

The Prevalence of Children with Disabilities in the Child Welfare System

A Preliminary Analysis of State Administrative Data

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Study Purpose

- To explore the prevalence and characteristics of children with disabilities with substantiated maltreatment in the child welfare system.

- To examine the correlations between demographic characteristics (age, race, location) and the likelihood a child with substantiated maltreatment in the child welfare system with be identified as having a disability.



- To examine the likelihood that a child with a disability label in the child welfare system is placed out of the home.

Methods

Sample

Minnesota's Social Service Information System (SSIS) database contains all the descriptive information on child welfare cases in the 87 Minnesota counties, with records for child protection created based on reports of child maltreatment and investigations. The MINN-LINK system housed at the School of Social Work's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare collects and matches a variety of statewide databases, including the SSIS database.

This study uses all SSIS child protection records included between January 1, 2005 through January 31, 2005. In our sample, we only included children who had substantiated cases of maltreatment, meaning that the caseworker determined that maltreatment did occur. The final sample that we used for our study had 6270 children ages 0-18 who had active child welfare cases through a county child protection agency in Minnesota during 2005.

Variables

Children were classified as having a disability if they had at least one of the 23 disability codes present in the SSIS database. For this analysis, several of the codes were collapsed into a single category. For example, children could have chemical dependency codes that indicated specifically alcohol or drug abuse; these were collapsed into a single "chemical dependency" code. Children with multiple, different disability codes (ie: visual impairment and emotional disturbance), were recoded into a new category of multiple disabilities. Other variables included race and ethnicity, metro or non-metro residence, and out of home placement.

Demographics of Children with Substantiated Maltreatment

	Children with disabilities		Children without disabilities		All Children with substantiated maltreatment	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
GENDER						
Female	611	44.2%	2583	52.9%	3194	50.9%
Male	772	55.8%	2304	47.1%	3076	49.1%
RACE						
White	882	63.8%	2784	57.0%	3666	58.5%
African American	313	22.6%	1257	25.7%	1570	25.0%
Native American	124	9.0%	479	9.8%	603	9.6%
Asian	16	1.1%	132	2.7%	148	2.4%
Unable to determine	48	3.5%	235	4.8%	283	4.5%
METRO/OUTSTATE						
Urban	633	45.8%	2471	50.6%	3104	49.5%
Rural	750	54.2%	2416	49.4%	3166	50.5%
OVERALL	1383	22.1%	4887	77.9%	6270	100%
OVERALL – over 5	1112	28.6%	2870	72.1%	3982	100%

Findings



Types of Disability Diagnosis for Children with Substantiated Maltreatment

Type of Disability Diagnosis	All children with disabilities (n=1383)	Children with disabilities over age 5 (n=1112)
Emotional Disturbance	518 (37.5%)	473 (42.5%)
Multiple Disabilities	131 (9.5%)	127 (11.4%)
Intellectual or Developmental Disability	148 (10.5%)	101 (9.1%)
Substance Use/Abuse	71 (5.1%)	67 (6.0%)
Specific Learning Disabilities	62 (4.5%)	51 (4.6%)
Speech Impairment	37 (2.7%)	21 (1.9%)
Physical Disability	29 (2.1%)	20 (1.8%)
Hearing Impairment	10 (0.2%)	7 (0.6%)
Adult Mental Illness	8 (0.6%)	6 (0.5%)
Visual Impairment	2 (0.1%)	2 (0.2%)
Currently Being Evaluated	97 (7.0%)	60 (5.4%)
Other	136 (9.8%)	101 (9.1%)
Unknown	134 (9.7%)	76 (6.8%)

Relationship between gender, race and location and disability label

- Female children with substantiated maltreatment are 38% less likely to have a disability label than male children with substantiated maltreatment (p<.01).
- White children are 1.35 times more likely to have a disability label than children who are not white (p<.01).
- Children with substantiated maltreatment living in rural areas are 41% more likely to have a disability diagnosis than children in urban areas. (p<.01).

Out of Home Placement for All Children with Substantiated Maltreatment

	Out of Home Placement		Odds Ratio
	Yes	No	
Disability Status			
Disability Label	888 (62.2%)	495 (35.8%)	2.16*
No Disability Label	2390 (48.9%)	2497 (51.1%)	

*p<.01, S.E.=.074, Gender, Race & Metro/Outstate not significant in model

Implications

The findings indicate that:

- More than a quarter of children over age 5 with substantiated maltreatment in Minnesota have a disability.
- Children who are white, male and living in rural areas are more likely to be identified as having a disability.
- Children with disabilities with substantiated maltreatment are most likely to have an emotional disability
- Children with disabilities are more likely to be in out of home placement than children without disabilities.

These findings give rise to the following implications:

- Preparation for child welfare workers and foster care providers should include mandatory training on disability-related issues.
- There is a need for specific, targeted efforts to recruit foster care providers with disability expertise.
- Parenting classes should include a focus on children with disabilities so that parents of these children are able to access appropriate supports.
- Child welfare providers should collaborate with disability organizations (e.g. County DD Services, PACER, ARC, Centers for Independent Living) to build strong connections between service providers.

Areas for Future Research

• Why are children with disabilities more likely to be in out of home placement than their non-disabled peers? Are children with disabilities at higher risk for more severe abuse, leading to out-of-home placement? Are they more likely to be removed from their homes due to their disability diagnosis in and of itself, or because their families' lack the supports necessary to care for them?

• How do children with different types of disabilities fare in the child welfare system? How does the type of disability impact a child's likelihood to be placed in out-of-home placement?

• What are the best practices in the field in working with children and youth with disabilities in the child welfare system? How can current standards of care be improved to better serve this population?



Background

- According to the 2006 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census:

- 6.1% of children in Minnesota ages 5 – 15 has a disability
- 6.8% of youth in Minnesota age 16-20 has a disability

- Previous research has found that children with disabilities experience a higher rate of maltreatment than children and youth without disabilities.

- Incidence of maltreatment among children with disabilities was 1.7 times higher than the incidence of maltreatment for children without disabilities (Crosse et al. 1992).
- Children with disabilities were 3.4 times more likely to be maltreated than their nondisabled peers (Sullivan & Knutson, 1998, 2000).
- Children in out-of-home placement are disproportionately represented in special education.
- Some studies have found that males with disabilities were more likely to experience maltreatment, others have found no gender differences.

- Little is known about children with disabilities' experiences within the child welfare system, including prevalence.

- No standardized collecting of disability data across state child welfare systems.
- No standardized definitions of disability or eligibility criteria used across programs and states.
- Lack of training of child welfare workers in disability, specifically in identifying children with disabilities.