

**Minority Overrepresentation in Child Welfare
Preliminary Examination
Jefferson County 2001-2006**

Prepared by
Cathryn Potter, Ph.D.
Butler Institute for Families
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Denver

Data for these analyses come from extracts from Colorado’s SACWIS system database, Trails, for the years 2001-2006. Four extracts were used for this report, one focusing on allegations of child maltreatment, one focusing on the investigation, and two focusing on risk and safety assessment. For this set of analyses, we focus on children served in child welfare. The primary analytic question is whether the characteristics of cases and case decisions vary by child ethnicity.

To read the tables, one should compare racial/ethnic groups by reading down the columns. In the case of nominal variables (such as the presence or absence of a characteristic or event), the data are presented as percentages. In the case of interval data (such as length of service or risk scores) the data are presented as averages. Although the ethnic groups contain different numbers of children, the statistics used to test significance of differences take into account these variations in group size.

These analyses are preliminary in nature and are very simple in nature, crossing race/ethnicity with one other attribute of interest. Future analyses will use more complicated statistical means for asking questions where multiple variables are of interest. These results do, however, present an important description of the variations in case processes for children of color.

Some 9,282 children were referred to Jefferson County with allegations of child maltreatment during this period of time. Table 1 presents the race/ethnicity of these children.

**Table 1
Child Race/Ethnicity**

Race/ethnicity	Percent
White	68.5%
African American	3.7%
Hispanic	21.6%
Native American	1.5%
Asian	1.3%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.2%
Other	3.1%

Allegations

The category of maltreatment (familial, institutional, etc.) does not vary by ethnicity. However the specific type of maltreatment does vary by ethnicity. Table 1 shows the result of this analysis. In general White and Hispanic families have similar patterns of referral (within 1-2 percentage points). African American families are more likely to be referred for physical abuse and lack of supervision. Native American families are more likely to be referred for failure to protect and lack of supervision, and less likely to be referred for sexual abuse. Asian families are more likely to be referred for failure to protect, lack of supervision, and medical neglect, and less likely to be referred for sexual abuse.

**Table 2
Type of Maltreatment by Ethnicity**

	Environment Injurious	Educational Neglect	Deprive of Necessities	Failure to Protect	Physical Abuse	Lack of Supervision	Medical Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse
White	40.6%	1.0%	2.7%	3.4%	26.6%	10.8%	1.3%	11.3%	2.3%
African American	31.8%	.6%	5.0%	2.8%	30.7%	16.2%	2.2%	10.6%	
Hispanic	43.4%	1.7%	2.1%	5.4%	23.0%	10.7%	1.8%	10.3%	1.8%
Native American	42.0%	2.9%	2.9%	7.2%	23.2%	14.5%	2.9%	1.4%	2.9%
Asian	41.3%			41.3%	21.7%	19.6%	6.5%	2.2%	4.3%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	25.0%				12.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	

The assessed severity of the referral also varies by ethnicity as seen in Table 3. More allegations related to White and Hispanic children are classified as minor and fewer as severe as compared to other ethnicities. Allegations for African American and Native American children are more likely to be categorized as severe.

**Table 3
Severity of Maltreatment by Ethnicity**

	Minor	Medium	Severe	Fatal	Not Determined
White	62.1%	27.9%	2.9%	.1%	7.0%
African American	52.0%	34.5%	9.0%		4.5%
Hispanic	56.2%	33.7%	4.6%		5.6%
Native American	56.3%	35.0%	5.0%		3.8%
Asian	70.5%	27.9%			1.6%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	37.5%	62.5%			
Other	72.1%	14.7%	3.1%		10.1%

Trails contains a count of prior referrals and prior screened out referrals. This count should be considered a low estimate because it results from the screener's search of records and often does

not contain prior referrals under different aliases for parents, or related to other children in the home. American Indian children have the highest number of prior referrals (1.73). White, Asian and Hispanic families have significantly higher average number of referrals (1.37, 1.39 and 1.53) as compared to Pacific Islander children (.33). The numbers of prior screen outs are very low. Pacific Islander children have fewer screen outs (.14) than do all other groups (range .21 to .4).

All children of color are more likely to have allegations move forward to investigations. This is particularly true for African American, Native American and Asian children. A full 8% more of African American and 10% more of Native American allegations move forward relative to allegations for White children.

**Table 4
Accepted for Investigation by Race/Ethnicity**

	Accepted for Investigation
White	75.4%
African American	83.2%
Hispanic	79.4%
Native American	86.0%
Asian	82.1%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	76.2%
Other	78.3%

Investigations

Some 5,359 children have completed investigations across the 5-year time period. The percentages of children in the system at this point in the case are similar to those at the allegation phase, with a slight decline in the percentage of white children and a slight increase in the percent of children of color.

**Table 5
Race/Ethnicity at Allegation and Investigation**

Race/ethnicity	Percent at Allegation	Percent at Investigation
White	68.5%	67.1%
African American	3.7%	3.5%
Hispanic	21.6%	21.8%
Native American	1.5%	1.8%
Asian	1.3%	1.8%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	.2%	.1%
Other	3.1%	3.9%

The finding of investigation varies by race/ethnicity. White and Asian youth are more likely to have reports unfounded, and less likely to have them founded, inconclusive or at risk requesting services. Reports for African American children are most likely to be founded, more than half of reports are founded for these children. Native American and Asian children are most likely to have the court order services.

**Table 6
Allegation Finding by Race/Ethnicity**

	Founded	Inconclusive	Unfounded	At risk requests services	Court Ordered Services
White	36.7%	22.9%	23.6%	9.2%	7.3%
African American	51.7%	18.5%	17.9%	6.0%	5.3%
Hispanic	43.5%	21.3%	19.0%	7.7%	8.1%
Native American	42.5%	21.3%	12.5%	6.3%	15.0%
Asian	25.6%	23.1%	28.2%	3.8%	19.2%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	40.0%	40.0%			20.0%
Other	24.4%	17.4%	25.0%	29.7%	3.5%

For the 1663 children with founded allegations, the recommended next steps vary by race/ethnicity. White children are much less likely to have a case opened than are children of color. African American and Native American children are extremely unlikely to avoid case opening.

**Table 7
Next Steps by Race/Ethnicity**

	Re-open a Case	Link to an Existing Case	Open a New Case	Do not Open a Case
White	13/0%	3.1%	61.5%	22.4%
African American	12.8%	9.0%	75.6%	2.6%
Hispanic	9.4%	5.6%	69.0%	16.0%
Native American	17.6%	11.8%	67.6%	2.9%
Asian	5.0%	25.0%	55.0	15.0%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	%	%	100.0% (2 children)	
Other	4.8%	4.8%	64.3%	19.0%

The investigation length also varies by race/ethnicity, with Pacific/Pacific Islander and African American investigations taking significantly less time than investigations for White children, and all other investigations taking longer.

Table 8
Average Investigation Length in Days by Race/Ethnicity

	Average Investigation in Days
White	24.6
African American	19.8
Hispanic	29.9
Native American	28.9
Asian	27.4
Pacific/Pacific Islander	10.1
Other	27.1

Risk Assessment

At the Risk Assessment phase, some 4,675 children have completed risk assessments. There are differences by race/ethnicity in the total abuse and neglect scores. Table 7 presents these differences. African American, Hispanic and Native American children are scored a significantly higher risk than White children, while Asian, Pacific Islander and Other children score lower than White children. The neglect score is especially high for Native American children. Average abuse risk scores follow the same pattern with the exception that Pacific Islander children also score higher than do White children. For the abuse risk score, the differences between groups are not as large as for neglect, but both are statistically significant.

Table 9
Average Neglect Score by Race/Ethnicity

	Average Neglect Score
White	3.40
African American	4.56
Hispanic	4.06
Native American	5.52
Asian	3.08
Pacific/Pacific Islander	3.25
Other	2.47

Table 10
Average Abuse Score by Race/Ethnicity

	Average Abuse Score
White	2.37
African American	2.95
Hispanic	2.76
Native American	3.93
Asian	1.23
Pacific/Pacific Islander	3.62
Other	2.13

Classification into Risk Levels follows roughly the same pattern. Neglect Risk Level is elevated for African American, Hispanic and Native American children. Because of the smaller

differences in abuse score, Abuse Risk Level is elevated most strongly for American Indian youth, where more than twice as many Indian children are rated at high risk as compared to White children.

**Table 11
Neglect Risk Level by Race/Ethnicity**

	Low	Medium	High
White	16.0%	68.3%	15.8%
African American	8.1%	71.6%	20.3%
Hispanic	12.5%	67.3%	20.2%
Native American	8.0%	64.8%	27.3%
Asian	18.2%	69.7%	12.1%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	25.0%	58.3%	16.7%
Other	23.3%	69.0%	7.8%

**Table 12
Abuse Risk Level by Race/Ethnicity**

	Low	Medium	High
White	31.9%	57.0%	11.1%
African American	27.3%	57.7%	14.9%
Hispanic	26.9%	58.9%	14.3%
Native American	22.5%	52.5%	25.0%
Asian	50.8%	42.6%	6.6%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	30.8%	53.8%	15.4%
Other	39.7%	50.7%	9.6%

The final Risk Levels are presented in Table 13. African American and Native American children are much less likely than White children to be scored at low risk. All children of color, except Asian children, are more likely to be scored at high risk. We do not see significant differences in the use of overrides to arrive at final risk scores.

**Table 13
Final Risk Level by Race/Ethnicity**

	Low	Medium	High
White	10.7%	69.6%	19.8%
African American	5.4%	69.7%	24.9%
Hispanic	9.2%	63.4%	27.4%
Native American	5.2%	59.7%	35.1%
Asian	10.2%	71.2%	18.6%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%
Other	17.2%	70.7%	12.1%

Safety Assessment

Some 4254 youth have completed safety assessments. There are differences by race/ethnicity on 11 of 17 specific safety concerns noted by caseworkers. These differences are presented in Table 14. To compare percentages one should read down the columns, comparing percentages for ethnicities. In all cases, except sexual abuse, African American children are coded more frequently as having a specific safety concern than are White children. In many cases, Hispanic children are more often coded with a safety concern. Native American children are much more likely to be coded with all these safety concerns, often they are at least twice as likely to be so coded.

**Table 14
Specific Safety Concerns by Race/Ethnicity**

	Sees Child in Negative Terms	Caused Harm or Made Threat	Unable to Protect	Explanation Unconvincing	Denies Access or Risk of Flight	Can't Meet Immed Needs	Substance Abuse	Sex Abuse	Emot Unstable or DD	DV	Child Unable to Self Protect
White	5.3%	12.7%	12.0%	3.2%	2.4%	5.1%	25.4%	10.7%	10.1%	11.5%	30.6%
African American	11.0%	22.0%	24.3%	4.6%	7.9%	14.7%	25.8%	7.4%	16.0%	22.2%	46.5%
Hispanic	5.7%	14.4%	15.8%	3.5%	2.9%	6.4%	26.8%	9.4%	7.7%	13.1%	37.0%
Native American	10.6%	13.8%	16.1%	10.6%	2.1%	9.6%	38.5%		15.2%	13.0%	50.6%
Asian	5.9%	7.2%	17.4%	4.3%	3.1%	4.4%	13.0%	7.2%	17.4%	10.1%	52.2%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	7.7%	7.7%	23.1%	0%	0%		46.2%	7.7%	15.4%		15.4%
Other	8.7%	13.1%	13.7%	1.9%	.6%	1.2%	12.6%	19.6%	8.2%	14.5%	24.7%

The number of safety concerns is presented in Table 15. Children of Color are more likely to have a safety concern, with the exception of Asian children.

Table 15
Number of Safety Concerns by Race/Ethnicity

	None	One or More
White	41.7%	58.3%
African American	29.0%	71.0%
Hispanic	39.1%	60.9%
Native American	37.8%	62.2%
Asian	44.8%	55.2%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	30.0%	70.0%
Other	38.8%	61.2%

Table 16 presents the results of examining the final Safety Decision, that is, the immediate response to existing safety concerns. As can be seen, children of color are more likely to have placement be the immediate response to safety concerns. Half of Native American children are placed at the point of safety assessment, and 47% of African American children are placed.

Table 16
Safety Decision by Race/Ethnicity

	No Safety Plan	Safety Plan	Placement of Children
White	41.0%	28.8%	30.2%
African American	25.4%	27.1%	47.5%
Hispanic	39.6%	23.5%	36.8%
Native American	30.3%	19.7%	50.0%
Asian	42.9%	19.6%	37.5%
Pacific/Pacific Islander	33.3%	0%	66.7%
Other	30.5%	48.6%	21.0%

Conclusion

These preliminary analyses indicate that there are differences in assessments and subsequent decisions by race/ethnicity. Without further analysis and qualitative discussion with Jefferson County child welfare workers and supervisors, it is difficult to know to what degree (if any) personal and/or institutional biases may be impacting these assessments and decisions. What is known at this point is that Jefferson County takes the issue of cultural competency quite seriously, and is engaging in multiple organizational strategies to address this issue. These data will provide specificity for internal discussions and for targeting of organizational change strategies.