



# A POPULATION-BASED ANALYSIS OF RACE AND POVERTY AS RISK FACTORS FOR MALTREATMENT

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# BACKGROUND

- There exist pervasive black/white racial disparities in rates of contact with the child welfare system throughout the United States
- Historically, these disparities have been measured using aggregated data, capturing crude differences between racial groups
- Recent studies, however, highlight the importance of adjusting for individual and community-level risk factors correlated with both race and maltreatment risk and suggest the impact of poverty may vary across groups

# OBJECTIVES

Aggregate black/white reporting disparities are attenuated/reverse when adjustments are made for risk factors present at birth (Putnam-Hornstein & Needell, 2011).

- *Is a similar phenomenon observed when substantiations and entries to foster care are modeled?*

Aggregate Latino/white disparities have not been noted in California, despite high rates of Latino poverty (Needell, et. al., 2011).

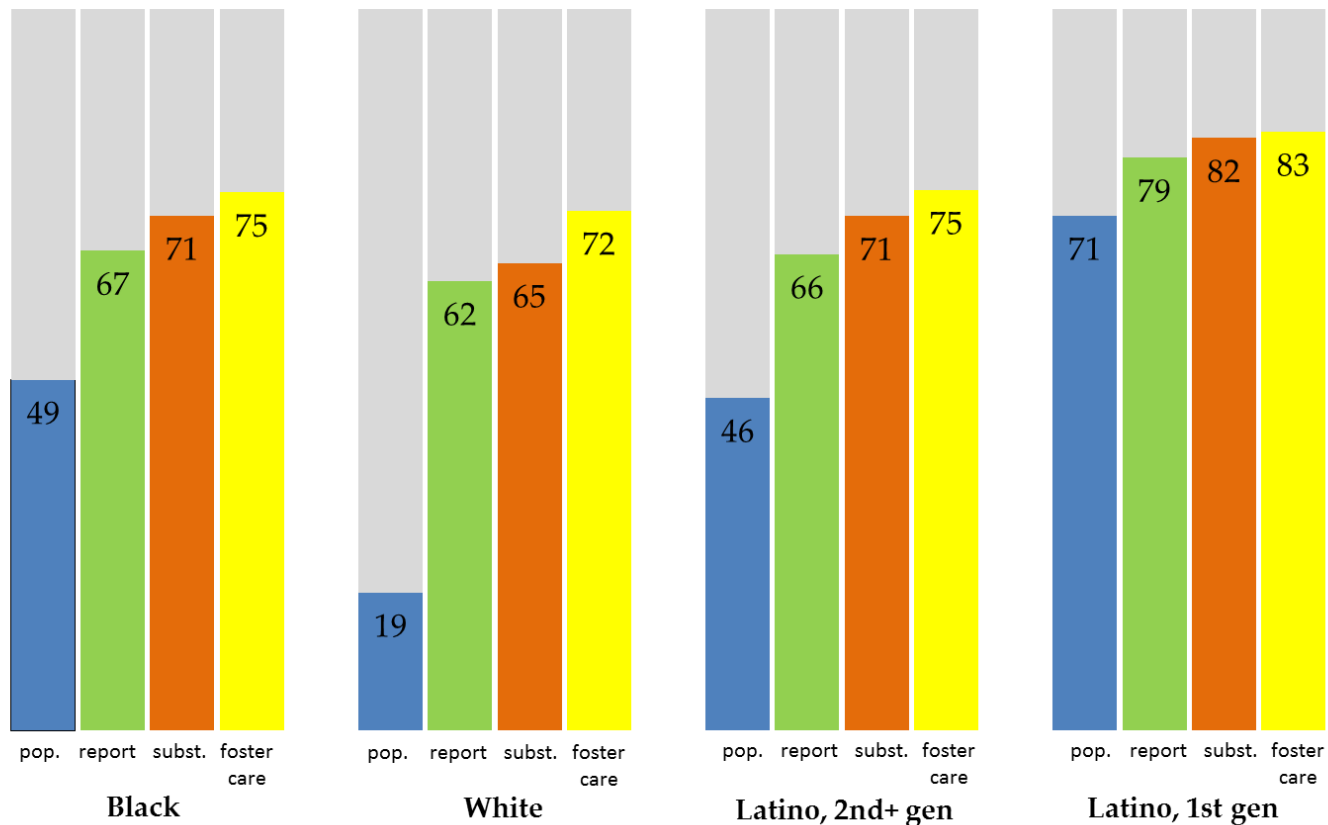
- *Why is this the case? Are there variations in disparities for children who are second generation+ compared with those who are first generation?*

# METHODS / APPROACH

- Prospective analysis of full 2002 California birth cohort (N=531,035) from birth through the age of five
- Prevalence of risk factors and cumulative rates of child welfare system contact
- Modeled crude and adjusted rates of system contact by race/ethnicity using GLM (*log link, Poisson distribution, standard error adjustment*)
- Adjustments made for: *sex, birth-weight, health, maternal age, paternity, birth order, maternal education, prenatal care*
- Significant interactions between a number of covariates and Medi-Cal coverage led us to stratify models
- Among children covered by Medi-Cal at birth:
  - *Crude/adjusted risk of being reported by age 5?*
  - *Crude/adjusted risk of substantiation by age 5?*
  - *Crude/adjusted risk of foster care placement by age 5?*

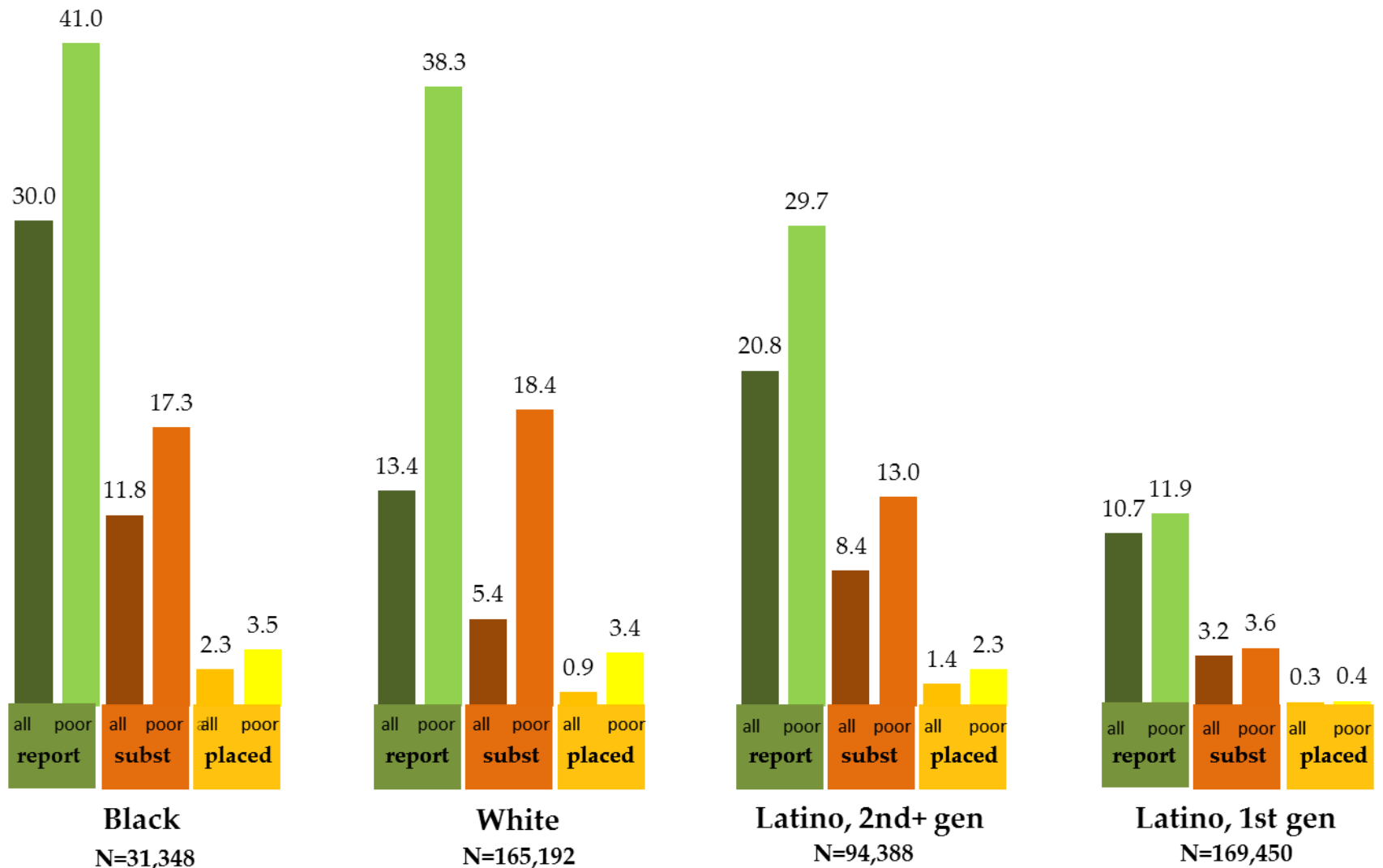
# WHY FOCUS ON CHILDREN COVERED BY MEDI-CAL?

Percent of Birth Cohort Covered by Medi-Cal at Birth  
*by Race/Ethnicity and Child Welfare Contact*



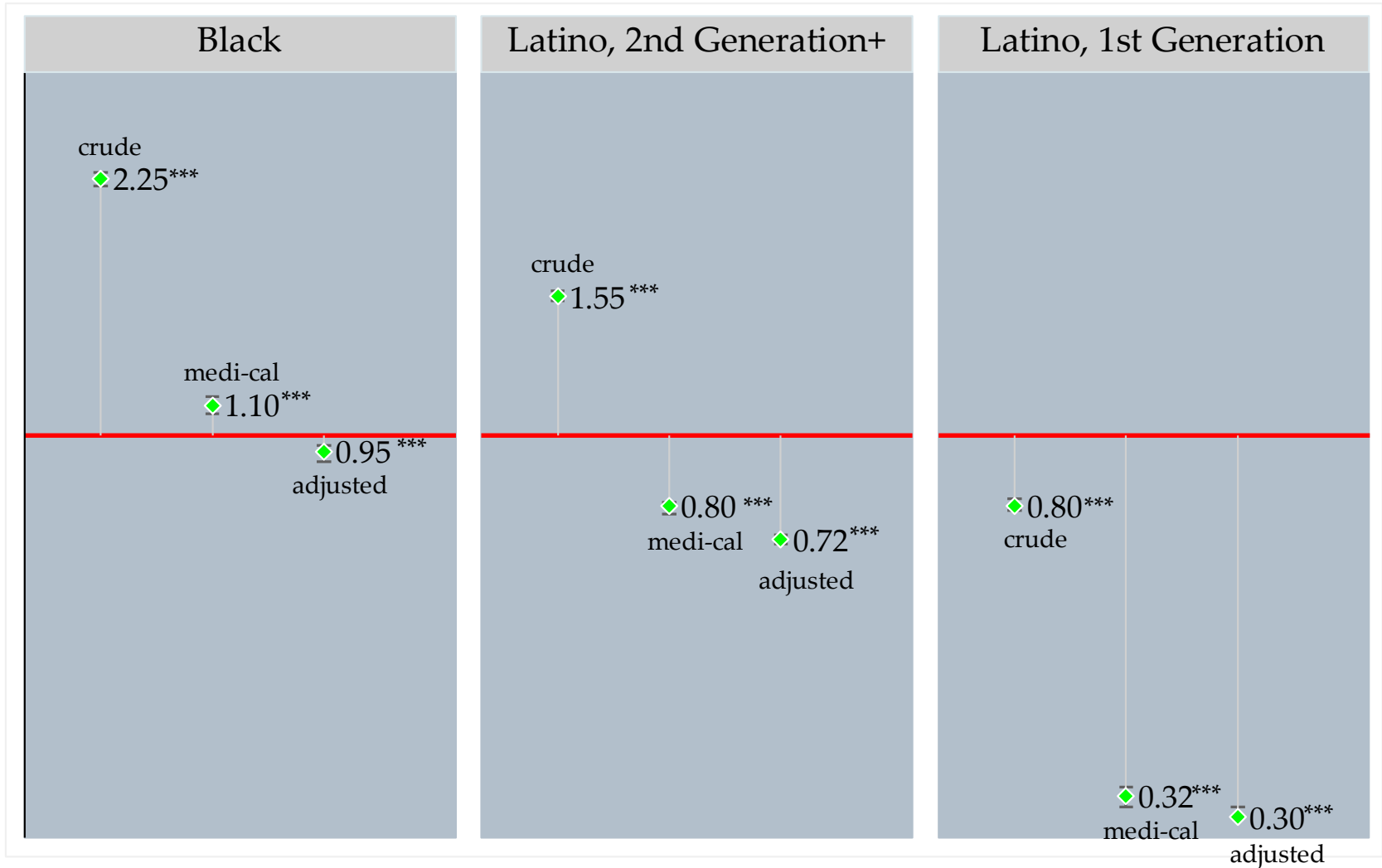
# Percent of Birth Cohort with CPS Contact before age 5

*by race/ethnicity, poverty status at birth, and level of contact*



# Risk of Being Reported for Maltreatment by Age 5 (vs White)

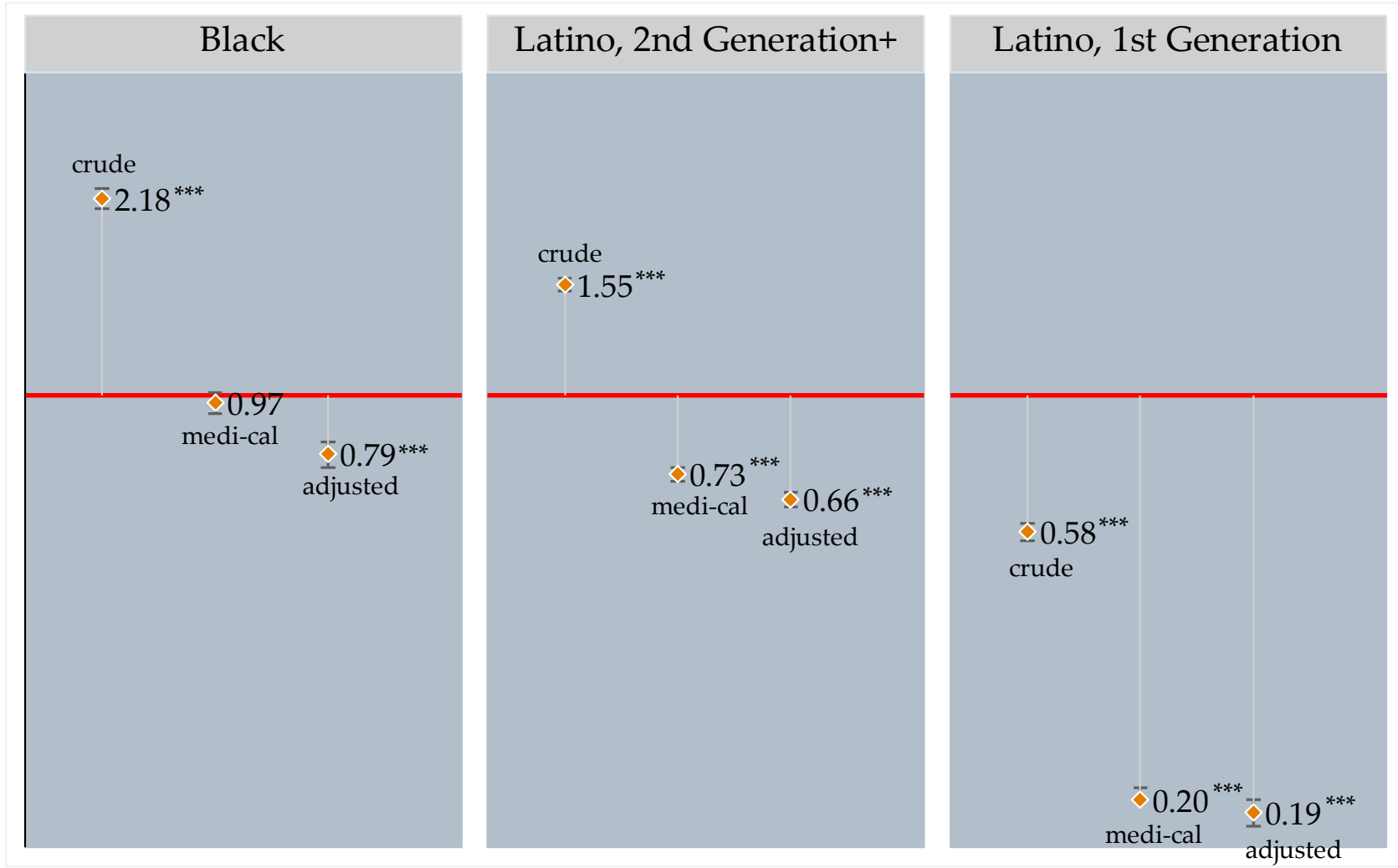
◆ RR    |——| 95% Confidence Interval



\*<.05    \*\*<.01    \*\*\*<.001

# Risk of Substantiated Maltreatment by Age 5 (vs White)

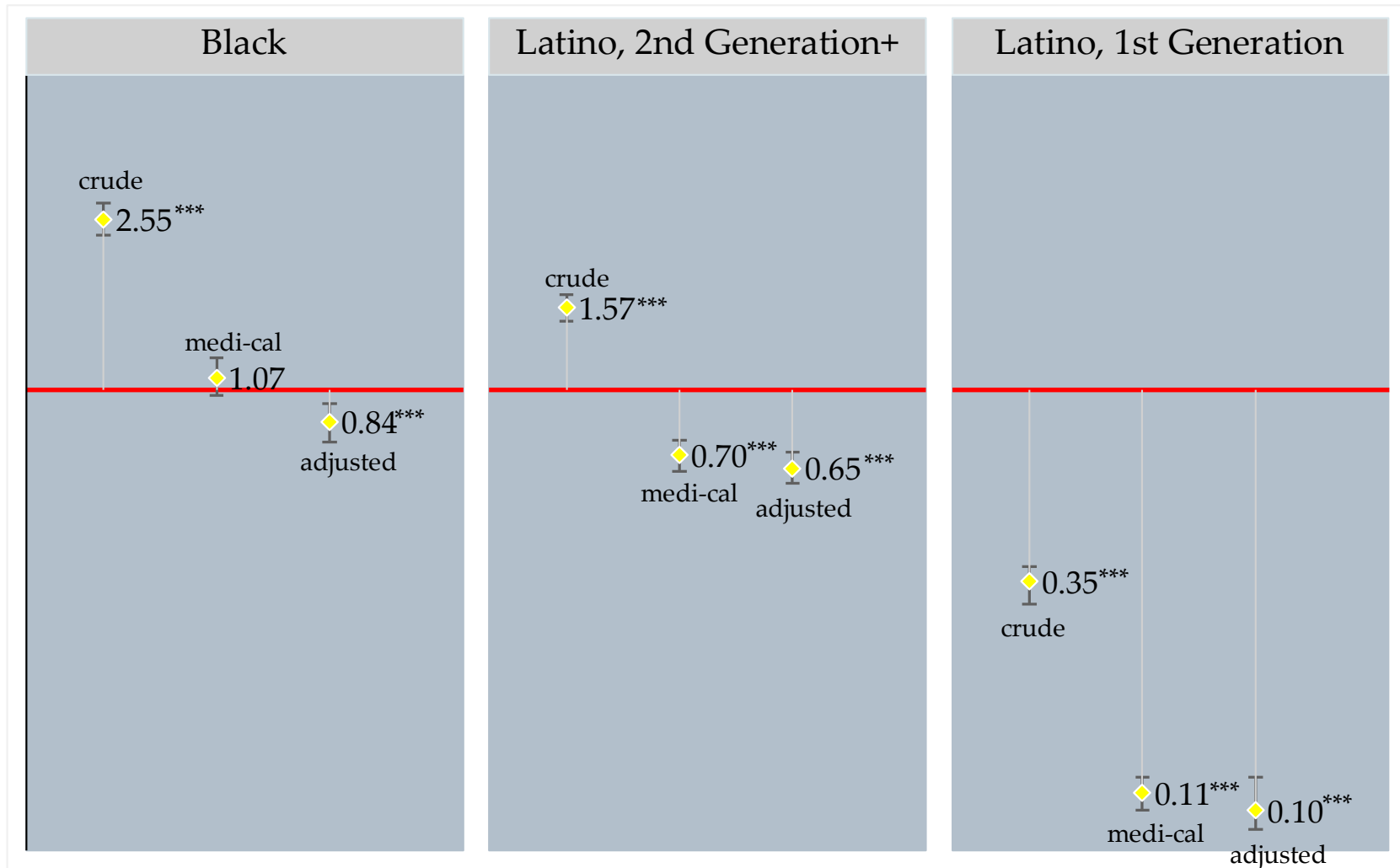
◆ RR    ┆──┆ 95% Confidence Interval



\* < .05    \*\* < .01    \*\*\* < .001

# Risk of Foster Care Placement by Age 5 (vs White)

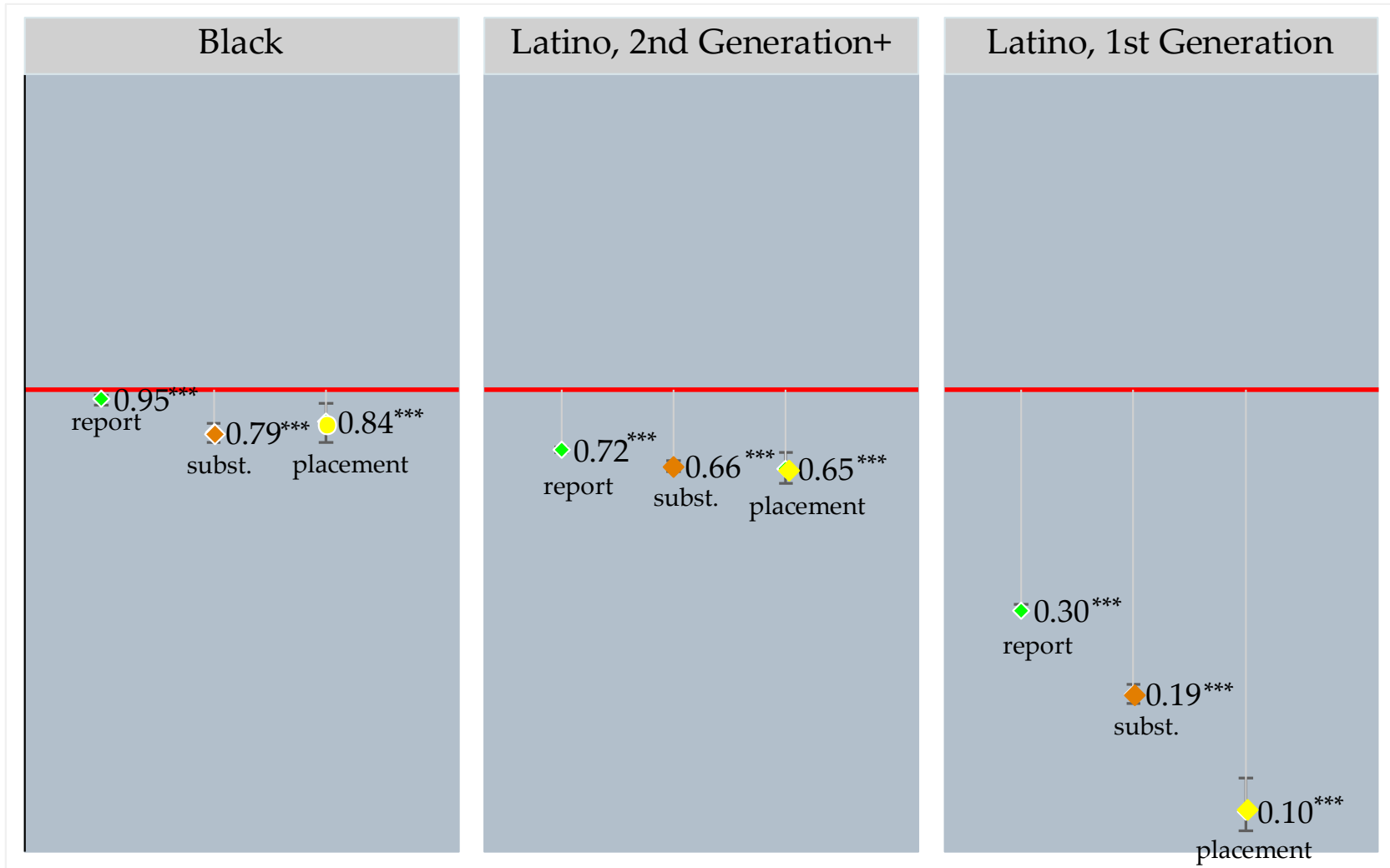
◆ RR    ┆──┆ 95% Confidence Interval



\* < .05    \*\* < .01    \*\*\* < .001

# Risk of Report, Substantiation, and Foster Care Placement by Age 5 (vs White)

◆ RR    ┆──┆ 95% Confidence Interval



\*<.05 \*\*<.01 \*\*\*<.001

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Cumulative rates of child welfare contact by age 5 vary dramatically across racial/ethnic groups, as does the prevalence of other risk factors
- Summary statistics indicating large black/white racial disparities mask significant covariate effects
- The Latino population of children in California consists of at least two distinct subsets, differentially impacted by poverty and with different risks of child welfare contact

# IMPLICATIONS?

- Two+ decades of misunderstood findings led to widespread belief that racial disparities observed in the child welfare system arose primarily from system and worker bias
- This (*and other*) recent studies suggest that once we are able to adjust for poverty and the cumulative presence of other risk factors, differences in risk continue to emerge, but often not in the manner once thought
- Aggregate racial disparities are very real and must be addressed. However, to develop effective interventions that promote change we need to address poverty and other risk factors that place certain groups of children at disproportionate risk of maltreatment

# MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS...

- *Why are people poor?*
- *Are the “thresholds” for reporting, substantiation, and removal the same for Black, Latino, and White children and families?*
- *If the reasons for poverty are systematically different across races, do these numbers still implicate bias?*



# QUESTIONS?

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