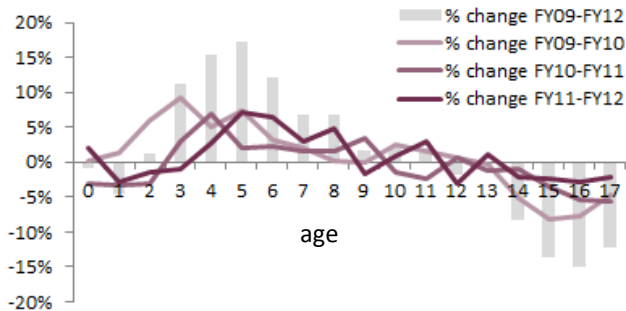


Substance Abuse Data in Child Welfare

By Melissa Correia

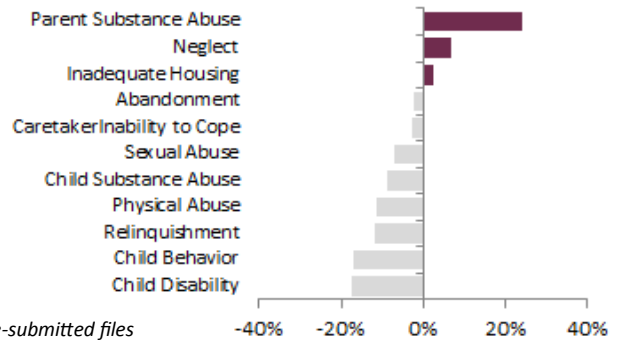
While entries have been stable, the entry of children ages 3 through 8 has increased noticeably.



Data source: Casey Family Programs, AFCARS state-submitted files

Children ages 5 and younger currently make up about 40% of the children in out-of-home care nationwide. The likelihood of removal from home is highest for infants, and while the overall number of entries into care has been relatively stable for the past few years, the number of children entering between the ages of 3 and 8 are increasing.

Between FY09 and FY12, parental substance abuse has increased as a removal reason for children entering.



Parental substance abuse is often reported as a removal reason in conjunction with neglect, which is the most common category of maltreatment for young children. Looking at available data from AFCARS, we find an increasing proportion of children entering care have parental substance abuse (a grouped category that includes both alcohol and drug use) identified as one of the reasons for removal.

Data on Substance Use as a Risk Factor

There is no standardized data collection regarding substance abuse as a risk factor for families involved in the child welfare system. In some states, such as those that use Structured Decision Making, detailed risk assessments document details related to substance abuse, including the type(s) of substances, frequency, and history of use. However, these data are not collected nationwide or required in federal reporting. NCANDS reporting of maltreatment allegations uses broad categories of abuse and neglect, any of which could involve parental substance abuse. For children that do enter out-of-home care, AFCARS reports the removal reason(s). Parental drug and alcohol use are two of many options a child protective services worker may select. There is tremendous variation within and across jurisdictions with regard to this type of documentation. In some cases, the child welfare worker may only select “Neglect” as the removal reason, because that is the allegation that was substantiated, or resulted in the child entering care. This approach reflects a focus on the neglect-

ful behavior, rather than the use of alcohol or drugs. In a summary of this issue, Rick Barth reports:

“Substance abuse by a child’s parent or guardian is commonly considered to be responsible for a substantial proportion of child maltreatment reported to the child welfare services. Studies examining the prevalence of substance abuse among caregivers who have maltreated their children have found rates ranging from 19 percent to 79 percent or higher. One widely quoted estimate of the prevalence of substance abuse among care-givers involved in child welfare is 40 to 80 percent. An epidemiological study published in the American Journal of Public Health in 1994 found 40 percent of parents who had physically abused their child and 56 percent who had neglected their child met lifetime criteria for an alcohol or drug disorder. Substance abuse has its greatest impact on neglect. In the 1994 study noted above, respondents with a drug or

alcohol problem were 4.2 times as likely as those without such a problem to have neglected their children.¹

Substance misuse increases the risk for possible negative outcomes children. A recent article in the journal, *Social Work Research*, cites the following regarding substance use disorders and child welfare data:

“...on average, children of substance-abusing parents enter CWS at significantly younger ages than do other children, are victims of more severe maltreatment, come from families with greater numbers of presenting problems and are more likely to be rereported for maltreatment than are

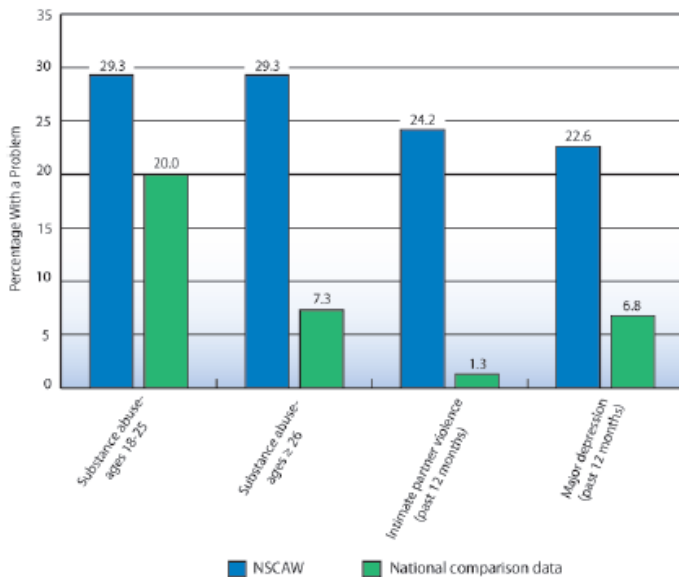
other CWS-involved children (Berger, Slack, Waldfoegel, & Bruch, 2010). The former are also more likely to be placed in foster care and once there, to remain in care longer and experience greater numbers of placements (Barth et al., 2006).”²

¹Barth, Richard P. Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect with Parent Training: Evidence and Opportunities. In *Preventing Child Maltreatment* Volume 19 Number 2 Fall 2009

²Traube, Dorian E. The Missing Link to Child Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being: Addressing Substance Misuse in Child Welfare. In *Social Work Research* Volume 36 Number 2 June 2012

Services for In-home Caregivers

Need for Services Among NSCAW In-home Caregivers, Compared to Adults Nationally



Compared to adults nationally, caregivers with child welfare involvement whose children remain at home after an investigation have much higher rates of substance abuse and may have a great need for services.

According to data provided in the *NSCAW Child Well-Being Spotlight: Caregivers of Children Who Remain In-home After a Maltreatment Investigation Need Services*, 86% of children who have been reported remain at home after the investigation. Even though those numbers tend to be lower for children whose parents suffer from substance use issues (see article above), there is a national trend toward providing whole family services with the goal of ensuring the child’s safety within the home or in shared housing while the parents’ substance use issues are being addressed.

The programs highlighted in this digest are strong examples of how such services can be provided to families with young children struggling with substance use disorders.

Wilson, E., Dolan, M., Smith, K., Casanueva, C., & Ringeisen, H. (2012). *NSCAW Child Well-Being Spotlight: Caregivers of Children Who Remain In-home After a Maltreatment Investigation Need Services*. OPRE Report #2012-48, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.