Examining Cumulative Disproportionality & Disparity in Child Welfare System Involvement

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Fundamental need in child welfare to understand the proportion of the child population who experience system contact during their childhood (prior to 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday).

- Allegations of maltreatment
- Substantiated/founded instances of maltreatment
- Entry into out-of-home care
- Adoption from out-of-home care

Previous studies have examined synthetic cohorts to estimate these rates.

Automated longitudinal data systems have now been in place for sufficient time to follow birth cohorts for a full 18 years.

It is also important to examine disparity of system contact over time by children of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Data & Method

- Data drawn from California Children’s Services Archive.
- Followed all child welfare system contacts for California children born in 1999 (n=515,504).
- Number and race/ethnicity of children was determined using Vital Statistics data.
- Number and race/ethnicity of children with child welfare system contact was determined using California SACWIS data.
- Frequencies were adjusted to account for children known to have been born outside California.
Cohort Composition

- Two types of cohorts:
  - Birth: Those children who were born in the state in a specific year based on Vital Statistics data.
  - Census: Those children who were age=0 in a specific year according to the Census data.

- Issues to consider for both types of cohorts include:
  - deaths,
  - in and out migration, and
  - inconsistent definitions of ethnicity.
Birth Cohort

- Denominator = Vital Statistics Birth Records

- Consideration of ethnicity based on mother to match birth records

- CWS/CMS birthplace data are incomplete so it is not possible to accurately limit cases in the numerator to children born in the state
Census Cohort

- Denominator = Department of Finance (Census based) Population Projection

- Consideration of ethnicity based on child to match population projections

- Denominator doesn’t include children who have died or moved out of the state, but numerator does
Results

System contact during childhood for:

- Children with any allegation of maltreatment.
- Children who were the victim of substantiated maltreatment.
- Children who were taken into foster care.
- Children who were adopted.
Substantiated Referrals - Births in 1999

- Black
- Native Amer.
- Hispanic
- White
- Asian/PI

Percent vs Years Since Birth graph showing trends over a range of years from 0 to 17.
First Entries into Foster Care - Births in 1999

Years Since Birth

Percent

Total

Black

Native Amer.

White

Hispanic

Asian/PI
Results

- More than a third of the children in the 1999 California birth cohort have been referred to child welfare services at least once during their childhood.

- About 10.5% of the birth cohort had at least one substantiated referral.

- About 4.5% of the birth cohort were removed from their parents’ care at least once during their childhood.

- Lifetime rates of system contact varied markedly by ethnicity:
  - Allegation rates—Asian/PI 17%, African American 61%.
  - Substantiation rates—Asian/PI 4%, African American 20%.
  - Removal rates—Asian/PI 2%, African American 13%.
  - Adoption rates—Asian/PI 0.3%, African American 3.3%

- Rates similar to those observed in synthetic cohort analyses.
Conclusions

- Effect of child welfare services is greater than expected in some communities.
- Disparity in system contact between ethnic groups was the same when examining the 2000 birth cohort.
- Simplicity of methodology lends itself to replication in many states.
Limitations

- Data duplication—may not have successfully disaggregated records for some children.

- In and out of state migration:
  - Children moving out of state may have contact in another state not captured in this study (would yield artificially low study rate).
  - Children moving in state not included in this study (would yield artificially high study rate).

- Identification of Native American children—a challenge due to many who have mixed ancestry, and how they are identified in the Census as well as to the CWS.
Next Steps

- Examine disparities in achieving permanency during childhood for children experiencing foster care.
- Analyze impact of additional factors (e.g., SES) on lifetime disparities in system contact.
Questions?

http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

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