2005
Executive Summary
for the
African American
Comparative
Case Review
Study Report
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Introduction

The African American Disparity Advisory committee recommended that the Minnesota Department of Human Services conduct a case review study in Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka and Olmsted counties. The goal and purpose of the case reviews was to take a close look at case practice and service delivery for African American families in comparison to Caucasian American families by examining the level, type and delivery of services. In addition, the Committee wanted to explore the similarities and differences in services as experienced by African American and Caucasian American families. While this case review was conducted using data from 2001, the recent 2003 DHS data report shows that African American children are still more likely to be over represented in Minnesota’s child protection system. The rate of allegations of child maltreatment statewide was 12.9 per thousand for all children, but 57 per thousand for African American children. Additionally, African American children were 5.0 percent of the total child population (based on 2002 census data) and 21.4 percent in out-of-home care.

In the summer of 2003 a team of fourteen county and state staff reviewed 206 neglect cases that included 103 matched pairs of children identified in the state’s social services information system (SSIS) as African American or Caucasian. The children were matched by gender, age group, county, and type of neglect: educational, abandonment, endangerment, inadequate supervision, etc.

Key Findings:
In most cases, there were no statistically significant differences between children identified as African American and those identified as Caucasian for case services and case outcomes at assessment, case management in the home and reunification services. However, we found differences in case and family characteristics during the assessment process. Furthermore, we found that race interacts with other case characteristics in a way that is predictive of some case dispositions.

Case and Family Characteristics in Assessment:
Some differences existed between Caucasian and African American children on case and family characteristics:

1) Caucasian children were more likely to live with their biological father than African American children.
2) Caucasian children were more likely to have mothers who had financial problems that were in addition to being on public assistance, and to have mothers who had physical, cognitive or mental health problems.
3) African American children were more likely to have a mother on public assistance, and to live in a household where domestic violence was a problem.

Assessment and Decision Making:
We did not find significant differences in the decision to discharge the case, determine the need for child protection services or place the child out of the home. For instance, the African
American child of the pair was placed at assessment in 15.5% of the pairs when the Caucasian child was not and the Caucasian child was placed at assessment in 13.6% of the pairs when the African American child was not.

**Case Management—in the Home:**

We did not find significant differences in the placement children in out of home care by race at this level. Due to case closures, there were 18 full pairs of children in case management services. In 22% of these cases, the African American child was placed and the Caucasian child was not. Likewise, in 22% of the pairs, the Caucasian child was placed and the African American child was not. There were also no differences in the number of children or matched pairs discharged from placement. There was also no difference in the pairs regarding the percent of cases closed during case management by race. About 32% of the pairs had one case closed and the other not. In 16.7% of these the African American child’s case was closed and the Caucasian child’s was not. In another 16.7% of the pairs, the reverse was true.

**Reunification:**

When we looked at the judge’s decision that there was “no need for reunification services” we found that nineteen percent of the African American children were judged not to require reunification services compared to twelve percent of the Caucasian children. While there appears to be some difference here, it is not statistically significant.

**Interaction of Race and Other Case Characteristics:**

We found that race interacts with other case characteristics in a way that is predictive of some case dispositions. For the purposes of this study, we focused on whether the child was in placement long enough to require reunification services. This is an important outcome because it means that regardless of how the child came to be in placement, the worker believed that there was enough reason for the child to remain in placement longer than 72 hours. Wherever this was the case, the child was described as receiving the more intensive intervention. Factors that were predictive of more intensive intervention were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Characteristic</th>
<th>Odds for More Intensive Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>7 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of the Child</td>
<td>1.5 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for every year younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Maltreatment</td>
<td>5 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American and Increasing Age of Child</td>
<td>1.3 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for every year older up to 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American and Mom Drug Problem</td>
<td>18 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian and Mom Financial Problem</td>
<td>38 to 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Observations from the Case Study that inform recommendations**

Workers need to be made aware that specific case characteristics may interact with the worker’s identification of a child’s race to influence their perceptions and decision-making. Examples of the case characteristics identified in the case record study include:

- Age of the child
- Mother’s drug use
- Mother’s financial problems

These findings indicate that the seeming lack of difference in total sample outcome does not equate with lack of difference in case experience by race. The observed differences in case disposition by race appeared to cancel each other out in these neglect cases to result in relatively even distribution of children going into placement from case management. If these points in the case process are not the major cause of disproportionality, it is important to consider other possible sources, for example decisions made by reporters (Hennepin study), during substantiation (Myers), and in the wait for a permanent home, e.g., the length of time children wait for adoption (DHS data).

In addition, the findings suggest the complexity of the case process requires more careful and case specific observation of intervention and decision making activities and practices in order to identify potential sources of bias and points for intervention with individual workers.

**Recommendations**

The major implications of these findings are threefold and complementary:

1. While potential bias may affect all of us at different points in time, they are critical in child protective services and therefore require targeted and ongoing attention.
   - This attention should be planful and systematic
   - It should be continuous throughout professional staff development and casework activities

2. Activities specific to case processing require special attention.
   a. In reporting and substantiation, we must
      - Educate the community and mandated reporters about what child protection is and the alternative services (community) to child protection that are available to African American families.
      - Prevention: Examine, improve and implement practice changes on the front end to prevent African American families from coming into the system.
      - Review internal case assessment decisions to ensure equity among different racial and ethnic populations.
      - Address mandated reporting issues for school age African American children and support access to community services that supports family functioning and meets their needs.
b. Through family support and reunification, we should
   • Utilize in-home case management services as a priority and preferred intervention for African American families.
   • Build, support and document family and community strengths of African American families.
   • Encourage the use and inclusion of positive family connections to improve the safety of the child and the cohesiveness of the family. Utilize family centered practice and culturally supportive methods such as Family Group Decision Making to enhance this effort.
   • Improve, enhance and support timely reunification efforts for African American children who have been removed out of the home.

c. In planning and implementing permanency for children, it is important to
   • Continue improving adoption and permanency efforts for African American children.
   • Focus on relatives: focus on early identification and search for relatives, including paternal and maternal and providing appropriate post permanency services to support adoption and transfer of legal custody.

3. These recommendations can be implemented in four steps: dissemination, planning for change, implementing change strategies and evaluating changes in practice.

   a. The Committee members, research team and all interested parties should use multiple dissemination activities to inform the field of the case study findings and heighten awareness of the effects of potential biases in case practice.
   b. County and supervisory units should devise a plan for working with African American families on their caseloads and determine the most effective ways to help workers identify potential issues and deal with them constructively.
   c. Implementation at the local and state levels
      i. Implement with new and existing activities.
      ii. Train workers: Provide specific customized training for workers, which focus on improving case practice with African American families and reducing biases.
   d. Ongoing evaluation
      Review progress and outcomes periodically at state and county levels.
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