



Why Child Protective Services Investigates So Many Families and How Even Good Intentions Backfire

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In recent months, conversations around the role of the police have drawn mainstream attention to what contemporary **policing actually encompasses**. Responding to violent crime constitutes **only a small share** of police work; instead, we often call on armed officers to address homelessness, mental illness, addiction, and other social adversities. Even when these encounters do not lead to arrest or physical violence, ubiquitous policing in marginalized communities, especially Black communities, heightens experiences of **exclusion, injustice, and precarity**.

In **a new study**, I trace how **another, parallel institution** comes to loom large in marginalized communities: Child Protective Services (CPS). Each year, U.S. child protection authorities, tasked with responding to child abuse and neglect, investigate the families of **over three million children**, disproportionately poor children, Black children, and Native American children. A staggering **one in three** children can expect a CPS investigation at some point during childhood.