

Foster Care Disparities in Oregon Across Race/Ethnicity and Economic Characteristics

by
Lexi Welch

A THESIS

submitted to
Oregon State University
Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
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degree of

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(Honors Scholar)

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David Rothwell

This thesis analyzes different aspects of the Oregon foster care system. It does this first by looking at racial/ethnic disparities across counties. Then it analyzes the relationship between foster care rates and child poverty rates, childhood food insecurity rates, free and reduced lunch eligibility rates, and unemployment rates for Oregon's 36 counties. Children who identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native and African American or Black were found to be overrepresented when compared with White children, and children who were Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander were found to be underrepresented. A positive correlation was found between foster care rates and child poverty rates, but no correlation was found for childhood food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and unemployment rates. The results of this thesis indicate the need for further research into the racial/ethnic disparities and warrant policy attention for the overrepresentation of American Indian/Alaskan Native and Black children in foster care.

Key Words: Foster care, poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, free and reduced lunch eligibility

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Lexi Welch, Author

The foster care system is a section within the child welfare system that provides children with 24-hour, out-of-home care. This care can vary in length of time because it is designed to be substitute care for children who are in harmful living situations. Foster care originated as a way to replace almshouse or orphanages in the late 19th century and later gained legislative backing through the creation of the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1912 (McGowan, 2005). The Children's Bureau was the first indication that the federal government took some responsibility for the welfare of children throughout the country (McGowan, 2005). Over the past century, the Children's Bureau created the child welfare and foster care system that we have today.

Children in foster care typically experience several traumas that lead to being removed from their home. According to Greeson et al. (2011), about 70 percent of children in foster care have experienced at least two forms of trauma; this can include physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse or neglect of the child. Additionally, the experience can be worsened by other stressful events such as chronic poverty, loss of a loved one, and natural disasters (Greeson et al., 2011). Children in foster care tend to have, or have greater risk for developing behavioral and emotional issues as a result of the trauma that is experienced, including post-traumatic stress, externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and high risk behaviors (Greeson et al., 2011). Children in foster care represent a vulnerable population; however, general information on children in foster care does not provide information on what inequalities, such as racial/ethnic or economic inequalities, exist within the foster care system leading already marginalized groups to become even more vulnerable.

This thesis aims to understand inequalities in the foster care system throughout

Oregon. I will do this through examining the disparity of children of color in the foster care system. Additionally, I will look at the relationship between foster care rates and county level characteristics on financial stability. In this part of the thesis, I will analyze how foster care rates are associated independently with child poverty rates, rates of food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility rates and unemployment rates across Oregon counties. Knowledge about the existence and magnitude of inequalities in this area will inform policy decisions for the foster care system.

Review of Literature

I review literature on the child welfare system to look at what research has shown about racial/ethnic representation in the child welfare system.¹ Then, I review the literature on the relationship between foster care and financial instability indicators: childhood poverty, child food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and unemployment. I also review literature on these topics to understand how they connect to the child welfare system and entry into foster care.²

Child Welfare System

The child welfare system is a complex system with a plethora of components. This system is primarily State run with Federal support through funding and legislation. For child welfare involvement to take place, a case of abuse or neglect must be reported to Child Protective Services (CPS); CPS then must investigate the report (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Common sources of reports include nonprofessionals,

¹ This encompasses the various steps that families and children will go through that may lead to placement in the foster care system.

² Because this is only an undergraduate thesis, this review of literature is not all encompassing.

social and mental health services, medical personnel, law enforcement or legal personnel, educational personnel, and daycare and foster care providers (Fluke, Shusterman, Hollinshead, & Yuan, 2005). If a threat of harm is substantiated, then CPS will decide the severity of the harm (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). This leads to families being required to participate in programs that provide support, or it can result in child(ren) being removed from the custody of the parent(s) (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014). If removal from parental custody occurs, then the children are a part of the foster care system and placed in kinship care, or with a foster family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014). Once children are in foster care, parental rights are not necessarily terminated, leading to different potential courses for the child; the child may stay with a foster family or in kinship care until their parents have received mandated services or parental rights can be terminated (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014). This can lead to the child being adopted by family and permanently residing in their home, or the child being adopted by a foster parent or someone who is looking to adopt (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Across the United States, children of color are more highly represented in the foster care system than White children. Hill (2006) explained that 60% of the children in the foster care system are children of color even though fewer than 50% of children in the country are from minority communities. In Oregon, 20% of children of in foster care were children of color even though they only made up 11% of the child population (*Governor's Task Force*, 2011). Knott and Donovan (2010) found that Black children had 44% higher odds of entering foster care than White children. Black children were more

likely to be placed in out-of-home care and stay in foster care for nine months longer than their White peers (Knott & Giwa, 2012). Black children and their families were also less likely to receive the same support services that their White counterparts receive. Carter (2010) analyzed factors that lead to American Indian/Alaskan Native children being placed in out of home care at rates much larger than that of White children. Even though American Indian and Alaskan Native children made up 1% of the population, they represented 2% of the foster care placements (Carter, 2010). Across Oregon, these disparities were found to be even greater. Black children were almost two times more likely to be represented in foster care when compared with White children (*Governor's Task Force*, 2011; Miller, Cahn, Bender, Cross-Hemmer, Feyerherm, & White, 2010). Additionally, American Indian/ Alaskan Native children were represented at more than 5.5 times the rate of White children (*Governor's Task Force*, 2011; Miller et al., 2010). According to Carter (2010), American Indian and Alaskan Native children were more likely to be investigated for physical neglect cases, whereas White children were more likely to be investigated for lack of supervision (Carter, 2010).

Many factors influence whether children are placed in out-of-home care. Many of these are related to poverty. The risk of placement in out-of-home care is said to increase if the mother is unemployed, receives state benefits, has only a basic education or has a criminal conviction (Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2013). It also increases if the family is low income; lives in overcrowded housing, are non-immigrants, have mental health problems, and live in council or rented housing (Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2013). Additional risk factors include if the mother was a teenage mother, the child was low birth weight or had a birth abnormality, there were frequent residential moves, and if the

child has parents who were themselves in care (Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2013).

Furthermore, without support systems and family support services in place, families are more at risk for out-of-home placement. Family support services include services designed to support parents in their role as caregiver, varying based on the needs of the family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Tillbury and Thoburn (2009) explain that there is an under-spending on preventative measures and an overall lack of access to support services that could help reduce foster care placement. Knott and Giwa (2012) indicated that a lack of support systems and preventative care occurs more often for Black children and families than for their white counterparts. This racial/ethnic difference in prevention services influences the ability that people of color have to gain new skills that could prevent behaviors, such as abuse and neglect, that could ultimately lead to foster care placement; thus, the disparate access to prevention may contribute to racial/ethnic disparities in the foster care system.

Additionally, neighborhood composition has been found to influence child maltreatment. Research has found that when people of color live in a community not representative of their racial/ethnic background, people of color stand out more; so when people learn about that family's practices, they are more critical of them (Miller, Cahn, Anderson-Nathe, Cause, & Bender, 2013; Klein & Merritt, 2014). Maguire-Jack and Showalter (2016) found that neighborhood social cohesion was also associated with lower levels of neglect within families.

Additional biases have been found to play some role in the placement of children in the foster care system. These include individual and systemic biases, such as "visibility bias; cultural bias and insensitivity; ... and foster and adoptive parent recruitment and

licensing practices” (Miller et al., 2013). This has an impact in regards to racial/ethnic representation in the system. Miller et al. (2013) indicated that case workers do not generally think to consider race when placing children with foster families or how the case worker’s own racial background impacts the placement. Thus, there are a variety of factors that can lead to placement of a child in foster care that range from individual risk factors to systemic inequalities.

Financial Stability

As seen above, economic disadvantage has been found to impact foster care placement, thus it is important to understand various aspects of financial stability. Because child finances are household finances, financial stability, or the ability to support oneself and one’s family, affects children through their caregivers. Indicators of financial stability, or instability, addressed in this thesis include but are not limited to poverty, food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and unemployment status. Below I discuss these indicators of financial insecurity and how they are measured.

Childhood Poverty. Using the Official Poverty Measure, poverty is measured by comparing pre-tax income with a threshold that is based on three times the cost of food for a family (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2016). This amount varies based on inflation calculated with the Consumer Price Index and family size (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Family size includes people who are living together and related by marriage, birth, and adoption. The poverty threshold is used for statistical purposes, and the U.S. Census Bureau (2016) recognizes that it does not necessarily equate to the amount of money that people and families need to be financially secure.

Approximately 21% of children in the United States or 15 million children lived in poverty in 2015 (Jiang, Granja, & Kobal, 2017). This means that their families made less than the poverty threshold, which for a family of three with one child in 2015 was \$19,078 (Jiang, Granja, & Kobal, 2017). Because of their low-income status, children in poor families have access to several benefits to try to supplement the negative effects of living in poverty; however, living below the poverty threshold can have many significant impacts on children including lower educational and cognitive outcomes, increased risk for behavioral and emotional problems, chronic health issues, and poor nutritional outcomes (Van Allen & Sterling, 2011; Bhattacharya, Currie, & Haider, 2004).

Additionally, several studies have found an association between poverty and foster care placement. Knott and Donovan (2010) explained that children from families with financial problems had 78% higher odds of being placed in foster care, and when children lived in households with inadequate housing, they had 86% higher odds of entering foster care. Similarly, Esposito, Chabot, Rothwell, and Delaye (2016) concluded that, in Quebec, absolute poverty was significantly related to higher percentages of out of home placement. Eckenrode, Smith, McCarthy, and Dineen (2014) found that there was a significant association between U.S. counties with greater income inequality, which is related to poverty, and increased rates of child maltreatment. As a result, the impacts of living in poverty are widespread and can range from poorer educational outcomes to higher rates of maltreatment and foster care placement.

Child Food Insecurity. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defined four different levels of food security: high food security and marginal food security are classified as being food secure, and low food security and very low food

security qualify for being food insecure (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Rabbitt, 2016). High food security involves having no issues with accessing food, while marginal food security involves reporting one or two instances of anxiety over the amount of food in the house, but it does not involve changes in diet or food intake because of the stress (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2016). Low food security includes having the quality, variety, or desirability of one's diet be reduced, but minimal indications of reducing food intake (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2016). In 2011, 21% of households were food insecure at some point with 10% of children experiencing food insecurity at some point during the year (Coleman-Jensen, McFall, & Nord, 2013). Finally, very low food security includes those who experience multiple indications of reduction of food intake and disruption of eating patterns which can include regularly feeling hungry or having parents skip their meals so that children can eat (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2016; Coleman-Jensen et al., 2013).

Food insecurity has been found to be more prevalent in homes where the adult(s) had less than a high school diploma, one parent was out of the labor force, the family was receiving food and nutrition programs, or the family had stopped receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits during the prior year (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2013). These rates of food insecurity were highest for Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic households; the prevalence was more than 2.5 times the prevalence for white households (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2013).

Experiencing food insecurity can have impacts that extend beyond just being hungry; it can lead to adverse developmental and health outcomes. General health in food insecure children has been shown to decrease, and as health decreased, children's stomachaches and headaches were shown to increase (Kimbrow & Denney, 2015).

Additionally, food insecurity is linked to increased internalizing and externalizing behaviors as well as hyperactivity and problems with inattention (Murphy et al., 1998). Kimbro and Denney (2015) explained that academic deficiencies were more likely to be present when children are food insecure. Thus, children who are food insecure can be negatively impacted across various aspects of their lives. When looking at the intersection between food insecurity and foster care rates, research was unavailable.

Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), created in 1946, funds a program allowing children to receive free school lunches or lunches at a reduced cost. In order to be eligible to receive free lunches, a child's family must be living at or below 135% of the poverty threshold (National School Lunch Program [NSLP], 2013). Eligibility for reduced lunch rates requires families to be living at or below 180% of this threshold (NSLP, 2013). Additionally, children can be automatically eligible for free meals through categorical eligibility. Categorical eligibility includes children who are members of households that receive Assistance Program benefits and children in the Migrant Education Program or programs under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2016). Children who qualify under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, children who are homeless and residing within another household, children who are in foster care, and eligible households that have not applied are all eligible for free meals as well (USDA, 2016). NSLP helps increase access to school meals for over 31 million children across more than 100,000 schools nationwide (NSLP, 2013).

NSLP has been beneficial in ensuring food is accessible to children in schools who may otherwise face financial barriers to receiving regular meals. Huang and

Barnidge (2016) found that the program reduces household food insufficiency by 14%. Kabbani and Kmeid's study (2005) showed the effectiveness of the NSLP as well. Although food insecurity is effective in reducing food insecurity, enrollment in free and reduced lunches has been associated with negative health outcomes, such as experiencing poor health or obesity (Schanzenbach, 2009; Gundersen, Kreider, & Pepper, 2012). However, Gundersen et al. (2012) explained that this association is most likely due to other risk factors that children living in low-income households experience at an increased rate, such as decreased access to healthy food overall. Beyond foster children being automatically eligible to receive free meals through the NSLP, there is a lack of research on the relationship between foster care rates and total free and reduced lunch eligibility rates for counties or states.

Unemployment. In the United States, 4.9% of the residents were unemployed in October 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This rate has decreased significantly since the Recession of 2008; however, being unemployed still poses a plethora of challenges for millions of people in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The stress caused by losing a job and being unemployed can have significant financial, psychological, and social impacts on the person who is unemployed (Brand, 2015). Losing a job creates a change in identity that can leave individuals struggling to figure out how to spend their time, how to support themselves and their families, and how to cope with the societal stigma associated with unemployment (Brand, 2015). It has also been associated with a decline in physical well-being (Brand, 2015).

Challenges related to unemployment extend to the families as well. Brand (2015) and Jolley, Newman, Ziersch, and Baum (2011) explained that job loss and

unemployment can increase marital stress leading to an increased risk of family disruption, frequently in the form of separation or divorce. Additionally, family activities and lifestyles decline because of the financial strain that job loss creates (Jolley et al., 2011). For children, the effects of unemployment can be significant and long lasting. Children whose parents are unemployed are at a higher risk of having lower self-esteem, educational attainment, and income in adulthood (Brand, 2015). Children in families with an unemployed parent are also at an increased risk of dropping out of school or being expelled or suspended from school (Brand, 2015). This negative academic impact continues when children seek post-secondary education. Coelli (2011) found that the financial constraints that follow parental unemployment decrease the likelihood that adolescents will choose to go to college immediately after high school graduation. As a result, the impacts of unemployment extend to those surrounding the person who is unemployed, sometimes creating lasting consequences. Overall, research relating foster care rates and unemployment rates is sparse.

Research questions

In the current study, I want to understand disparities within the foster care system and how foster care rates relate to child poverty, food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and unemployment rates. I am looking at racial/ethnic disparities within the foster care system in order to increase state-wide awareness of inequalities and potentially gaps within the foster care system. Additionally, this interest is due to the lack of literature, especially in Oregon, related to the topic of foster care rates and financial instability. The current study is motivated by five main research questions:

1. What is the rate of racial/ethnic disparity in the foster care system?
 - 1a. What races/ethnicities are overrepresented?
 - 1b. Where are races/ethnicities overrepresented the most?
2. What is the relationship between childhood poverty and foster care rate?
3. What is the relationship between child food insecurity and foster care rate?

4. What is the relationship between free and reduced lunch and foster care rate?
5. What is the relationship between unemployment and foster care rate?

Methods

I used data from a variety of sources to examine foster care rates. My primary interest was to understand racial/ethnic disparities within the Oregon foster care system at the county level. I also examined how childhood poverty, child food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and unemployment rates across 36 Oregon counties relate to foster care rates in those counties. In collaboration with Children First for Oregon (CFFO), an organization that advocates for Oregon's children by informing policy makers with data and research, I accessed data published in their annual County Data Book (Children First for Oregon, 2016). The County Data Book is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Project. The sample for research question 1 varies from the sample for research questions 2 through 5 because information for research question 1 was only available for 2014, whereas for research questions 2, 4, and 5, information was available for 2007 through 2014. For research question 3, information was only available for 2011 through 2014.

For research question 1, data for Federal Fiscal Year 2014 on foster care by 34 Oregon counties was used, which was obtained by the Department of Human Services (DHS) (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2015). Sherman and Wheeler Counties were not included because they did not have any data due to their small populations. The data included the total numbers of children who were in the foster care system for at least one day during FFY 2014. Data from CFFO was provided for 11,443 children in foster care and 955,056 children in the total population during Federal Fiscal Year 2014.

Some of the values were masked to maintain confidentiality. According to the executive director of CFFO, T. Hunt (personal communication, April 27, 2016), masked data is determined through the use of the “Five or 50 rule,” where if there were fewer than five occurrences or individuals within a reported category the information was suppressed. Additionally, if there were fewer than 50 individuals in the total group for the population category, then the number of occurrences was suppressed (T. Hunt, personal communication, April 27, 2016). It included information on children in foster care ages 0 to 17.

For research questions 2 through 5, overall foster care rates by county were used. Data was available from CFFO from 2007 to 2014. These rates include all children entering into foster care for at least one day, ages 0 to 17 as reported by the Children’s Bureau (2017).

Data for child poverty variable was obtained by CFFO through the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2007 through 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Childhood food insecurity describes the rate of children living in food insecure households from 2011 to 2014 in Oregon. Food insecurity included households where food intake is reduced and typical eating patterns are changed due to financial concerns (Feeding America, 2017a). This data was retrieved from Feeding America in their Map the Meal Gap publication (Feeding America, 2015).

Free and reduced lunch eligibility data was included in the CFFO data via the Oregon Department of Education for 2007 to 2014. It included rates for eligibility for each county and the state of Oregon.

Unemployment was measured for Oregon counties between 2007 and 2014. This information was obtained by CFFO through the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017). The unemployment rate is based on the percentage of people in the labor force who do not have a job but have actively been looking for work and are available for work or capable of working (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Measurement

Dependent variable: Foster care disparity. Data for 2014 foster care rates included information on both county and race/ethnicity. Race/ethnicity included the following categories: American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, White, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Unknown/Declined/Unable to Determine. To determine the race/ethnicity of a child in foster care, parents reported information on the first recorded race/ethnicity that the child identifies with to DHS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System [AFCARS], 2012; Oregon Department of Human Services, 2015). If the child is too young to self-report and they do not have a parent present to report, the child falls within the unable to determine category (AFCARS, 2012). If a child identifies with Hispanic as their ethnicity, they fall within Hispanic regardless of racial identity (AFCARS, 2012).

Financial stability.

Child poverty. Child poverty rates were measured using information on the number of children living in families that fall at or below the poverty threshold for each given year (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Childhood food insecurity. To generate the community-level data, Feeding America looked at the state level correlation between food insecurity and indicators of

food insecurity, such as poverty and unemployment. Then they generate estimated food insecurity rates for county level data by using the correlation coefficients and other county level information for the same variables (Feeding America, 2017b).

Free and reduced lunch eligibility. Eligibility was determined through the use of the poverty threshold. This data includes both those who qualified for free lunches (135% of the poverty threshold) and those who qualified for reduced price lunches (180% of the poverty threshold) (Oregon Department of Education, 2017). It also includes data on children who were categorically qualified for free and reduced lunches (Oregon Department of Education, 2017).

Unemployment. Unemployment rates are calculated through the use of the Current Population Survey, a monthly survey that measures unemployment through contacting 60,000 eligible households nationwide (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Procedure

Foster care disparity. To calculate the racial/ethnic disparities present in the Oregon foster care, I calculated a foster care disproportionality index and disparity ratio.

$$Disproportionality_{Black} = \frac{\left(\frac{BlackFosterCare}{TotalFosterCare} \right)}{\left(\frac{BlackPopulation}{TotalPopulation} \right)}$$

First, for each county, I created a race-specific foster care rate by dividing the number of children in foster care for each race by the total number of children in the foster care system. I then calculated the race-specific population rate of children of each race/ethnicity that were present in the total child population for each county by dividing the numbers of children for each race/ethnicity in the county by the total child population for the county. Then, I used the race-specific foster care rate and divided it by the race-

specific population rate to estimate a disproportionality index. Disproportionality is used to look at the proportion of a group in the population being affected by something in comparison to the entire population of the group (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009). In this case, disproportionality shows the amount of children of each race/ethnicity in the foster care system compared to the amount of the children of each race/ethnicity in the total population. This is the proportion of children of that race/ethnicity in the foster care system. For the disproportionality index, a value of one represents the race-specific foster care rate as being proportional to the race-specific population rate. Values below one represent underrepresentation within the foster care system, and values above one represent overrepresentation within the foster care system for the specific race. I utilized a t-test in order to find the significance of the over or underrepresentation for each race/ethnicity in comparison with children who identified as White.

I then calculated a disparity index for each race/ethnicity in every county by dividing the disproportionality index for each race/ethnicity by the disproportionality index for White children.

$$Disparity_{Black} = \frac{Disproportionality_{Black}}{Disproportionality_{Caucasian}}$$

Disparity looks at whether there is a difference between two different groups' representation (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009). In this case, comparing the rates of children of various races/ethnicities in the foster care system with the representation of White children allows us to see the difference between the representations. For the disparity index, values of one represent the race/ethnicity as being represented in the same proportion of White children. Values less than one show that the children of that

race/ethnicity are underrepresented when compared with White children, and values over one show that the children are overrepresented when compared with White children.

Foster care and financial stability characteristics. For research questions 2-5, I calculated the correlation of the state overall independent variable with dependent variable foster care rate. Then, I calculated the correlation between each independent variable and foster care rate for each county. Analyses were not conducted when insufficient data was present in a county This method pools the data across all available years with data.³

Results

Foster Care Disparities

Table 1 shows the disproportionality index for each race/ethnic group, the disproportionality index for White, and the results of a comparison of means test that tested the statistical significance of the difference between two means. Results showed that in 2014, across Oregon as a whole, children who were American Indian/Alaskan Native were significantly overrepresented ($M=1.652$, $SD=0.707$) in the Oregon foster care system when compared with White children. Additionally, Black children were significantly overrepresented ($M=1.500$, $SD=0.422$). When compared with White children, children who identified as Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander were significantly underrepresented ($M=0.134$, $SD=0.042$; $M=0.567$, $SD=0.156$). Children who identified as Hispanic were also underrepresented ($M=0.878$, $SD=0.447$) in comparison to White children; however, this result was not statistically significant.

³ It is possible to look at how these questions vary across year but we did not do that in this thesis.

Table 1

Comparison of Means for Disproportionality

| | <i>Obs.</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Obs.</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> value |
|---------------------|---|----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Comparison of Means | American Indian/Alaskan Native Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | White Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | |
| Foster Care Rate | 16 | 1.65 | 0.707 | 34 | 1.03 | 0.168 | 4.82** |
| Comparison of Means | Asian Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | White Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | |
| Foster Care Rate | 3 | 0.134 | 0.042 | 34 | 1.03 | 0.168 | -13.6** |
| Comparison of Means | Black Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | White Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | |
| Foster Care Rate | 9 | 1.500 | 0.422 | 34 | 1.03 | 0.168 | 5.43** |
| Comparison of Means | Hispanic Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | White Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | |
| Foster Care Rate | 25 | 0.878 | 0.447 | 34 | 1.03 | 0.168 | -1.73 |
| Comparison of Means | Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | White Disproportionality Index Ratio | | | |
| Foster Care Rate | 3 | 0.567 | 0.156 | 34 | 1.03 | 0.168 | -3.41** |

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

Next, I analyzed where in Oregon the racial/ethnic disparities were present across Oregon in 2014. The results showed that American Indian/Alaskan Native children were significantly overrepresented compared White children in 2014 in six of the 16 counties with complete data. These counties included Jackson, Klamath, Lane, Marion, Multnomah, and Wasco County. Children who identified as Black were significantly

overrepresented in five of the nine counties that we have data for where cases occurred. Clackamas, Jackson, Lane, Linn, and Multnomah County were the five counties with statistically significant disparities. Asian children were significantly underrepresented in the three counties that data was present for. These counties included Lane, Multnomah, and Washington County. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were underrepresented in two of the three counties where data was present. These disparities were present in Marion and Multnomah County. Children who identified as Hispanic were significantly overrepresented in one of the 25 counties (Malheur) where there were cases, and they were significantly underrepresented when compared with White children in 12 of the 25 counties. The 12 counties included Clackamas, Clatsop, Coos, Deschutes, Josephine, Klamath, Lane, Lincoln, Marion, Tillamook, Umatilla, and Wasco County. Overall, 17 counties had statistically significant disparities; disparities were present across four races/ethnicities in both Lane and Multnomah County, and they were present for three races/ethnicities in Marion County. See Table 2.

Table 2

Racial/Ethnic Foster Care Disparities in Oregon Counties

| County | American Indian/Alaskan Native Disparity | Asian Disparity | African American or Black Disparity | White Disparity | Hispanic Disparity | Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander |
|-----------|--|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Baker | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1.547 | 0 |
| Benton | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 1.689 | 0 |
| Clackamas | 1.569 | -- | 1.512* | 1 | 0.587* | -- |
| Clatsop | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.456* | 0 |
| Columbia | 0.874 | 0 | -- | 1 | 1.292 | 0 |
| Coos | 1.174 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.399* | -- |
| Crook | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Curry | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Deschutes | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.466* | 0 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|---|--------|--------|
| Douglas | 1.266 | -- | -- | 1 | 1.051 | -- |
| Gilliam | -- | 0 | 0 | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Grant | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Harney | -- | 0 | 0 | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Hood River | 0 | 0 | -- | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Jackson | 2.847* | -- | 1.947* | 1 | 1.092 | -- |
| Jefferson | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 1.447 | 0 |
| Josephine | 0.908 | -- | 0.865 | 1 | 0.405* | 0 |
| Klamath | 2.883* | 0 | 1.185 | 1 | 0.441* | -- |
| Lake | -- | -- | -- | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Lane | 1.456* | 0.108* | 1.430* | 1 | 0.755* | 0.756 |
| Lincoln | 1.425 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.446* | 0 |
| Linn | 0.800 | -- | 2.185* | 1 | 0.906 | 0 |
| Malheur | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 1.387* | -- |
| Marion | 1.482* | -- | 1.059 | 1 | 0.566* | 0.442* |
| Morrow | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | -- | -- |
| Multnomah | 4.202* | 0.231* | 2.687* | 1 | 1.063 | 0.556* |
| Polk | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 1.001 | 0 |
| Tillamook | -- | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.308* | -- |
| Umatilla | 1.269 | -- | -- | 1 | 0.606* | 0 |
| Union | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.339 | 0 |
| Wallowa | 0 | 0 | -- | 1 | -- | 0 |
| Wasco | 2.037* | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.503* | 0 |
| Washington | 1.547 | 0.114* | 1.315 | 1 | 1.086 | -- |
| Yamhill | 1.346 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.799 | 0 |
| Total | 1.693* | 0.151* | 1.576* | 1 | 0.905 | 0.584* |

Note. * $p < .05$. -- Indicates values were masked to assure confidentiality. 0 indicates that there were no children present in the foster care system of the race/ethnicity in the county.

Foster Care Rates and Financial Stability Characteristics

Next, we turn to research questions 2-5. Summary statistics are shown in Table 3. Across years, the child poverty rates ranged from 13% in Clackamas County to 38% in Wheeler County, with a state-wide pooled rate of 24%. Childhood food insecurity rates ranged from 21% in Benton, Clackamas, Gilliam, Hood River, and Washington County to 32% in Harney County. There was a state-wide average of 27%. The state-wide free and reduced lunch eligibility rate was 52%, ranging from 33% in Clackamas County to 69% in Morrow County. Unemployment rates ranged from 6% in Benton County to 17%

in Yamhill County with a state-wide pooled rate of 9%. Foster care rates ranged from 0.5% in Benton County to 6.4% in Gilliam County. The state-wide pooled rate was 1.8%.

Table 3

Summary statistics child poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, and foster care averaged across years.

| County | Child Poverty Rate (2007 – 2014) | Childhood Food Insecurity Rate (2011 – 2014) | Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility Rate (2007 – 2014) | Unemployment Rate (2007 – 2014) | Foster Care Rate (2007 – 2014) |
|------------|----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Oregon | 0.24 | 0.27 | 0.52 | 0.091 | 0.018 |
| Baker | 0.283 | 0.305 | 0.493 | 0.089 | 0.020 |
| Benton | 0.147 | 0.213 | 0.361 | 0.060 | 0.005 |
| Clackamas | 0.127 | 0.213 | 0.331 | 0.076 | 0.007 |
| Clatsop | 0.235 | 0.264 | 0.499 | 0.072 | 0.018 |
| Columbia | 0.168 | 0.247 | 0.395 | 0.093 | 0.020 |
| Coos | 0.280 | 0.276 | 0.501 | 0.102 | 0.028 |
| Crook | 0.258 | 0.311 | 0.568 | 0.129 | 0.014 |
| Curry | 0.248 | 0.268 | 0.574 | 0.107 | 0.020 |
| Deschutes | 0.185 | 0.259 | 0.435 | 0.104 | 0.006 |
| Douglas | 0.273 | 0.300 | 0.560 | 0.117 | 0.021 |
| Gilliam | 0.184 | 0.215 | 0.466 | 0.065 | 0.064 |
| Grant | 0.256 | 0.280 | 0.509 | 0.119 | 0.012 |
| Harney | 0.285 | 0.319 | 0.567 | 0.122 | 0.023 |
| Hood River | 0.208 | 0.213 | 0.567 | 0.066 | 0.008 |
| Jackson | 0.243 | 0.275 | 0.520 | 0.099 | 0.016 |
| Jefferson | 0.314 | 0.308 | 0.775 | 0.114 | 0.012 |
| Josephine | 0.313 | 0.305 | 0.590 | 0.112 | 0.021 |
| Klamath | 0.268 | 0.281 | 0.632 | 0.110 | 0.027 |
| Lake | 0.275 | 0.291 | 0.484 | 0.111 | 0.023 |
| Lane | 0.210 | 0.253 | 0.480 | 0.085 | 0.023 |
| Lincoln | 0.286 | 0.267 | 0.603 | 0.086 | 0.023 |
| Linn | 0.243 | 0.286 | 0.448 | 0.102 | 0.016 |
| Malheur | 0.343 | 0.292 | 0.678 | 0.089 | 0.019 |
| Marion | 0.257 | 0.272 | 0.569 | 0.088 | 0.020 |
| Morrow | 0.225 | 0.253 | 0.689 | 0.078 | 0.011 |
| Multnomah | 0.224 | 0.242 | 0.526 | 0.076 | 0.019 |
| Polk | 0.185 | 0.240 | 0.499 | 0.076 | 0.015 |
| Sherman | 0.229 | 0.304 | 0.535 | 0.082 | 0.040 |
| Tillamook | 0.244 | 0.269 | 0.577 | 0.077 | 0.015 |
| Umatilla | 0.229 | 0.254 | 0.600 | 0.082 | 0.011 |
| Union | 0.219 | 0.264 | 0.480 | 0.088 | 0.010 |
| Wallowa | 0.256 | 0.260 | 0.439 | 0.104 | 0.008 |

| | | | | | |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Wasco | 0.244 | 0.248 | 0.589 | 0.074 | 0.022 |
| Washington | 0.139 | 0.211 | 0.373 | 0.069 | 0.008 |
| Wheeler | 0.376 | 0.260 | 0.454 | 0.072 | 0.021 |
| Yamhill | 0.184 | 0.241 | 0.491 | 0.170 | 0.009 |

Table 4 shows the correlations between variables of interest for research questions 2 through 5. Overall, foster care rates were positively correlated with child poverty rates, childhood food insecurity rates, and free and reduced lunch eligibility rates; however, they were negatively correlated with unemployment rates.

Table 4

Correlation matrix for poverty, food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, unemployment, and foster care rate.

| | Child Poverty Rate | Child Food Insecurity | Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility | Unemployment Rate | Foster Care Rate |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Child Poverty Rate | – | | | | |
| Child Food Insecurity | 0.687** | – | | | |
| Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility | 0.618** | 0.389** | – | | |
| Unemployment Rate | 0.465** | 0.691** | 0.298** | – | |
| Foster Care Rate | 0.154** | 0.071 | 0.064 | -0.008 | – |

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

Foster care rates and child poverty rates. To analyze the relationship between foster care rates and child poverty rates in Oregon across years and counties, I calculated a pairwise correlation. The calculation was significant and showed a small, positive correlation, $r(281) = 0.154$, $p = 0.009$, for the state of Oregon from 2007 to 2014 (see

Figure 1).

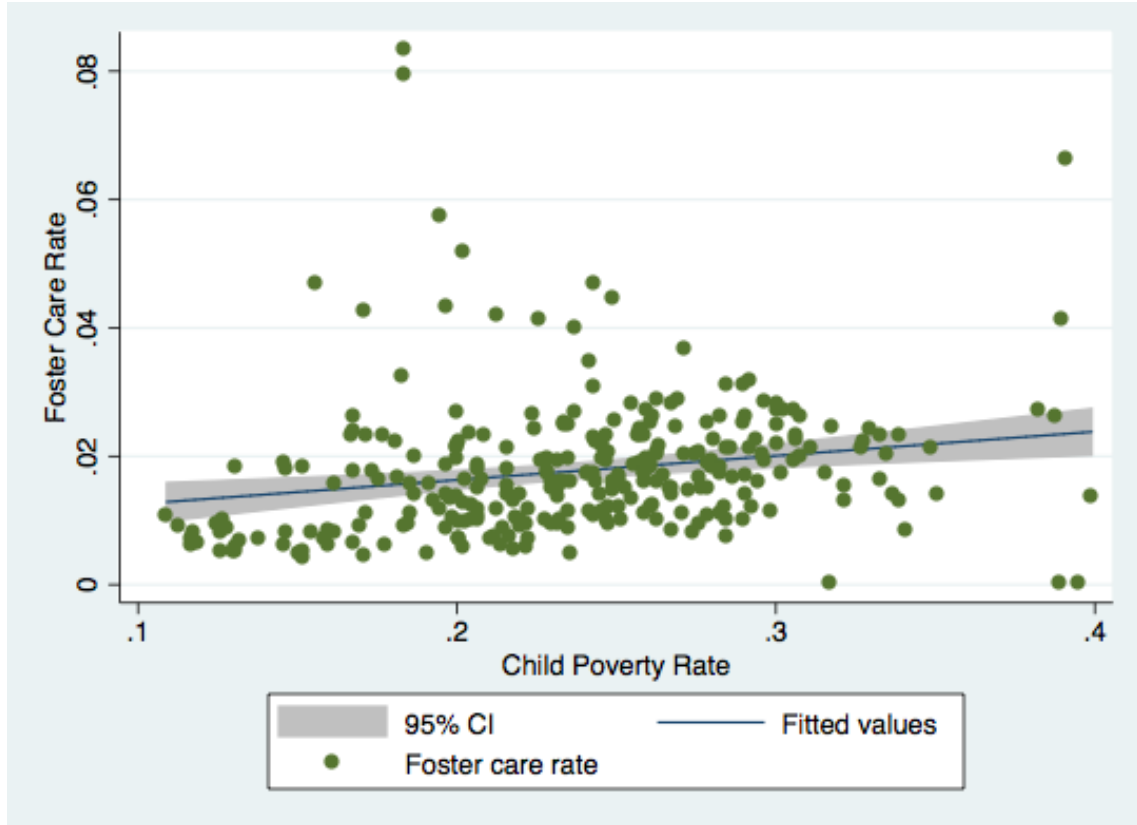


Figure 1. Correlation between foster care rate and child poverty rate in the state of Oregon and across 36 Oregon counties from 2007 to 2014.

Next, I analyzed the correlation across counties (see Table 5). I found a statistically significant, positive correlation in Douglas County, $r(6) = 0.880, p = 0.004$. Negative correlations were found in Grant County, $r(6) = -0.803, p = 0.016$; Harney County, $r(6) = -0.756, p = 0.030$; Jackson County, $r(6) = -0.894, p = 0.003$; Tillamook County, $r(6) = -0.743, p = 0.035$; and Washington County, $r(6) = -0.762, p = 0.028$.

Table 5

Relationship between child poverty rates and foster care rates.

| County | Degrees of Freedom | R |
|--------|--------------------|---|
|--------|--------------------|---|

| | | |
|------------|-----|----------|
| Oregon | 281 | 0.154** |
| Baker | 6 | 0.342 |
| Benton | 6 | -0.026 |
| Clackamas | 6 | -0.310 |
| Clatsop | 6 | 0.327 |
| Columbia | 6 | 0.364 |
| Coos | 6 | 0.325 |
| Crook | 6 | 0.203 |
| Curry | 6 | 0.264 |
| Deschutes | 6 | 0.275 |
| Douglas | 6 | 0.880** |
| Gilliam | 6 | 0.470 |
| Grant | 6 | -0.803* |
| Harney | 6 | -0.756* |
| Hood River | 6 | -0.348 |
| Jackson | 6 | -0.894** |
| Jefferson | 6 | 0.104 |
| Josephine | 6 | 0.666 |
| Klamath | 6 | -0.471 |
| Lake | 6 | 0.467 |
| Lane | 6 | 0.103 |
| Lincoln | 6 | 0.307 |
| Linn | 6 | -0.610 |
| Malheur | 6 | 0.216 |
| Marion | 6 | -0.618 |
| Morrow | 6 | -0.190 |
| Multnomah | 6 | -0.645 |
| Polk | 6 | -0.662 |
| Sherman | 5 | -0.244 |
| Tillamook | 6 | 0.743* |
| Umatilla | 6 | -0.513 |
| Union | 6 | -0.129 |
| Wallowa | 5 | 0.546 |
| Wasco | 6 | 0.304 |
| Washington | 6 | -0.762* |
| Wheeler | 3 | 0.373 |
| Yamhill | 6 | 0.633 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Foster Care Rates and Childhood Food Insecurity

To understand foster care rates and childhood food insecurity across the Oregon foster care system from 2011 to 2014, I calculated the correlation and did not find a

statistically significant correlation, $r(141) = 0.071$, $p = 0.398$ (see Figure 2).

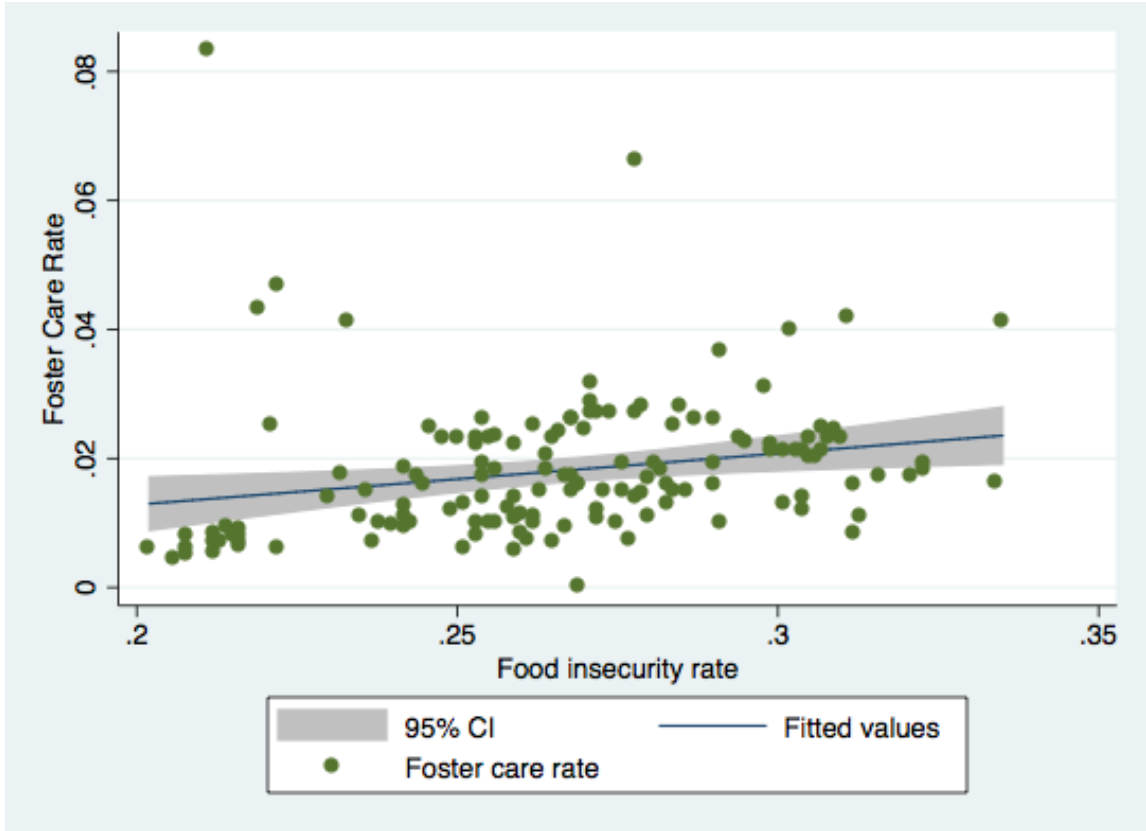


Figure 2. Correlation between foster care rate and childhood food insecurity rate from 2011 to 2014 across 36 Oregon counties.

Significantly negative correlations were found in Gilliam County, $r(2) = -0.952$, $p = 0.048$, and Jackson County, $r(2) = -0.971$, $p = 0.029$. There was a positive correlation present in Marion County, $r(2) = 0.997$, $p = 0.003$. See Table 6.

Table 6

Relationship between childhood food insecurity rates and foster care rates.

| County | Degrees of Freedom | R |
|--------|--------------------|--------|
| Oregon | 141 | 0.071 |
| Baker | 2 | -0.109 |
| Benton | 2 | 0.883 |

| | | |
|------------|---|---------|
| Clackamas | 2 | 0.454 |
| Clatsop | 2 | -0.553 |
| Columbia | 2 | 0.920 |
| Coos | 2 | -0.707 |
| Crook | 2 | 0.027 |
| Curry | 2 | 0.326 |
| Deschutes | 2 | 0.677 |
| Douglas | 2 | -0.736 |
| Gilliam | 2 | -0.952* |
| Grant | 2 | 0.056 |
| Harney | 2 | 0.948 |
| Hood River | 2 | 0.495 |
| Jackson | 2 | -0.971* |
| Jefferson | 2 | 0.303 |
| Josephine | 2 | 0.331 |
| Klamath | 2 | 0.170 |
| Lake | 2 | 0.059 |
| Lane | 2 | -0.886 |
| Lincoln | 2 | 0.432 |
| Linn | 2 | 0.323 |
| Malheur | 2 | -0.825 |
| Marion | 2 | 0.997** |
| Morrow | 2 | 0.363 |
| Multnomah | 2 | 0.478 |
| Polk | 2 | -0.044 |
| Sherman | 2 | 0.869 |
| Tillamook | 2 | 0.228 |
| Umatilla | 2 | 0.853 |
| Union | 2 | -0.697 |
| Wallowa | 2 | 0.841 |
| Wasco | 2 | -0.926 |
| Washington | 2 | 0.821 |
| Wheeler | 1 | 0.051 |
| Yamhill | 2 | 0.153 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Foster Care Rates and Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility Rates

Figure 3 shows that the relationship between foster care rates and free and reduced lunch eligibility rates was not statistically significant, $r(281) = 0.064$, $p = 0.287$.

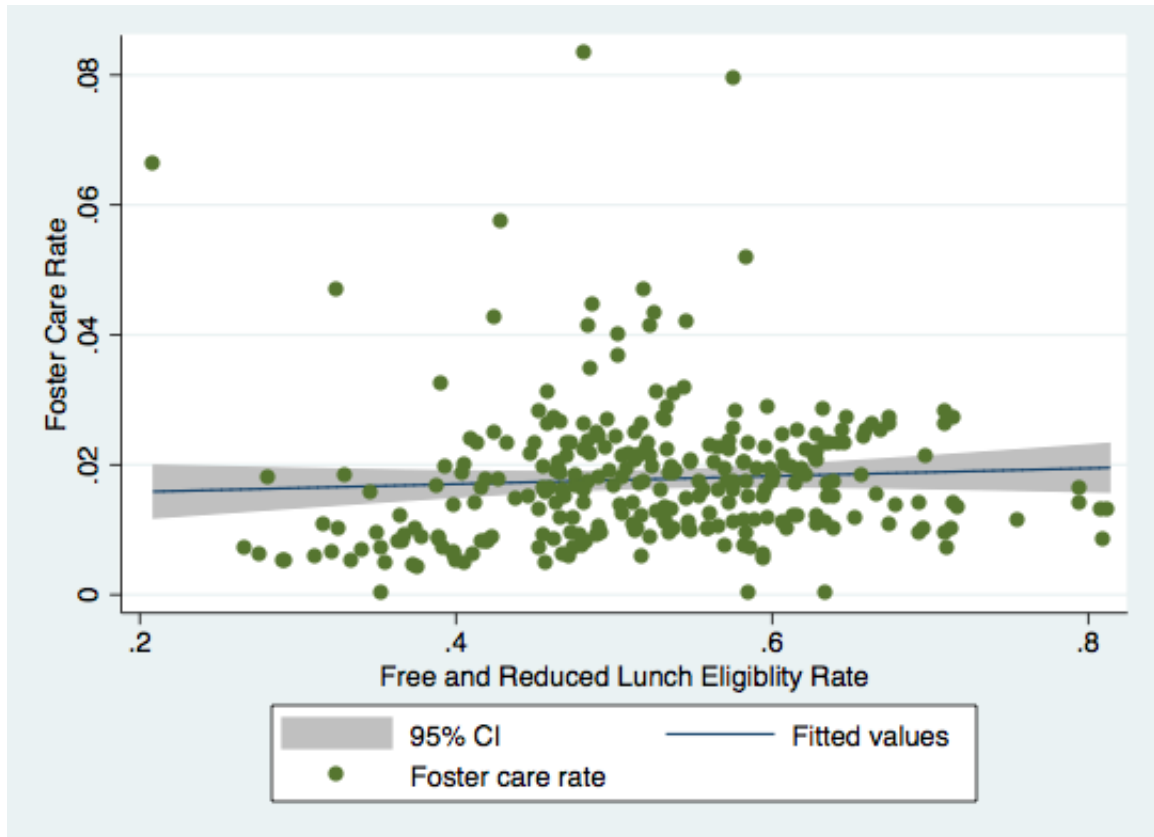


Figure 3. Relationship between foster care rates and free and reduced lunch eligibility rates throughout Oregon from 2007 to 2014.

When calculations across counties were done, positive correlations were found for Columbia County, $r(6) = 0.721$, $p = 0.044$; Douglas County, $r(6) = 0.765$, $p = 0.027$; Josephine County, $r(6) = 0.882$, $p = 0.004$; Tillamook County, $r(6) = 0.832$, $p = 0.011$; and Yamhill County, $r(6) = 0.912$, $p = 0.002$. The results showed negative associations for Grant County, $r(6) = -0.800$, $p = 0.017$; Jackson County, $r(6) = -0.756$, $p = 0.030$; Marion County, $r(6) = -0.872$, $p = 0.005$; Multnomah County, $r(6) = -0.965$, $p = 0.0001$; Polk County, $r(6) = -0.810$, $p = 0.015$; and Washington County, $r(6) = -0.890$, $p = 0.003$. See Table 7.

Table 7

Relationship between free and reduced lunch eligibility rates and foster care rates.

| County | Degrees of Freedom | R |
|------------|--------------------|----------|
| Oregon | 281 | 0.064 |
| Baker | 6 | 0.114 |
| Benton | 6 | 0.228 |
| Clackamas | 6 | 0.668 |
| Clatsop | 6 | -0.175 |
| Columbia | 6 | 0.721* |
| Coos | 6 | 0.666 |
| Crook | 6 | 0.148 |
| Curry | 6 | 0.069 |
| Deschutes | 6 | 0.437 |
| Douglas | 6 | 0.765* |
| Gilliam | 6 | 0.677 |
| Grant | 6 | -0.800* |
| Harney | 6 | -0.323 |
| Hood River | 6 | -0.560 |
| Jackson | 6 | -0.756* |
| Jefferson | 6 | 0.230 |
| Josephine | 6 | 0.882** |
| Klamath | 6 | -0.407 |
| Lake | 6 | -0.099 |
| Lane | 6 | -0.177 |
| Lincoln | 6 | 0.497 |
| Linn | 6 | -0.216 |
| Malheur | 6 | 0.460 |
| Marion | 6 | -0.872** |
| Morrow | 6 | -0.533 |
| Multnomah | 6 | -0.965** |
| Polk | 6 | -0.810* |
| Sherman | 6 | -0.296 |
| Tillamook | 6 | 0.832* |
| Umatilla | 6 | -0.613 |
| Union | 6 | 0.039 |
| Wallowa | 5 | -0.666 |
| Wasco | 6 | 0.465 |
| Washington | 6 | -0.890** |
| Wheeler | 3 | -0.698 |
| Yamhill | 6 | 0.912** |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Foster Care Rates and Unemployment Rates

In order to analyze the relationship between Oregon foster care rates and unemployment rates from 2007 to 2014, I conducted a pairwise correlation statistical analysis test. Overall, there was no statistically significant correlation, $r(281) = -0.008$ $p = 0.893$ (see Figure 4).

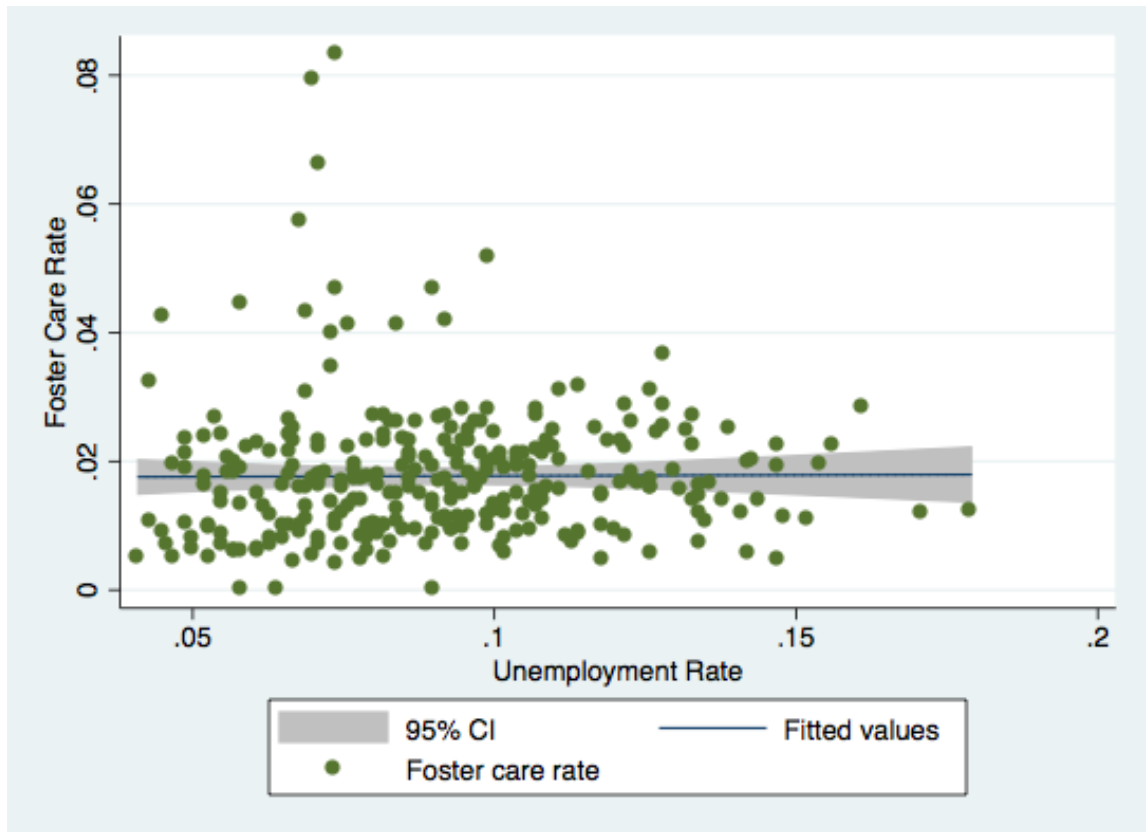


Figure 4. Correlation between foster care rates and unemployment rates across Oregon from 2007 to 2014.

Analyzing the correlations across counties showed significant correlations in Coos County, $r(6) = 0.759$, $p = 0.029$; and Linn County, $r(6) = -0.849$, $p = 0.008$. See Table 8.

Table 8

Relationship between unemployment rates and foster care rates.

| County | Degrees of | R |
|--------|------------|---|
|--------|------------|---|

| | Freedom | |
|------------|---------|----------|
| Oregon | 281 | -0.008 |
| Baker | 6 | 0.533 |
| Benton | 6 | -0.355 |
| Clackamas | 6 | -0.333 |
| Clatsop | 6 | 0.513 |
| Columbia | 6 | -0.393 |
| Coos | 6 | 0.759* |
| Crook | 6 | -0.346 |
| Curry | 6 | 0.481 |
| Deschutes | 6 | -0.253 |
| Douglas | 6 | 0.378 |
| Gilliam | 6 | 0.688 |
| Grant | 6 | -0.527 |
| Harney | 6 | -0.340 |
| Hood River | 6 | 0.023 |
| Jackson | 6 | -0.680 |
| Jefferson | 6 | 0.267 |
| Josephine | 6 | 0.397 |
| Klamath | 6 | -0.705 |
| Lake | 6 | 0.384 |
| Lane | 6 | 0.371 |
| Lincoln | 6 | -0.239 |
| Linn | 6 | -0.849** |
| Malheur | 6 | -0.453 |
| Marion | 6 | -0.251 |
| Morrow | 6 | -0.470 |
| Multnomah | 6 | -0.092 |
| Polk | 6 | -0.563 |
| Sherman | 6 | 0.344 |
| Tillamook | 6 | 0.546 |
| Umatilla | 6 | -0.159 |
| Union | 6 | -0.552 |
| Wallowa | 5 | -0.061 |
| Wasco | 6 | -0.360 |
| Washington | 6 | -0.124 |
| Wheeler | 3 | 0.079 |
| Yamhill | 6 | 0.170 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

I analyzed five questions relating to Oregon foster care rates, including the racial/ethnic disparities within the foster care systems and the locations of the disparities

and the relationship between foster care rates and four characteristics of financial stability. These characteristics included child poverty rates, childhood food insecurity rates, free and reduced lunch eligibility rates, and unemployment rates.

In my analysis of racial/ethnic disparities in the Oregon foster care system, I found that African American or Black children were 58% more likely than White children to be represented in the foster care system. Additionally, American Indian/Alaskan Native children were 69% more likely to be represented in the foster care system than White children. My results reinforce previous findings, showing that children who are Black or American Indian/Alaskan Native are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Hill, 2006; Knott & Donovan 2010; Knott & Giwa, 2012); however, the disparities are not as large as previous findings for the state of Oregon (*Governor's Task Force*, 2011; Miller et al., 2010). I found that children who are Asian are 85% less likely to be represented in the foster care system, and children who identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander are 42% less likely to be represented. The disparity for Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native children warrants policy attention and further research to understand the mechanisms driving these inequalities. For some Oregon counties such as Marion, Multnomah and Lane, the disparities occurred across multiple races/ethnicities, which is something that would benefit from further research. Multnomah County is especially notable in that it had the highest disparities for both American Indian/Alaskan Native and Black children compared to any other county. Multnomah County would greatly benefit from future research into the disparities and policy attention.

When analyzing the relationship between foster care rates and poverty rates

across Oregon, the overall correlation was significantly positive; however, there was variation in the correlations by county. The overall state finding aligns with several studies presented in the literature (Knott & Donovan, 2010; Esposito et al., 2016; Eckenrode et al., 2014). While there was a small correlation between foster care rates and child poverty, it is important to recognize that foster care is not an issue based on socioeconomic status; children in families across all income levels can become a part of the foster care system. There was no significant correlation between foster care rates and the other three characteristics of financial stability: childhood food insecurity rates, free and reduced lunch eligibility rates, and unemployment rates. Because free and reduced lunch eligibility is fairly broad and encompasses not only children in the foster care system, but a plethora of others as well, it makes sense that foster care rates were not affected as free and reduced lunch eligibility rates increased. The results were somewhat more surprising for food insecurity and unemployment rates; however, because of the absence of previous literature, I was not sure what to expect.

Limitations

Several limitations bear mentioning. For the analysis of racial/ethnic disparities, I only had data for one year, which did not allow me to look at how the disparities have varied or remained the same over the years. To advance our understanding we would need to look at these disparities and how they have changed over time in order to understand whether the disparities are significant long term. Additionally, there were many counties that had missing information or no instances of children in foster care for different races/ethnicities. Because there was so much data that was masked, a few of the races/ethnicities only had a couple of county observations to analyze.

Furthermore, the correlation tests can only speak to association. Correlations do not suggest causation around what leads to higher chances of being placed in the foster care system. Also, the free and reduced lunch eligibility data does not indicate how community eligibility impacts the free and reduced lunch eligibility rates. This means that the statistics presented in the study may not include the entire picture for free and reduced lunch eligibility across all of the counties. Because there are so many factors that lead to entrance into foster care, it would be beneficial to account for other confounding variables, such as age, access to support services, and parent education level.

Conclusion

Because so many children enter into foster care, I wanted to understand the inequalities that may occur among marginalized populations when entering out-of-home placement. I addressed racial/ethnic disparities within the Oregon foster care system, showing that children who identify as Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native are overrepresented when compared with White children. I also addressed the relationship between foster care rates and characteristics of financial stability, showing a positive correlation between foster care rates and childhood poverty, but no significant results between foster care rates and childhood food insecurity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and unemployment rates. The overrepresentation for Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native children shows the need for more research looking into the causes of these disparities and warrants policy attention. Findings on the correlation between child poverty and foster care rates demonstrates the need for further research analyzing the factors leading to the correlation inform approaches that try to prevent the initial need for child welfare involvement.

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