

CPS = CHILD POVERTY SURVEILLANCE

**DISENTANGLING NEGLECT FROM POVERTY ACROSS DEFINITIONS, OUTCOMES, INTERVENTIONS, AND
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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ATTENTION TO CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IMPACTS

- My intersectional observations (Black, Female identifying, Mother)
- Experience in child welfare settings – problem identification
- Evidence generated from previous inquiries

SHORT AGENDA

- CWS (Child Welfare System) ~ CPS (Child Protection Services)
 - **Child Poverty Surveillance**
- Some numbers
- Empirical evidence of lived experiences
- Protecting children from the conditions of racialized poverty
- Three broken legs – dignity, power, voice
- Opportunities for repair
- Parental perspectives on improving engagement; uptake of prevention and intervention

WHAT IS THE CPS, ANYWAY?

- The mission:
 - CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act, 1974) – punitive response to family’s needs without consideration of context and structural discrimination.
 - ASFA (Adoption and Safe Family Act, 1997) - Safety, permanency, well being
 - **Save children from harm (the harm of poverty?)**
 - Do service mechanisms align between program goals and well being outcomes - **safety from intentional abuse or unintentional poverty?**

NUMBERS

- 3.8 million maltreatment reports (USDHSS, 2022)
- 618,000 cases of substantiated maltreatment in 2020
- Victims – 76.1% neglect; 16.5% physical abuse; 9.4% sexual abuse
- Black kids - 21.1% of victims vs. 13.7% of child population; 13.2 victimization rate
- White kids – 43.1% of victims vs. 49.6% of child population
- Latinx kids – 23.6% of victims vs. 25.6% of child population
- AI/AN – highest rate at 15.5% per 1K children

SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT, LOW SES, AND RACISM

- No one intends to experience poverty and racism, yet these factors are directly related to CWS oversight.
- Parenting behaviors should be assessed as a function of available resources and histories of structural discrimination in environmental contexts.
- CWS oversight is stigmatizing, and the take home message is – ‘family surveillance is needed because you are a poor minority.’
- CWS was not intended to mitigate the impact of poverty.
- CWS processes are by design oppressive.
- CWS from initial contact and throughout the involvement experiences should adopt a nonjudgmental approach.
- CWS surveillance is punitive by nature.

RACIALIZED POVERTY

- Intersection of populations of color and those with low socio-economic status results in systems' over-surveillance coupled with judgments regarding child maltreatment risk
- Understood as *racialized poverty* in the United States and associated with Black/African American families involuntarily living in poverty and suffering systemic oppression based on the skin they live in.
- Experiences with poverty are intensified by structural racism in practice, inclusive of mandating reports from school professionals
- Racialized poverty shapes negative perceptions of historically disenfranchised populations seeking and in need of equitable supports mindful of marginalized contexts. Embedded in the institutional procedures and policies of bodies responsible for protecting children and inform the actualization of surveillance.



THREE LEGS OF TROUBLING
IMPACT

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES or CHILD POVERTY SURVEILLANCE

CPS-Impacted Parents Lack:

- **DIGNITY** - stigma; judgement; poor quality resources (food, housing, neighborhood, choices, services, childcare); unworthy to flourish and thrive
- **POWER** – surveillance/oversight; lack of information regarding rights and resources; distrust of system; coercion; structurally racist system-level barriers; diminished agency in family decisions
- **VOICE** - self-advocacy; centered lived experiences; parental narratives in the literature and among decision-making stakeholders, policy-makers, intervention designers

BROKEN LEG ONE: DIGNITY

We were supposed to get a washer and dryer, because like I said, we are Title 1 School, and for the community, in case they don't have enough, they could come to the school and wash their clothes. I'm telling you it's very, very sad. Mom 3

They took them right away, the day they came to my house to do their investigation with the police... they took my kids, that day. Mom 6

So, she would come... and say, oh, you don't have enough food and you might not see food in my fridge, but I have food in my freezer. And that's because I can't afford to buy fresh food... every few days, right? I don't have the luxury of time or resources to do that. So, I'm going to buy frozen foods because I know they last longer, and I can cook them whenever I need. Mom 7

Because I wasn't showing... I was able to donate blood without them knowing that I was pregnant and to pay for rooms when we couldn't... because of that they said that I was using a needles. I've never used a needle in my life... They didn't believe that I was going to the blood bank... never checked, never followed on anything... never drug tested us, nothing. Mom 8

BROKEN LEG ONE: DIGNITY

The hospital social worker... finally came back on, I was able to talk to her and they were saying that they didn't know who I was and that wasn't my baby because my baby was too light skinned. Mom 8

I'm breastfeeding... it was ruthless, they basically were trying to tell me, oh well you can pump and I can say this to you because... you and I both know those first couple of days is a little shaky... my milk was coming in... just took her. It was horrible... the night they took her I had to get up and change my shirt like three times. Mom 9

The cop said to me, why are you out here? No, first he said how old are you? I said, mister, I'm 15. He says, so why are you out here at this time of night? I said, because I have a foster home... Foster mother won't give me no money to get what I need to get for school or anything. So I figured I'd just come out here sell my body for a little bit just to get some type of money that I need to do what I need to do for school. She won't even give me money for my school reports. Mom 14

BROKEN LEG TWO: POWER DYNAMICS

But you know what makes me upset? If your child is in foster care, they get everything... my daughter couldn't get mental services because she wasn't in the foster care system - that is bogus, outrageous, and not correct. How dare you say I have to give up my rights for her to get care and help? What kind of injustice is that? Even when Christmas time comes... they only have gift cards now for the kids that are in foster care... what about the struggling parents that still have parental guardianship and rights over their kids? That's wrong. Mom 10

I felt like they were trying to set me up for something bad to happen so they can take both of them and I could go to jail. But I wasn't letting them do that. I wasn't giving them that victory, satisfaction of doing that. I'm like, I'm above y'all, I already know how y'all work. I've been in foster care too. Let's not get it twisted. I know how you all work. Mom 14

BROKEN LEG THREE: VOICE

But as far as like the voices go, I feel like it's not really like, I feel like if I say something, I don't want to be put in jeopardy of the person feeling like, okay, I have to like go to [CPS] with this. Mom 1

One of the [CPS] counselors told me that I should just go back to my husband because I'm young and I need to raise my children with their father (with knowledge of DV experienced by mom). Mom 7

I'm my own boss entity, self-elevated black woman. Don't tell me how to parent... tell me how to be. Mom 10

I felt like they didn't want to do their job... that they were waiting for something to happen... waiting for something bad to happen for them to take my children because they don't want to do their job. I'm not stupid. I know what you're doing... I'm not giving you a reason to take my children... I'll just take higher... to the Commissioner... to the news... wherever I need to... but you're not taking my kids. Mom 14

OPPORTUNITIES

- Fruitful pathways for Black families
- Child and family well being support (not system)
- Parental empowerment and self-actualization based on their perspectives of well being
- Centering the voices of strength and endurance in the context of systems oversight highly correlated with racism and colorism
- Collaboration with impacted moms, birth parent rights' advocacy groups, across disciplines focused on well being outcomes among systems impacted Black families

TAKE HOME

- What are we trying to do? Mission/Vision?
- Who's in the room?
- Who interprets and tells the narrative?
- The need for a direct line of evidence findings from lived experience accounts and legislators charged with allocating financial supports committed to considering the long-term impact and vitality of an equitable society at large.

SOLIDARITY AND COMPASSION

Thoughts/comments?

Thank you!



My respect and appreciation to the moms that look like me and entrusted me with their stories of trauma and resilience.

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