



Slowing the Number of Young Children who
Cross from Child Welfare to Probation:
An Analysis for Santa Clara County, CA

Angela Irvine, Ph.D.

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Overview

Ceres Policy Research was hired to identify factors that predict probation involvement for youth under the age of fourteen. Through our analyses, we recommend that Santa Clara County focus on whether a youth has an emergency referral or a substantiated case in their history as they assign young people to diversion and probation services. We explain our findings in more detail below.

Background

Santa Clara County in California has recently experienced an increased number of young children—ages 10 to 14—with a history of child welfare involvement who have entered or are escalating within the youth justice system. These escalations are of particular concern because escalating justice involvement disrupts youth development (Mendel, 2011).

An internal memo written by the Santa Clara Probation research department reported on 79 unduplicated youth (Carpenter, 2017). They found that:

- The population is predominantly male (84%) and Latino (71%).
- Most of the youth were aged 14 (66%, n=52), followed by youth aged thirteen (22%, n=17). There were seven 12-year old and three 11 year olds youth in the sample.
- The most common crimes created by this population are robbery (26%; n=20); first degree burglary (44%; n=35), and driving/taking a car without permission (27%; n=21).

This report was commissioned to determine if Ceres Policy Research could identify child welfare-related variables that would predict involvement with the youth justice system as well as escalation within the youth justice system.

Methods

Ceres reviewed an existing data set, conducted statistical analysis, and identified two variables that should be used by the department to flag young children for enhanced child welfare and probation services.

Ceres conducted a wide array of statistics tests to identify potential risk factors for youth who are fourteen and under. Appendix B lists all of the variables that were calculated.

Analyses of Variance

Ceres ran a series of analysis of variance tests to determine whether youth under the age of fourteen, Black youth, Latinx youth, youth of color, and boys were more likely than other youth to have any of the defined risk factors.

Regression Analyses

Ceres ran a series of regression analyses to determine if the variables that were statistically significant for youth under fourteen continued to be significant once we controlled for age of first referral, race, and gender.

Summary of Results

We share the results of each type of test below:

Analyses of Variance

The analyses of variance showed that being Black, Latinx, a youth of color or a boy were not significant in any of the analyses.

For youth under fourteen, the variables that remained consistently statistically significant were ever having a referral, ever having an emergency referral, ever having a substantiated case, having two referrals, having two emergency referrals, and having two substantiated cases.

Regression Analyses

All of the variables that were significant during the analyses of variance remained significant within regression analyses. The first three variables (ever having a referral, ever having an emergency referral, and ever having a substantiated case), however, had higher r squared values. This means that having a single referral, emergency referral or substantiated case is more predictive than having two.

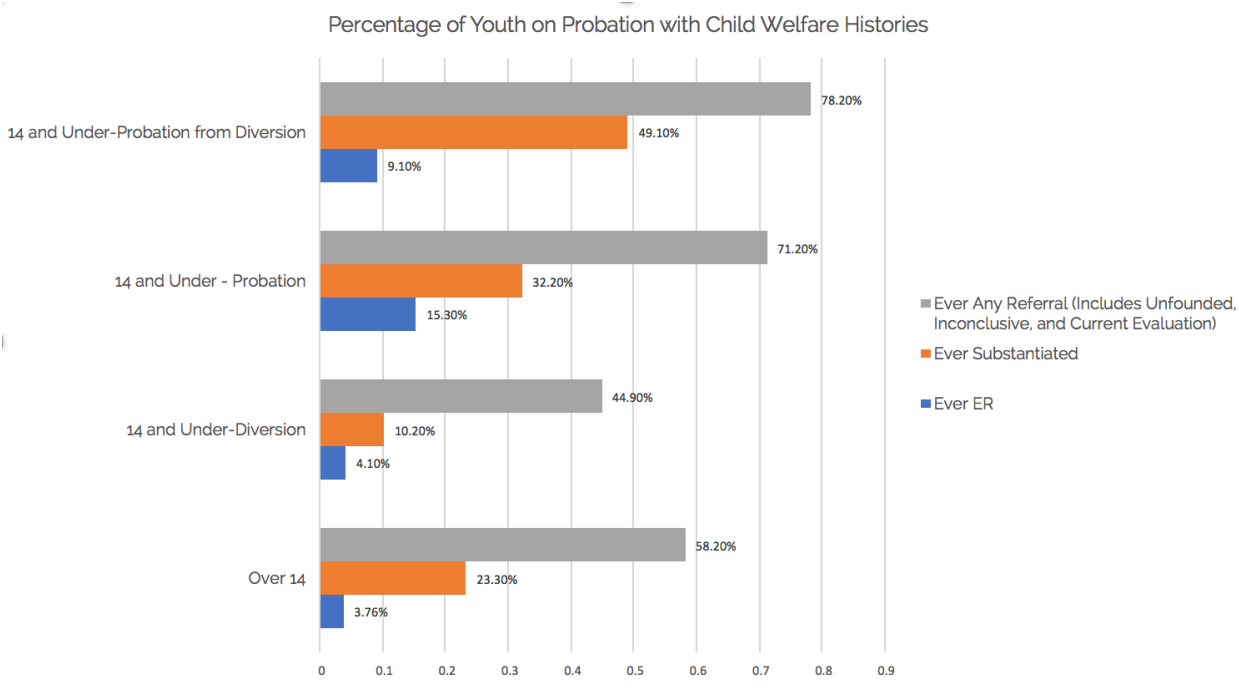
The full results are available upon request. For the purposes of this report, we are sharing a bar chart that reflects what percentage of each group has a risk factor in their history.

The chart below is split into four different groups of young people: Youth over the age of fourteen, youth under the age of fourteen who were referred to diversion but never escalated to formal probation, youth under the age of fourteen who were arrested and immediately referred to formal probation, and youth under the age of fourteen who were referred to diversion after being arrested, but eventually escalated to formal probation.

There were the following total numbers per category:

- 1329 youth over the age of fourteen;
- 49 youth under the age of fourteen that stayed on diversion;
- 59 youth under the age of fourteen that went straight to probation, and
- 55 youth who escalated from diversion to probation.

For each of these groups, we calculated the percentage of young people who have ever had any referral to child welfare (this could include any substantiated case, unfounded case, inconclusive case, or current evaluation in their lifetime); the percentage of young people in each category with a substantiated case any time in their life; and the percentage of young people in each category with an emergency response any time in their life.



We want to use this chart to help the probation department identify youth who need additional support services.

Youth who go straight into formal probation can receive important intervention programs. 15% of these youth have had an emergency response and 32% have had a substantiated case. Compared with youth on diversion, youth who go straight to probation are 3 ½ times more likely to have an emergency response and three times more likely to have a substantiated case. This justifies providing enhanced family support and permanency services for these youth.

Youth who are in a diversion program should receive prevention programs. Over 9% of the youth who elevate from diversion to probation have had an emergency response and over

49% have had a substantiated case. Comparing youth on diversion to the youth who escalate, the youth who escalate are over two times as likely to have an emergency response and five times as likely to have a substantiated case. These numbers justify putting preventative family support and permanency services in place for diversion youth.

Notably, probation could provide the enhanced services for youth on probation. However, providing services for youth on diversion threatens to widen the net of the youth court on low risk youth. For this reason, we recommend that probation work with child welfare to provide these enhanced family support and permanency services within the county, but outside the punitive web of the justice system.

Conclusion

Ceres Policy Research identified emergency responses and substantiated child welfare cases as factors that are linked to justice involvement and justice escalation within Santa Clara County. By focusing on these two variables, the county can provide enhanced family support and permanency services for diversion and probation youth. The county, however, must take precautions to not widen the net of the court system by partnering with child welfare to serve youth on diversion.

Appendix A: References

Carpenter, Craig. 2017. Youth Aged 14 and Under Referred January 01, 2017-September 30, 2017. Memo from the Research and Evaluation Unit to the Chief Probation Officer, Santa Clara Probation Department, Santa Clara, CA.

Mendel, Richard A. 2011. No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration. Policy brief published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.

Appendix B: Computed Variables

Ceres Policy Research received an existing, deidentified data set of youth who were referred to diversion or probation between January 1, 2017 and September 30, 2017. Ceres staff combined duplicated records to create a database of unduplicated youth. Ceres then used the data to compute the following variables:

Gender. This is a binary variable. Male=1; female=2.

Black. This is a binary variable. Black youth=1; all others=0.

Latinx. This is a binary variable. Latinx youth=1; all others=0.

Youth_of_Color. This is a binary variable. Black and Latinx youth=1; all others=0.

Under_fourteen. This is a binary variable. A youth fourteen or under=1; all others=0.

Young_probation. This is a categorical variable. Over 14=0; youth who are 14 and under and have only been on diversion=1; youth who are 14 and under and have only been on probation=2; youth who are 14 and under and have escalated from diversion to probation=3.

Youth_age_at_first_referral. This is a continuous numerical variable. This lists the age that each young person was when a referral was made. The value is missing if there was never a referral.

Youth_age_at_first_case_started. This is a continuous numerical variable. This lists the age that each young person was when the first case was started. The value is missing if there was never a case.

Cumulative_number_of_ER_investigations. This is a continuous numerical variable that adds the total number of ER investigations for youth. If a young person never had an ER investigation, the value is 0.

Cumulative_number_of_substantiated_cases. This is a continuous numerical variable that adds the total number of substantiated cases for each youth. If a young person never had a substantiated case, the value is 0.

Cumulative_number_of_inconclusive_investigations. This is a continuous numerical variable that adds the total number of inconclusive investigations for each youth. If a young person never had an inconclusive investigation, the value is 0.

Cumulative_number_of_unfounded_referrals. This is a continuous numerical variable that adds the total number of unfounded referrals for each youth. If a young person never had an unfounded referral, the value is 0.

Cumulative_number_of_current_investigations. This is a continuous numerical variable that adds the total number of current investigations for each youth. If a young person doesn't have a current investigation, the value is 0.

Cumulative_number_of_cases_for_a_family. This is a continuous numerical variable that adds the total number of cases for each family. If a family never had a case, the value is 0.

Case_presently_open. This is a binary variable. If a youth has a case presently open the value=1; no=0.

Ever_ER. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had an emergency referral=1; all others=0.

Ever_substantiated. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had a substantiated case=1; all others=0.

Ever_inconclusive. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had an inconclusive referral=1; all others=0.

Ever_unfounded. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had an unfounded referral=1; all others=0.

Ever. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had an ER, substantiated, inconclusive, unfounded or current case=1; all others=0.

Two_ER. This is a binary variable. Two emergency referrals=1; all others=0.

Two_substantiated. This is a binary variable. Two substantiated cases=1; all others=0.

Two_inconclusive. This is a binary variable. Two inconclusive cases=1; all others=0.

Two_unfounded. This is a binary variable. Two unfounded cases=1; all others=0.

Two_cases. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had two ER, substantiated, inconclusive, unfounded or current cases=1; all others=0.

Four_ER. This is a binary variable. Four emergency referrals=1; all others=0.

Four_substantiated. This is a binary variable. Four substantiated cases=1; all others=0.

Four_inconclusive. This is a binary variable. Four inconclusive cases=1; all others=0.

Four_unfounded. This is a binary variable. Four unfounded cases=1; all others=0.

Four_cases. This is a binary variable. If a youth ever had four ER, substantiated, inconclusive, unfounded or current cases=1; all others=0.