

Differential Response on Racial Equity Outcomes

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-Link Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we examined the impact of a Differential Response (known in Minnesota as Family Assessment) approach on racial equity and child safety outcomes, focusing on overrepresented groups in Minnesota's child welfare system. This study explored whether race was a predictor in pathway assignment to either Family Investigation (FI) or Family Assessment (FA), as well as trends in pathway switch from FA to FI. Overall findings indicate that outcomes for children of color in FA have become more equitable over time, but racial disparities still existed in later years of the study. Findings were mixed – African American, Native American, and Multiracial children were less likely than Caucasian children to be assigned to FA for only some years of the study time frame, while Hispanic children were more likely.

Discussion on Practice Implications

- 1.** This research brief opens with a discussion on the presence of racial disparities and disproportionality experienced by families of color with higher rates of child maltreatment reports. What factors have contributed to the disproportionate representation of children and families of color in child welfare? Why do you think it is important to understand trends in disparities and disproportionality?
- 2.** Differential Response (Family Assessment) may increase family engagement, improve family and worker satisfaction, and may improve child safety by reducing recidivism of child maltreatment. What are your experiences with Differential Response? How have you seen Differential Response being utilized with families of color?
- 3.** Findings from this study were mixed—African American, Native American and Multiracial children were less likely than Caucasian children to be assigned to the differential response pathway for only some years of the study time frame while Hispanic children were more likely. There is some evidence to suggest that outcomes for children of color assigned to differential response have become more equitable over time, but racial disparities still exist. What are some ways to reduce disproportionate representation of children and families of color in child welfare (in general) and Minnesota's dual-response system?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

- 1.** While some progress has been made in addressing disparities for children of color in Minnesota's child welfare system, the benefits of differential response may not be shared equitably across all groups. What other research or best practice are you aware of that may help to reduce racial disparities? How is your agency helping to reduce racial disparities? What are some system-level or agency-level barriers you've encountered in reducing racial disparities? What collaborations and policy changes are necessary to reduce the racial disproportionality evident in Minnesota's child welfare system?
- 2.** Child welfare professionals encounter many decision-making points throughout the life of a case, including those addressed in this study (e.g., assigning a case to a Differential Response/Family Assessment or Family Investigation track). How are those decisions made at your agency? How does your process influence racial disproportionality in your county?