



# Childhood Child Protection Involvement...

University of Southern California  
Children's Data Network



"IT IS PRETTY SHOCKING TO THINK CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES PERFORM SO MANY MALTREATMENT INVESTIGATIONS, YET STILL MISS MANY KIDS WHOSE ABUSE GOES UNREPORTED...."

— T. Field, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017

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# Overview

# Relevance

[we have an 'early warning' system...]



7,400,000

Children alleged to be victims of abuse / neglect



3,500,000

Children screened-in for an investigation or alternative response



676,000

Substantiated victims



???

Services

- \* Self-harm behaviors
- \* Substance abuse
- \* Mental health disorders
- \* Criminal justice involvement
- \* Homelessness
- \* Preventable deaths
- \* Next generation abuse / neglect
- \* Poor academic achievement

## Los Angeles Times Science Now

Discoveries from the world of science and medicine



### 1 in 8 U.S. children will become victim of serious abuse or neglect

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Home » American Journal of Public Health (AJPH) » February 2017

#### Lifetime Prevalence of Investigating Child Maltreatment Among US Children

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[Abstract](#)   [Full Text](#)   [References](#)   [Supplements](#)   [PDF](#)   [PDF Plus](#)

**Objectives.** To estimate the lifetime prevalence of official investigations for child maltreatment among children in the United States.

**Methods.** We used the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System Child Files (2003–2014) and Census data to develop synthetic cohort life tables to estimate the cumulative prevalence of reported childhood maltreatment. We extend previous work, which explored only confirmed rates of maltreatment, and we add new estimations of maltreatment by subtype, age, and ethnicity.

# Data



517,935

1999 Birth Cohort



358,867

CA (non-LA) births



159,068

LA births

# Birth Cohort Estimates



[we miss child welfare encounters for children who moved out of state, e.g., age 6-14, and then move back]



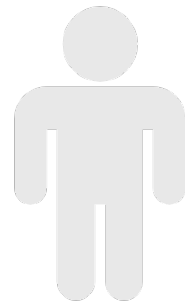
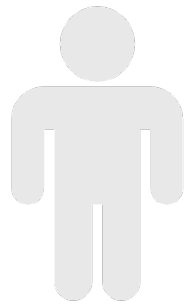
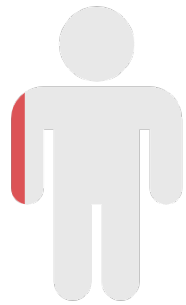
[we do not include children who were born elsewhere, but moved to CA at a later age]



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18



# Referrals

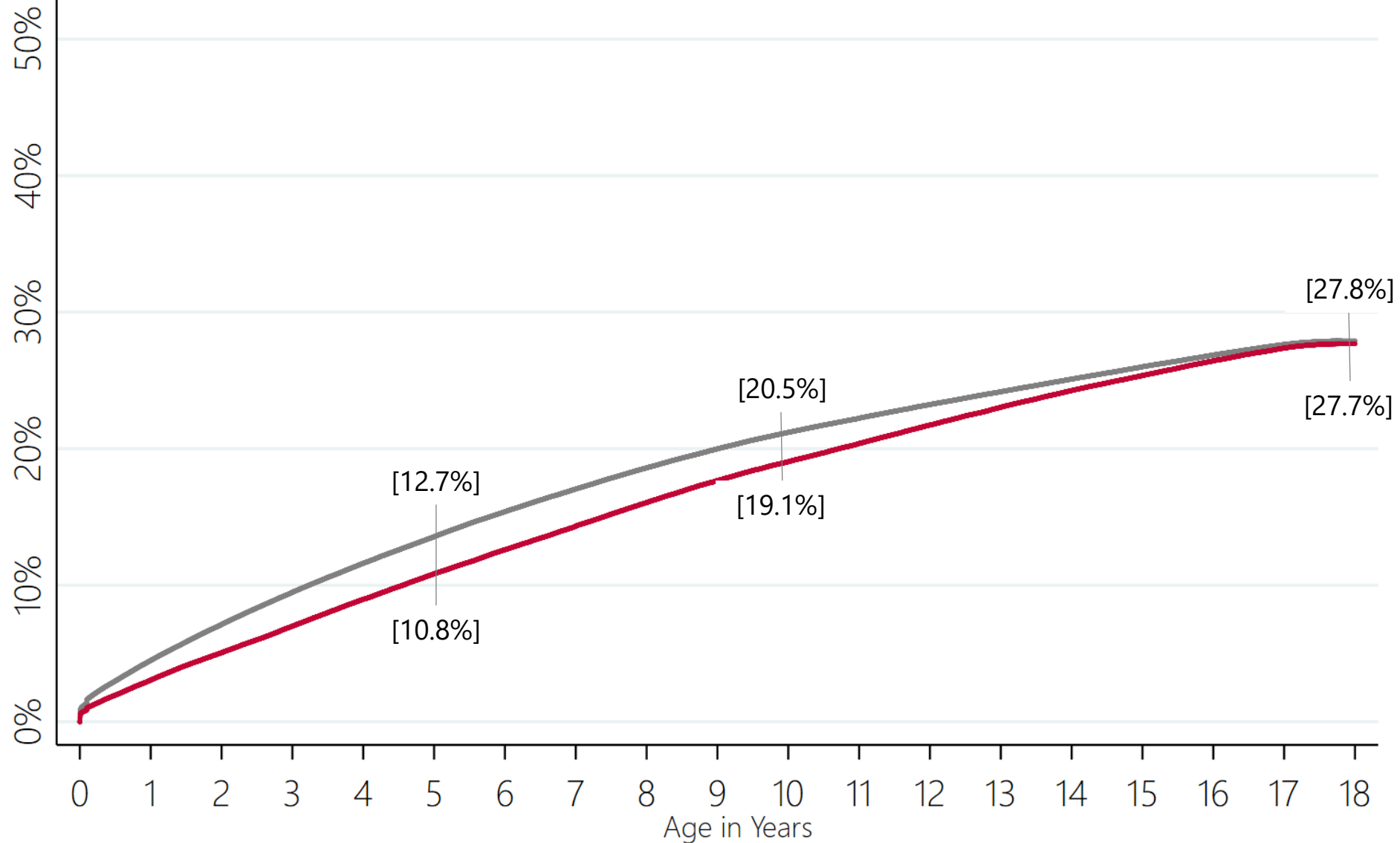


1 in 4

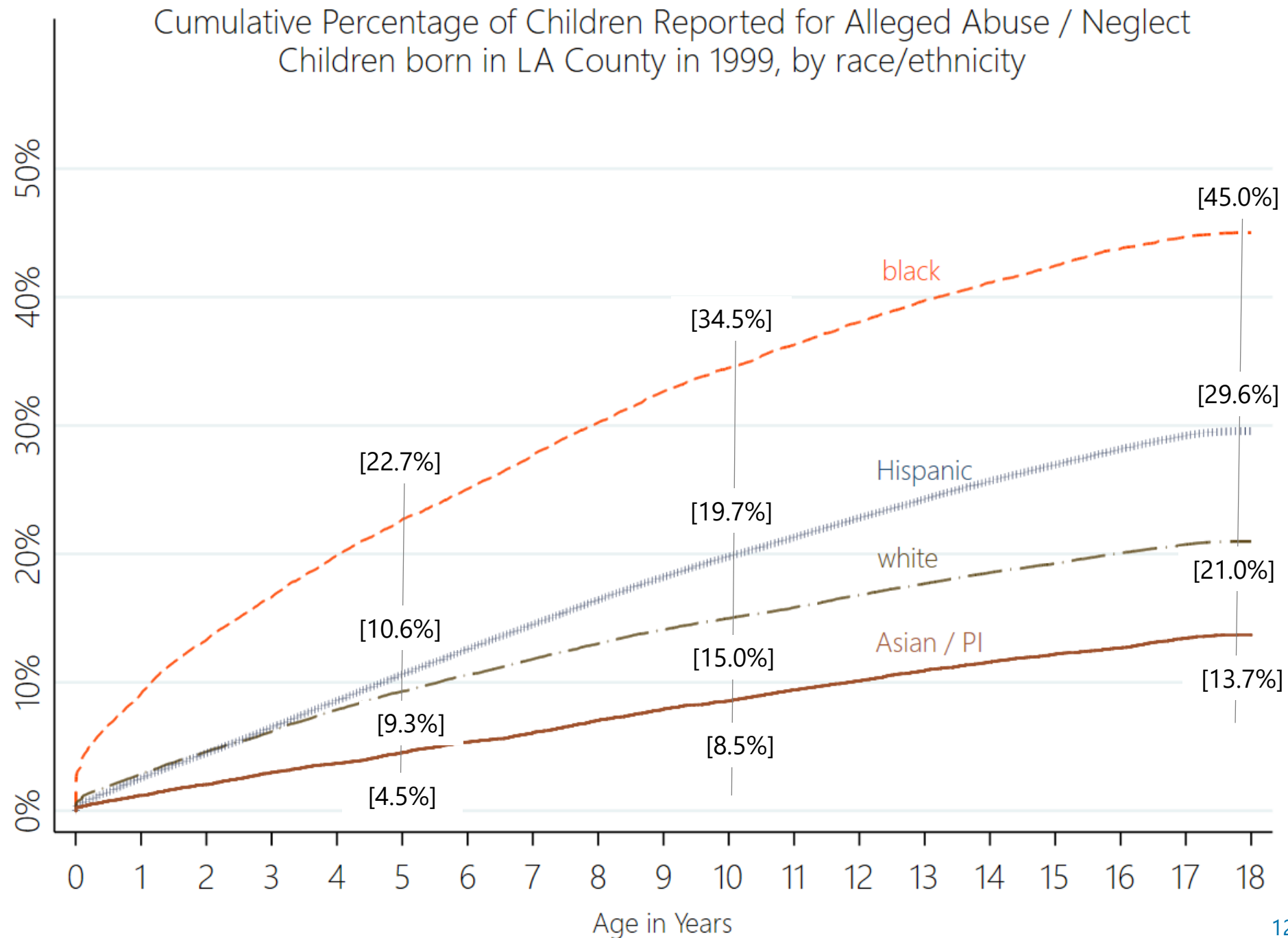
# Referrals

Cumulative Percentage of Children Reported for Alleged Abuse / Neglect  
Children born in California in 1999

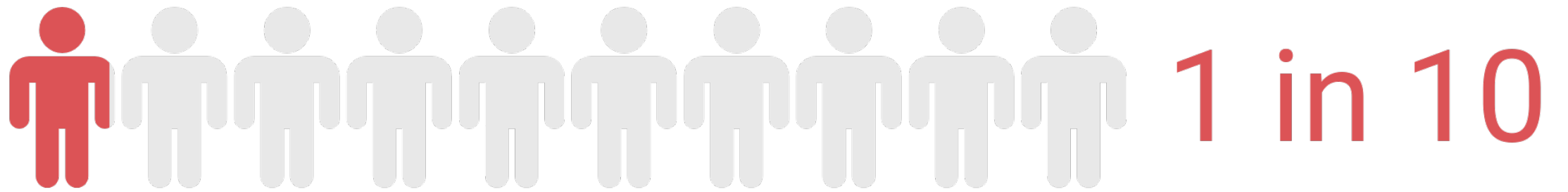
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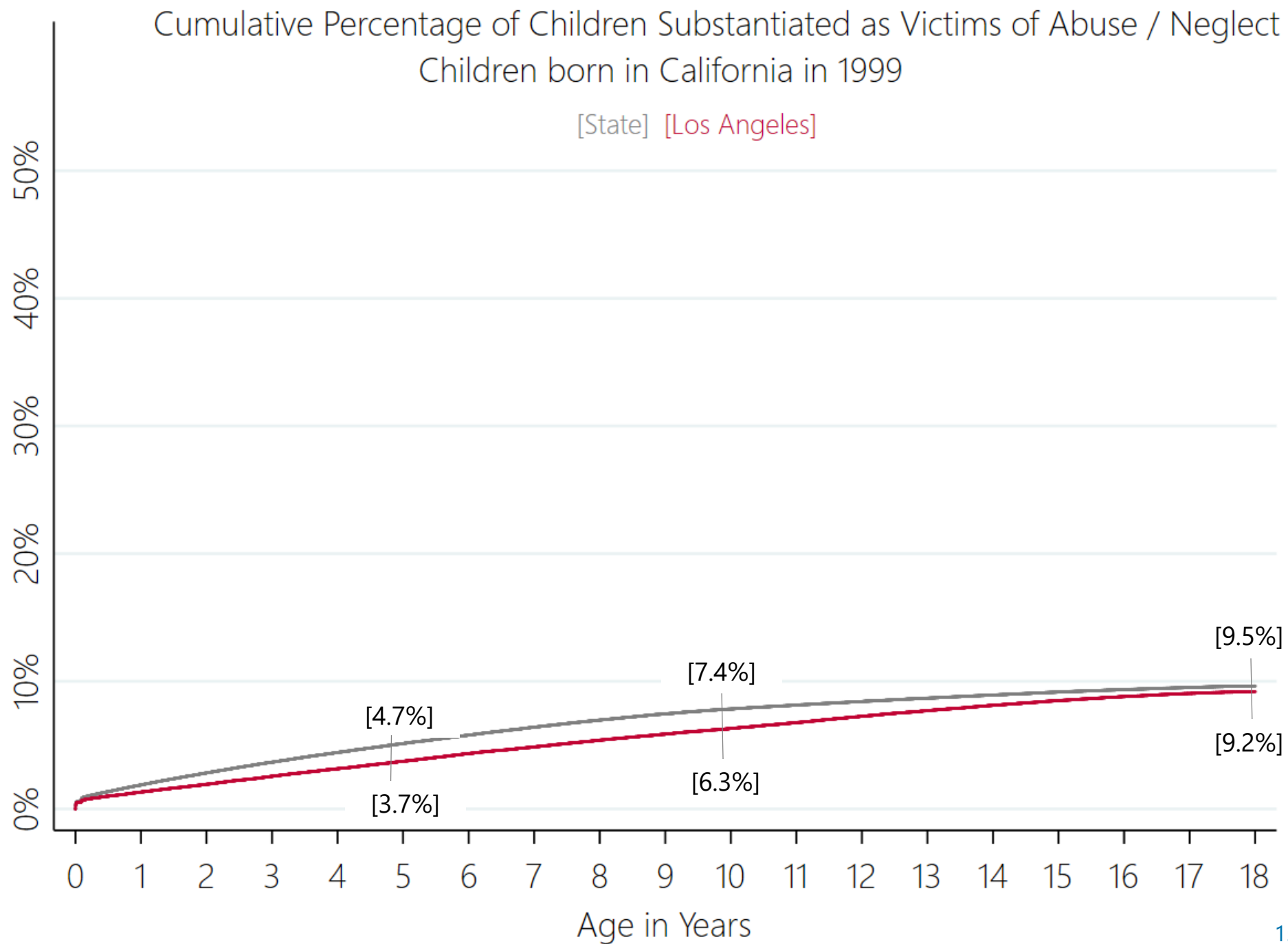
# Referrals



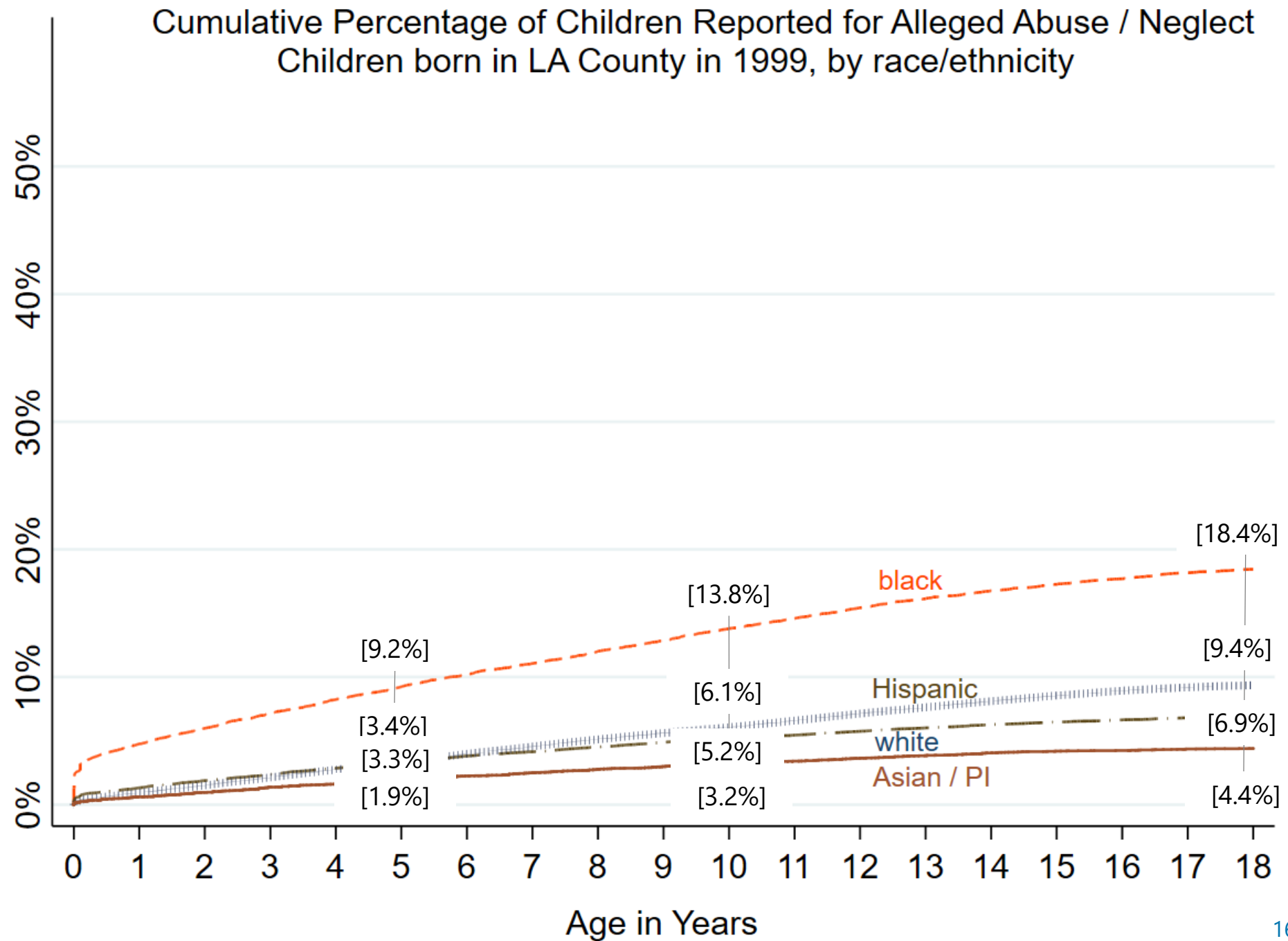
# Substantiations



# Substantiations



# Substantiations





# Candid Reflections *(unscripted)*

# Thoughts (and Questions)

Mission creep...child welfare systems were not designed to serve as an all-purpose family safety net.

**1**

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Mandatory reporting laws - have they been stretched too far?

**2**

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Absence of accountability for malicious referrals in the context of family custody disputes.

**3**

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The sheer volume of referrals means that much more attention must be paid to quality screening. A LOT of referrals are low risk

**4**

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We need to invest and learn more about preventative engagement strategies.

**5**

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Denmark - mutual obligation.

# 1

## Mandatory Referrals

*"The current flood of unfounded reports is overwhelming the limited resources of child protective agencies..."*

- Initially, mandatory reporting laws applied only to physicians, who were required to report only "serious physical injuries" and "nonaccidental injuries."
- In the ensuing years, however, increased public and professional attention, sparked in part by the number of abused children revealed by these initial reporting laws, led many states to expand their reporting requirements.



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Douglas J. Besharov, Lisa Laumann

May 1, 1996 | Social Science and Modern Society

SHARE



### Child abuse reporting

Poverty Studies



Getty Images

# 2

## Malicious Referrals

### **California**

#### **Failure to Report**

##### **Penal Code §§ 11166(c); 11166.01**

Any mandated reporter who fails to report an incident of known or reasonably suspected child abuse or neglect is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by up to 6 months in a county jail or by a fine of \$1,000, or both. If a mandated reporter intentionally conceals his or her failure to report an incident known by the mandated reporter to be abuse or severe neglect, the failure to report is a continuing offense until an agency specified in § 11165.9 discovers the offense.

Any supervisor or administrator who violates § 11166(1) [that prohibits impeding others from making a report], shall be punished by not more than 6 months in a county jail or by a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both.

Any mandated reporter who willfully fails to report abuse or neglect, or any person who impedes or inhibits a report of abuse or neglect, where that abuse or neglect results in death or great bodily injury, shall be punished by not more than 1 year in a county jail or by a fine of not more than \$5,000, or both.

#### **False Reporting**

##### **Penal Code § 11172(a)**

Any person reporting a known or suspected instance of child abuse or neglect shall not incur civil or criminal liability as a result of any report, unless it can be proven that a false report was made and the person knew that the report was false or was made with reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the report.

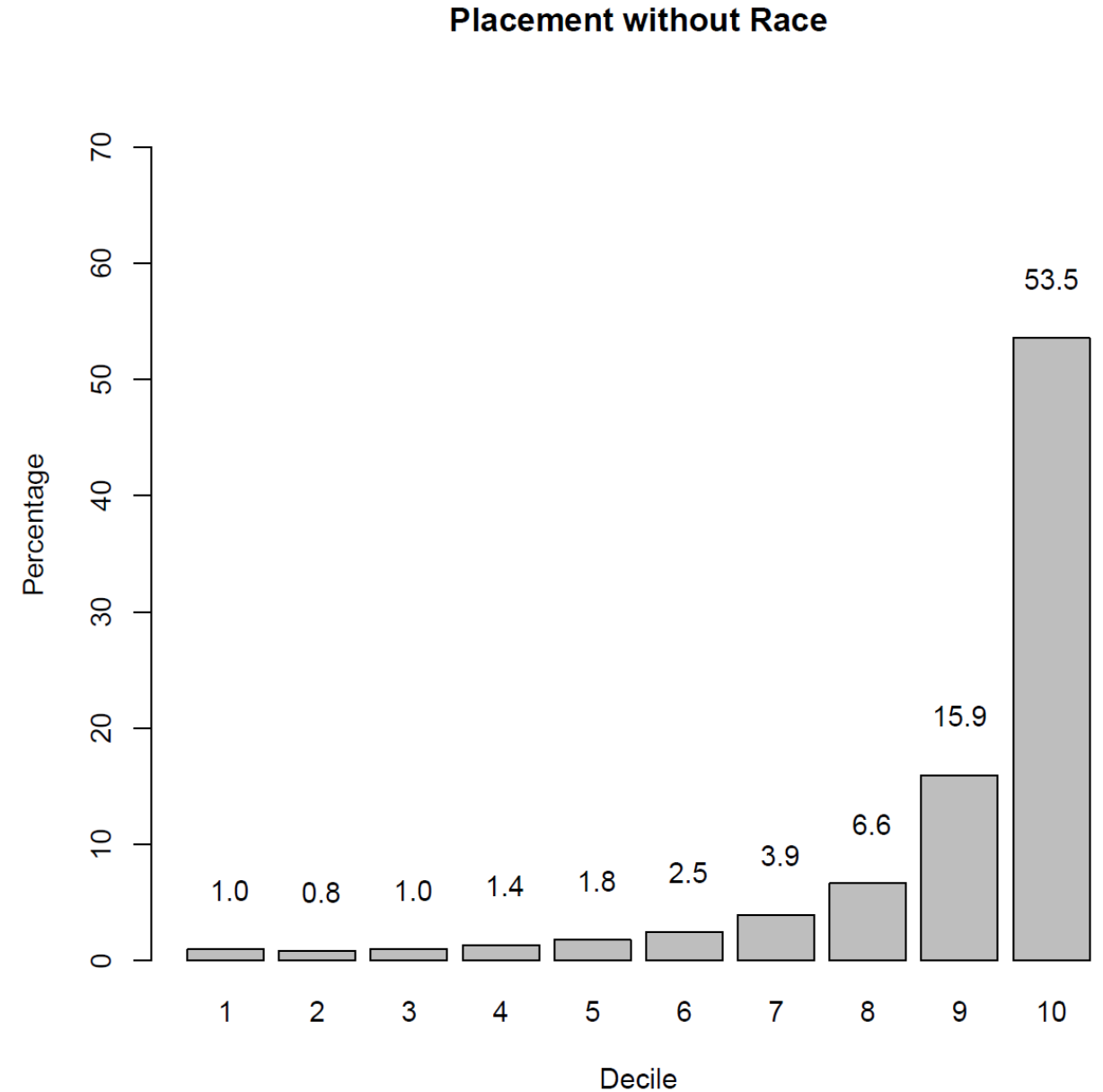
Any person who makes a report of child abuse or neglect known to be false or with reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the report is liable for any damages caused.

# 3

## Volume of Referrals

Data suggests that 50% of referrals may be very, very low-risk.

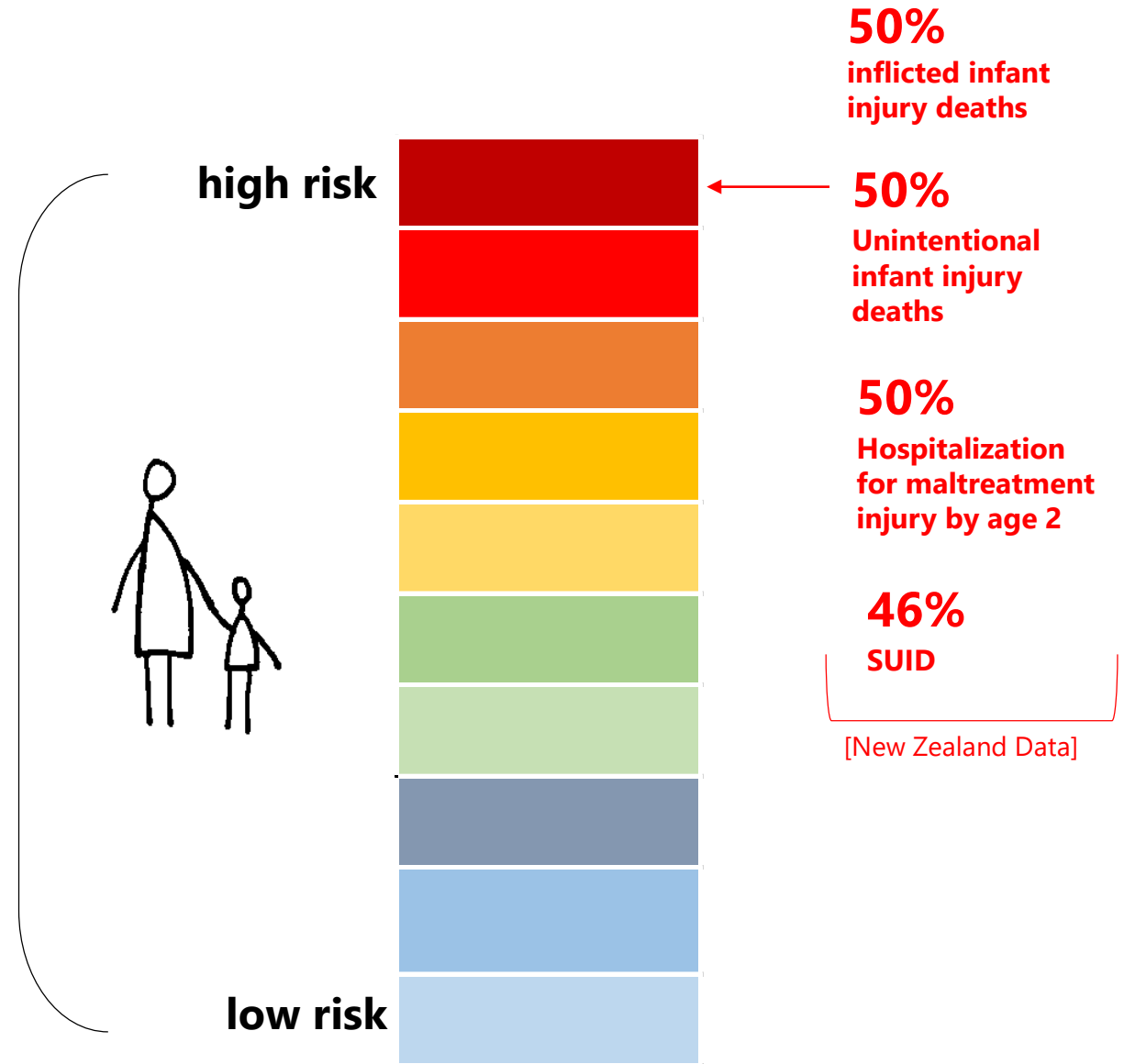
Yet, we screen-in more than two-thirds for investigation.



# 4

We fail to build out targeted services alongside our community prevention campaigns

We need to be concrete and specific about where we need services and who should receives those services...



# 5

## Denmark

### “Mutual Obligation”

- Broader social safety net for families – but strong sense that government should act to protect children when parents do not fulfill their caregiving obligations.
- Informal review of US child protection cases? Danish child welfare workers were surprised by the inaction of our system...



# Questions?

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