

Comparing rates of entering DHHS custody for Native and non-Native children

Based on data provided by the state, we calculated the rates at which Native and non-Native children enter DHHS custody in Maine from 2002 to 2013. This allowed us to compare these two rates to determine whether or not Native children were more likely to enter DHHS custody than non-Native children.

How did the TRC calculate the rate of entering DHHS custody for different groups of children?

To calculate the rate of entering DHHS custody for children of different groups in Maine, we divided the number of children entering DHHS custody from a particular group by the total number of children from that group who live in Maine. Then we multiplied that number by 1,000 to get the rate per 1,000 children.

Example	What's the calculation?	What does it mean?
In 2009, 29 Native children entered foster care out of 2,159 Native children in Maine.	$(29/2,159)*1,000=13.43$	This means that in 2009, Native children entered foster care at a rate of 13.43 per 1,000.
In 2009, 737 non-Native children entered foster care out of 275,787 non-Native children in Maine.	$(737/275,787)*1,000=2.67$	This means that in 2009, non-Native children entered foster care at a rate of 2.67 per 1,000.

How did the TRC come up with its finding?

In our full analysis, we did this calculation for every year from 2002 to 2013, for both Native and non-Native children. We then averaged the numbers for these years so that the outcome would represent a trend, rather than whatever may have occurred in a single year.

Where did the TRC get the numbers?

Type of data	Where it's from
Number of Native and non-Native children entering foster care.	Data provided by the state from MACWIS, or the Maine Child Welfare Information System for 2002 to 2014.
Number of Native and non-Native children in Maine.	We used annual numbers published on Kids Count's website, which is based on U.S. Census data. This allowed us to make a year-by-year comparison. http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#ME

What was the TRC's finding?

We found out that the average rate of entering foster care for Native children was 14.85 per 1,000, and the average rate for non-Native children was 2.89 per 1,000. **This means that, on average, from 2002 to 2013, Native children entered foster care at a rate 5.1 times greater than the rate for non-Native children.**

Should this finding be considered the "final say"?

Certainly not. However, because the numbers suggest such a substantial disproportionality, our findings strongly indicate a need for further analysis to better understand how disproportionality changes through different points in time in the child protective process, for example, in numbers of referrals, opened cases, removal from the home, length of stay in foster care, and for outcomes in exiting foster care. In addition, data specific to different child welfare districts should also be considered.