

Life Circumstances of Diverse Parents with Disabilities with Child Welfare System Involvement

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Using data from the 2018 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), this study examines the life circumstances of parents with disabilities involved with the child welfare system, specifically including parents from racial and ethnic minority groups. Parents with disabilities in the child welfare system, compared to parents without disabilities in the child welfare system, have a higher risk of inadequate housing, domestic abuse, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and financial struggles. For many of these life circumstances, Black and Hispanic parents with disabilities have a higher risk than those without disabilities in the same racial or ethnic group.

Introduction

Children of color face disproportionate representation in the child welfare system compared to white children. In addition, parents with disabilities are also disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. There are biases among many child welfare workers that can negatively affect outcomes for members of these marginalized groups. Through an intersectional lens, Black and Hispanic parents with disabilities have unique experiences due to the interactions between racism and ableism. However, there is limited knowledge about disabled parents of color within the child welfare system. Both parents with disabilities and parents of color face economic hardship and inadequate housing that can lead to worse outcomes in child welfare cases. It is necessary to examine the discrimination and biases that affect

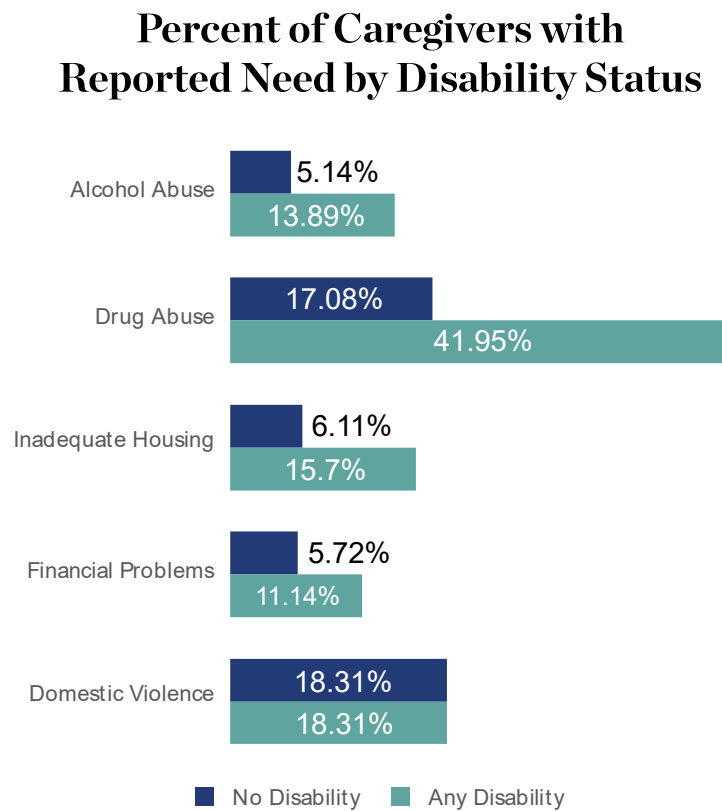


disabled parents of color in order to provide adequate supports for these parents and their families.

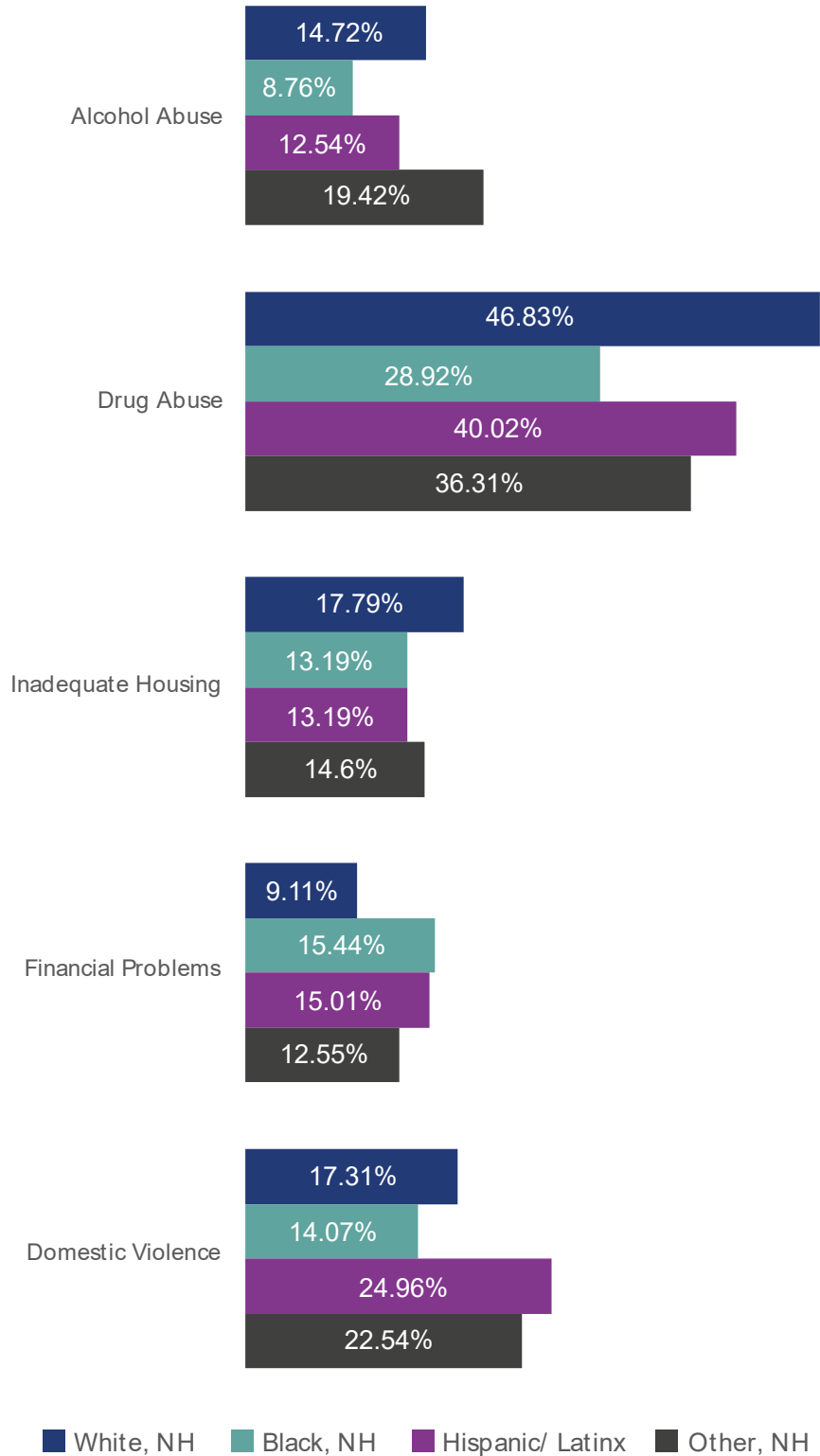
How are the life circumstances of parents in the welfare system affected by race and disability?

This study examines the intersection of disability status and race and ethnicity as they predict life circumstances. Specific life circumstances in the study include alcohol abuse, drug abuse, inadequate housing, financial problems, and domestic violence. Results show that parents with disabilities face higher likelihoods of each risk factor compared to parents without disabilities when controlling for children's age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Additionally, Black parents with a disability have higher odds of drug abuse (2.99), financial problems (3.91), and domestic violence (1.88) compared to Black parents without a disability. Hispanic parents with a disability have higher odds of domestic violence (1.32) compared to Hispanic parents without a disability.



Percent of Disabled Caregivers with Reported Need, by Race/Ethnicity



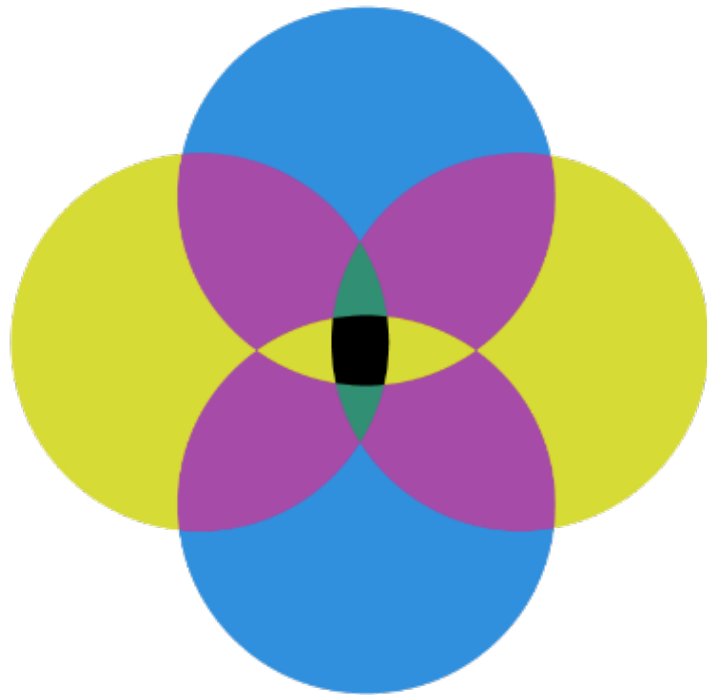
Note that “NH” in the above chart indicates “non-Hispanic.” Accessible versions of the visual data representations above are available in the [Appendix](#).

Importance of the study

This study is the first national investigation of the life circumstances of parents in the child welfare system through an intersectional lens (examining race and disability). The findings suggest that racism exacerbates the disparities that parents with disabilities face compared to parents without disabilities. To address these disparities, there must be available, accessible, and relevant services that child welfare workers can provide to parents with disabilities, and these services must be culturally competent. Limitations of the study include the possible duplication of individuals (because an individual can have more than one case in a single year) and missing data.

Future directions for research

As this study is the first of its kind, additional research is necessary to investigate the intersection between race and disability for parents with child welfare involvement. For example, it is critical to examine how intersectionality relates to child welfare outcomes, such as out-of-home placements and termination of parental rights. The results of this study underscore the need for more research to address the disparities related to race and disability for parents involved in the child welfare system.



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The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS.

Credit

Heyman, M., Li, F. S., Swinford, L., & Mitra, M. (2023). The life circumstances of diverse parents with disabilities with child welfare system involvement. *Child Welfare, 100*(5).

Appendix

Accessible Versions of Data Representations

Percentage of Caregivers with Reported Need by Disability Status

	Alcohol Abuse	Drug Abuse	Inadequate Housing	Financial Problems	Domestic Violence
No disability	5.14%	17.08%	6.11%	5.72%	18.31%
Any disability	13.89%	41.95%	15.7%	11.14%	18.31%

Percentage of Disabled Caregivers with Reported Need by Race/Ethnicity

	Alcohol Abuse	Drug Abuse	Inadequate Housing	Financial Problems	Domestic Violence
White, NH	14.72%	46.83%	17.79%	9.11%	17.31%
Black, NH	8.76%	28.92%	13.19%	15.44%	14.07%
Hispanic/Latinx	12.54%	40.02%	13.19%	15.01%	24.96%
Other, NH	19.42%	36.31%	14.6%	12.55%	22.54%

How to Cite This Brief

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