
CROSSOVER YOUTH

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
PROBATION YOUTH WITH
PREVIOUS REFERRALS TO
CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Children's
Data Network

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Children's Data Network (CDN) is a university, agency, and community collaborative focused on the integration and application of data to inform programs and policies for children and their families. The CDN receives essential infrastructure funding from First 5 LA and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, additional project support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, and the California Department of Social Services, and operates in partnership with the California Child Welfare Indicators Project at UC Berkeley.



OVERVIEW

A new study linked administrative records for youth leaving Probation supervision with data on previous referrals to Child Protective Services. Findings document that most youth had a history of maltreatment referrals, including many dating back to early childhood. Study findings call attention to a significant group of “crossover” youth who came to the attention of child protective services when they were quite young, well before they became involved in the delinquency system.

INTRODUCTION

The California State Los Angeles School of Criminalistics and Criminal Justice¹, in collaboration in the Children’s Data Network (CDN) at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, conducted a retrospective analysis of the timing and degree of previous involvement with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for a recent cohort of Probation youth. The goal of this study was to examine the proportion of youth with intensive Probation involvement² who had also touched the child protection system at an earlier point in their lives, but were not necessarily known to both systems simultaneously. It was designed to identify possible touch points when prevention-oriented family support and strengthening could have helped to resolve family problems at an earlier stage, potentially preventing later entry into the juvenile justice system.

THE STUDY

The CDN probabilistically matched records concerning 806 unique youth in the 2015 “Suitable Placement” and “Camp Cohorts” of the Los Angeles County Probation Department to statewide maltreatment referral records. After limiting the population to 387 youth who exited from suitable placement or camp, the CDN then assessed the prevalence of concurrent or past involvement with the child protection system.

RESULTS

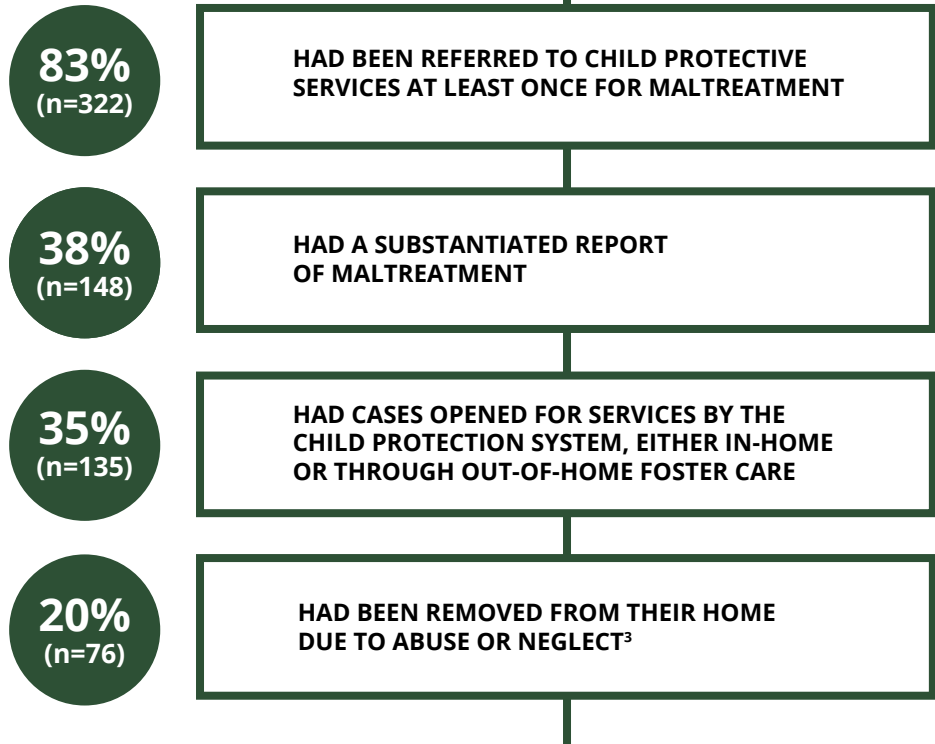
Prevalence and Nature of Reported and Substantiated Maltreatment, Case Openings, and Out-of-Home Placement.

¹ Herz, D. & Chan. (2017). *Los Angeles County Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study, Part II: Assessing the Experiences of Probation-Involved Youth Exiting from Out-of-Home Placements Across Two Cohorts*. LA, CA: California State University Los Angeles School of Criminalistics and Criminal Justice

² Youth selected for this study exited suitable placement or camp placements in 2015.



OF THE 387 YOUTH IN THE 2015 SUITABLE PLACEMENT AND CAMP COHORTS WHO HAD EXITED³:



THE RESULTS INDICATE THAT AMONG YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM, THE PREVALENCE OF PAST CHILD PROTECTION INVOLVEMENT MAY BE EVEN HIGHER THAN PREVIOUSLY REALIZED. FOUR OUT OF FIVE LA PROBATION YOUTH HAD RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE REFERRAL FOR SUSPECTED MALTREATMENT, WITH MANY EXPERIENCING THEIR FIRST REFERRAL EARLY IN CHILDHOOD.

³ A “true” exit was defined as: Youth released from suitable placement or camp back into the community (i.e., Home on Probation) or to suitable placement as part of their step-down release plan from camp.



ALLEGED MALTREATMENT⁴...

- *Was very common.* Of the 387 youth in the 2015 Suitable Placement and Camp Cohorts who had exited, 83% had been referred to the child protection system at least once for alleged maltreatment. These were often not isolated concerns: the mean number of previous referrals for maltreatment was 5.6.
- *First occurred early in life.* 70% of all youth referred for maltreatment experienced their first referral before age 10; 43% before age 5. Mean age at first referral was 6.7 years; median age was 6.0.
- Neglect was the most common maltreatment allegation, followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse, respectively.

SUBSTANTIATED MALTREATMENT²...

- *Was very common.* More than one-third (38%) of youth in this cohort had substantiated reports of childhood maltreatment.
- *First occurred early in life.* Among youth with substantiated reports of maltreatment, one-third experienced their first substantiation before age 5. Mean age at first substantiation was 7.7 years; median age was 7.3.
- Neglect (23%) was the most common substantiated allegation, followed by emotional abuse (12%), physical abuse (10%), and sexual abuse (3%), respectively.

CASE OPENING²...

- *Was very common.* More than one-third (35%) of youth in this probation exit cohort had cases opened for services by the child protection system, either in-home or through the foster care system. Nearly half (42%) of youth with reported maltreatment, and almost all (91%) youth with substantiated allegations had cases opened.
- *First occurred early in life.* Among youth who had child protection cases opened, nearly half (45%) experienced their first case opening before age 5.

⁴ No statistically significant differences were observed in the prevalence of childhood referral or substantiation for abuse and/or neglect, case opening, and out-of-home foster care placement between those exiting suitable placement and camp. For that reason, only overall results are presented.



FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT²...

- *Was relatively common.* One-fifth (20%) of youth exiting Suitable Placement or Camp had been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect and placed in child welfare-supervised foster care.⁵
- *First occurred early in life.* Among youth with a history of out-of-home foster care placement, 43% experienced their first removal and placement before age 5.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Prevalence of referred and substantiated maltreatment, case opening, and foster care placement was significantly higher among:

- Female (vs. male) youth exiting Probation
- Black (vs. Latino and white) youth exiting Probation

	MALE YOUTH (N=318)	FEMALE YOUTH (N=69)
Past referral of maltreatment*	80.8%	94.2%
Mean age at the first referral	6.7	7.0
Mean Number of referrals	5.3	6.9
Past substantiation as a victim*	34.6%	55.1%
Past case opening*	32.1%	47.8%
Past out of home placement*	26.7%	33.3%

*p<.05

	BLACK YOUTH (N=116)	LATINO YOUTH (N=249)	WHITE YOUTH (N=18)
Past referral of maltreatment*	90%	80%	83%
Mean age at the first referral*	5.6	7.3	7.5
Mean Number of referrals*	6.5	5.1	7.8
Past substantiation as a victim*	41%	37%	--
Past case opening*	43%	30%	--
Past out of home placement*	24%	17%	--

*p<.05 [--] = cell masked due to small sizes of less than 10; "Other" race not presented. Note: Case openings may include those where families requested voluntary services and therefore did not include a substantiated victim.

⁵These out-of-home foster care placements were not related to Probation Department placements.



POLICY QUESTIONS

Results from this sample of exiting Probation youth in LA County indicate that more than four out of five had been referred to the child protection system, and significant numbers had experienced referrals beginning early in childhood. While about one third had protective services cases opened at some point during childhood, another two-thirds had not. It is not known how many of these families may have received referrals to community providers at the time the maltreatment allegation occurred, or subsequently engaged in community- or school-based services. It seems likely, however, that a more systematic approach to connecting families to available resources when a maltreatment referral is received could help resolve family problems earlier, enhancing child safety in the short term and decreasing the need for law enforcement or Probation involvement at a later stage.

These data illuminate the importance of coordinating cross-system responses to “dual status” youth who are simultaneously involved with both child protection and delinquency systems [and for “crossover” youth who sequentially come to the attention of both systems]. Los Angeles County has reason to be proud of its progress in this domain. The 241.1 Joint Assessment Protocol and Multidisciplinary Team efforts to assist these dual status youths have helped the Superior Court, Probation and DCFS align their efforts to support these youth and their families. Findings from this study challenge us to consider how implementation of the County’s child maltreatment prevention plan⁶ could proactively strengthen referral to and engagement with community-based services, helping families get engaged in supports, resources, opportunities and services that may prevent involvement in one or both systems altogether.

Study findings suggest some key policy questions, yet to be answered, which could drive planning and improve collaboration across public and private sectors and with the multiple stakeholders needed to support children, youth, and families:

1. How can we ensure that families referred to the child protection system are properly connected and engaged in community-based services when cases are not opened?

⁶ *Paving the Road to Safety for Our Children: A Prevention Plan for Los Angeles County*. (June 2017). LA, CA: Office of Child Protection.



2. Do current procedures for referring families lead to timely connections with appropriate services? Is the capacity of community-based prevention service providers that currently contract with DCFS⁷ adequate to meet the needs of families?
3. What family strengthening, support and service interventions are most effective in decreasing longer-term involvement with the child protection and delinquency systems?
4. Are there geographic regions or communities where gaps between community needs and service capacity are especially challenging? Is it possible to grow existing infrastructure to meet emerging needs or are there instances where family needs don't match the programs available in terms of gender, culture, ethnicity and race? How can the County develop more effective public-private partnerships to support quality improvement and address these unmet needs?
5. What have the agencies that currently provide these services learned about effective prevention of subsequent involvement with child protection and juvenile delinquency through strategies designed with and for specific subgroups / subpopulations? For example, which strategies seem to be most effective in meeting needs of girls and young women who cross between these two systems? Are current efforts to support Black and Latino families effective?

Findings from the current study suggest that it is critical that we carefully examine the resources available and connections made for families referred to our child protection system. Previous research has shown that a first referral of maltreatment is often a seminal event in the life of a child – frequently followed by additional referrals and other adversities.⁸ Adoption of a countywide approach to prevention provides a significant opportunity to align public and private resources, enhance existing prevention and early intervention efforts, and support more families so they don't require the attention of our child protection and delinquency systems.

⁷ Prevention services are organized under three contracts: Prevention and Aftercare, Alternative Response Services, Partnership For Families.

⁸ Dakil, S. R., Sakai, C., Lin, H., & Flores, G. (2011). Recidivism in the child protection system: Identifying children at greatest risk of reabuse among those remaining in the home. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 165(11), 1006-1012.

