

## PLACEMENT DECISION-MAKING IN CHILD WELFARE: A PROVINCIAL PROFILE OF ASSOCIATED FACTORS

Hee-Jeong Yoo<sup>1</sup>, BSW & Bruce MacLaurin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Hjhyoo@ucalgary.ca

### INTRODUCTION

Out-of-home placement is described as being the most costly and intrusive response to a child protection investigation [2]. Out-of-home care is the largest single expenditure for many child welfare organizations in Canada [1]. There is limited understanding on the benefits of this costly intervention, and for which children placement is best suited for. Children in care are reported to experience greater behavioural problems [5], hinder youths' willingness to engage in relationships [6], and decrease cognitive skills [5]. Alberta has seen an increase in child welfare placements from 2003 when 7% of all child investigations noted a formal child welfare placement compared with 9% in 2008 [4]. The Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (AIS-2008) is the second cycle of a provincial study that examines reported incidents of child abuse and neglect [4]. Based on a secondary data analysis of the AIS-2008 dataset, this poster will provide a provincial profile of factors associated with child welfare placement cases, and no child welfare placement cases in Alberta in 2008.

### METHODS

This poster is based on 27,417 child maltreatment investigations from the AIS-2008 dataset comparing characteristics of cases where placement was noted (n=2,383), and cases where no placement was noted (n=24,764). Bivariate analysis and Pearson's chi-squared tests were conducted to compare select child, household, and case characteristics of these two types of cases.

### RESULTS

A higher percentage of placement investigations involved children younger than 1 year old (14%) compared to no placement investigations (8%). At least one child functioning concern was noted in 76% of placement child investigations and in 42% of no placement child investigations. Ninety-three percent of placement investigations noted at least one caregiver risk factor, and 75% of no placement investigations. Placement cases noted varied percentages of categories of maltreatment investigations, with neglect as the most frequent (54%), followed by physical abuse (15%), emotional maltreatment (14%), exposure to intimate partner violence (7%), and sexual abuse (3%). Of no placement cases, neglect

was most noted (29%), followed by exposure to intimate partner violence (24%), physical abuse (17%), emotional maltreatment (10%), and sexual abuse (3%). Forty percent of placement cases noted emotional harm requiring therapeutic treatment, compared to a significantly lower percentage for no placement cases (12%). Placement cases noted a higher percentage where physical harm was severe enough to require treatment (7%), compared to no placement cases (1%). Seventy-four percent of placement cases noted the duration of a suspected or substantiated maltreatment event occurring over multiple incidents, compared to 41% for no placement investigations.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis shows the multi-faceted nature of casework placement decision-making, and the breadth of factors caseworkers consider while attempting to balance competing child welfare orientations [3]. Findings are consistent with current literature where placement cases were noted as having a higher percentage of children younger than 1 year old, and factors which create a greater level of risk to the child such as increased child functioning concerns, increased caregiver risk factors, and poorer household conditions. Placement cases noted higher percentages for physical abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment.

### REFERENCES

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