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State Spending on Public Benefit Programs and the Differential Impact on Child Maltreatment by Race and Ethnicity

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Public Benefit Programs & Their Differential Impact on Child Maltreatment by Race and Ethnicity

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BACKGROUND

- Public benefits have been shown to decrease child maltreatment overall, but their impact on pervasive racial disparities is unknown.

OBJECTIVE

- To determine if the associations between state-level spending on public benefit programs and rates of child maltreatment reporting differ by race & ethnicity.

METHODS

- **Design**: Ecological study using NCANDS data and spending data from numerous sources.
- **Population**: All 50 states during 2010-2019.
- **Outcome**: Race-specific rates of maltreatment reporting to Child Protective Services.
- **Exposure:** Population-level annual state spending on public benefit programs per person living in poverty, overall, and by individual categories: 1) cash, housing, and in-kind, 2) housing infrastructure, 3) childcare assistance, 4) refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and 5) Medicaid.
- **Analysis**: Generalized estimating equations, with an interaction between race and spending and repeated measures of state, estimated β coefficients adjusted for federal spending, year, race-specific child poverty rates, and U.S. Census Division. Similar models tested federal spending adjusted for state spending.
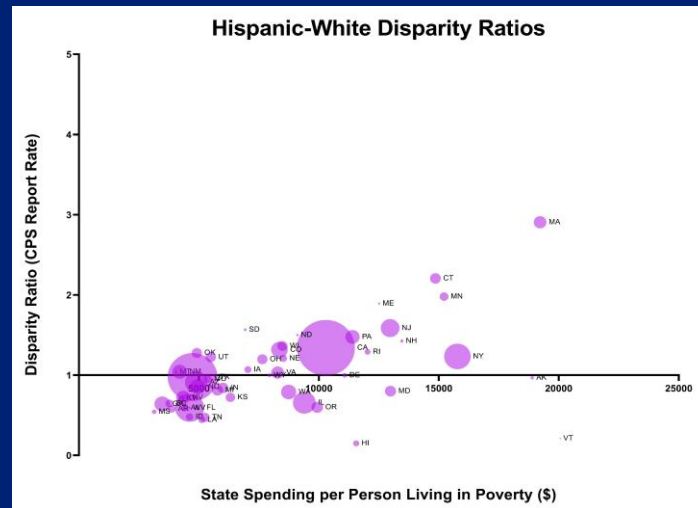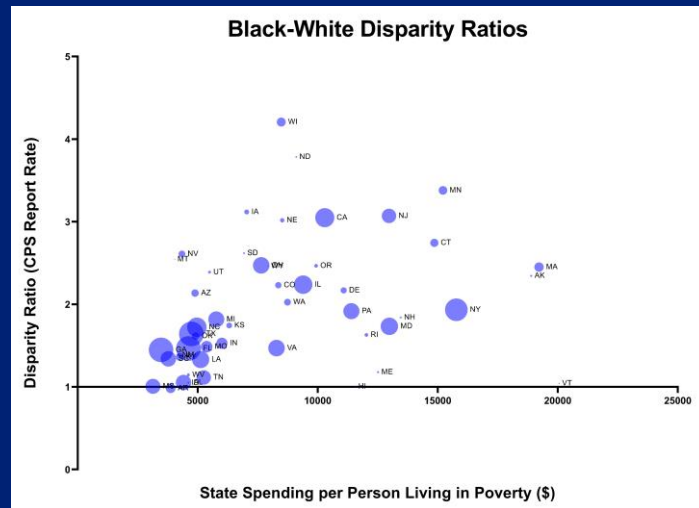

State benefit programs were associated with disproportionate decreases in maltreatment for non-Hispanic White children, potentially *contributing to, and not resolving,* racial & ethnic disparities in child maltreatment.

Figure. Disparity ratios for maltreatment reporting to child protective services (CPS) in relation to population-level state spending on benefit programs. Disparity ratios calculated as ((rate among Black or Hispanic children) ÷ (rate among non-Hispanic White children)). Bubble size proportional to each states' race-specific populations (i.e., potentially affected children).

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HYPOTHESIS

- State spending would be associated to a greater degree with lower reporting rates for non-Hispanic White children than Black and Hispanic children.

RESULTS

- State spending was disproportionately associated with lower child maltreatment reporting for non-Hispanic White children, with estimates being 2-10x greater than those for Black and Hispanic children. (Table)
- Differential impacts for White children contributed to increasing disparities (Figure).
- Total federal spending was not associated with differential associations.

Table. State Spending, β coefficients, p< 0.05
† interaction term p<0.1, ‡ interaction term p<0.05.

Spending Category	Black	Hispanic	non-Hispanic White
All Categories ‡	-0.02	0.01	-0.06
Cash, housing, in-kind †	-0.007	-0.007	-0.08
Housing infrastructure †	-0.03	0.04	-0.19
Childcare †	0.11	-0.06	-0.88
EITC	-0.60	-0.27	-1.35
Medicaid ‡	-0.06	-0.02	-0.12

IMPLICATIONS

- If our findings are true and causally linked, plausible mechanisms include:
  1. Less deep-seated poverty and other risk factors, on average, for White families,
  2. Racist policies leading to inequitable distributions of benefits, and/or
  3. Racist reporting practices.
- States' eligibility criteria and distribution practices for benefit programs should be examined to ensure equitable impacts on adverse child outcomes, especially given the lack of differential associations with federal spending on benefit programs.