



Highlights of [GAO-08-1064T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

A significantly greater proportion of African American children are in foster care than children of other races and ethnicities relative to their share of the general population. Given this situation, GAO was asked to analyze the (1) major factors influencing their proportion in foster care, (2) strategies states and localities have implemented that appear promising, and (3) ways in which federal policies may have influenced the proportion of African American children in foster care. This testimony is based on a GAO report issued in July 2007 (GAO-07-816), which included a nationwide survey; a review of research and policies; state site visits; analyses of child welfare data; and interviews with researchers, HHS officials, and other experts. It includes updates where possible.

What GAO Recommends

In our July 2007 report, GAO recommended that HHS further assist states in addressing disproportionality. HHS noted that GAO's recommendation was consistent with its efforts to provide technical assistance to states, but it has not addressed the specific actions. GAO continues to believe that further assistance is important for helping states address disproportionality. GAO also suggested that Congress consider amending current law to allow subsidies for legal guardianships. HHS believes its proposal for restructuring child welfare funding, first offered in 2004, would give states the option to do this, but the viability of this proposal is uncertain.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1064T](#). For more information, contact Kay Brown at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

HHS and Congressional Actions Could Help Reduce Proportion in Care

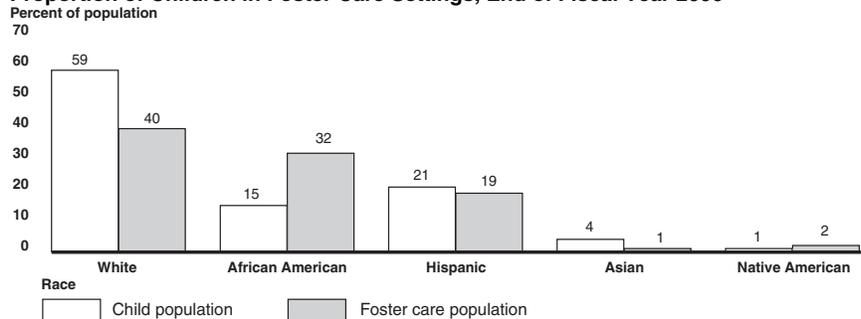
What GAO Found

According to our survey results, key factors contributing to the proportion of African American children in foster care included a higher rate of poverty, challenges in accessing support services, racial bias and distrust, and difficulties in finding appropriate adoptive homes. Families living in poverty have greater difficulty accessing housing, mental health, and other support services needed to keep families stable and children safely at home. Bias or cultural misunderstandings and distrust between child welfare decision makers and the families they serve also contribute to children's removal from their homes into foster care. African American children also stay in foster care longer because of difficulties in recruiting adoptive parents, the lack of services for parents trying to reunify with their children, and a greater reliance on relatives to provide foster care who may be unwilling to terminate the parental rights of the child's parent—as required in adoption—or who need the financial subsidy they receive while the child is in foster care.

Most states we surveyed reported using various strategies intended to address these issues, such as building community supports, providing cultural competency training for caseworkers, and broadening the search for relatives to care for children. Researchers and officials also stressed the importance of analyzing data to address the proportion of African American children in care in order to better understand the issue and devise strategies to address it. HHS provides information and technical assistance, but states reported that they had limited capacity to analyze their own data and formulate strategies to address disproportionality.

According to our survey, states viewed some federal policies, such as those that promote adoption, as helpful for reducing the proportion of African American children in foster care. However, they also expressed concerns regarding policies that limit the use of federal funds to provide preventive services and support legal guardianship arrangements. As an alternative to adoption, subsidized guardianship is considered particularly promising for helping African American children exit from foster care.

Proportion of Children in Foster Care Settings, End of Fiscal Year 2006



Source: GAO analysis of preliminary 2006 data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System and 2006 Census data.