

**State-Level Variation in the Cumulative Prevalence of
Confirmed Maltreatment and Foster Care Placement, 2004-2015**

Extended Abstract for 2019 Population Association of America Conference
March 22, 2019

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Exposure to abuse, neglect, and related out-of-home care placements in early life are important risk factors and predictors of children's social, economic, physical, and emotional wellbeing both in early life and over the life course (e.g. Courtney et al. 2014; Gilbert et al. 2009; Jonson-Reid and Barth 2000). Further, these experiences are surprisingly common and unevenly distributed across the child population in the United States. Point-in-time estimates of the share of children who experience confirmed maltreatment in a given year and the share of children who are in foster care on any given day are quite small (1.0% and 0.3%, respectively; authors' calculations, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2018a, 2018b). However, research using synthetic cohort life tables estimates that the numbers and proportions of children who ever experience either of these events are much higher.

Roughly one in eight children will ever experience a confirmed maltreatment case in the United States (Wildeman et al. 2014), for instance. This is a remarkably high prevalence given that a confirmation of maltreatment requires that (a) the maltreatment be reported to child protective services (CPS), (b) CPS determine that the report may be credible and "screen in" the report for investigation, and (c) CPS find sufficient evidence to confirm that maltreatment occurred. For Black children, the risks are even higher: just over one in five can expect to have a confirmed maltreatment case at any point between their birth and their 18th birthday (21%). Risks of foster care placement are also high, with roughly 6% of all US children, 10% of African American children, and upwards of 15% of Native American children placed in foster at least once between birth and age 18 (Wildeman and Emanuel 2014).

These estimates of the cumulative risks of confirmed maltreatment and foster care are effective in highlighting the prominence of the child welfare system in the lives and wellbeing of children in the U.S. However, they are limited in that they provide national information on a

system that operates at the state level. To address this gap, we extend the life table strategy first used by Wildeman and colleagues (Wildeman and Emanuel 2014; Wildeman et al. 2014) to estimate state-level and racial/ethnic variation in (1) the cumulative prevalence of confirmed maltreatment and (2) foster care placement, (3) racial disparities in the risks of these events and (4) the ratio of children who experience confirmed maltreatment at some point to those who experience foster care placement at some point.

Data and Methods

To generate these estimates, we rely on data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care and Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), both of which are housed at the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) at Cornell University (NDACAN 2018a, 2018b). The core benefits of these data are that they provide information on (1) every foster care placement in the (since 2000) and the vast majority of confirmed maltreatment cases (since 2004) in the U.S.; (2) each child's age and whether they experienced their first confirmed maltreatment case or foster care placement in the last year; and (3) the child's race/ethnicity, sex, and county/state in which the CPS is filed.

Because each state operates its own CPS system, we can use these data to generate state-level estimates of the cumulative prevalence of confirmed maltreatment and foster care placement.

Consistent with prior work estimating the cumulative risk of confirmed maltreatment (Wildeman et al. 2014) and foster care placement (Wildeman and Emanuel 2014) at the national level, this study uses synthetic cohort life tables to generate state-level estimates of the prevalence of these experiences. For the main analyses, we pool results for the entire period (2004-2015) in order to generate stable state-level estimates even for groups that form small

shares of the state populations. We also present state-level estimates of Black/White, Hispanic/White, and Native American/White inequality in the cumulative prevalence of confirmed maltreatment and foster care placement to illustrate geographic variation in racial/ethnic disparities in system contact. In the final stage of the analysis, we estimate race/ethnicity-specific ratios of state cumulative risks of confirmed maltreatment to cumulative risks of foster care placement in order to demonstrate social and spatial/jurisdictional variation in the intensity of child welfare system involvement.

Preliminary Results

Our preliminary analyses provide support for four conclusions. First, there is vast cross-state variation in the cumulative prevalence of exposure to these events, with confirmed maltreatment risks ranging from less than 1% to 21% and foster care placement risks ranging from 2% to 9%. Second, Black and Native American children experience exceptionally high cumulative risks of CPS exposure in some states. Cumulative rates of exposure to confirmed maltreatment for African American children exceed 20% in nine states; cumulative rates of exposure to foster care for Native American children exceed 20% in six states. Third, there is great variation across states in the share of children who experience confirmed maltreatment who end up in foster care: some states have ratios of close to 1:1, indicating that approximately equivalent numbers of children will experience foster care placement as confirmed maltreatment in those states, while others have ratios of 3:1 and higher. Finally, racial disparities in the cumulative prevalence of confirmed maltreatment and foster care placement are smallest in the Southeast, where the disparities rarely exceed 1:1, and tend to be largest in the upper Midwest, where disparities routinely approach and sometimes exceed 4:1. Taken together, these findings

illustrate high levels of between-state variation in CPS contact may have implications both population-level health and racial disparities therein.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Cumulative Risks of Confirmed Maltreatment, 2004-2015

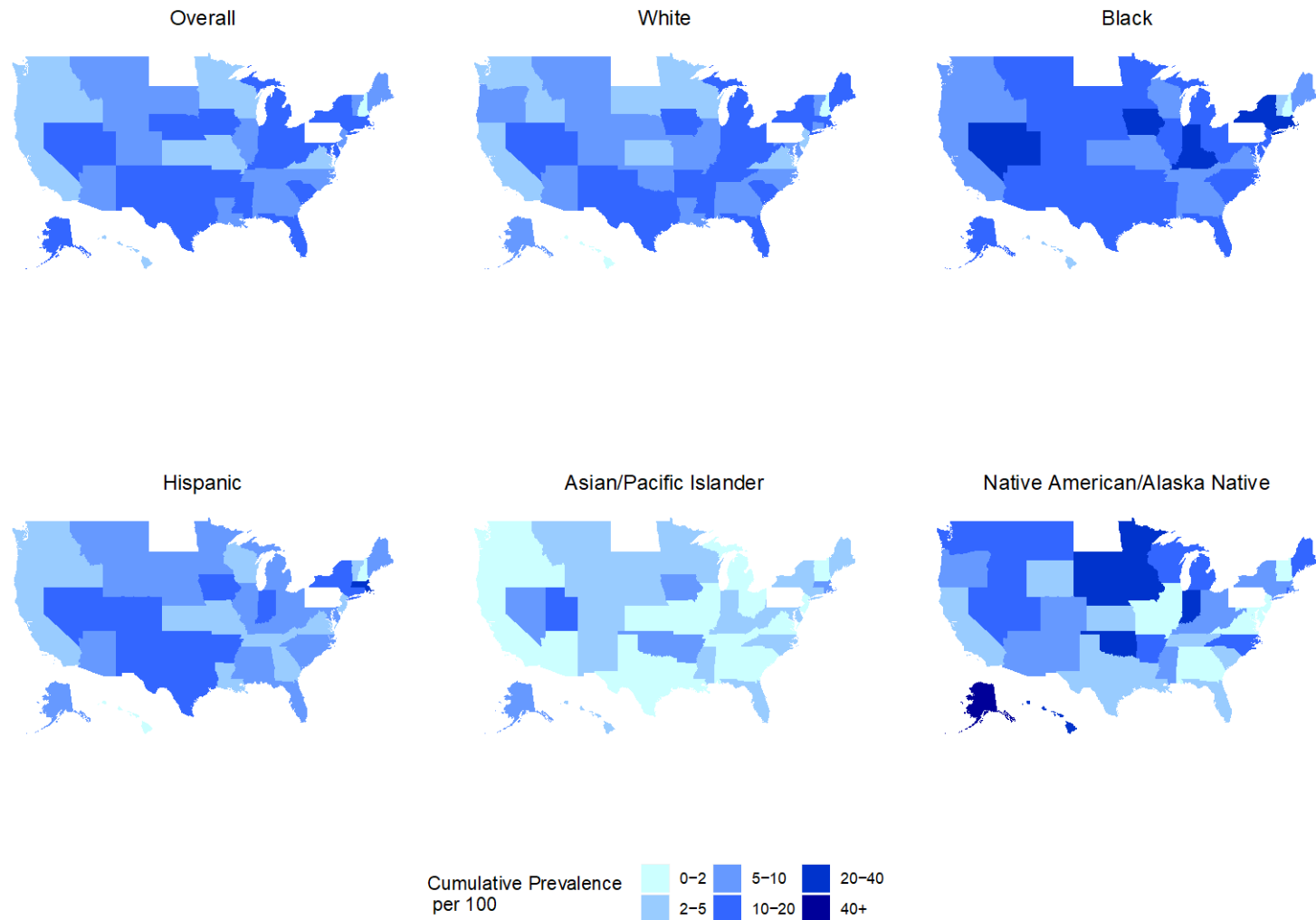


Figure 2. Cumulative Risks of Foster Care Placement, 2004-2015

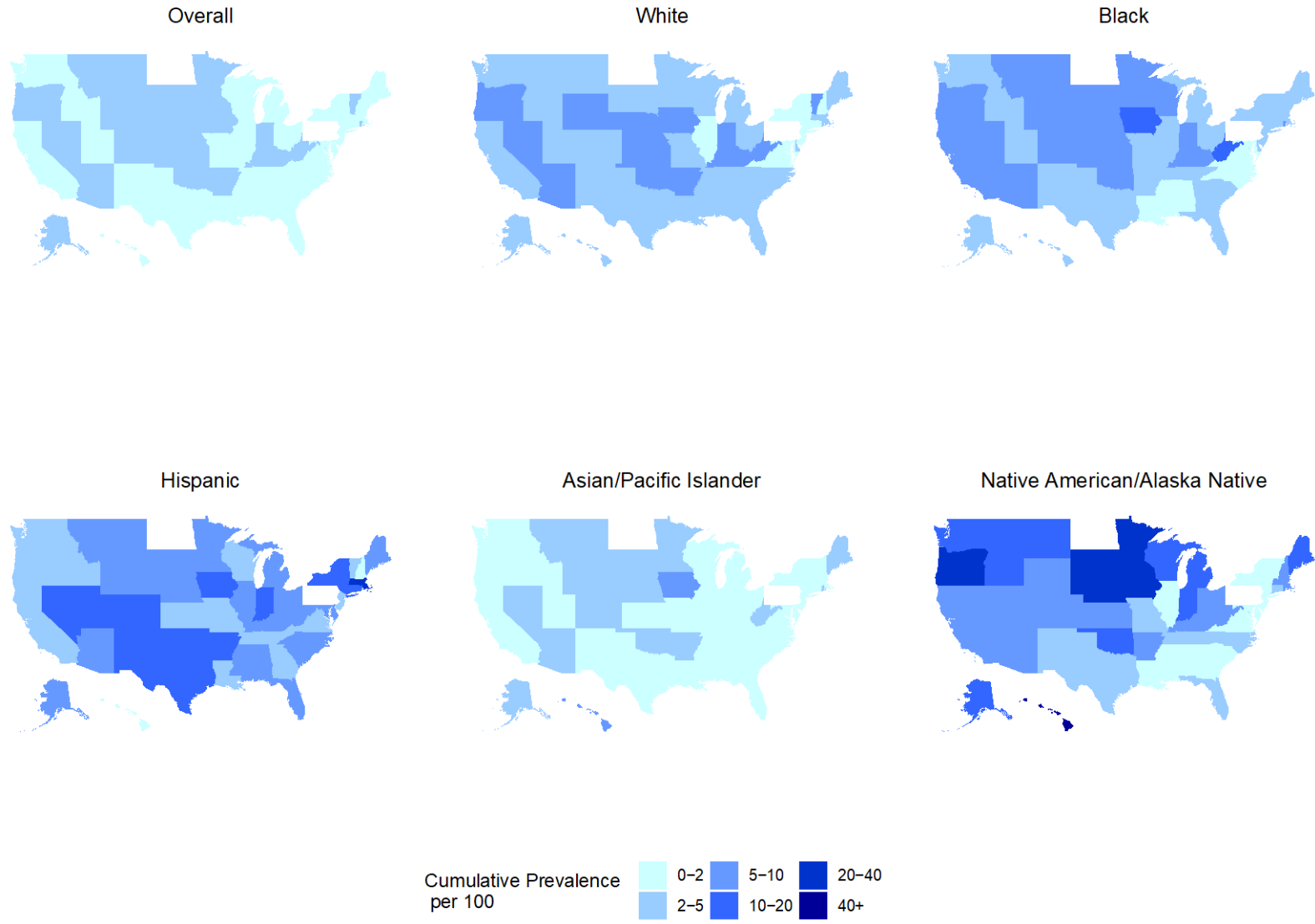
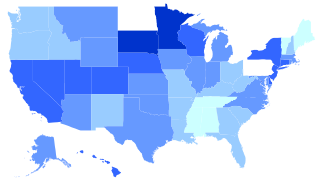


Figure 3. Racial/Ethnic Inequality in Confirmed Maltreatment and Foster Care Placement (Relative to Whites), 2004-2015



Foster Care Placement

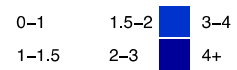
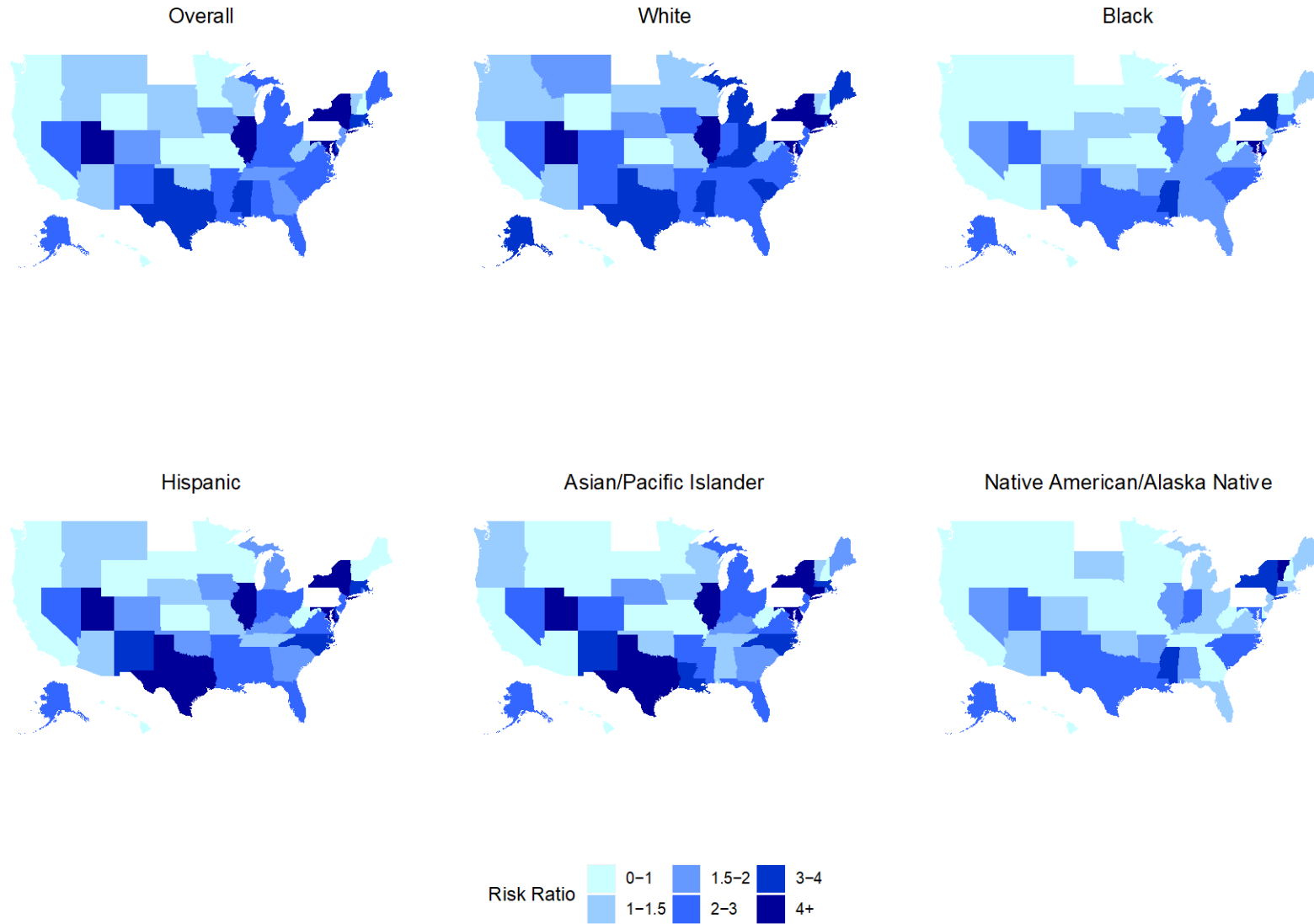


Figure 4. Ratio of Risk of Confirmed Maltreatment to Risk of Foster Care Placement, 2004-2015



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