



Placement of children in out-of-home care in Québec, Canada: When and for whom initial out-of-home placement is most likely to occur



Tonino Esposito ^{a,*}, Nico Trocmé ^b, Martin Chabot ^c, Aron Shlonsky ^d, Delphine Collin-Vézina ^e, Vandna Sinha ^e

^a McGill University, Centre for Research on Children and Families, 3506, University, suite 106, Montreal, Quebec, H3A 2A7, Canada

^b McGill University, Faculty of Social Work, Centre for Research on Children and Families, Canada

^c McGill University, Centre for Research on Children and Families, Canada

^d University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work, Canada

^e McGill University, Faculty of Social Work, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 May 2013

Received in revised form 10 October 2013

Accepted 10 October 2013

Available online 22 October 2013

Keywords:

Out-of-home placement

Child maltreatment

Neighborhood effects

Clinical-administrative data

Census data

Longitudinal analysis

ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the growing child protection placement literature by providing the first Canadian provincial longitudinal study examining when and for whom initial out-of-home placement is most likely to occur. Anonymized clinical-administrative child protection data were merged with the 2006 Canadian Census data for the province of Québec, and the final dataset included 127,181 children investigated for maltreatment for the first time between April 1, 2002 and March 31, 2010. Cox proportional hazard results indicate that the vast majority of investigated children do not experience a placement, but for the others, placement tends to occur immediately following the maltreatment investigation with only a slight increase in risk over time. The increased risk of placement for younger children aged 0 to 9 years was statistically explained by a combination of male gender, behavioral problems, parents' high risk lifestyles, hospital referral, the number of investigations and neighborhood area socioeconomic disadvantages. The increased risk of placement for older children aged 10 to 17 years was statistically explained by a combination of behavioral problems, police reporting, the number of investigations and neighborhood area socioeconomic disadvantages. Neighborhood area socioeconomic disadvantages significantly contributed to the increased risk of out-of-home placement for all children, but this factor is most influential when it comes to younger children.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The placement of children in out-of-home care occurs in principle when children cannot be safely supported in their own homes. This notion is entrenched in many national and international child protection statutes, such as Section 4 of the recent amendments to the Québec *Youth Protection Act (2007)* which states that, when children are in need of child protection services, every effort must be made to keep them with their families. At the international level, Sections 2 and 3 of the *United Nations (2009)* for the alternative care of children also state that support efforts should primarily be directed to keep children in the care of their families. These legal tenets reinforce the notion that the best environment for children is ideally with their natural families. In spite of these efforts, out-of-home care rates have been increasing in Canada. The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) shows a 21.7%¹ relative increase in the placement rate, from 2.67 per 1000 in 1998 to 3.25 per 1000 in 2008 (Trocmé et al., 2010).

While at the individual level, the removal of a child from an unsafe family environment is not a negative outcome – indeed for some children it may be the only feasible option available – at a program level, every effort should be made to develop and provide family support services needed to improve family circumstances while keeping children living at home. Yet, it is difficult to know who would benefit without first knowing who is most at risk, and when placement is most likely to occur. This knowledge is meant to assist child protection authorities in developing and implementing support services needed to improve family circumstances while keeping children living at home.

No Canadian provincial longitudinal studies have attempted, up to now, to examine when and for whom placement is most likely to occur. As a result, Canadian child protection authorities must often make difficult program decisions while relying on research evidence from jurisdictions where child protection policies and the structure of child protection services are notably different. Québec's child protection statutes, for example, include situations where a child's behavior might put the child's safety or well-being at risk as a ground for intervention, a category that is not included in most other jurisdictions in North America. There also is significant variation regarding the extent to which child protection services target younger children versus adolescents: in the United States and United Kingdom younger children represent the majority of those admitted to out-of-home care, whereas

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 514 691 6517.

E-mail address: tonino.esposito@mcgill.ca (T. Esposito).

¹ Percentage represents the relative change between 1998 CIS and 2008 CIS but it does not provide statistical evidence that the increase is clinically significant.

in Canada older children represent the majority of first admissions (Thoburn, 2010; Wulczyn, Barth, Yuan, Harden, & Landsverk, 2005). Additionally, studies often do not differentiate sufficiently between the placement trajectories of the youngest compared to older children, thereby masking age-specific differences that may explain why placement changes occur. The current study addresses this knowledge gap by providing the first Canadian provincial longitudinal analysis of when and for whom initial out-of-home placement is most likely to occur. The study uses age-specific models to compare the youngest children to early school age children, and adolescents to middle school age children, and separates behavioral problems from other reasons for requiring child protection placement services.

2. Background studies

Studies examining why children are admitted to out-of-home care vary in objective and methodology. While these studies are useful in informing child protection authorities about the specific needs of the unique population examined, they do not as a whole lead to conclusions regarding other factors most likely to influence placement. For example, certain studies report that infants are more likely to be placed, while others report that risk of placement increases with age. Wulczyn, Hislop, and Harden (2002) and Thoburn (2010) found that the youngest cohorts of children were more likely to enter out-of-home care; in contrast, James et al. (2006) found that as children aged, each year increased their odds of placement by 32%.

James et al. also reported that the primary reason children were removed from their caregivers was supervisory neglect (46%). However, Farmer, Mustillo, Burns, and Holden (2008) did not find that any of the family-level factors – including supervisory neglect – were significantly related to out-of-home placement. Like James et al. however, they reported that older children, primarily males, were more likely to be placed in out-of-home care. Other studies have also reported that males and older children, specifically those manifesting behavioral problems, have a higher likelihood of placement (Berger, Bruch, James, & Rubin, 2009; Brook & McDonald, 2009; Walrath & Liao, 2005).

Institutions with which children are in contact during certain periods of their lives can influence the risk of placement (Wulczyn, Barth, Yuan, Harden, & Landsverk, 2005). These institutions may include the hospital at birth, the school for middle school age children and the police for older youth. These institutions may be indicative of family and child functioning. For example, infants referred by front-line health services may come from families with co-occurring problems (i.e. substance abuse, material and physical neglect etc.). Runyan, Gould, Trost, and Loda (1982) report that referrals from hospital physicians and law enforcement agencies significantly contributed to the increased likelihood of placement. However, Lindsey (1991) examined factors affecting out-of-home care placement using discriminant analysis of various age groups, and reports that referrals from law enforcement agencies, as well as other legal referrals, were predictive of placement for children aged 13 to 15 years and no other age group.

Evidence generally supports the notion that maltreatment and youth criminal justice services are associated. A study by Yampolskaya, Armstrong, and McNeish (2011) examined risk factors for children in placement aged 7 to 17 years using Florida administrative data and reported that the chronicity, but not the severity of maltreatment, increases the risk that children will become involved with the youth criminal justice system. Regarding the association between placement and youth criminal justice services, early studies such as Runyan and Gould (1985) – which used a historical matched cohort design to compare rates of subsequent youth criminal justice service requests between maltreated children in long-term out-of-home care and children who remained in their homes – found that maltreated children in out-of-home care were more likely to have committed a crime. The study also reported a positive correlation between the number of placements and youth criminal justice convictions. Jonson-Reid and Barth (2000a,

2000b) examined children in California using administrative data, and reported higher youth criminal justice involvement for children in out-of-home care compared to those living at home as had Runyan & Gould. Doyle (2007) also examined youth criminal justice data linked to child protection data in Illinois, and reported that children placed in out-of-home care are two to three times more likely to enter the youth criminal justice system. In contrast, in a retrospective study of foster children, Widom (1991) reported that placement did not increase the risk of youth criminal behavior. Most research in the area of youth criminal justice, such as the studies mentioned above, attempts to demonstrate a one-way association between the placement and youth criminal behavior. While these studies contribute to our understanding of the placement–youth criminal justice link, no studies to date considered the influence of youth criminal justice on the decision to place children.

Many studies in the United States report a disproportionate representation of African American and Native American children in out-of-home care (Hill, 2007; Texas Health Human Services Commission, 2006; Wulczyn & Lery, 2007). The overrepresentation of First Nations children placed in out of home care has been an alarming problem in Canada, where, in some jurisdictions, over two-thirds of children in care are First Nations. In a re-analysis of the 2008 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS), Sinha et al. (2011) found that, for every 1000 First Nations children served by the sampled agencies, there were 10.3 investigations leading to informal kinship care placement and another 12.6 investigations leading to formal child welfare placements. For non-Aboriginal children, however, there were 0.9 investigations leading to informal kinship care, and 1.1 investigations leading to formal placements per 1000 non-Aboriginal children (Sinha et al., 2011).

In a compilation of child welfare research published by Lindsey and Shlonsky (2008), they report that a disproportionate number of children come to the attention of child protection services as a result of socioeconomic disadvantages alone. Lindsey (1991) found that the income level of the parents was the best predictor of whether children were placed in out-of-home care. Similarly, Berger and Waldfogel (2004) examined the influence of family structure and economic disadvantages on the likelihood of placement for children using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and concluded that those from low-income families are more likely to be placed in out-of-home care. Lery's (2009) study examining the role of neighborhood structure and placement using three different spatial scales – (1) census tract, (2) block groups and (3) zip codes – found that the different spatial scales produced similar results in that placement was significantly higher in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Lery (2009) concluded, “no matter how neighborhoods are delineated, areas with high levels of poverty tend to border other high poverty areas, and areas with high risk for out-of-home care entry tend to be located near other areas with high entry rates” (p. 335).

There has been an extensive effort to document the risk factors associated with out-of-home placement. Yet, applying current research evidence within a Canadian (or specifically a Québec) child protection context is difficult as a result of variations in the structure of child protection services across jurisdictions and samples used across studies, which often results in a variation in the factors found to be most likely to influence placement. Building on the existing literature, this study will: (1) use age-specific models to compare the youngest children to early school age children and adolescents to middle school age children; (2) separately analyze behavioral problems and other reasons for child protection services; (3) examine whether a request for youth criminal justice services influences the risk of placement; and (4) examine if neighborhood area socioeconomic disadvantages further contribute to the unique age-specific risk of placement.

3. Method

For this study, two different data sources were merged together to create a provincial dataset. The first data source consists of anonymized

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10311566>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10311566>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)