



Racial Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System: Disproportionate Need or Systematic Bias?

*Presented at the John Burton Foundation Child Welfare Policy Briefing
November 20, 2008
Fresno, California*

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Overview...

- ✓ What? *(what defines disproportionality and disparity?)*
- ✓ Who? *(who is disproportionately represented?)*
- ✓ Where? *(where is disproportionality observed?)*
- ✓ When? *(when do disparities arise?)*
- ✓ How? *(how is disparity being addressed?)*
- ✓ Why? *(why do disparities exist?)*

What defines disproportionality? disparity?

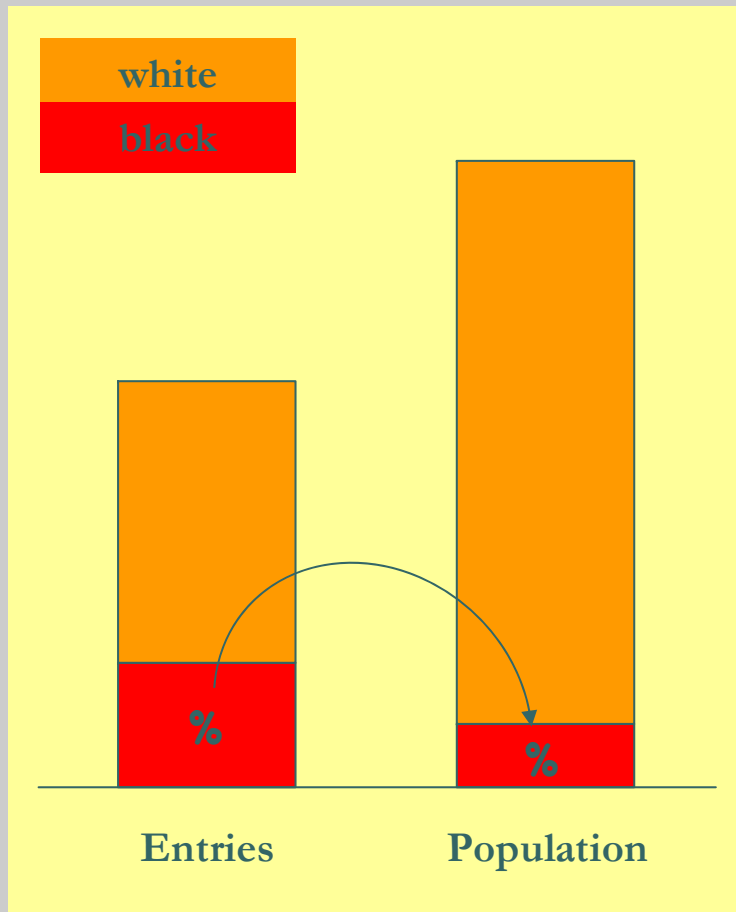
- ✓ **disproportionality:**

a descriptive measure of the degree to which a group makes up a proportion that is higher or lower than that group's proportion in some larger population

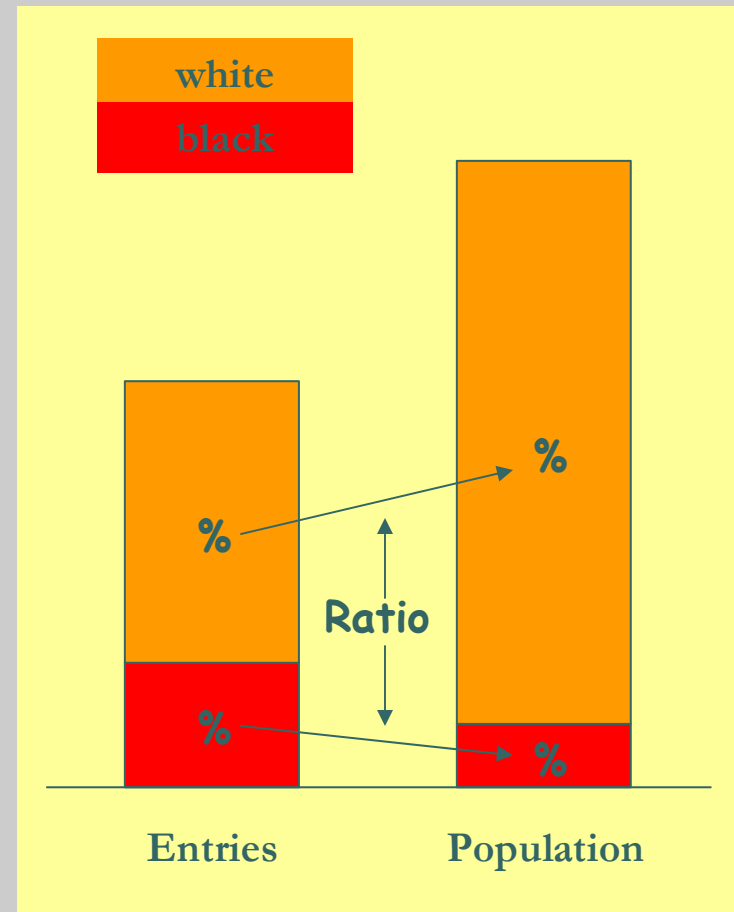
- ✓ **disparity:**

a comparison of one group to another group, a relative rate or relative risk measure (Shaw, et. al., 2008)

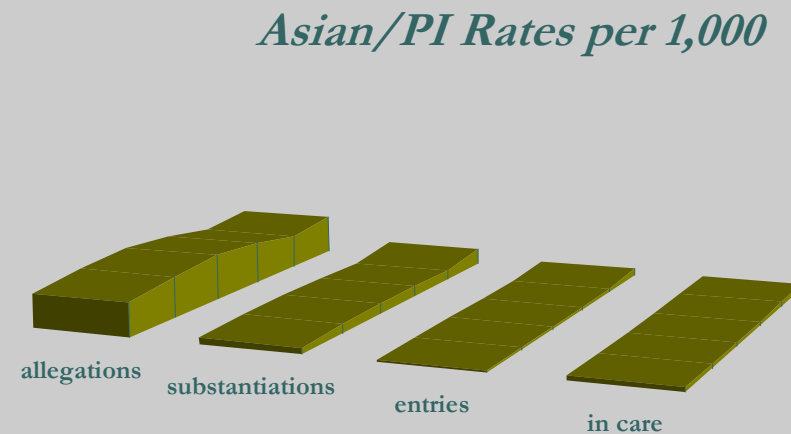
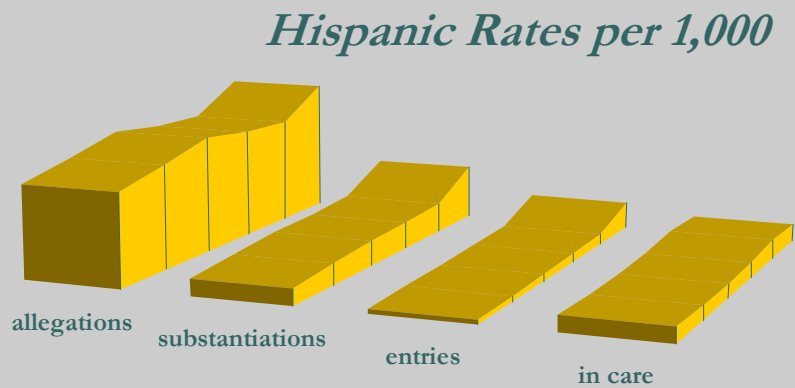
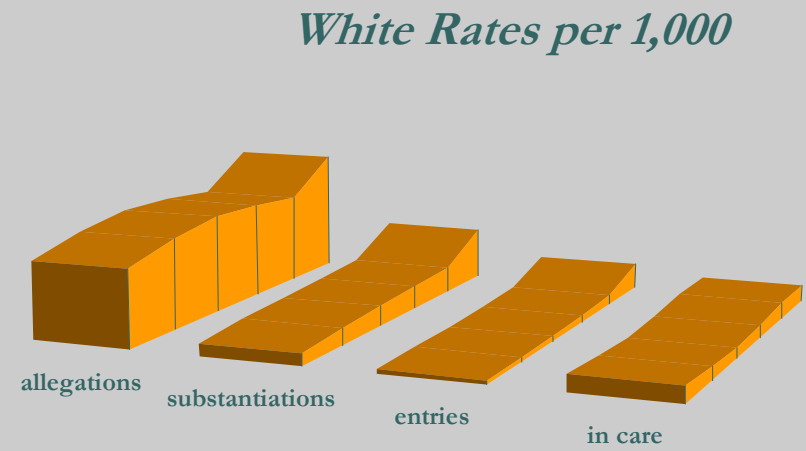
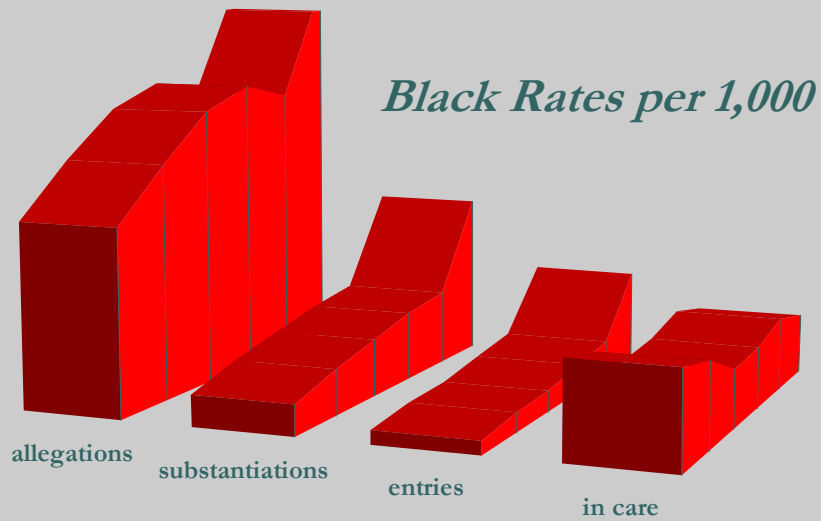
disproportionality



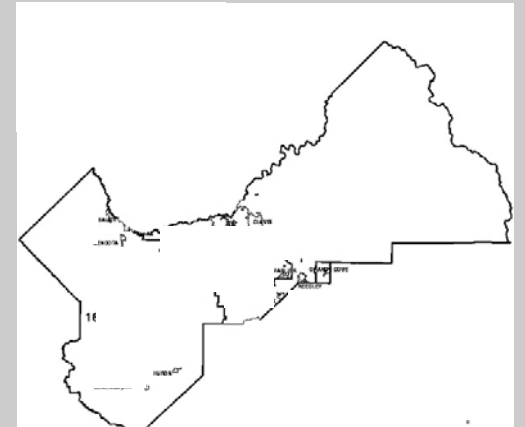
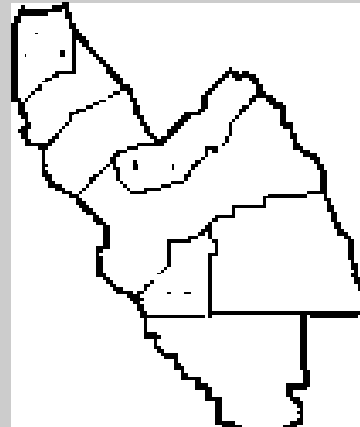
disparity



Who is disproportionately represented?



Where is disproportionality observed?

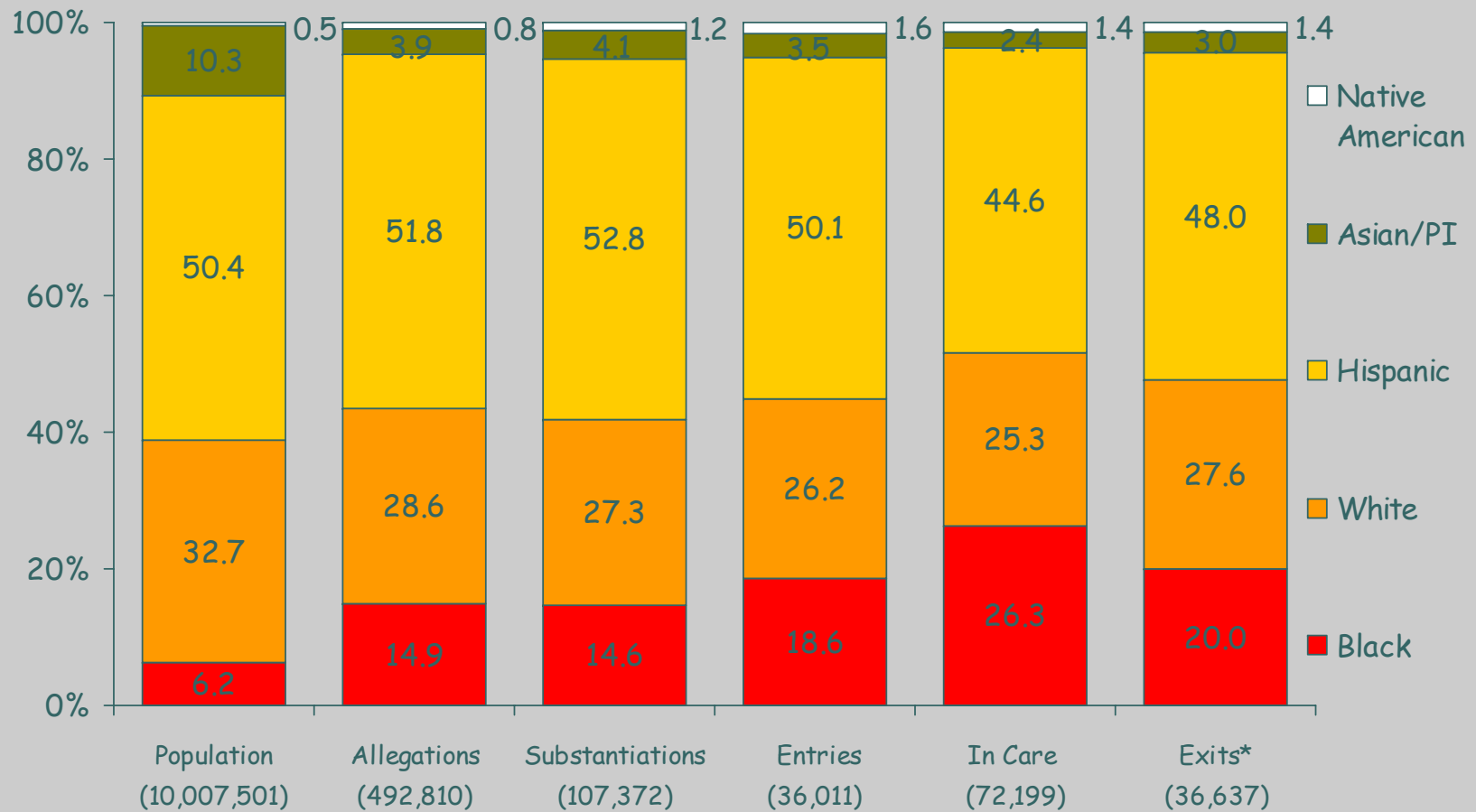


2007

California:

Ethnicity and Path through the Child Welfare System

(Missing Values & Other Race Excluded from % Calculations, <18 years of Age)



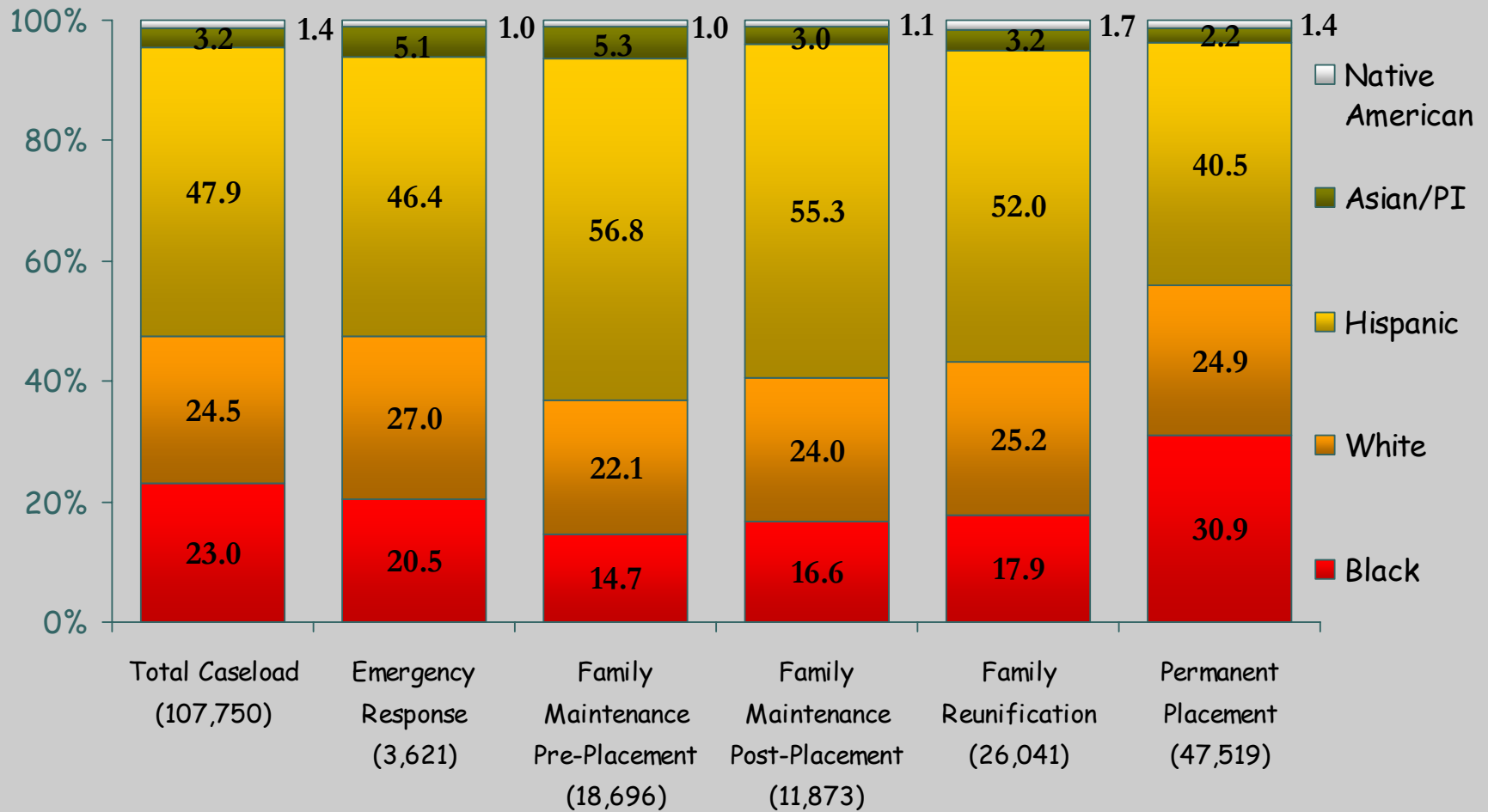
*includes children age 18

April 1, 2008

California:

Caseload By Ethnicity and Case Service Components

(Missing Values & Other Race Excluded from % Calculations, Includes All Ages)

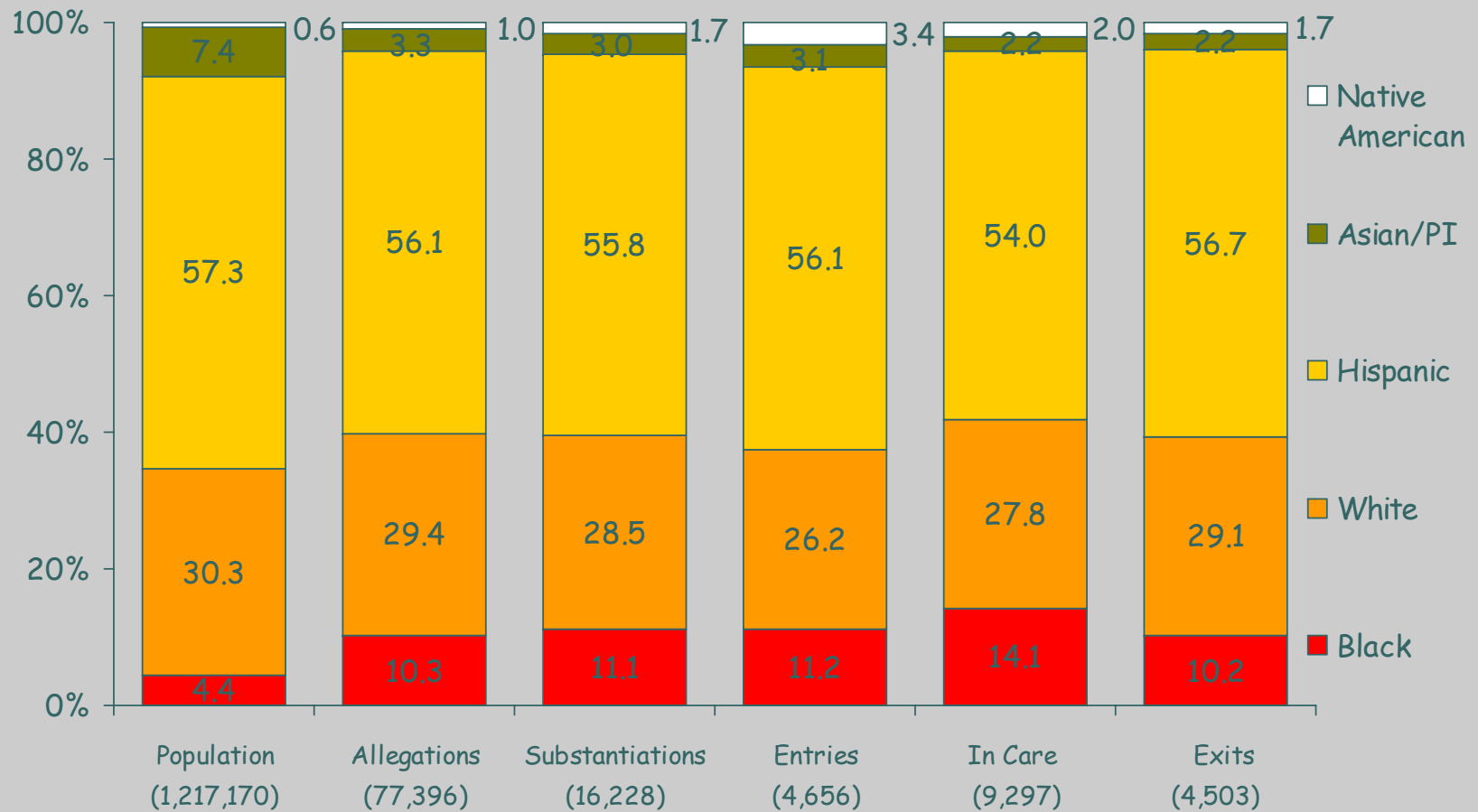


2007

San Joaquin Valley:

Ethnicity and Path through the Child Welfare System

(Missing Values & Other Race Excluded from % Calculations, <18 years of Age)



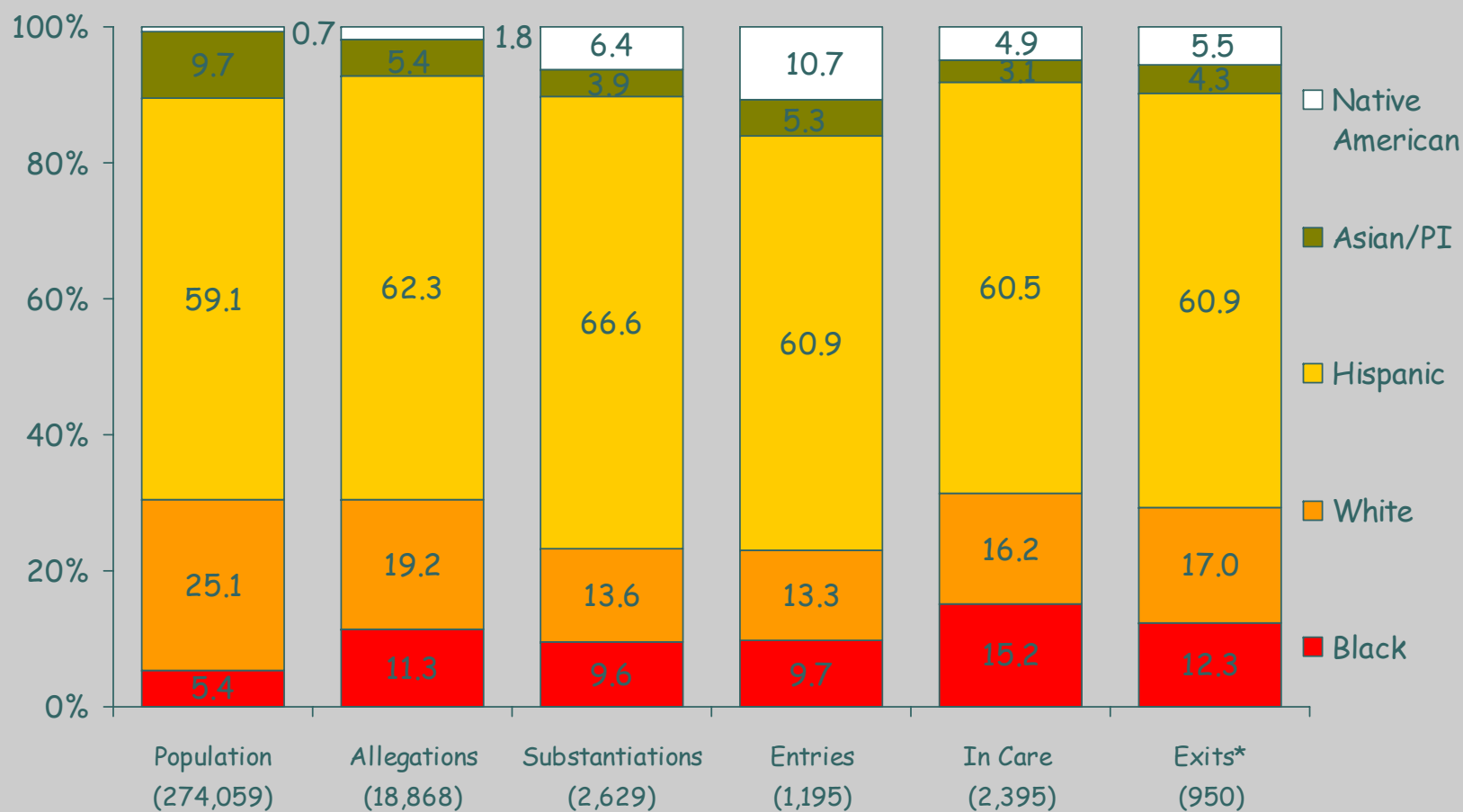
*includes children age 18

2007

Fresno County:

Ethnicity and Path through the Child Welfare System

(Missing Values & Other Race Excluded from % Calculations, <18 years of Age)



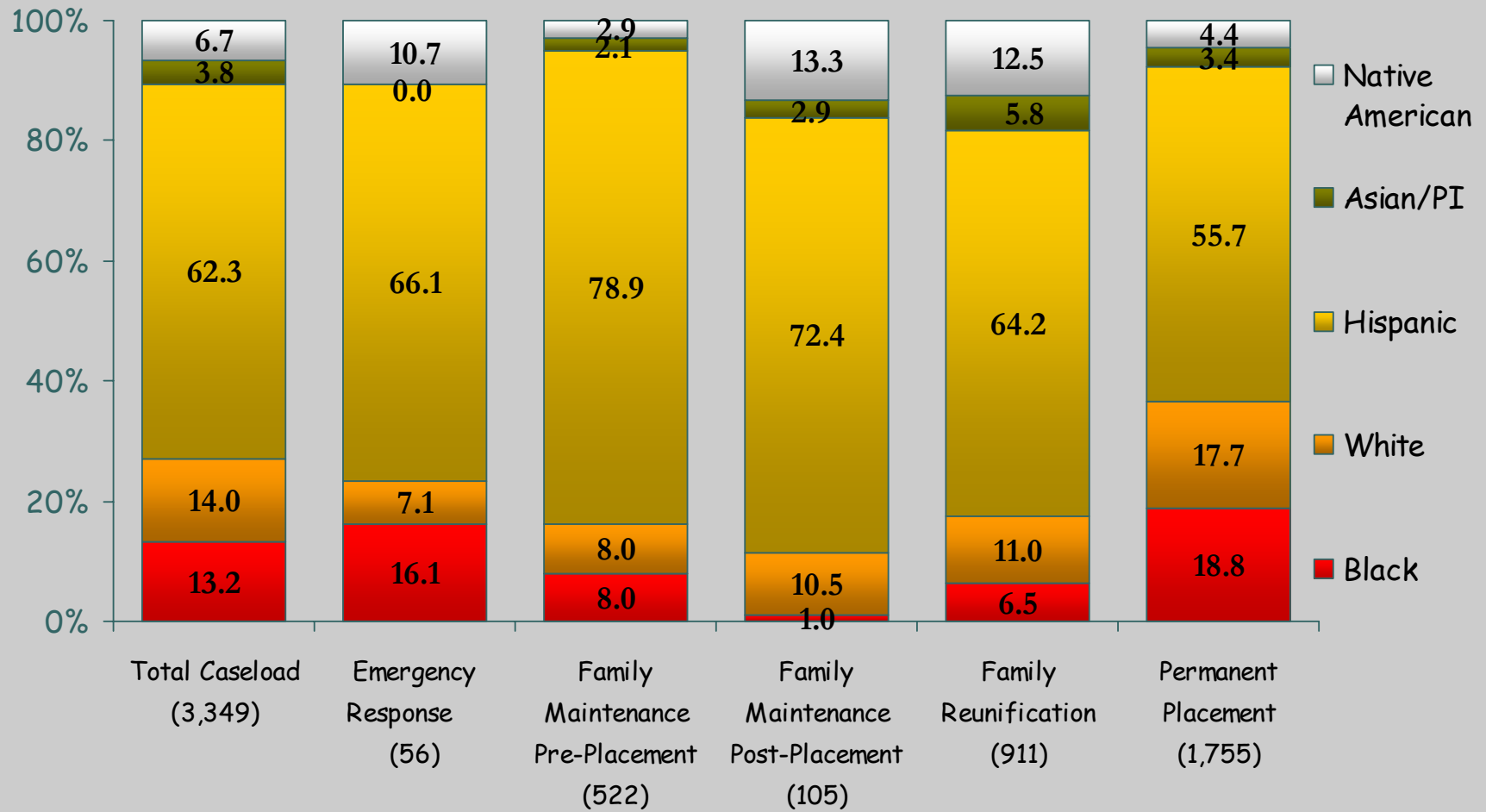
*includes children age 18

April 1, 2008

Fresno:

Caseload By Ethnicity and Case Service Components

(Missing Values & Other Race Excluded from % Calculations, Includes All Ages)

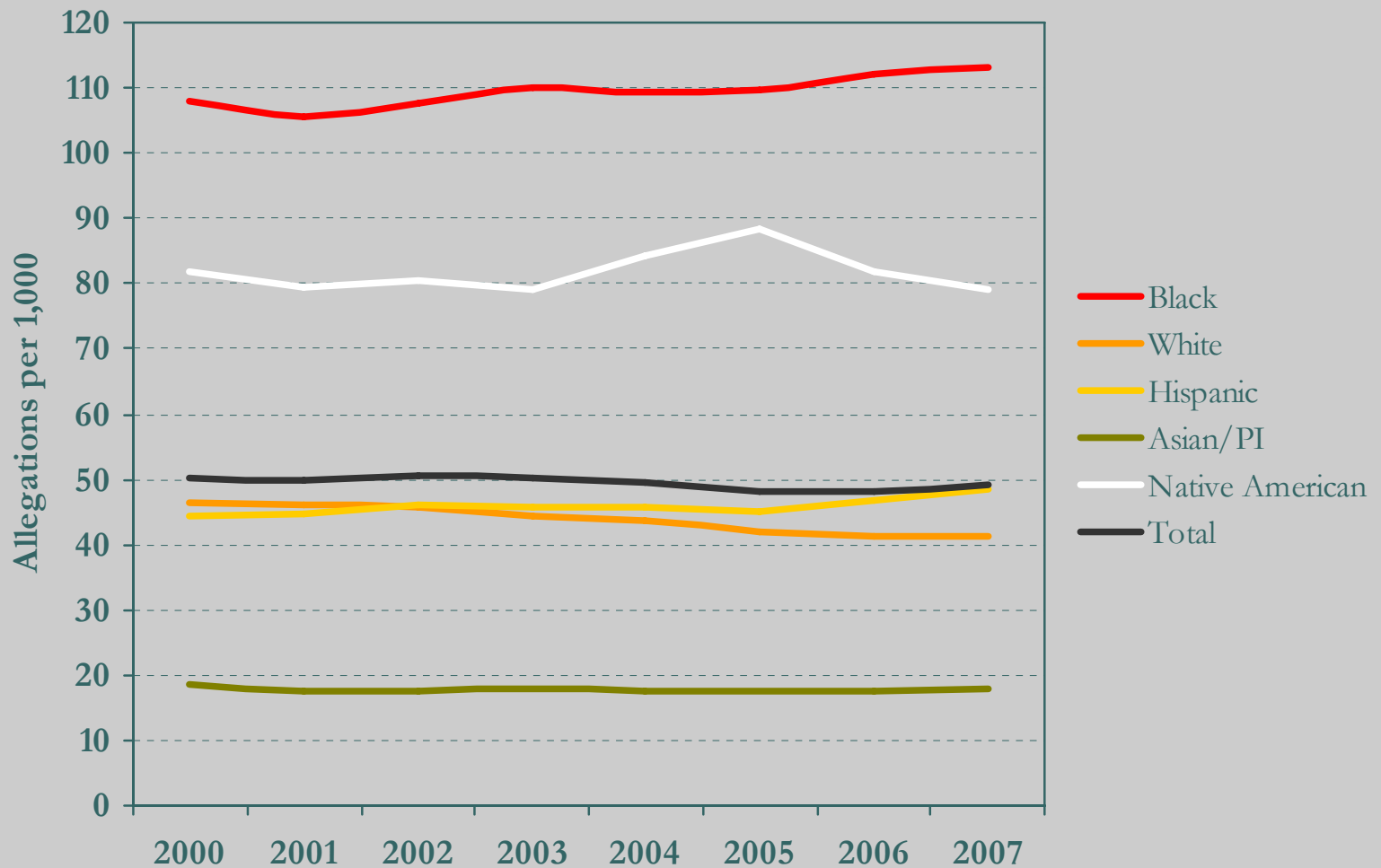


When do disparities arise?

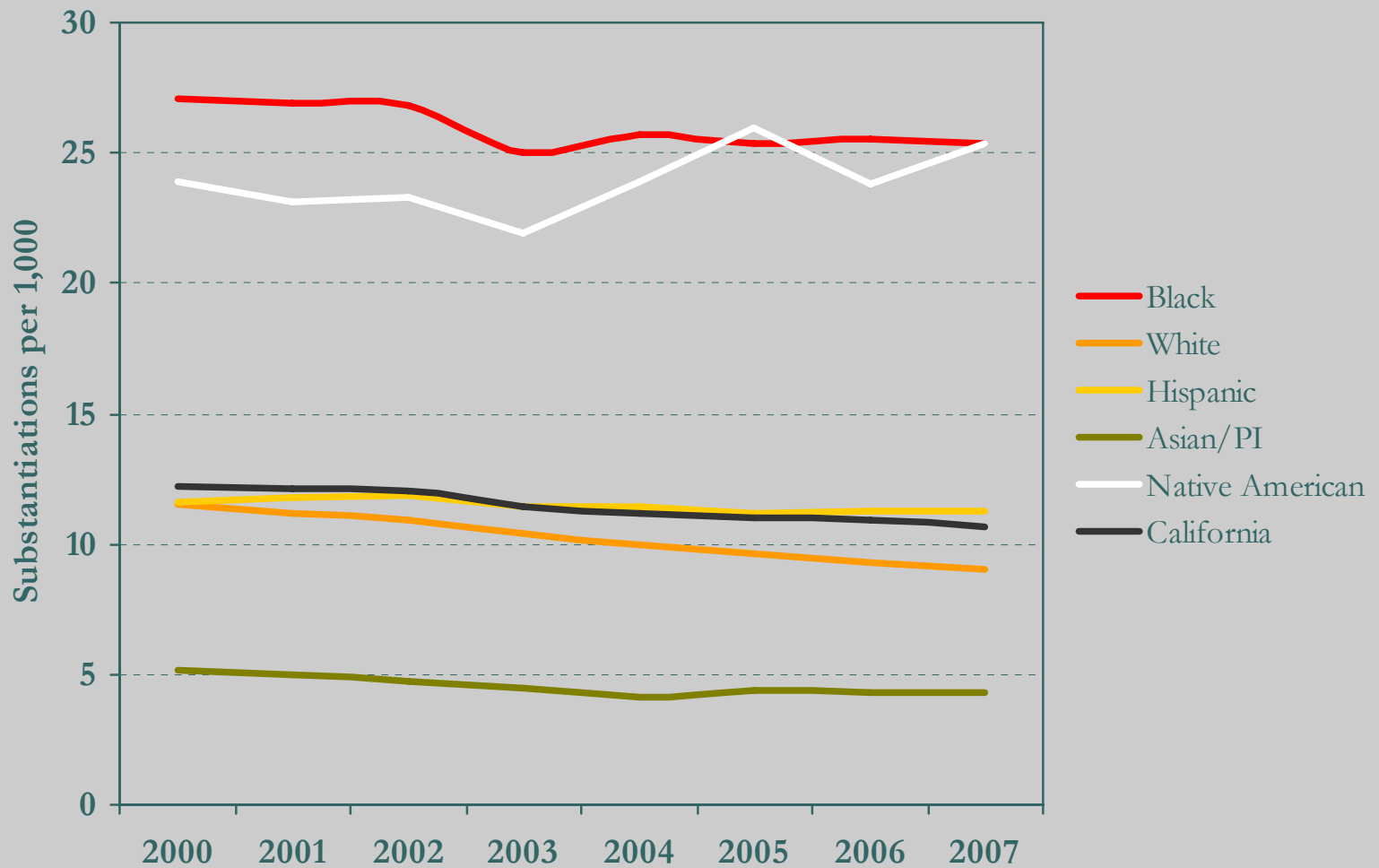
- ✓ The racial disproportionality at each decision point manifests in group disparities (since every time one group is overrepresented, another group must be underrepresented).
- ✓ Since “in care” is not a decision point, the disparity observed in the population of children in foster care must be a function of disparities observed in entries relative to exits



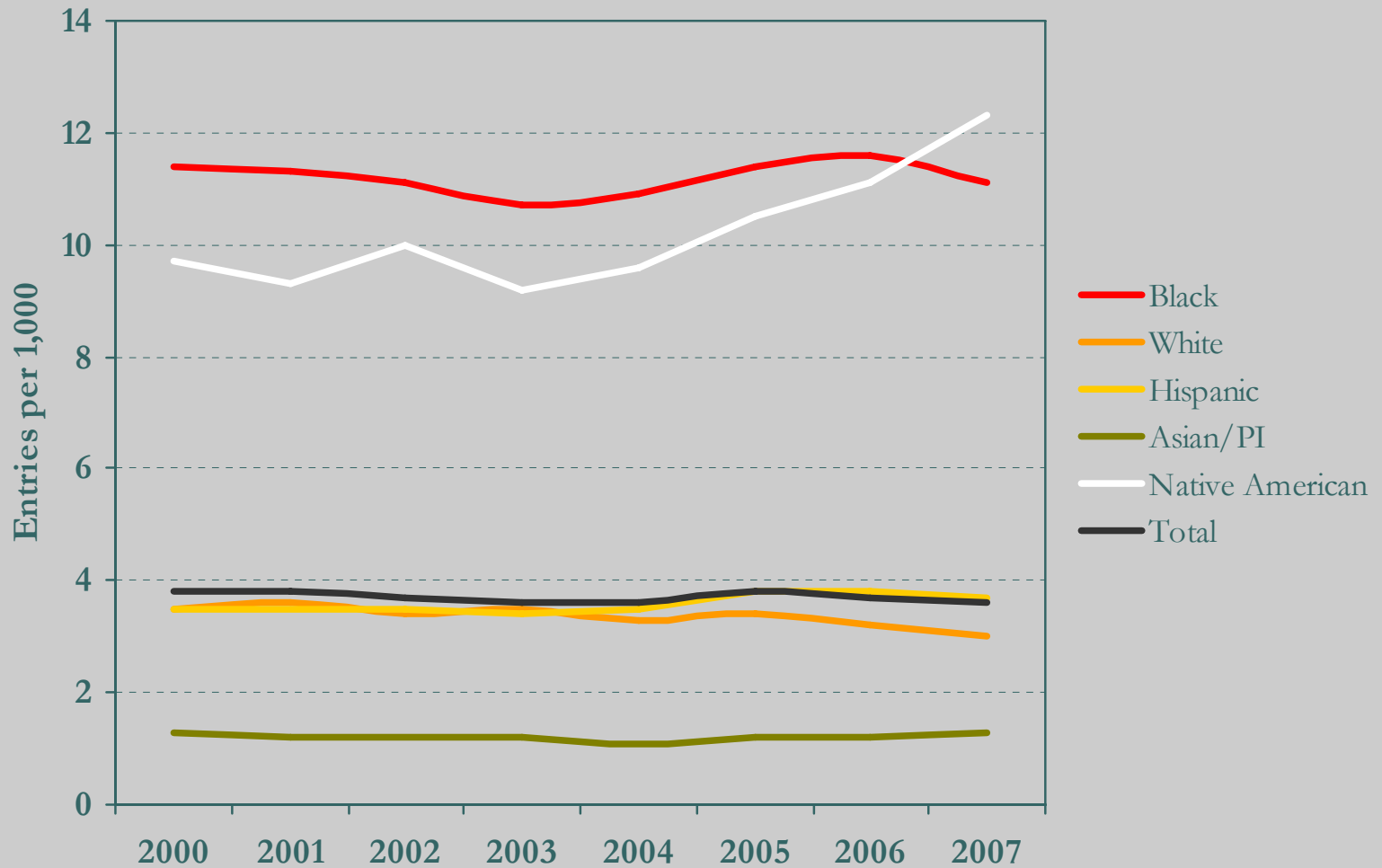
2000-2007
California:
Allegation Rates per 1,000 by Ethnicity



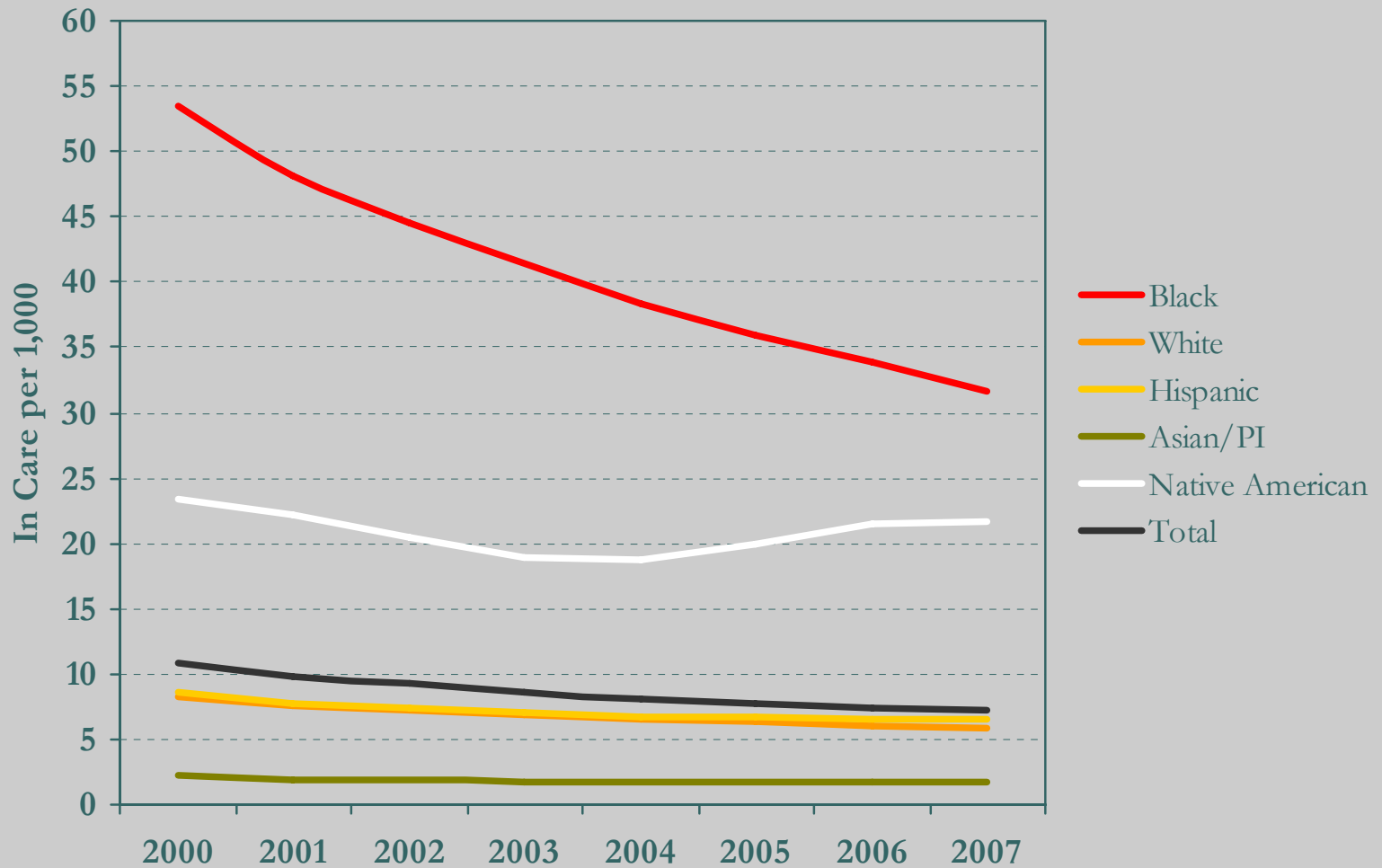
2000-2007
California:
Substantiation Rates per 1,000 by Ethnicity



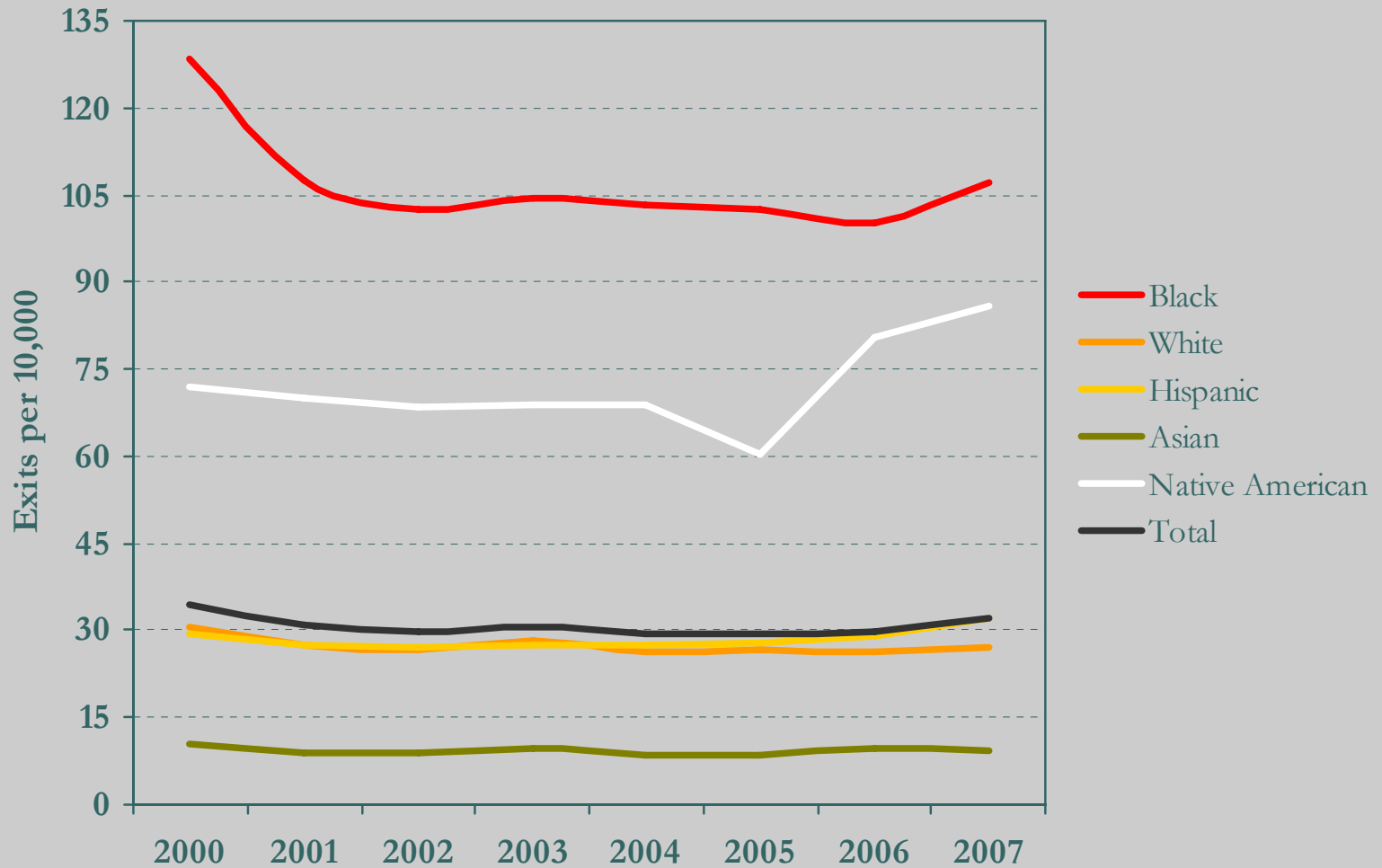
2000-2007
California:
Entry Rates per 1,000 by Ethnicity



2000-2007
California:
In Care Rates per 1,000 by Ethnicity



2000-2007
California:
Exit Rates per 10,000 by Ethnicity
ages 0-20



How is disparity being addressed?

Nationally

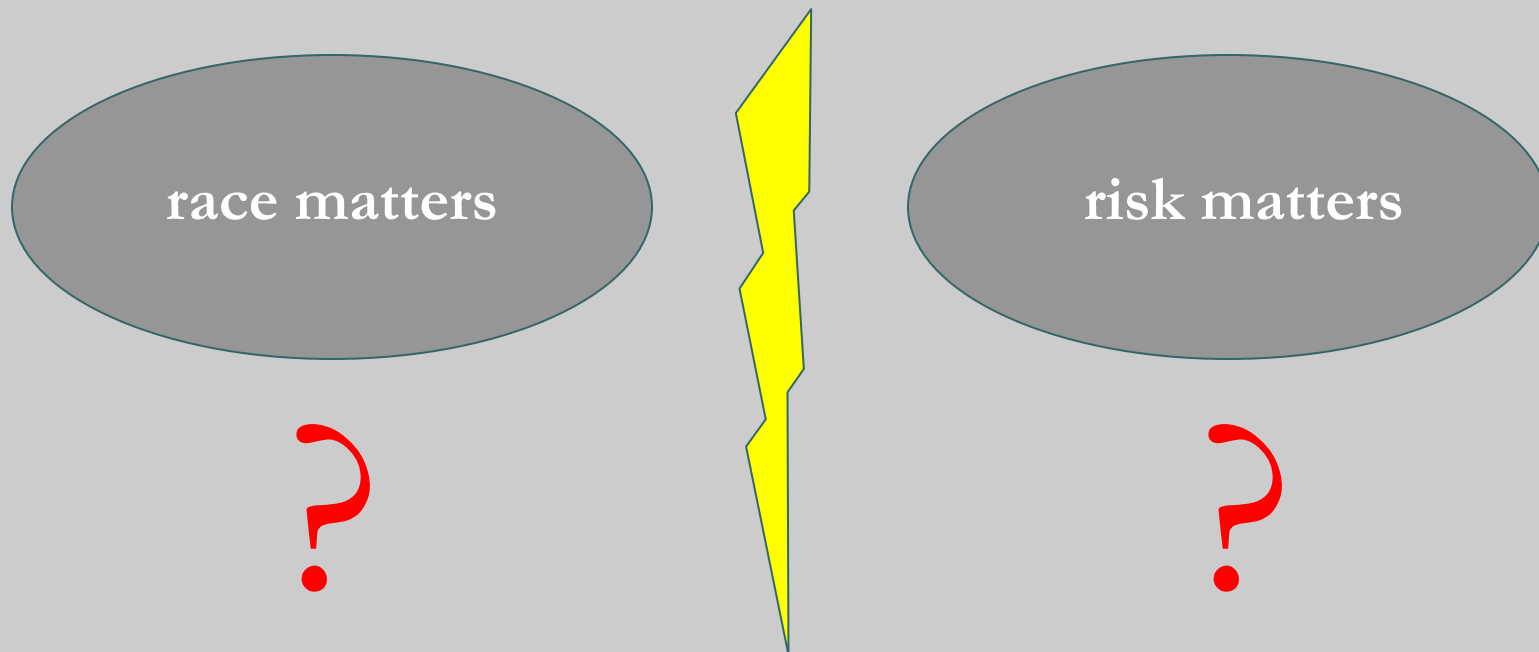
- ✓ Cultural trainings to reduce bias and sensitize workers (45 states had in place as of 2007)
- ✓ Infusion of funding and technical assistance from the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity at the State and local level
- ✓ Family and community involvement

Fresno

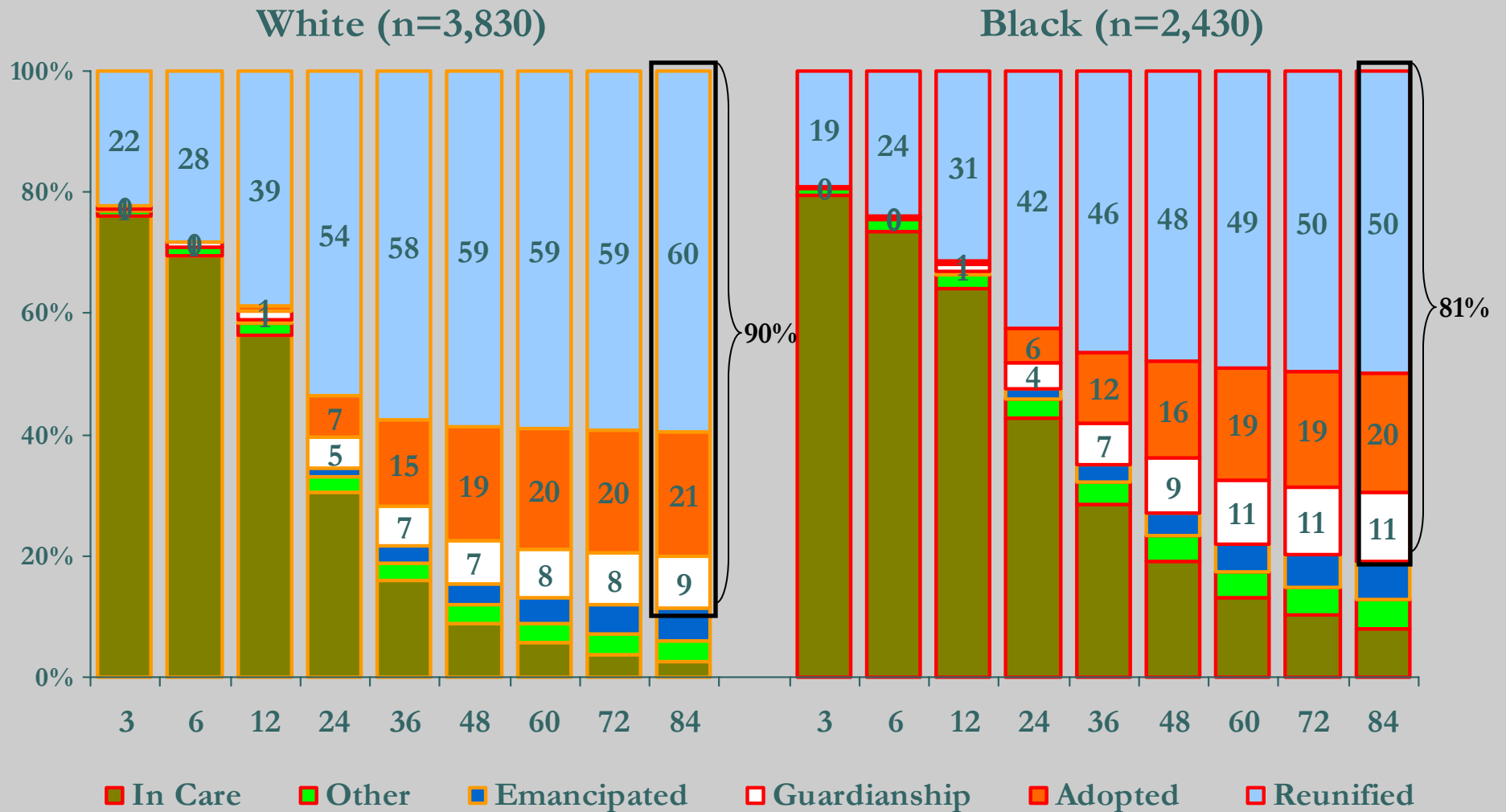
- ✓ Standing Committee on Disproportionality
- ✓ Movement from deficit-focused to strengths-based
- ✓ Cultural sensitivity trainings
- ✓ Celebration of staff culture/diversity
- ✓ Team Decision Making...Community Reps
- ✓ Cultural Brokers
- ✓ Focus on individual cases

Why do disparities exist?

*“Major factors affecting children’s entry into foster care included African American families’ **higher rates of poverty**, families’ difficulties in accessing support services so that they can provide a safe home for vulnerable children and prevent their removal, and **racial bias** and cultural misunderstanding among child welfare decision makers.” (GAO, 2007)*



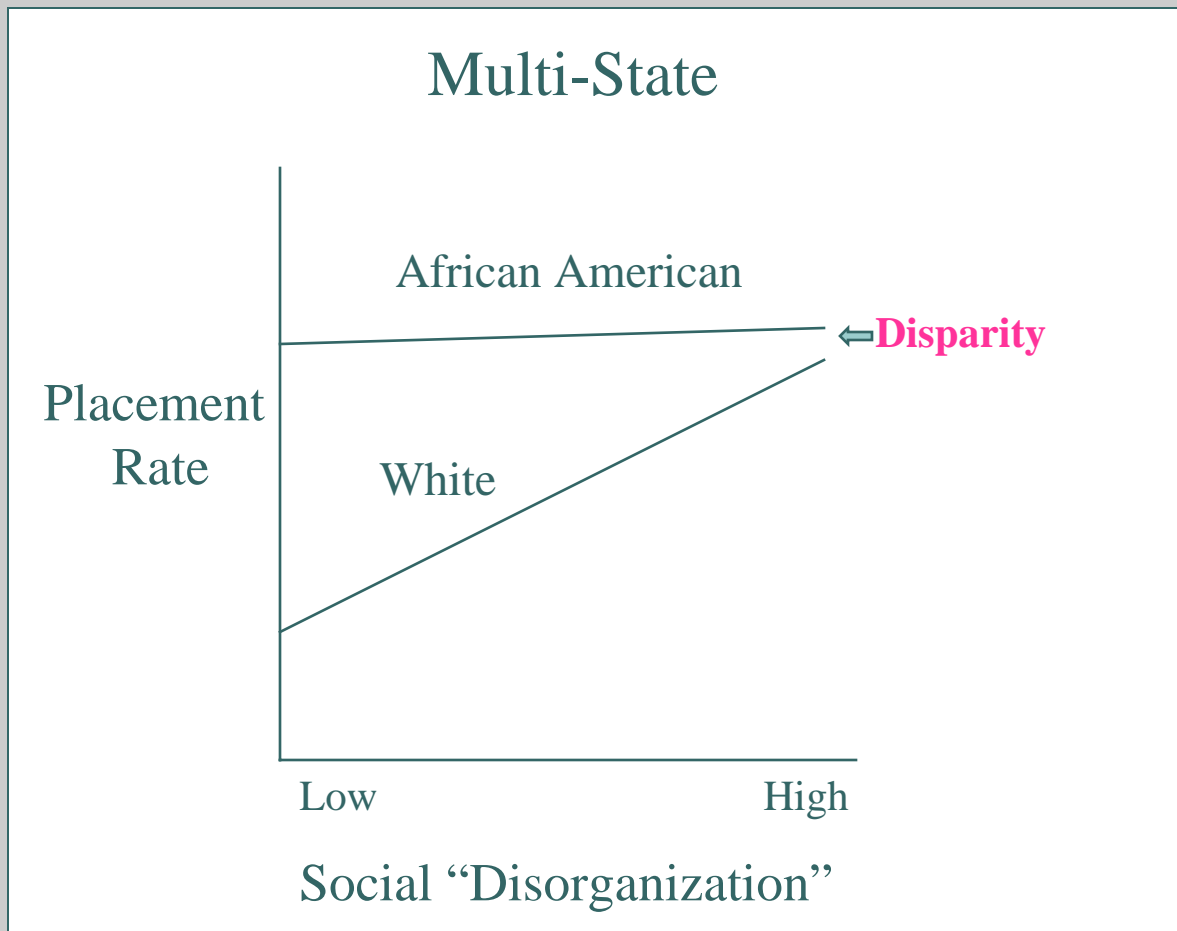
July-December 2000 First Entries California: Exit Types through 7 years from Entry



(And why do we need to understand the sources?)

- ✓ Research has not yet decomposed the relative contributions of bias, resources, risk, and context
- ✓ No easy task...empirical work focuses (by necessity) on only those children who have contact with child protective services (and the factors that are associated with their contact)
 - ✓ We don't know the "true" incidence of child abuse and neglect (notwithstanding the NIS)
 - ✓ We don't know if those who have contact amount to a representative or a biased sample of the full population of children subjected to maltreatment
- ✓ Yet these hold important implications for how and where we intervene to reduce/eliminate disparities...as well as what our expectations should be

Ongoing Research Efforts...



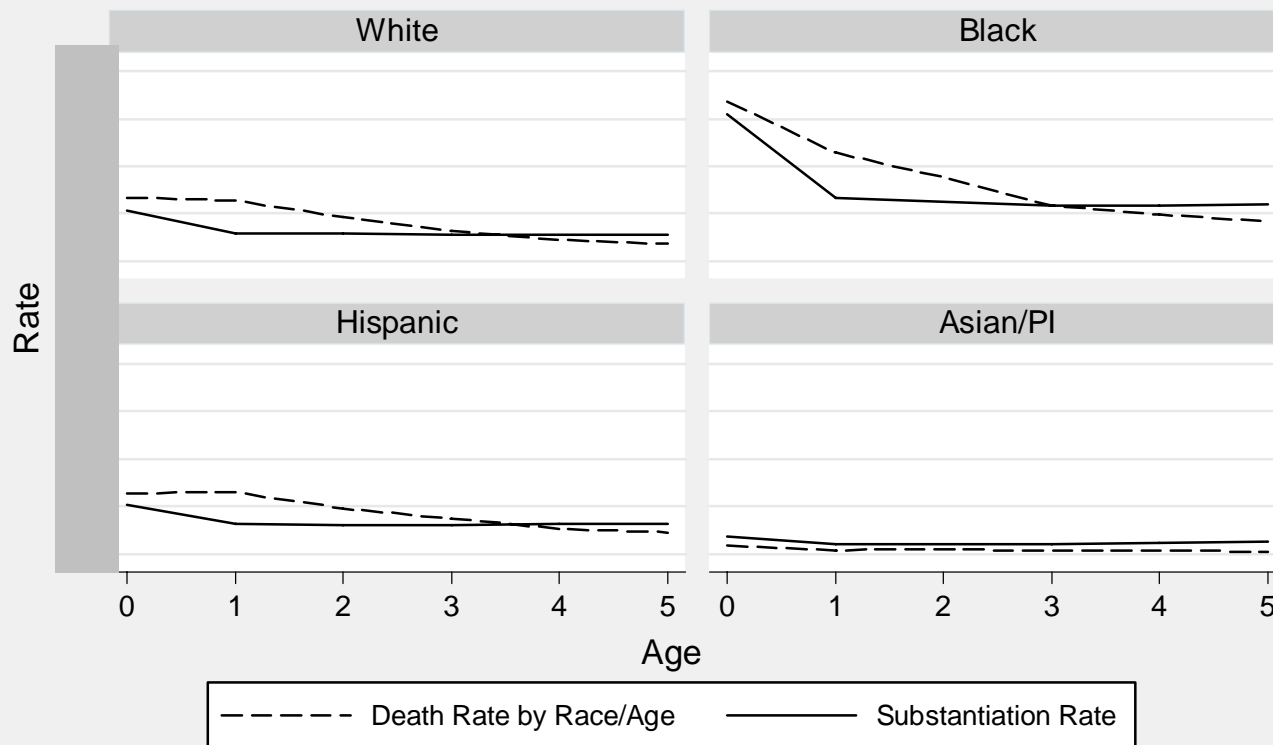
Social disorganization is related to placement but how it is related depends on race

Areas of high disorganization are associated with lower rates of disparity

Wulczyn, F. & Lery, B. (unpublished). Social context and racial disparities in foster care admissions. Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago.

Injury vs. Maltreatment

Injury Death Rates (per 100,000) and Maltreatment Substantiation Rates (per 1,000) by Age and Race/Ethnicity



1. Injury Death Data pooled across 1995-2005
2. Substantiation Data pooled across 1998-2005

All cause injury death rates by race closely track maltreatment rates.

Ratios of death to injury rates by race and age suggest racial differences that appear unrelated to risk.

Putnam-Hornstein, E. (unpublished). A population-based proxy for child maltreatment? Center for Social Services Research, University of California at Berkeley.

Concluding Thoughts...

- ✓ We are still far from understanding the dynamics of racial disparity
- ✓ Caution must be exercised...potential for unintended consequences
- ✓ Casey-CSSP recommendation for Federal Policy: *“set a national benchmark for holding state and county level child welfare leaders accountable for a reduction in the level of racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system”*
- ✓ Contra Costa Times: *“Lately, county welfare officials have pushed to change that with programs designed to keep more black children in their homes and out of foster care. But some county social workers say moves to correct the imbalance come with a price—pressure to apply a lower standard of safety in those homes.”*



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<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/>

Thank you to my colleagues at the Center for Social
Services Research, the California Department of Social
Services and the Stuart Foundation