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Racial Disproportionality in the Foster Care System in Texas:

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Racial Disproportionality in the Foster Care System in Texas:

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Recent studies on foster care services have focused on evaluating how to expedite reunification and permanency after a child was placed out-of-home, particularly when the foster home was considered a temporary placement for children in the child protection system (Madden, Maher, McRoy, Ward, Peveto, & Stanley, 2012; Wang, Lambert, Johnson, Boudreau, Breidenbach, & Baumann, 2012). Other studies have addressed the need to provide services to help foster children achieve self-sufficiency (Stewart, 2013) and maintain good health (Heiligenstein, 2010).

In 2011, Texas established the Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities to combat these problems. Using Texas data as an example, this paper demonstrates how to use a state's data to address the importance of studying racial disproportionality in public child welfare, as well as the need for the reduction of racial disproportionality. Although the progress charting data only show minimal gains in Texas, this documentation process aims to help child welfare administrators use data to pinpoint the need to develop culturally relevant interventions with children, families, and communities that have been affected by disproportionality and disparities.

Importance of Studying Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare

A report from Child Welfare Information Gateway (2007) addressed the disproportionality numbers among racial groups served by the child protection system, particularly in foster care programs. According to that report, African American children accounted for 15% of the nation's general American population and 34% of all children in foster care. Disproportionality is "the level to which groups of children represent in the child welfare system at higher or lower percents/rates than their presence in the general population" (University of California, Berkeley, 2014). The disproportionality index for foster children in a specific racial/ethnic group (A) is calculated as:

$$\text{Disproportionality of (A)} = \frac{\text{(A) in Foster Care / Total Children in Foster Care}}{\text{(A) in Population / Total Children in Population}}$$

An index of less than 1 indicates a lower representation in the foster care system than in the general population, while an index over 1 means the group has a higher representation in the foster care system than in the general population. This formula implies that if the disproportionality index is 1, the foster care percentage and the child population percentage of a

specific ethnic group (e.g., (A) as indicated in the formula) are equal. Therefore, the 19% gap (34% - 15%) stated in the U.S. Government Accountability Office report can be re-calculated as a *disproportionality index* (34% ÷ 15%=2.27) to describe the overrepresentation of African American children in foster care relative to its general population in 2007. This index suggests that in 2007, African American children representation in the foster care system was 1.27 times higher than the percentage of African American children represented in the general child population. These numbers strongly suggest that our child welfare system lacks balance and that more children of a particular race or ethnicity suffer.

Since Texas' 80th Legislature in 2007, 13 disproportionality specialists have been studying and using methods of closing the racial disproportionality gap and promoting service equity in child welfare (Texas Department of Family & Protective Services [TDFPS], 2014a). To build a framework for studying this gap, McRoy (2011) identifies several variables to explain what can contribute to disproportionality reduction, including community partnership, analyses on balancing stressors and community supports, and family preservation strategies. Green, Belanger, McRoy, and Bullard (2011) assert that many states are still facing serious challenges to ending disproportionality due to the continuous racial disparity in child protection services case reporting and investigations.

Disproportionality also illustrates how service barriers are linked with "unequal treatment" or treatment disparity among people with certain racial identities and characteristics (Wells, 2011). This challenge has been presented along with relevant statistics to support additional effort in reducing incidents that cause racial disproportionality in child welfare. For example, since 2011, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges has published a yearly bulletin reporting racial disproportionality in foster care. Its latest issue shows that between 2010 and 2014 "African American disproportionality has now decreased from 2.5 to 2.0 nationally" and in Texas from 2.3 to 2.0 (Wood & Summers, 2014, p.4). These decreases illustrate both progress and continuing concern.

With service planning in mind, DFPS implemented its "Foster Care Redesign" in 2013 to keep children closer to their homes or families and provide incentives to help children improve their emotional health. A series of Public Private Partnership forums were held "to ensure the interests of children and youth in care were well represented," and the first "Single Source Continuum Contract" was funded to serve seven counties in the Fort Worth area with an anticipated outcome of improving the quality of services being delivered (TDFPS, 2014c).

The following analyses address demographic changes and the disproportionality data among children from major racial/ethnic groups in Texas, with special attention to African American and Hispanic American children in foster care. Findings suggest the use of existing data across Texas as baseline measures prior to evaluating the effectiveness of redesigned system for foster care children. The paper also analyzes trend data from 2002 to 2013 covering foster care children in Texas. It is noted that data came mainly from the state data books in order to demonstrate the state's public effort to examine the demographics and needs of foster children.

Method

State and region data on foster care children's characteristics were extracted from the Data Books (2002-2013) published on the DFPS website. In terms of disparity comparisons, data came from DFPS website to examine racial/ethnic statistics of African American children, Anglo children, Asian children, Native American children, and Hispanic children. Additional data on the total child populations were found in Kids Count Data Center from 2002-2012 and in the Center for Public Policy Priorities report for the 2013 data.

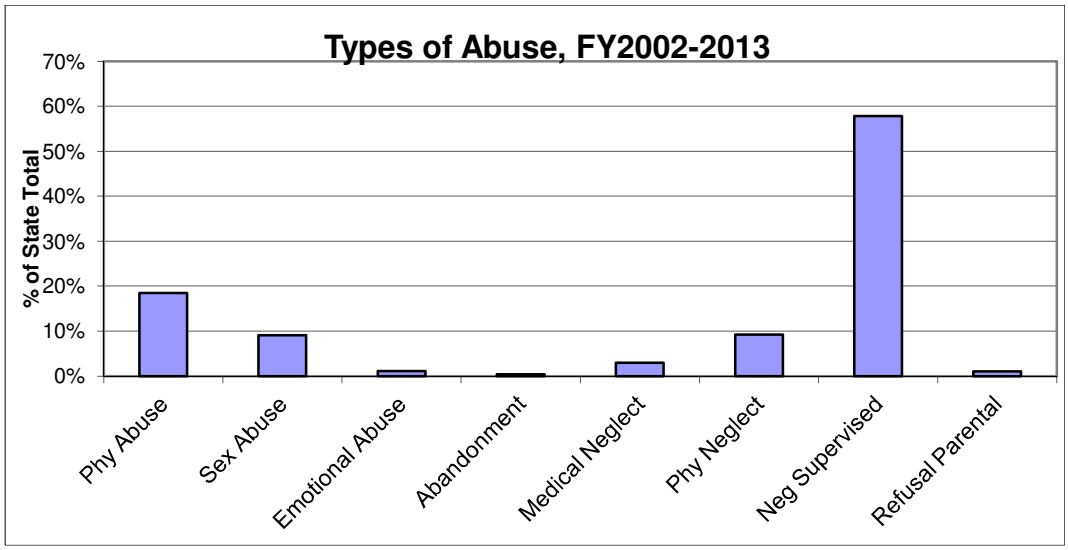
Two major research questions addressing children's characteristics and their cultural factors are: 1) What are the demographic characteristics of children in foster care? 2) Does disproportionality exist among both Hispanic and African American children in Texas? Preliminary data from DFPS Data Books show that the number of foster care children reached its highest point in 2007. Accordingly, trend analyses over a 12-year period between 2002 and 2013, covering six years before and six years after the 2007 peak, aimed to provide information regarding recent changes that could help evaluators examine baseline measures with data to support the needs of foster care children before assessing the impact of foster care redesign on this population.

Results

Types of Abuse & Removal Reasons

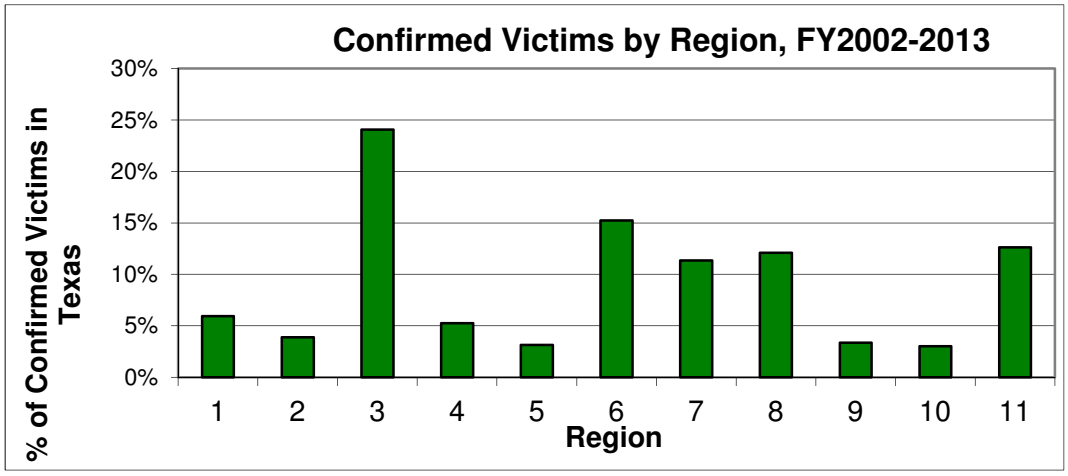
Foster care children are typically placed out-of-home as a result of abuse and neglect by their parents or primary caregivers. As a result, we first examined statistical data for children who were confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect by region. Between 2002 and 2013, 882,592 abuse occurrences were reported to DFPS. The top four most frequently occurring types of abuse/neglect were neglectful supervision (57.79% of all occurrences), physical abuse (18.46%), physical neglect (9.2%), and sexual abuse (9.09%). Among the 11 regions in Texas, region 3 had the highest percentage of reported abuse (24.33%, 214,758 occurrences, with 180,774 unduplicated confirmed victims), followed by region 6 (15.05%, 132,851 occurrences, with 114,430 victims) and region 11 (12.67%, 111,868 occurrences, with 94,887 victims). (See Graph 1, Graph 2, Table 1, Table 2.1, and Table 2.2)

These DFPS statistics can only be used to compare trends over the specified years but cannot identify proportional ratios relative to each region's child population as this information is not readily available. The analysis shows that there were no significant differences in these data within each region among the years or between the first 6-year and the second 6-year data. Using descriptive data can only illustrate that the most populous region also had the most reported abuse/neglect cases. The ratio of occurrences of abuse/neglect per confirmed child victim (1.17) is particularly important to note. This ratio means that some confirmed victims experienced multiple types of abuse between 2002 and 2013. To present a clearer picture of the rate of abuse, regional child population counts can calculate the ratio of child abuse/neglect that occurred in each region. For example, the state of Texas had an annual average of 73,549 occurrences reported from 2002 to 2013, which was 1.11% of the state's annual average child population (6,576,360) recorded in the same period. Had the statistics been provided in the DFPS Data Books, a regional comparison would have been helpful.



Sources: DFPS Data Books, 2002 to 2013

Graph 1. Confirmed Child Abuse/Neglect Victims in Texas Regions, FY2002-2013



Sources: DFPS Data Books, 2002 to 2013

Graph 2. Confirmed Victims by Region

Table 1. All Reported Abuse/Neglect Occurrences by Region, 2002-2013

Region	Occurrences: 12 years	% to All Occurrences	Occurrences: Annual Average
Lubbock (1)	53,730	6.09%	4,478
Abilene (2)	35,007	3.97%	2,917
Arlington (3)	214,758	24.33%	17,897
Tyler (4)	46,968	5.32%	3,914
Beaumont (5)	27,449	3.11%	2,287
Houston (6)	132,851	15.05%	11,071
Austin (7)	98,222	11.13%	8,185
San Antonio (8)	103,836	11.76%	8,653
Midland (9)	30,656	3.47%	2,555
El Paso (10)	26,867	3.04%	2,239
Edinburg (11)	111,868	12.67%	9,322
Unknown	268	0.03%	22
State Total	**882,592**	**100%**	**73,549**

Data Source: DFPS Data Books, 2002 to 2013

Table 2.1. Confirmed Victims of Abuse/Neglect, Combined FY2002-13

Region	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Abandonment
Lubbock (1)	9,283	3,790	767	126
Abilene (2)	5,300	2,677	558	102
Arlington (3)	44,739	19,457	1,798	1,000
Tyler (4)	8,187	4,404	518	135
Beaumont (5)	4,792	2,590	285	117
Houston (6)	29,661	15,627	1,506	763
Austin (7)	17,680	8,602	818	293
San Antonio (8)	16,659	9,176	920	491
Midland (9)	4,966	2,512	517	103
El Paso (10)	4,785	1,873	452	127
Edinburg (11)	16,841	9,369	1,514	318
Unknown	31	23	1	10
State Total	**162,924**	**80,200**	**9,660**	**3,591**
% of State Total	**18.46%**	**9.09%**	**1.09%**	**0.41%**

Sources: DFPS Data Book 2002 (p.54); 2003 (p.54); 2004 (p.54); 2005 (p.63); 2006 (p.54); 2007 (p.36); 2008-2013

Note: Victims of different types of abuse and neglect do not represent the total number of victims because one victim may have been reported with multiple types of child abuse/neglect.

Table 2.2. Confirmed Victims of Abuse/Neglect, Combined FY2002-13

Region	Medical Neglect	Physical Neglect	Neglectful Supervision	Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility	**Unduplicated Confirmed Victims***	**% of Unduplicated Confirmed Victims**
Lubbock (1)	1,358	5,536	32,328	542	44,601	5.94%
Abilene (2)	1,148	4,664	20,326	232	29,138	3.88%
Arlington (3)	5,584	17,428	122,775	1,977	180,774	24.07%
Tyler (4)	1,445	5,179	26,599	501	39,446	5.25%
Beaumont (5)	887	2,617	15,894	267	23,568	3.14%
Houston (6)	4,158	12,319	66,960	1,857	114,430	15.23%
Austin (7)	2,491	7,618	59,440	1,280	85,298	11.36%
San Antonio (8)	3,449	8,088	64,253	800	90,871	12.10%
Midland (9)	1,001	3,322	17,997	238	25,221	3.36%
El Paso (10)	876	2,900	15,623	231	22,723	3.02%
Edinburg (11)	3,735	11,483	67,672	936	94,887	12.63%
Unknown	1	23	159	20	227	0.03%
State Total	**26,133**	**81,177**	**510,026**	**8,881**	**751,184**	**100.00%**
% of State Total	**2.96%**	**9.20%**	**57.79%**	**1.01%**		

Sources: DFPS Data Book 2002 (p.54); 2003 (p.54); 2004 (p.54); 2005 (p.63); 2006 (p.54); 2007 (p.36); 2008-2013

Note: Victims of different types of abuse and neglect do not represent the total number of victims because one victim may have been reported with multiple types of child abuse/neglect.

Length of Time in Care for Children Who Achieved Permanency Status

Data Books with information on permanency planning reported "substitute care" data, i.e., children who have been placed out of their home, including both foster care children and children in other types of placements (see Table 3 and Graph 3). For the entire 12-year period, most children under DFPS care spent less than 12 months in substitute care. However, over time, an increasing trend showed that proportionally fewer children spent 12 months or less in substitute care, and a proportionately greater number of children spent more than 13 months in substitute care. This increasing trend over the 12 years can be seen both when comparing the two 6-year periods as well as yearly data on foster care children across all 12 years. A separate analysis based on data of foster care children would have been helpful to check if the same trends hold true.

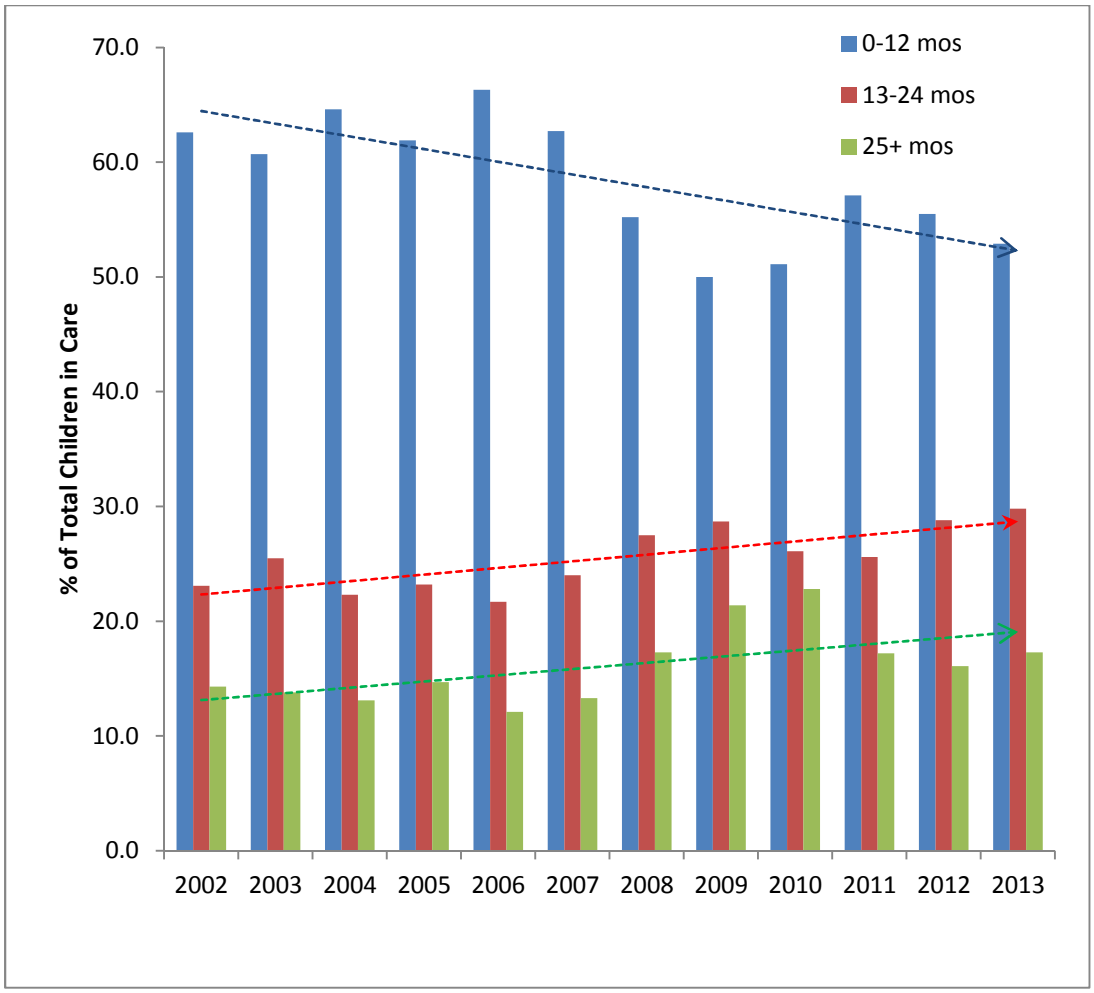
Table 3.

Length of Time in Care for Children Who Achieved Permanency Status

	Length of time in care for children who achieved permanency status* (%)		
Year	0-12 months	13-24 months	25+ months
2002	62.6	23.1	14.3
2003	60.7	25.5	13.8
2004	64.6	22.3	13.1
2005	61.9	23.2	14.7
2006	66.3	21.7	12.1
2007	62.7	24.0	13.3
2008	55.2	27.5	17.3
2009	50.0	28.7	21.4
2010	51.1	26.1	22.8
2011	57.1	25.6	17.2
2012	55.5	28.8	16.1
2013	52.9	29.8	17.3
Average 2002-2007	63.1	23.3	13.6
Average 2008-2013	53.6	27.8	18.7
Overall Average	58.4	25.5	16.1

*Children who left substitute care back to their own home, or via permanent relative placement, via adoption consummation, or due to the ending of DFPS legal responsibility

Sources: Data Books, 2002, p.81; 2007, p.61; 2012, p.65; 2013, p.62



Graph 3. Length of Time in Care for Children Who Achieved Permanency

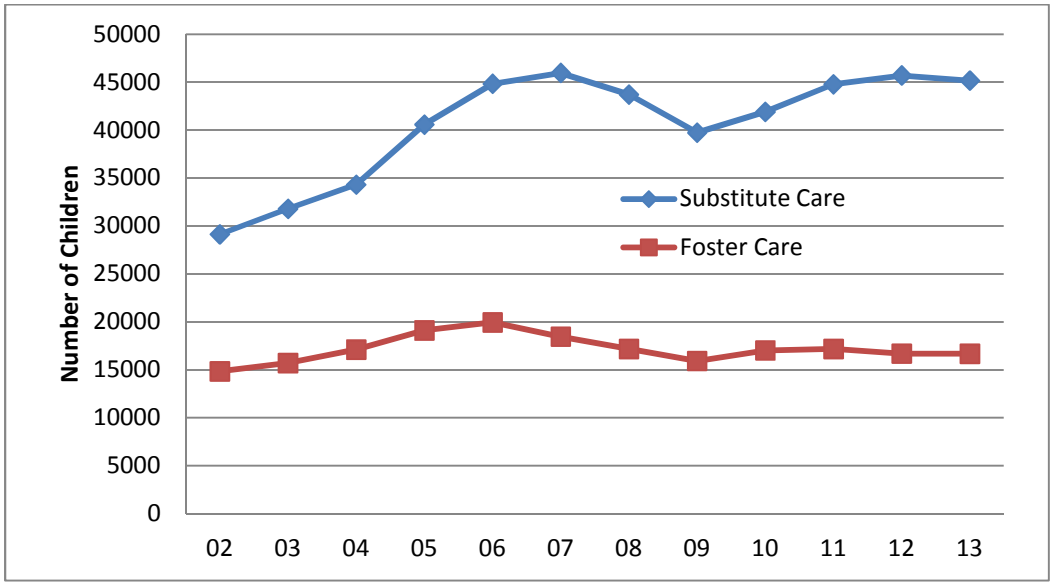
Foster Care in Texas, 2002-2013

Data over a period of 12 years from 2002 to 2013 were used to describe the demographics of children and youth in foster care in Texas, including youth who were 18 and above. Data presented in each year were unduplicated counts, i.e., a child was not counted twice for continuous foster placement in subsequent years. It is not clear, however, if repeated abuse cases were counted, i.e., a child being placed in foster care on separate occasions during the 12-year period. A total count of children in the entire substitute care system is also presented for comparison purposes. (See Table 4 and Graph 4.)

Table 4. Data Sets

Nature	Fiscal year	Unduplicated Count of Children in Foster Care*	Total Count of Children in Substitute Care**
Time	FY2002	14,843	29,136
	FY2003	15,709	31,795
	FY2004	17,109	34,312
	FY2005	19,113	40,577
	FY2006	19,942	44,829
	FY2007	18,462	45,962
	FY2008	17,186	43,697
	FY2009	15,932	39,733
	FY2010	17,027	41,902
	FY2011	17,183	44,780
	FY2012	16,697	45,694
	FY2013	16,676	45,159

*Foster care statistics are based on cases as of August 31 of that year; **Substitute care statistics are based on all out-of-home placement cases as of the end of the fiscal year, including foster care placement cases.
Sources: DFPS Data Books from 2002 to 2013



Graph 4. Foster Care Cases Relative to the Entire Substitute Care Population, Annual Statistics 2002-2013

On August 31, 2013, there were 16,676 foster care children served in Texas, a 5.8% increase compared to the 15,709 foster care children served ten years ago on August 31, 2003. This comparison excluded the 2002 count because the 2002 statistics did not include youth who were 21 years of age. Data showed an upward trend in the number of children served in foster homes between 2002 and 2006, a decreasing trend from 2007 and 2009, and maintained 16,000-17,000 children through 2013.

Foster children were distributed relatively evenly by age group, as defined in the state data source. One fourth (25.29%) of the foster children were in the 14-17 age group, which represented the highest percentage among all age groups. Among most ages, the absolute number of youth in foster care showed a stable or decreasing trend though the percentage distributions were similar between the first and second 6-year periods. By contrast, the 18-21 year age group showed an increasing trend. Although representing only 2.7% of the total children in care during the entire 12 years, 1.46% more 18-21 year old clients ("aging-out youth") received care under the foster care system between 2008 and 2013 than in the prior 6-year period. (See Table 5.1 and Table 5.2.)

In terms of gender, proportionally more foster children were male (52.94%) than female (47.05%) in the 12 years (Graph 5). In terms of ethnic representations, Hispanic children had the highest percentage (37.77%) among all children in foster care in the 12 years, and their data also showed an increasing trend from 33.6% in 2002 to 41.3% in 2013 (Graph 6). African American children represented a high percentage among all children in foster care during the years studied (average=28.56%). When comparing the first and second 6-year time periods, there was a 1.34% decrease in African American representation in the system (29.21% vs. 27.87%). The highest point was 32.9% in 2002, which decreased to 29% in 2003, then increased from 2009 (30.8%) to 2011 (30.3%) and decreased in 2012 (22.9%) and 2013 (23.1%) (see Table 6).

Table 5.1 Demographics of Children in Foster Care in Texas, 2002-2007

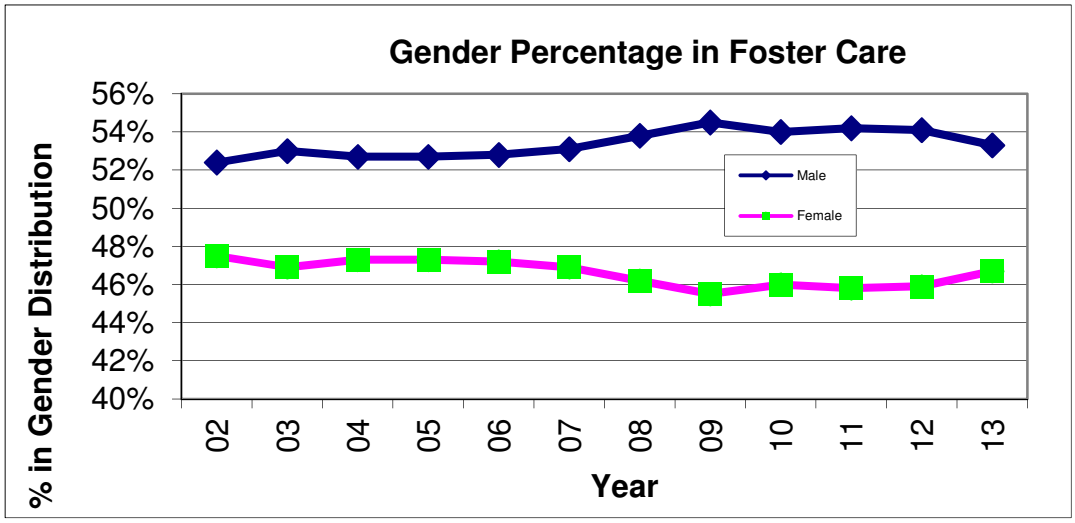
Year	2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Age Range												
0-2	2,893	19.5	3,110	19.8	3,467	20.8	4,161	21.8	4,404	22.1	3,934	21.3
3-5	1,905	12.8	2,165	13.8	2,489	14.5	2,798	14.6	3,025	15.2	2,873	15.6
6-9	2,448	15.6	2,503	15.9	2,777	16.2	3,267	17.1	3,534	17.7	3,264	17.7
10-13	3,293	22.2	3,322	21.1	3,402	19.9	3,560	18.6	3,519	17.6	3,304	17.9
14-17	4,013	27.0	4,314	27.5	4,648	27.2	4,988	26.1	5,040	25.3	4,668	25.3
18-21	291*	2.0	295	1.9	326	1.9	339	1.8	420	2.1	419	2.3
Sex												
Male	7,782	52.4	8,331	53.0	8,095	47.3	10,064	52.7	10,532	52.8	9,804	53.1
Female	7,052	47.5	7,368	46.9	9,010	52.7	9,045	47.3	9,408	47.2	8,654	46.9
Unknown	9	0.1	10	0.1	4	0.0	4	0.0	2	0.0	4	0.0
Race/Ethnicity												
Anglo	4,886	32.9	5,201	33.1	5,619	32.8	6,201	32.4	6,439	32.3	5,762	31.21
African American	4,654	31.4	4,707	30.0	4,958	29.0	5,484	28.7	5,581	28.0	5,342	28.94
Hispanic	4,994	33.7	5,503	35.0	6,232	36.4	7,101	37.2	7,509	37.7	6,938	37.58
Native American	52	0.4	41	0.3	55	0.3	45	0.2	50	0.3	46	0.2
Asian	75	0.5	80	0.5	53	0.3	55	0.29	68	0.3	59	0.32
Other	182	1.2	177	1.1	192	1.1	227	1.2	295	1.5	315	1.7
Total no. of children	**14,843**	**100**	**15,709**	**100**	**17,109**	**100**	**19,113**	**100**	**19,942**	**100**	**18,462**	**100**

Sources: DFPS Data Books 2002 (p.70), 2006 (p.73), and 2007 (p.48)
*Data in 2002 did not include those who were 21 years of age

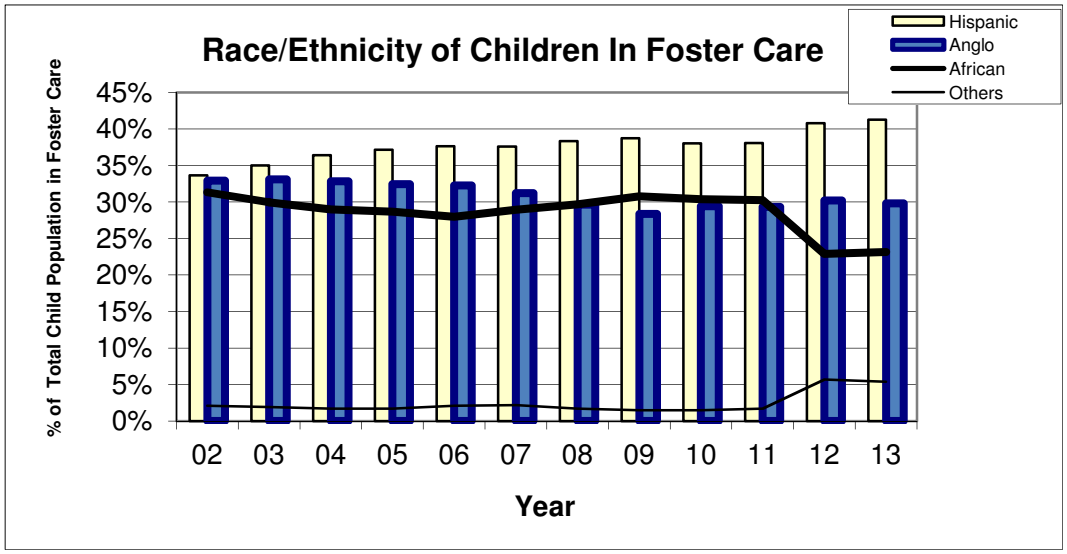
Table 5.2. Demographics of Children in Foster Care in Texas, 2008-2013

Year	2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Age Range												
0-2	3,623	21.1	3,319	20.8	3,868	22.7	3,797	22.1	3,614	21.6	3,634	21.8
3-5	2,497	14.5	2,249	14.1	2,711	15.9	2,903	16.9	2,766	16.6	2,837	17.0
6-9	3,068	17.9	2,679	16.8	2,782	16.3	2,948	17.2	2,948	17.7	3,050	18.3
10-13	3,090	18.8	2,930	18.4	2,959	17.4	2,972	17.3	2,820	16.9	2,774	16.6
14-17	4,395	25.6	4,225	26.5	4,102	24.1	3,976	23.1	3,947	23.6	3,747	22.5
18-21	513	3.0	530	3.3	605	3.6	587	3.4	602	3.6	634	3.8
Sex												
Male	9,245	53.8	8,689	54.5	9,203	54.0	9,308	54.2	9,030	54.1	8,886	53.3
Female	7,940	46.2	7,243	45.5	7,824	46.0	7,874	45.8	7,667	45.9	7,790	46.7
Unknown	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Race/Ethnicity												
Anglo	5,094	29.6	4,522	28.4	5,008	29.4	5,044	29.4	5,048	30.2	4,970	29.8
African American	5,104	29.7	4,903	30.77	5,174	30.4	5,199	30.3	3,825	22.9	3,858	23.14
Hispanic	6,587	38.3	6,169	38.72	6,479	38.1	6,545	38.1	6,813	40.8	6,882	41.27
Native American	41	0.2	49	0.3	45	0.3	51	0.3	22	0.1	17	0.1
Asian	61	0.4	52	0.33	58	0.3	59	0.3	38	0.2	47	0.28
Other	299	1.7	237	1.5	263	1.5	285	1.7	951	5.7	902	5.4
Total no. of children	**17,186**	**100**	**15,932**	**100**	**17,027**	**100**	**17,183**	**100**	**16,697**	**100**	**16,676**	**100**

Sources: DFPS Data Books 2011 (p. 53), and 2013 (p. 50)



Graph 5. Gender of Foster Care Children/Youth, 2002-2013



Graph 6. Race/Ethnicity of Children in Foster Care, 2002-2013

Table 6. Children in Foster Care: A Trend Analysis

YEAR	2002-2007		2008-2013		**2002-2013**	
Age Range	6-Yr Avg.	%	6-Yr Avg.	%	**12-Yr Avg.**	**%**
0-2	3,662	20.89	3,643	21.70	**3,652**	**21.29**
3-5	2,543	14.50	2,661	15.85	**2,602**	**15.16**
6-9	2,966	16.92	2,913	17.35	**2,939**	**17.13**
10-13	3,400	19.40	2,924	17.42	**3,162**	**18.43**
14-17	4,612	26.31	4,065	24.22	**4,339**	**25.29**
18-21	348	1.99	579	3.45	**463**	**2.70**
Gender						
Male	9,101	51.94	9,060	53.98	**9,081**	**52.94**
Female	8,423	48.05	7,723	46.02	**8,073**	**47.05**
Not Reported	6	0.03	0	0.00	**3**	**0.02**
Race/ Ethnicity						
Anglo	5,685	32.43	4,948	29.48	**5,316**	**30.99**
African American	5,121	29.21	4,677	27.87	**4,899**	**28.56**
Hispanic	6,380	36.39	6,579	39.20	**6,479**	**37.77**
Native American	48	0.27	38	0.22	**43**	**0.25**
Asian	65	0.37	53	0.31	**59**	**0.34**
Other	231	1.32	490	2.92	**360**	**2.10**
Total No. of Children	**17,530**	**100**	**16,784**	**100**	**17,157**	**100**

Disproportionality Issues among Children in Foster Care

Over the 12-year period, less than one third (30.99%) on average of children in foster care were Anglo, 28.56% African American, more than one third (37.77%) Hispanic, and 0.34% Asian. While Hispanic children represented the largest percentage of the total foster children, the number of African American children in foster care demonstrated the highest disproportionality rate relative to the African American child population (see Table 7.1 and Table 7.2).

Table 7.1. Children in Total Population and Foster Care by Race/Ethnicity, 2002-2007

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Texas Child Population	**6,060,372**	**6,132,980**	**6,208,259**	**6,290,970**	**6,446,798**	**6,565,872**
Total Children in Foster Care	**14,843**	**15,709**	**17,109**	**19,113**	**19,942**	**18,462**
Anglo Child Population	**2,548,409**	**2,514,742**	**2,493,282**	**2,473,736**	**2,473,623**	**2,453,205**
Anglo % of Total Child Population*	42.05%	41.00%	40.16%	39.32%	38.37%	37.36%
Anglo Child in Foster Care	4,886	5,201	5,619	6,201	6,439	5,762
Anglo Child % in Foster Care	32.92%	33.11%	32.84%	32.44%	32.29%	31.21%
Hispanic Child Population	**2,529,668**	**2,613,289**	**2,690,653**	**2,767,796**	**2,860,692**	**2,936,814**
Hispanic % of Total Child Population	41.74%	42.61%	43.34%	44.00%	44.37%	44.73%
Hispanic Child in Foster Care	4,994	5,503	6,232	7,101	7,509	6,938
Hispanic % of Total in Foster Care	33.65%	35.03%	36.43%	37.15%	37.65%	37.58%
African American Child Population	**778,923**	**777,246**	**777,250**	**777,203**	**813,889**	**812,483**
African American % of Total Child Population	12.85%	12.67%	12.52%	12.35%	12.62%	12.37%
African American Child in Foster Care	4,654	4,707	4,958	5,484	5,581	5,342
African American % in Foster Care	31.35%	29.96%	28.98%	28.69%	27.99%	28.94%
Asian Child Population	**194,933**	**203,478**	**211,439**	**219,442**	--	**228,384**
Asian Child % of Total Child Population	3.22%	3.32%	3.41%	3.49%	--	3.48%
Asian Child in Foster Care	75	80	53	55	68	59
Asian Child % in Foster Care	0.51%	0.51%	0.31%	0.29%	0.34%	0.32%

*Percentage of total child population is based on data source from Kids Count which includes the counts of children aged from 0 to 17.
**Percentage of total number of children in foster care is based on data source from DFPS on August 31 of the year selected, which includes children aged from 0 to 17.
Source 1: Kids Count at http://www.kidscount.org
Source 2: DFPS Data Books 2002 to 2007
Source 3: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2013

Table 7.2. Children in Total Population and Foster Care by Race/Ethnicity, 2008-2013

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Texas Child Population	**6,675,917**	**6,792,907**	**6,875,479**	**6,928,639**	**6,985,639**	**6,952,177**
Total Children in Foster Care	**17,186**	**15,932**	**17,027**	**17,183**	**16,697**	**16,676**
Anglo Child Population	**2,429,558**	**2,409,086**	**2,398,086**	**2,317,712**	**2,332,640**	**2,317,712**
Anglo % of Total Child Population*	36.39%	35.46%	34.88%	33.45%	33.39%	33.34%
Anglo Child in Foster Care	5,094	4,522	5,008	5,044	5,048	4,970
Anglo Child % in Foster Care	29.64%	28.38%	29.41%	29.35%	30.23%	29.80%
Hispanic Child Population	**3,010,752**	**3,087,941**	**3,317,777**	**3,389,573**	**3,415,186**	**3,389,573**
Hispanic % of Total Child Population	45.10%	45.46%	48.26%	48.92%	48.89%	48.76%
Hispanic Child in Foster Care	6,587	6,169	6,479	6,545	6,813	6,882
Hispanic % of Total in Foster Care	38.33%	38.72%	38.05%	38.09%	40.80%	41.27%
African American Child Population	**810,236**	**808,006**	**864,858**	**811,081**	**809,036**	**811,081**
African American % of Total Child Population	12.14%	11.89%	12.58%	11.71%	11.58%	11.67%
African American Child in Foster Care	5,104	4,903	5,174	5,199	3,825	3,858
African American % in Foster Care	29.70%	30.77%	30.39%	30.26%	22.91%	23.14%
Asian Child Population	**--**	**--**	**238,555**	**--**	--	**--**
Asian Child % of Total Child Population	--	--	3.47%	--	--	--
Asian Child in Foster Care	61	52	58	59	38	47
Asian Child % in Foster Care	0.35%	0.33%	0.34%	0.34%	0.23%	0.28%

*Percentage of total child population is based on data source from Kids Count which includes the counts of children aged from 0 to 17.
**Percentage of total number of children in foster care is based on data source from DFPS on August 31 of the year selected, which includes children aged from 0 to 17.
Source 1: Kids Count at http://www.kidscount.org
Source 2: DFPS Data Books 2008 to 2013
Source 3: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2013

Based on the disproportionality index formula, the general child population according to ethnic/racial group must be found in order to examine the proportion of children from those ethnic/racial groups in the foster care system (Table 8). However, there is a limitation on the available statistics since the definition of "general child population" includes only children under the age of 18. Since foster children in the system include those who are 18-21 years old—about 2.3% of all foster children—the use of child population data to compute the index may overestimate the representation index across these racial groups.

Table 8. Racial/Ethnic Representations of Foster Care Children: Comparing Two 6-Year Periods

	1st six-year Avg. 2002-2007	2nd six-year Avg. 2008-2013	Overall Avg. 2002-2013
Texas Child Population	6,284,209	6,868,512	6,576,360
Total Children in Foster Care	17,530	16,784	17,157
Anglo Child Population	2,492,833	2,367,466	2,430,149
Anglo % of Total Child Population*	39.67%	34.47%	36.95%
Anglo Child in Foster Care	5,685	4,948	5,316
Anglo Child % in Foster Care	32.43%	29.48%	30.99%
Hispanic Child Population	2,733,152	3,268,467	3,000,810
Hispanic % of Total Child Population	43.49%	47.59%	45.63%
Hispanic Child in Foster Care	6,380	6,579	6,479
Hispanic % in Foster Care	36.39%	39.20%	37.77%
African American Child Population	789,499	819,050	804,274
African American % of Total Child Population	12.56%	11.92%	12.23%
African American Child in Foster Care	5,121	4,677	4,899
African American % in Foster Care	29.21%	27.87%	28.56%
Asian Child Population	207,323	238,555	216,039
Asian % of Total Child Population	3.30%	3.47%	3.29%
Asian Child in Foster Care	65	53	59
Asian % in Foster Care	0.37%	0.31%	0.34%

The disproportionality index of African American children increased from 2.44 in 2002 to 2.59 in 2009, much higher than their population representation in Texas. The average disproportionality index between

foster children representation and their representation in the total child population was the greatest among African American children with an average index of 2.33. On average, there were proportionately two times more African American children in foster care than in their population representation. When the disproportionality data among African American foster children were broken down by time period, the disproportionally index was found to be the same between the 2002-2007 data and the 2008-2013 data. However upon closer examination, a declining trend was noted, from an average of 2.40 between 2002 and 2011 to 1.98 between 2012 and 2013. Even with a decline of 0.42, the disproportionality index (1.98) African American children are still highly represented in child welfare at a proportionate rate close to double (1.98 times) their representation rate in the general child population (see Table 9 and Table 10).

Table 9. Disproportionality Index in Foster Care

Race/ Ethnicity	Disproportionality Index by Race/Ethnicity											
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Anglo	0.78	0.81	0.82	0.83	0.84	0.84	0.81	0.80	0.84	0.88	0.91	0.89
Hispanic	0.81	0.82	0.84	0.84	0.85	0.84	0.85	0.85	0.79	0.78	0.83	0.85
African American	2.44	2.36	2.31	2.32	2.22	2.34	2.45	2.59	2.42	2.58	1.98	1.98
Asian	0.16	0.15	0.09	0.08	NA	0.09	NA	NA	0.10	NA	NA	NA

Data based on children between the ages of 0 and 17 during the year of analysis; NA=Data not available.

Table 10. Disproportionality Index in Foster Care: Six-Year Trend

Foster Children's Ethnicity	1st 6-year 2002-2007	2nd 6-year 2008-2013	**Overall 2002-2013**
Anglo	0.82	0.86	**0.84**
Hispanic	0.83	0.82	**0.83**
African American	2.33	2.33	**2.33**
Asian	0.12	0.10	**0.11**

Discussion

Examining data on foster care children can help establish baseline measures to support community engagement. From 2002 to 2013, neglectful supervision was a major reason for removing and placing children out of their homes. Time in substitute care, although not to be used to estimate foster care stay, indicates an increasing trend in terms of the amount of time children have spent in out-of-home care. Data available for foster care children show that, while the total number of children in foster care hit a peak in 2006 with a gradual decline through 2009, the numbers rose again in 2010 and have remained steady through 2013. Consistently throughout the 12-year period, proportionally more male children have been served in the foster care system than female children. One-fourth (25.29%) of foster children were in the 14-17 age group, representing the highest percentage among all age groups. These demographic data support the need to examine the state's service trends in order to ensure that foster children and their families of all ethnicities receive services that are gender sensitive, age and development specific, and efficient.

One major finding is related to using both raw numbers and disproportionality indexes among foster care children by ethnicity to expand services for children of color. In raw numbers, Hispanic children have the highest numbers in foster care, with African American and Anglo children being fairly equal at the second position. These numbers reflect that Hispanic children were represented with the highest percentage (37.77%) among all children in foster care in all 12 years, and their data also showed an increasing trend from 33.6% in 2002 to 41.3% in 2013. However, the African American data show inconsistencies between their foster care representations relative to their child population data. These inconsistencies mean that African American children are disproportionately overrepresented in these foster child data (average=28.56%), which is more than double of the child population percentage of African Americans in the state (average=12.23%), as indicated by a disproportionality index of 2.33. Texas should examine the immediate needs of these foster children and their families, who may be impacted due to racism and discrimination in the system and society. The disproportionality index must be used instead of raw numbers or percentages.

Senate Bill 6 passed in January 2005, authorizing the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Department of Family and Protective Services to release data and analyze disproportionality issues in child welfare (James, Green, Rodriguez, & Fong, 2008). This effort

empowered additional discussions during the 80th Texas Legislature, which culminated in hiring 13 disproportionality specialists since 2007 to work with communities across Texas. These specialists were tasked not only with analyzing the issue but also with providing direct support through community-based activities to affected communities so that health access and other racial disparities could be targeted for elimination (TDFPS, 2014a). Due to the systemic nature of this racially specific problem, changes cannot occur with small efforts or short-term commitments. Our data show that it took over six years for the state to lower the disproportionality index of the African American children represented in the public child welfare system by only 0.02. Continuous efforts must be planned and disproportionality specialists must continue their tasks so that this reducing trend will continue and its committed workforce will expand.

In addition to this effort, other forms of support have been identified to assist sibling groups in the child welfare system. Statistics were not readily available in the public domain to analyze sibling group placements within the same home or in the same region for us to analyze the situation. Nevertheless, on June 17, 2011, Texas Governor Rick Perry signed Senate Bill 218 into law, directing DFPS to plan and pilot test the state foster care redesign project (TDFPS, 2014b). This "foster care redesign" aims to recruit a single-source continuum contract for foster care and contract with service providers who have had extensive community involvements in the region. This newly designed system also aims to keep children close to their natural environment—home, school, and community—and to provide incentives that motivate and help service providers improve children's conditions, including unifying with their siblings in out-of-home placements.

Outcomes achieved under these aims must be measured, so this study suggests that data on child characteristics, including gender issues, age and racial/ethnic disparities, forms of abuse and neglect, as well as sibling group placements that are close to the children's family or community, must be reexamined prior to evaluation. One limitation is that the entire state has very few disproportionality specialists who are responsible for major tasks in community organizing and service planning. Evaluating their efforts must also involve the entire community and include CPS staff's input.

Conclusion

This study provides progress charting data to analyze changes that have occurred since the implementation of the new foster care redesign project. Foster care redesign in Texas is based on evidence supporting best practices and the commitment of experienced and competent service

providers. Service funding that was formerly based on the “levels of care” system was eliminated so that services could be planned around improvement and success rather than documenting a higher level of problematical behaviors as measured by a pathological-based threshold (TDFPS, 2014c). Additionally, the goal of foster care should be to limit the time a child receives out-of-home services, and relationship building is considered the most important aspect of foster care. The sibling group foster care and adoption initiatives have become popular concepts in the foster care redesign and in service training.

Although the data show a trend of case reduction in most regions in Texas, continuous disproportionality issues still affect African American children in the child protection system. It is highly recommended that more disproportionality specialists be appointed to help affected communities understand the impact of these issues on children’s futures. Working closely with the community to find the “youth voice” should be a major part of the redesign. In the words of a child advocate, changes are needed but we must be “patient with the system and all the changes” (TDFPS, 2014c).

In conclusion, this descriptive study with charts summarized from public domain data provides support for closely examining the trends over a decade that could project future foster care children characteristics for better service planning and community engagement. The goal is to reduce racial disproportionality with the hope of a concomitant reduction in issues faced by children in foster care. Based on these data and findings, we suggest that solutions and strategic plans be established to help these children stay in placements for shorter periods of time and that services be carefully designed to meet the challenging needs faced by children, particularly those who have been disproportionally represented in the system without much family or informal support. Culturally relevant training to reduce disproportionality gaps and to determine needs of children and families of color must be provided to ensure that CPS staff will deliver ethnically sensitive services to both clients and service providers under the newly developing foster care redesign system.

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