New findings on outcomes for children and young people who have contact with Child, Youth and Family

Sarah Crichton, Robert Templeton, Sarah Tumen (The Treasury) and Rissa Ota, Debra Small, Moira Wilson and David Rea (Ministry of Social Development)

(1) Overview

1. Until recently there has only been limited statistical information available about the subsequent life outcomes of children and young people who have contact with child protection services. This paper provides some important insights into the nature and extent of contact with Child, Youth and Family, as well as subsequent adult outcomes depending on the level of contact.

2. The paper uses a new dataset that links records from a range of government agencies. This new data allows an analysis of government service utilisation for a cohort of children born between 1 July 1990 and 30 June 1991.

3. The analysis looks at the extent to which children in the birth cohort had contact with Child Youth and Family as a result of either care and protection or youth justice concerns. Prior to 18 years of age around 15% of the cohort had some form of care and protection contact with Child Youth and Family. Approximately 4.4% were referred to Child, Youth and Family for youth justice reasons.

4. The paper also reports on the subsequent education, benefit receipt and criminal justice outcomes. The data shows that compared to other children in the cohort, those who had contact with Child, Youth and Family were less likely to attain basic school qualifications, were more likely to be early entrants to the benefit system (sometimes with their own children), and were more likely to have later contact with the adult corrections system.

(2) The Integrated Child Dataset

5. The Integrated Child Dataset was developed by the Ministry of Social Development and draws together administrative data from the Ministry of Social Development (benefit, care and protection, Family Start), Department of Corrections (sentencing), Ministry of Education (participation and attainment), Department of Internal Affairs (birth and death registrations) and Ministry of Health (including maternal health and hospitalisations). Information on individuals in the dataset is drawn from different collections by matching individuals according to names, gender, and date of birth.

6. Much of the analysis reported here was undertaken by the Treasury’s Analytics and Insights team who were seconded to the Ministry of Social Development to work on the analysis of this data. Ethics approval for the data linkage and programme of work was granted by the Central Region Health and Disability Ethics Committee (12/CEN/46).
7. The estimates in this note should be treated as having wide margins of uncertainty for a number of reasons including:

- there is incomplete Child, Youth and Family data from the early 1990s which means that some of the estimates of prevalence are understated because of lack of data at early ages

- the process of matching is probabilistic and creates some level of error as there are cases where individuals cannot be matched (and appear in the data with less service delivery utilisation than actually occurred), as well as cases where individuals have been wrongly matched (and appear in the data with inaccurate estimates of service delivery utilisation)

- the data covers a specific time and cohort and some care must be taken in generalising to the experience of current cohorts of children. More recent cohorts have had a higher likelihood of being notified to Child, Youth and Family, partly because of administrative changes related to family violence events attended by Police.

8. The analysis reported here should be seen in the context of what is known from New Zealand’s longitudinal surveys about life course outcomes following exposure to abuse and neglect, as well as youth offending trajectories.¹

9. Key features of the new data reported here is that it represents the records of the entire population and their contact with selected government services. An important caveat is that the administrative measures of substantiated findings of abuse and neglect or Police referral to Child, Youth and Family are not necessarily comprehensive or reliable measures of the underlying phenomena of maltreatment or youth offending. The data is also limited in the description of individual characteristics and circumstances captured in interactions with government services.

(3) Contact with Child, Youth and Family

Care and protection

10. Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (1989) provides the statutory basis for Child, Youth and Family’s intervention with children and young people. Section 17 of the act sets out the responsibilities of Child, Youth and Family social workers around the investigation of reports of concerns. Section 14 of the act defines a child or young person in need of care or protection. This includes the fact that the child or young person is being, or is likely to be, harmed (whether physically or emotionally or sexually), ill-treated, abuse or seriously deprived. A child is defined in the Act as being under 14 years of age, while a young person is defined as being 14, 15, or 16 years of age.

11. A child or young person’s contact with Child, Youth and Family for care and protection reasons can be divided into a number of different levels of contact depending on the highest level of the child’s involvement with Child, Youth and Family. These categories are:

• ‘notification only’ occurs where a member of the public or an agency has expressed a concern about the care or protection of the child to Child, Youth and Family (and this has been assessed by a social worker and recorded as a report of concern that does not require further action)

• ‘notification and investigation’ describes a higher level of contact where following an initial assessment, a site level social worker has conducted an investigation or child and family assessment

• ‘notification, investigation and substantiated findings of abuse and neglect’ occurs where a social worker has made a formal finding that the child has suffered physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect. This category may also include a subsequent Family Whanau Agreement or Family Group Conference where the social worker has concluded that statutory intervention is necessary

• care where a court has determined that a child or young person is in need of care and protection and grants a custody or guardianship order. In most cases the child or young person will have had a substantiated finding of abuse and neglect.

12. It is important to recognise that these administratively derived measures of engagement may not be a reliable measure of the real occurrence of child maltreatment. This reflects both the extent to which children are notified to the agency, as well as the uncertainty inherent in making a determination that maltreatment has occurred.

13. Graph 1 describes the childhood and protection experience of the cohort of children born in the 12 months before 30 June 1991. As can be seen:

• around 15% of children in this birth cohort had some form of contact with Child, Youth and Family up until age 18 years

• for just under 5% of children in the birth cohort their highest level of contact with Child Youth and Family was at least one substantiated finding of abuse or neglect

• a further 2% of children in the cohort entered care at least once.

14. In total over 7% of the cohort appear to have had at least one substantiated finding of abuse of neglect (ie as well as the 5% whose highest level of contact was a substantiated finding, the majority of children who experience care will have had a substantiated finding of abuse or neglect).

\[^{2}\text{This excludes findings related to the child’s behavioural difficulties or intentions of self-harm.}\]

\[^{3}\text{This excludes findings related to the child’s behavioural difficulties or intentions of self-harm.}\]

Graph 1: Prevalence of highest level of care and protection contact with Child, Youth and Family up until 18 years of age: cohort born in the 12 months to 30 June 1991

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The population is identified using Ministry of Education data on school enrolment since 2006. The analysis uses a research linkage (linkage 5), and it is important to note that data linkage errors means that the figures should be viewed as estimates.

15. The estimates above represent the highest level of contact, and it is important to recognise that for most children and young people who had some form of contact with Child, Youth and Family, there would have been multiple contacts over prolonged periods of time. The extent of multiple contacts can be seen in the children who make up the current case-load of Child, Youth and Family. Of the 28,079 children who are currently engaged with the agency in some form, 70% have been previously notified to the agency (on average six times), 20% have had previous findings of maltreatment, and 20% have previously been in care.

16. The analysis presented above uses the 1990/91 birth cohort as this enables enough time to have elapsed so as to measure later adult outcomes.

17. However a key issue for this analysis is that there is incomplete data in the early 1990s because not all paper and prior electronic records were entered into the CYRUS database when it was established in 2000. This means that the real extent of contact with Child, Youth and Family is underestimated.4

18. Relatedly, another issue is the extent to which the real experience of the 1990/91 cohort is representative of what current cohorts might experience in the future.

19. Graph 2 shows the care and protection contact with Child, Youth and Family by age 10 years for multiple birth cohorts. As can be seen, later cohorts have had higher levels of contact with Child, Youth and Family. This increase in measured rates of contact is an artefact of both more comprehensive data, as well as changes in the real level of contact. For more recent birth cohorts there has been a real increase in contact, which appears to be partly the result of

---

4Previous research has found that 20% of the 1993 birth cohort had some form of contact with Child, Youth and Family. This compares with 15% for the 1990/91 birth cohort. The estimates of the prevalence of substantiated findings and care are however very similar. Ministry of Social Development (2012) Children’s contact with MSD Services, https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/childrens-contact-with-msd-services/index.html
changes in Police procedures for notification where there has been a family violence incidence, as well as an increased recognition of emotional abuse or neglect.

Graph 2: Care and protection contact with Child, Youth and Family by 10 years of age for selected birth cohorts

Source: Integrated Child Dataset.
Note: Birth cohorts born between 1 July and 30 June each year

20. Table 1 shows the prevalence of contact with Child, Youth and Family for care and protection reasons for the 1990/91 birth cohort by sex and ethnicity. The table reports slightly higher levels of contact for females compared to males. The table also shows marked differences by ethnicity. Approximately 28% of Māori children, 18% of Pacific children, 12% of European children and 4% of Asian children in the cohort had some form of contact with the care and protection system.
Table 1: Care and protection contact with Child, Youth and Family by age 18 for cohort born in the 12 months to 30 June 1991, by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of contact</th>
<th>No care and protection contact (%)</th>
<th>Notification only (%)</th>
<th>Notification and Investigation (%)</th>
<th>Notification, investigation and substantiated finding of maltreatment (%)</th>
<th>Care (%)</th>
<th>Total care and protection contact (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnicity</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The analysis reflects the population at 30 June 2012 and in this case is identified using Ministry of Education data on school enrolment since 2006. The analysis uses a research linkage (linkage 5), and it is important to note that data linkage errors means that the figures should be viewed as estimates.

Youth justice

21. Child, Youth and Family is required under the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (1989) to respond to children and young people who have offended or who are at risk of re-offending. This includes responsibility for managing and implementing the Family Group Conference process, supporting the Youth Court in providing interventions for serious young offenders, providing youth justice residential facilities, and purchasing community-based services for child and young offenders.

22. Graph 3 provides information on the life-time prevalence of contact with Child, Youth and Family for youth justice reasons for the cohort born in the 12 months to June 1991. Overall approximately 4.4% had at least one youth justice referral to Child, Youth and Family between the ages of 10 and 17 years.

23. An important point is that just over half of the young people who had youth justice contact with Child, Youth and Family had some level of prior contact with the agency for care and protection reasons.
Graph 3: Prevalence of youth justice contact with Child, Youth and Family up until 18 years of age: cohort born in the 12 months to 30 June 1991

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The population is identified using Ministry of Education data on school enrolment since 2006. The analysis uses a research linkage (linkage 5), and it is important to note that data linkage errors means that the figures should be viewed as estimates.

24. Graph 4 provides a comparison of the youth justice related contact for the 1990/1991 cohort compared to later birth cohorts. This shows a decline in measured contact which is consistent with declining levels of Police referrals to CYF in recent years.

Graph 4: Youth justice related contact with Child, Youth and Family for selected birth cohorts up until age 18 years (cohorts born in 12 months to 30 June)

Source: Integrated Child Dataset

25. Table 2 provides a breakdown of differences in youth justice contact with Child, Youth and Family by gender and ethnicity. As can be seen, males are significantly more likely than females...
to have a youth justice referral to Child, Youth and Family. There are also marked differences by ethnicity with almost 10% of Māori young people in the birth cohort having had youth justice related contact with Child Youth and Family.

Table 2: Youth justice related contact with Child, Youth and Family for cohort born in the 12 months to June 1991, by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No youth justice contact (%)</th>
<th>Total youth justice contact (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnicity</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The population is identified using Ministry of Education data on school enrolment since 2006. The analysis uses a research linkage (linkage 5), and it is important to note that data linkage errors means that the figures should be viewed as estimates.

(3) Life course trajectories by type of contact with Child, Youth and Family

26. Analysis of the Integrated Child Dataset enables some important insights about the subsequent life course trajectories of children and young people who had contact with Child, Youth and Family. In what follows we report school achievement, benefit receipt, youth justice and adult corrections outcomes for individuals within the 1990/91 birth cohort up until 21 year of age.

Care and protection

27. Graph 5 shows outcomes for children who have contact with Child, Youth and Family for care and protection reasons. The data shows that for children and young people with any form of care and protection contact, a larger proportion experienced adverse outcomes compared to children who had no contact. By age 21, individuals who had any level of care and protection contact with Child, Youth and Family were more likely to have:

- left school with less than a level 2 NCEA qualification
- been in receipt of a main benefit
- been in receipt of a main benefit with a child included
- been referred to Child, Youth and Family for youth justice reasons, and
- received a community or custodial sentence in the adult corrections system.
28. Graph 5 shows the dramatically worse average outcomes for children who experienced care. For example, almost 80% of those who experienced care left school with less than NCEA level 2, 33% had a youth justice referral, and over 85% had been in receipt of a main benefit by age 21 years.

Graph 5: Selected life course outcomes to age 21 for cohort born in the 12 months to June 1991, by type of contact with Child, Youth and Family until 18 years of age

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The population is identified using Ministry of Education data on school enrolment since 2006. The analysis uses a research linkage (linkage 5), and it is important to note that data linkage errors means that the figures should be viewed as estimates.

29. It is useful to put this analysis in the context of other recent research that looks at the needs of children and young people who are currently in care. Children and young people currently in care have higher rates of stand downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions from school, lower levels of NCEA achievement, lower levels of PHO enrolment and high rates of use of mental health services.²

30. The relatively small difference in outcomes for those who had substantiated findings of maltreatment as opposed to only notifications is an important finding. This may reflect the quality of decision making that has led to this categorisation.

**Youth justice**

31. Graph 6 shows outcomes for children and young people who had contact with CYF for youth justice reasons. As can be seen, those with youth justice contact had significantly higher rates of leaving school with less than NCEA level 2, receiving a main benefit or having a child included in their main benefit by age 21, and receiving a custodial and/or community sentence.

Graph 6: Selected life course outcomes to age 21 for cohort born in the 12 months to June 1991, by type of youth justice contact with CYF up until 18 years of age

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The analysis reflects the population at 30 June 2012 and in this case is identified using Ministry of Education data on school enrolment since 2006. The analysis uses a research linkage (linkage 5), and it is important to note that data linkage errors mean that the figures should be viewed as estimates.

(4) A government service delivery perspective

32. The data shows that many of the children and young people who have contact with Child, Youth and Family experience poor outcomes in the future. These trajectories will likely reflect a range of factors including:

- the underlying characteristics and circumstances of children and young people (for example poverty or behavioural issues linked to poor mental health)

- the experience of abuse and neglect, as well as causing immediate physical and psychological harm to children, is highly likely to increase risks of poor health, education underachievement, criminal offending, benefit receipt, and early parenting, and

- insufficient or ineffective government services.

33. Despite being a relatively small proportion of the cohort, children who have had contact with Child, Youth and Family make up a sizeable proportion of the ‘at risk’ group of many other agencies. This can be seen in graph 7 which shows the percentage of individuals in the cohort who experienced poor outcomes, and who have previously had contact with Child, Youth and Family. For example, among young people in the 1990/91 birth cohort who were in receipt of a benefit with a child by age 21, just under half had previously had contact with Child, Youth and Family for care and protection reasons.
Graph 7: Percentage of individuals with adverse outcomes who had prior contact with Child, Youth and Family (1990/91 birth cohort)

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The percentage who have had prior contact with Child, Youth and Family is under-estimated because of lack of data in the early 1990s.

34. The high prevalence of poor outcomes among children and young people who had contact with Child, Youth and Family is associated with considerable fiscal costs to government. Graph 8 provides estimates of the average per person Child, Youth and Family, benefit, and corrections spending for each of the groups. These estimates represent actual and modelled costs to 35 years of age.

35. As can be seen, on average there are large fiscal costs associated with adult benefit receipt and corrections sentences for individuals who have an episode of care or youth justice referral. For example:

- for individuals who had at least one care experience, the average amount of Child, Youth and Family spending was almost $100,000, and the subsequent benefit and corrections expenditure to age 35 years was over $200,000

- for young people who had a youth justice referral, average Child, Youth and Family spending was just under $35,000, while subsequent welfare and corrections expenditure to age 35 years was nearly $190,000
Graph 8: Selected fiscal costs life course outcomes for cohort born in the 12 months to June 1991, by type of contact with CYF up until 18 years of age

Source: Integrated Child Dataset
Note: The percentage who have had prior contact with Child, Youth and Family is under-estimated because of lack of data in the early 1990s.

References


