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# KEEPING FAMILIES FROM FALLING INTO THE RIVER: REIMAGINING CHILD MALTREATMENT PREVENTION

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# SOME THINGS ABOUT ME



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# AGENDA/ OUTLINE

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The problem

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What the literature says

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Are we asking the right questions?

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Reimagining child maltreatment prevention

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What this means for you



# THE PROBLEM

- **3,925,000:** total reports to CPS nationally in 2020
- **7,100,000:** children total included
- **3,121,409:** children were subject to an *investigated* report in 2020

(Kids Count Data Center, 2021; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022)

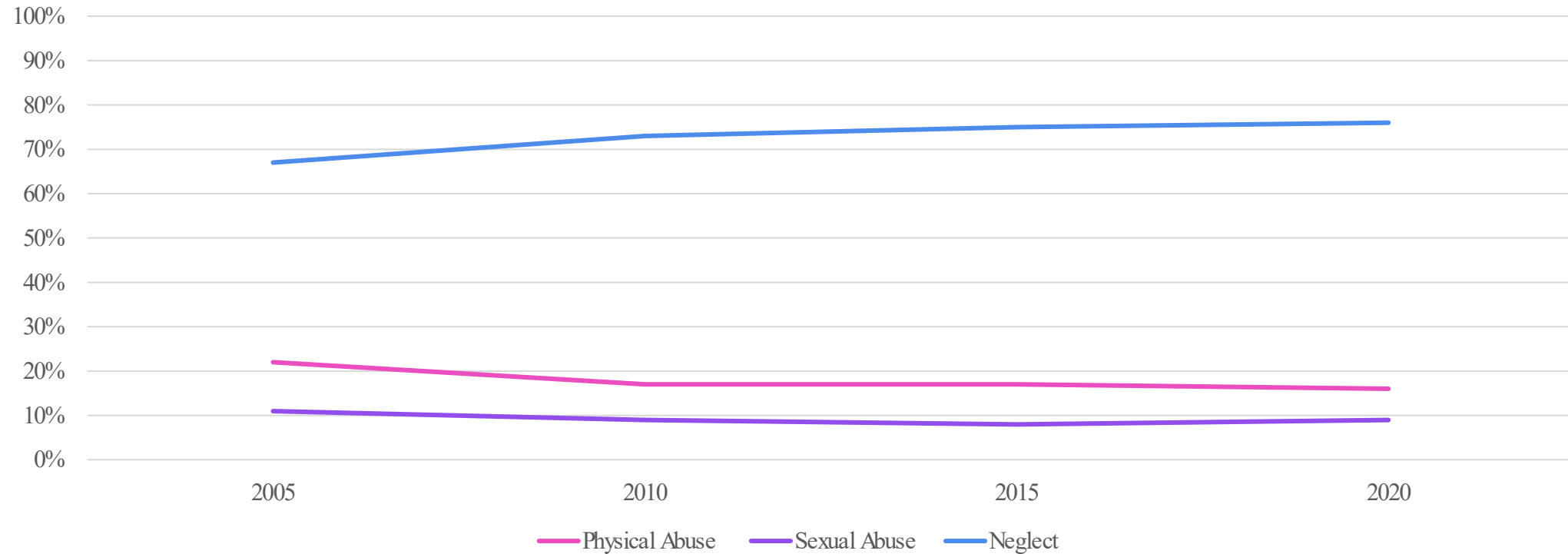
- **\$428 billion:** Economic burden in the US in 2015  
(Peterson et al., 2018)
- **\$ 33 billion:** spent in SFY 2018  
(Rosinsky et al., 2021)



# THE PROBLEM

## NEGLECT

Change in Substantiated Cases over Time by Maltreatment Type



Data Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, FFY2011-2020



# THE PROBLEM

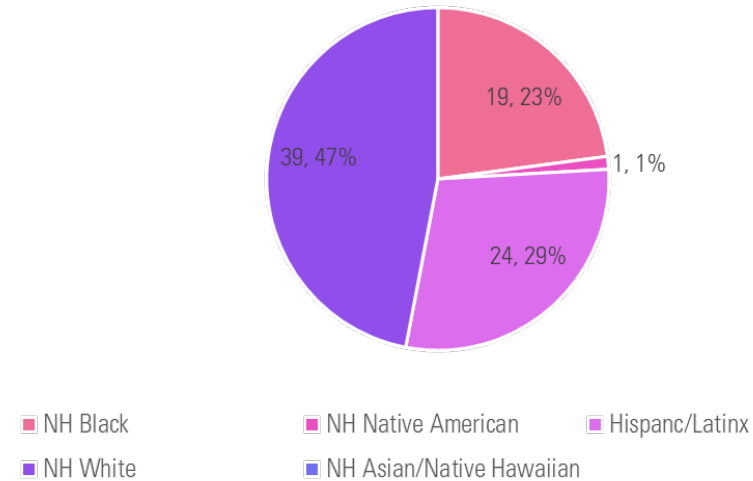
## RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

- Neglect is more often substantiated for children living in low-income conditions than children living in higher-income households
- Neglect is more often substantiated in cases including Black and Indigenous children compared to White children

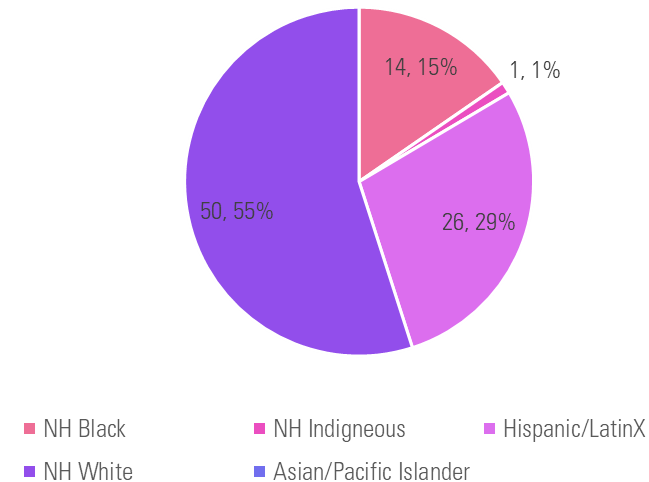
(Sedlak et al., 2010)

(Billingsley, 1972; Fluke et al., 2003; Kim & Drake, 2018; Pelton, 1978; Roberts, 2002; Wildeman et al., 2014)

Substantiated cases by race/ethnicity in 2020, US



Overall population 2020, US





# THE LITERATURE

## ON NEGLECT

- Reasons for neglect are different from those of physical or sexual abuse  
(Blumenthal, 2021; Bullinger et al., 2020; Dubowitz et al., 1993; MacKenzie et al., 2011; Mulder et al., 2018)
- Neglect = “failure to” + vague & varying definitions  
(Blumenthal, 2021)
- Intent of caregivers  
(Blumenthal, 2021)
- Connected to poverty → poverty is a risk factor maltreatment  
(Briar-Lawson et al., 2021; Bywaters et al., 2016; Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2014; Gillham et al., 1998; Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017; Thomas & Waldfogel, 2022)



# THE LITERATURE ON NEGLECT

→ Already vague definitions vary by state

## KANSAS

K.S.A. 38-2202: ““Neglect” means

- **acts or omissions** by a *parent, guardian or person responsible* for the care of a child resulting in harm to a child, or presenting a likelihood of harm
- and the acts or omissions are **not due solely to the lack of financial means** of the child's parents or other custodian.
- Neglect may include, but shall not be limited to” failure to provide
  - Material necessities
  - Adequate supervision
  - Medical care

## MISSOURI

- Pursuant to section 210.110, RSMo:
  - “A failure to provide, by *those responsible for the care, custody, and control* of the child
  - the **proper or necessary support**, education as required by law, nutrition, or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the child’s well-being.”
- Pursuant to 13 CSR35-31.010, *proper or necessary support* is defined as:
  - “**Adequate** food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or other care and control necessary to provide for the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health or development.”





# THE LITERATURE

## ON RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

### “DISPARITY DEFENDERS”

(ROBERTS, 2022, P.40)

Numbers do not reflect a disproportional but an accurate, higher need for services of families of color (Ards, 2003; Bartholet, 1991, 2009, 2016; Drake, 2011)

- Blames factors solely outside the system
- Accepts disproportionality as status quo

(Detlaff et al., 2020, Detlaff & Boyd, 2020)

### THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IS RACIALLY BIASED

At different points of contact in the CWF

- “front-end” racism: (un)conscious biases of mandated reporters (Krase, 2013, 2015)
- Exposure/visibility bias  
(Ards et al., 1998; Ards et al., 2003)
- biased CPS/judiciary/law enforcement decision making processes

(Boyd, 2014; Dettlaff et al., 2020; Fluke et al., 2011; Roberts, 2022)



# ARE THEY ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?



<https://pin.it/4GkDEYb>



# THE QUESTION W E SHOULD ASK

Why are we letting families fall  
into the river in the first place?



# CHILD MALTREATMENT PREVENTION REIMAGINED

- Extensive literature connecting neglect to poverty  
(Detlaff et al., 2020; Eckenrode et al., 2014; Kim & Drake, 2018; Miller et al., 2012; Schenk-Fontaine & Gassman-Pines, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022)
- Poverty is something the child welfare system alone cannot fix
- “...child maltreatment prevention programs should pay explicit attention to **policies in other service systems** that may also help mitigate economic hardship among the families that they serve.” (Cancian et al., 2013, p.433)

→ Macro Policies



# CHILD MALTREATMENT PREVENTION REIMAGINED

## Macro policies related to child maltreatment decreases

- **Earned Income Tax Credit**  
(Arno et al., 2009; Berger et al., 2017; Kovski et al., 2021; Kovski et al., 2021)
- **Paid Family Leave**  
(Bullinger et al., 2023; Klevens et al., 2016)
- **Economic Supports**  
(Cancian et al., 2013; Citrin et al., 2022; Ginn et al., 2022; Otley et al., 2022)
- **Medicaid Expansion**
  - **reductions in reports of child neglect**  
(Brown et al., 2019; McGinty et al., 2022)
  - **reduced foster care referrals due to neglect**  
(Beland et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2021)
  - **reductions in evictions & general anti-poverty impact**  
(Allen et al., 2019; Zewde & Wimer, 2019)



# CHILD MALTREATMENT PREVENTION REIMAGINED

## REPORTS OF CHILD NEGLECT

- **Brown et al., 2019**
  - # of screened-in reports
  - children < 6
  - reduction of 442 *neglect* reports per 100,000
- **McGinty et al., 2022**
  - # of screened-in reports
  - ages grouped 0–5, 6–12, and 13–17
  - 13.4%, 14.8%, and 16.0% in the average rate of child *neglect* reports per 100,000

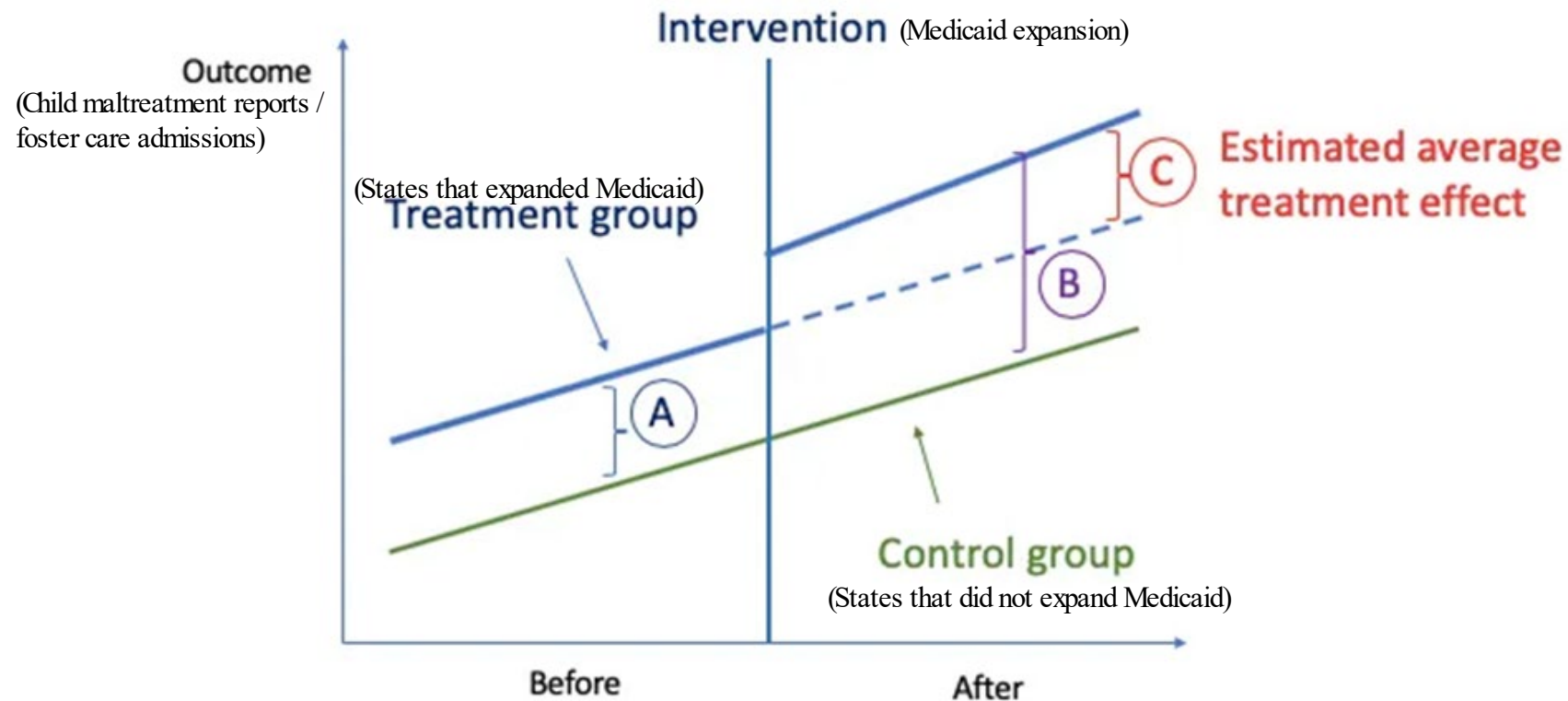
## FOSTER CARE ADMISSIONS

- **Beland et al., 2021**
  - 17.5% reduction in total foster care admissions
  - 32% reduction in admission for *neglect*
- **Tang et al., 2021**
  - No significant relationship between total foster care admissions
  - 33% reduction in admissions due to parental substance use





# DIFFERENCE-IN-DIFFERENCE ANALYSIS



<https://medium.com/dataman-in-ai/identify-causality-by-difference-in-differences-78ad8335fb7c>



# CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

- The majority (>70%) of all child maltreatment reports is for alleged neglect
- Neglect is highly intertwined with poverty
- The child welfare system itself is not equipped to fix structural inequities
- Macro policies might be better suited to prevent neglect
- (Indirect) economic supports show great promise
- More research is needed



# WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR YOU?

- Divide between micro-level practice and macro-level change initiatives (Moya et al., 2018)
- Even in social work education
- Deceptive divide
- Neglects core concept of social work: systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005)
- Macro-level policy impact
  - indirect impact on your workload and resources to adequately serve your clients



# MACRO STRATEGIES FOR YOU

- Vote
  - Voting is Social Work!  
<https://votingissocialwork.org/>
  - inform your clients on how to register and where to vote
- Call/write your legislators:  
[http://www.kslegislature.org/li\\_2012/b2011\\_12/members/](http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2012/b2011_12/members/)
- Write blogs/op-eds
  - <https://www.theblogstarter.com/>
  - <https://www.kansascity.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article230345204.html>
- Raise awareness of clients to macro issues impacting them
- Run for a local positions (school/library board)
  - [https://files.gabbart.com/1190/so\\_you\\_want\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_school\\_board\\_member\\_published.pdf](https://files.gabbart.com/1190/so_you_want_to_be_a_school_board_member_published.pdf)
- Donate to advocacy organizations
  - <https://www.actlocal.network/directory/orgRegion/kansas>
  - [https://www.firststepalliance.org/post/25-social-justice-organizations?gclid=CjwKCAiA9NGfBhBvEiwAq5vSyyiMRQu\\_XSvNpR34z5dzgLsnr2l8raEPsqjby4aL7x4OLirXqYYBBocjEYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.firststepalliance.org/post/25-social-justice-organizations?gclid=CjwKCAiA9NGfBhBvEiwAq5vSyyiMRQu_XSvNpR34z5dzgLsnr2l8raEPsqjby4aL7x4OLirXqYYBBocjEYQAvD_BwE)
- Follow activists/educational pages on social media
  - <https://crescendowork.com/workplace-inclusion-blog/2020/7/24/top-instagram-accounts-follow-diversity-inclusion-social-justice-activism-content>
  - <https://linktr.ee/macrounited>



# QUESTIONS?

References and Resources Page

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cgzOFJ914-h3JN4KvR64AnUarPtHkofeDxU7xvYuc7w/edit?usp=sharing>



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