

# Study: Racial bias may influence child welfare decisions

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Racial bias may contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American children in the child welfare system, a new study says.

The study's findings demonstrate a complex relationship between children's race, [poverty](#), and caseworkers' assessment of risk in the decision-making process, says lead author Alan Dettlaff, assistant professor in the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Recent research suggested that racial bias was not a source of the overrepresentation of African-American children in the child [welfare system](#), but that poverty and other risk factors were, Dettlaff said.

But the results of the new study "demonstrate that racial bias does exist in the decisions made by [child protection](#) agencies, even after accounting for the influence of poverty and other risk factors," he said.

Dettlaff and his colleagues examined reports of alleged maltreatment with substantiation decisions from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services from 2003 to 2005.

The study, appearing online in the journal Children and Youth Services Review, shows that racial disparity in the child welfare system cannot be attributed to a single factor. It showed that although poverty is an important factor that may contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American children in the child welfare system, [racial bias](#) in

child protection agencies needs to be considered because it may lead to inequitable treatment of [children](#) and families.

Study co-authors are Stephanie Rivaux of the University of Texas at Austin, Donald Baumann of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, John Fluke of Child Protection Research Center, Joan Rycraft of the University of Texas at Arlington, and Joyce James of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's Center for the Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities.

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

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