

## **Forum on Race, Poverty, and Child Abuse Prevention Research**

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Several decades ago, researchers alerted the child abuse and neglect field to the disparity in the numbers of children of a racial minority (primarily African American), compared with children classified as white, reported for child maltreatment and placed in different program services of state child welfare agencies around the country. The racial disparity was confirmed by national surveys gathering information on victims of abuse and neglect, but little subsequent work was done to understand how and why children classified as in the minority throughout the nation had become the majority in state child protective services (CPS).

National incidence studies on the phenomenon of child maltreatment maintain that etiology and occurrence are unrelated to the race of perpetrator or victim. Instead, the presence of risk factors, chiefly poverty or low-income, is cited as a more robust explanatory variable. Because race (and, to some degree, ethnicity) is confounded, equally or more important measurable variables, such as income, education, and unequal institutional treatment, are emphasized in research. In many studies, therefore, race tends to be politely avoided or sympathetically dismissed, frequently devalued, or simplified.

Despite the uneven record of scientific investigation of this important domain, research findings have produced far-reaching insights about the role race plays, often independent of income, in reporting, interpreting, treating, and preventing child maltreatment. As child welfare administrators grapple to answer questions on factors associated with racial disparities; as prevention researchers and practitioners position themselves to shape and guide policy decisions impacting child welfare systems; and as the country becomes more ethnically diverse, we believe it is important for all to revisit the inroads of this neglected topic.

We are pleased to showcase three examples of current child maltreatment research that examine situations in which race matters. Sandra Chipungu and Tricia Bent-Goodley provide an overview of the nature of child welfare services in which the recipients are impoverished and of a minority. They also offer a canopy of constructive concepts to move practitioners and administrators toward more effective service delivery and prevention strategies.

Samuel Myers and his colleagues pursue a different course. They investigate two competing theories assumed to produce disparities—the existence of individual or systemic discrimination in reporting and substantiating child maltreatment versus the prevalence of structural risk factors that dictate interventions and need for services.

Finally, Dennette Derozotes reports on the work of a consortium of researchers who are systematically examining the causes of disproportionate representation and differential treatment in child welfare.

The works presented here are stimulating and may energize the prevention field to lead the country in unraveling the roles played by one's race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in situations where the outcome is child maltreatment.