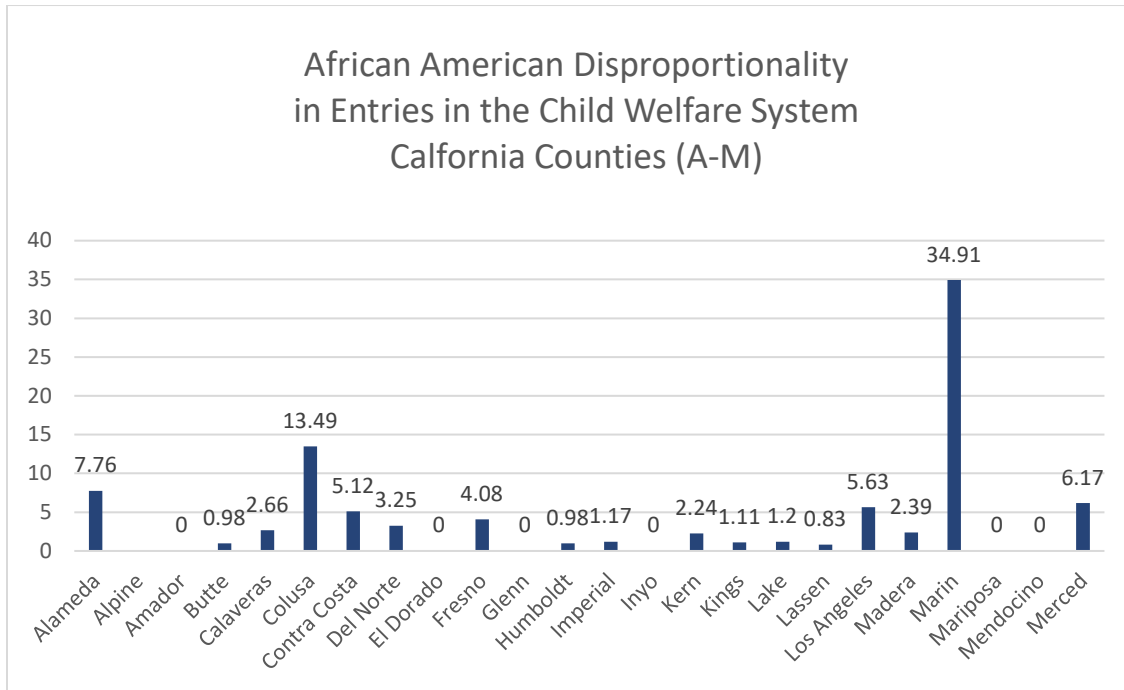


Figure 9

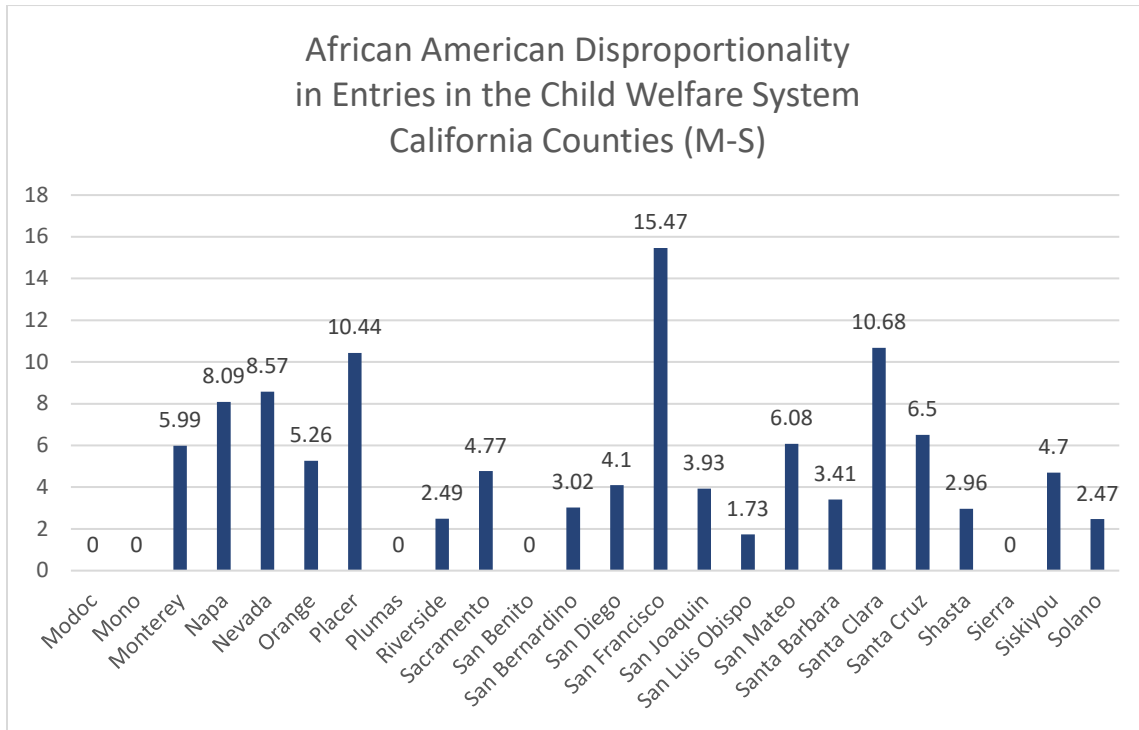


Figure 10

