

**Multiple System Involved Youth:  
A descriptive analysis of pathways traversed between  
juvenile justice and child welfare for youth in Cuyahoga  
County**

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### Introduction

There is growing interest in the population of youth that have some connection to both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. It is recognized that these youth enter one or both systems at various ages and through various pathways, but it has been challenging to determine the touch points for potential collaboration and the entire scope of the challenges faced by the youth who are dually involved.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), which has been working with Cuyahoga County's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for many years, had previously discussed issues concerning this population with agency leaders. Additionally, AECF staff were aware that Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) had been working with local agencies to build an integrated data system (IDS) and that these linked data would be potentially useful to explore the patterns of cross-over and dual involvement of youth with the juvenile justice system. AECF made a small grant to CWRU to work with DCFS and the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court to identify some key questions that could be informed by the integrated data, with the ultimate goal of becoming more cognizant of the needs of the youth that the two systems had in common and opportunities for working together<sup>1</sup>. This report provides a summary of the results of these analyses.

### Background

Children that receive child welfare services are at-risk for later delinquency and involvement with the juvenile justice system, and there is a long history of research confirming this link (Herz, Ryan, & Bilchik, 2010; Maschi, Hatcher, Schwalbe, & Rosato, 2008). Those youth that are involved in both systems tend to have more numerous and complex problems than those involved with only one system, but they often do not get the coordinated care that the need because of agency boundaries (Herz et al., 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Originally there was also an interest in studying youth referred to DCFS by the Juvenile Court as "family in need of service". However, it was not possible to specifically identify these youth in the integrated data system.

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### Definitions and pathways

Concerns about the intersection between child welfare and juvenile justice populations have not always been guided by clear definitions and terminology. Crossover youth is a term that has been applied to children involved with child welfare services who later engage in delinquent behavior. Another term, dually involved youth, has tended to refer to those simultaneously involved with child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Herz et al., 2010). However, these two terms are not always clearly distinguishable due to the various sequences of entry and exit into the two systems. The most common sequence is for children to first become involved child welfare services and then later to come to the attention of the juvenile justice system (Huang, Ryan, & Herz, 2012). Less attention has been paid to youth that first come to the attention of the juvenile justice system and are then referred to child welfare for services.

### Risk factors

Studies have identified various predictors of either dual or crossover involvement in both systems. Demographic factors tied to the individual, such as gender and race/ethnicity, have been consistently associated with juvenile justice involvement among children who received child welfare services. Males touched by child welfare are much more likely than females to become juvenile justice involved, as are African American youth (Maschi et al., 2008; Ryan & Testa, 2005; Shook et al., 2013; Yampolskaya & Chuang, 2012). For example, 7% of all first-time juvenile offenders in Los Angeles County from 2002 and 2005 were involved with the child welfare system. By comparison, 14% of first-time arrests for African Americans were involved with child welfare (Ryan, Herz, Hernandez, & Marshall, 2007). Hispanic ethnicity has also been linked to increased risk for delinquency among children who receive child welfare services (Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000a, 2000b).

Past work has also examined how experiences in the child welfare system affect the risk of cross over or dual involvement with juvenile justice. Children are more likely to become involved with juvenile justice if they have their first contact with child welfare services later in childhood or in adolescence (Cutuli, et al, 2016; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000a, 2000b; Kolivoski, Shook, Goodkind, & Kim, 2014; Shook et al., 2013; Widom, 1991; Yampolskaya & Chuang, 2012). Also well-documented is the link between multiple foster care placements and/or spells

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and later delinquency and juvenile justice involvement (Ryan & Testa, 2005; Shook et al., 2013; Widom, 1991; Yampolskaya & Chuang, 2012). The type of foster care may also make a difference, with increased risk for juvenile justice involvement associated with group home or congregate care settings compared to other types of foster care (Cutuli et al., 2016; Ryan, Marshall, Herz, & Henandez, 2008).

### Data and analytic approach

This study relied on linked juvenile court and child welfare administrative records contained in the ChildHood Integrated Longitudinal Data (CHILD) system maintained at CWRU (see <http://povertycenter.case.edu/data-systems/child-data-system/>). The decision was made to focus on those youth that had their first contact for delinquency with juvenile court between 2010 and 2014 to examine their child welfare involvement, if any, that occurred before, during or after their appearance in juvenile court. The following research questions were addressed:

- What proportion of youth with a delinquency filing had child welfare involvement?
- What sequences of involvement could be identified (e.g., early child welfare involvement with later delinquency, delinquency followed by child welfare referral, simultaneous involvement in both systems) and what is the prevalence of these sequences?
- Are there differences in demographic characteristics or risk factors among the groups defined by these sequences?
- What are the implications for cross-system collaboration and/or prevention?

### Sample and data linkage

The study sample was all youth that had a first delinquency filing in Cuyahoga County in 2010-2014. There were 11,441 youth identified as meeting these criteria. Using linked child welfare records, we searched for the following DCFS events for these youth from 1990 through 2014: child maltreatment investigations, case openings and closings, and out of home placements. The timing of delinquency filings and dispositions and of the DCFS events were utilized to determine the sequences of involvement in both systems. Demographic and risk factor information were retrieved from both DCFS and Juvenile Court records.

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### Classification

The sequences of involvement were grouped as follows:

Table 1. Definition of groups

Group	Definition and estimation	Time point
0 Non-Dual Involvement	0a. No CW (n=3,607, 35.0%)	JJ
1 Non-Concurrent Dual Involvement	1a. CW First (n=3,782, 36.7%)	CW JJ
	1b. JJ First (n=73, 0.7%)	JJ CW
2&3 Concurrent Dual Involvement	2a. CW First (n=138, 1.3%)	CW OV JJ
	2b. CW First w/ historical CW (n=1,572, 15.2%)	CW CW OV JJ
	3a. JJ First (n=94, 0.9%)	JJ OV CW
	3b. JJ First w/ historical CW (n=1,051, 10.2%)	CW JJ OV CW

**Note.** 0a+1a+2a+2b+3a+3b = 10,317.

CW=Child Welfare, JJ=Juvenile Justice, OV=Overlapped period.

We classify youth into three large groups: (1) non-dual, (2) non-concurrent dual, and (3) concurrent dual involvement. The latter two groups were further classified into six different groups according to the sequence and concurrency of system involvement (e.g., child welfare vs. juvenile justice system) as well as previous child welfare history.

### Findings

The study found a high degree of DCFS involvement among the youth with delinquency filings in juvenile court. As shown in Table 1, 27.6 percent of the delinquent youth had concurrent involvement with both systems (Group 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b). Another 36.7 percent could be considered crossover youth because they had previous, but no concurrent child welfare involvement (Group 1a). A relatively small percentage (0.7%) had DCFS involvement only following their delinquency period (Group 1b).<sup>2</sup> Finally, 35.0 percent of the delinquent youth had no involvement at all with DCFS (Group 0a).

The three groups were compared on their demographic characteristics. As can be seen in Table 2, males were more prevalent in non-dual group, while females were more likely to be in

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that child welfare data are censored for some youth. In other words, the study ended with 2014 data, but some of the delinquent youth had not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, so they could still have a DCFS event that would not have been observed in the data.

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non-concurrent dual and in concurrent dual groups. African Americans were over-represented in non-concurrent dual and concurrent dual groups, while white youth were likely to be in non-dual group. Non-dual involved youth were somewhat older on average than other youth when they had a first delinquency filing.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics by system involvement

Variable	Non-Dual 0a		Non-Concurrent Dual				Concurrent Dual							
	n	%	1a		1b		2a		2b		3a		3b	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>														
(Female)	996	27.6	1,136	30.0	25	34.2	55	39.9	700	44.5	35	37.2	434	41.3
(Male)	2,608	72.3	2,645	69.9	48	65.8	82	59.4	871	55.4	59	62.8	617	58.7
(Missing)	3	0.1	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Race</b>														
(White)	1,541	42.7	772	20.4	25	34.2	38	27.5	347	22.1	32	34.0	203	19.3
(AA) <sup>a</sup>	1,848	51.2	2,816	74.5	45	61.6	89	64.5	1,149	73.1	57	60.6	799	76.0
(Hispanic)	139	3.9	118	3.1	1	1.4	6	4.3	42	2.7	3	3.2	31	2.9
(Other)	61	1.7	66	1.7	2	2.7	3	2.2	32	2.0	2	2.1	18	1.7
(Missing)	18	0.5	10	0.3	0	0.0	2	1.4	2	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Age<sup>b</sup></b>														
(≤12)	209	5.8	274	7.2	15	20.5	20	14.5	231	14.7	11	11.7	135	12.8
(13-15)	1,293	35.8	1,663	44.0	39	53.4	69	50.0	835	53.1	49	52.1	584	55.6
(16-18)	2,105	58.4	1,845	48.8	19	26.0	49	35.5	506	32.2	34	36.2	332	31.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,607</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,782</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,572</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,051</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Note.** Group 0a-3b=See Table 1 for definitions. <sup>a</sup> = African American. <sup>b</sup> = Age measured at 1st petition date.

The type of arrest charge (most serious) at the first delinquency filing for each group is shown in Table 3.1 and 3.2. The delinquent youth with DCFS involvement also displayed more serious delinquency charges than did those with no involvement. For example, more than half of the concurrent dual youth had a violent offense as their most serious arrest (ranged from 51.9% for group 3b to 62.3% for group 2a), while about 30 percent of non-dual youth did so.

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Table 3.1. Arrest charge type at first petition by system involvement

Type	Non-Dual 0a		Non-Concurrent Dual				Concurrent Dual							
	n	%	1a		1b		2a		2b		3a		3b	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Abuse <sup>a</sup>	1	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Conspiracy	5	0.1	9	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Drugs	352	9.8	218	5.8	2	2.7	7	5.1	49	3.1	7	7.4	46	4.4
Liquor	311	8.6	90	2.4	6	8.2	0	0.0	18	1.1	2	2.1	13	1.2
Other	24	0.7	10	0.3	2	2.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.1
Property	1,176	32.6	1,285	34.0	24	32.9	32	23.2	417	26.5	25	26.6	299	28.4
Public order	658	18.2	765	20.2	15	20.5	13	9.4	227	14.4	8	8.5	147	14.0
Unruly	1	0.0	3	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Violent</b>	1,079	29.9	1,401	37.0	24	32.9	86	62.3	858	54.6	52	55.3	545	51.9
Total	3,607	100.0	3,782	100.0	73	100.0	138	100.0	1,572	100.0	94	100.0	1,051	100.0

**Note.** Group 0a-3b=See Table 1 for definitions. <sup>a</sup> = Abuse/Neglect/Custody.

Arrest charge type is defined as the single most serious charge.

Table 3.2. Arrest charge type at first petition by system involvement: Violent vs. Non-Violent

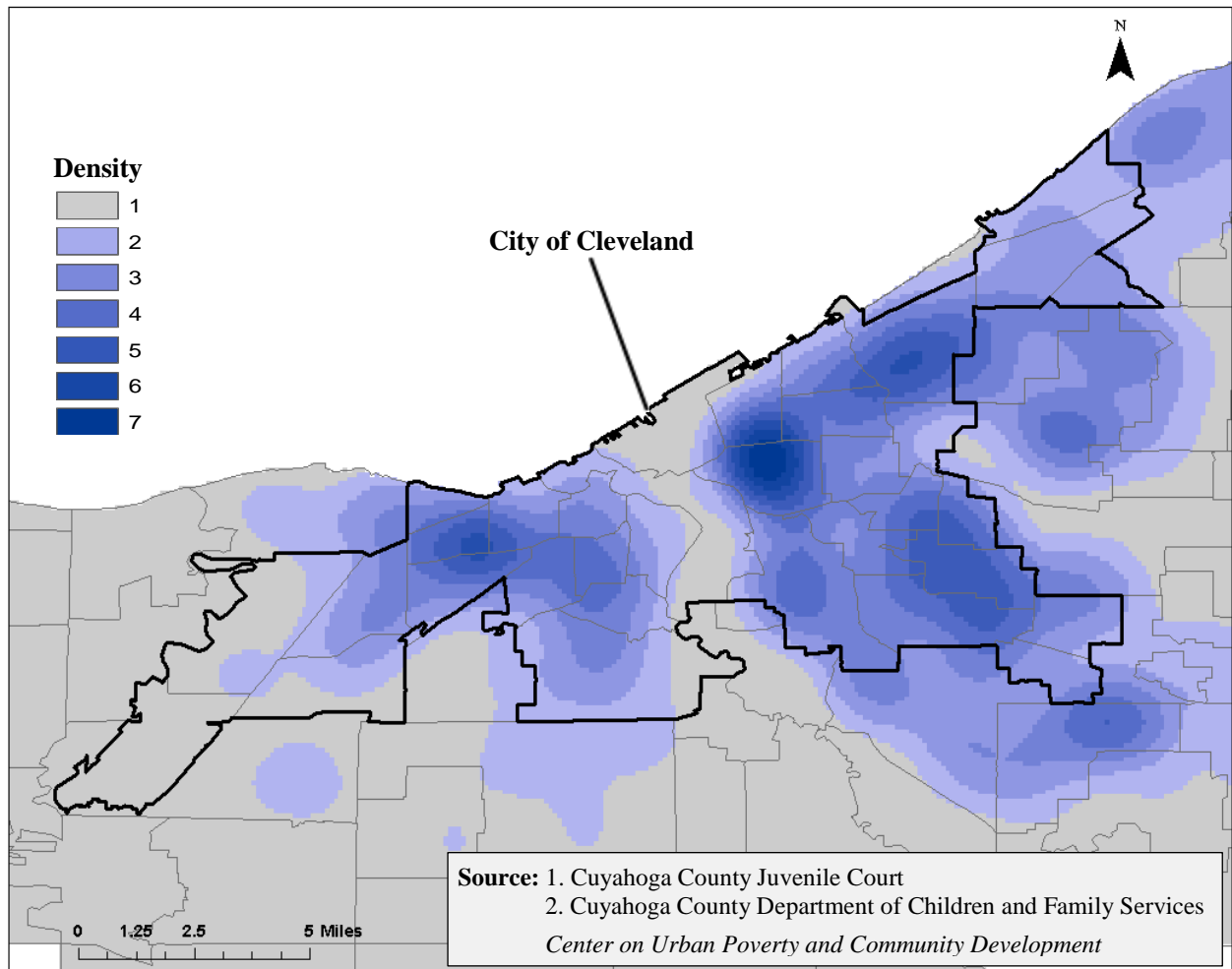
	Non-Dual 0a		Non-Concurrent Dual				Concurrent Dual							
	n	%	1a		1b		2a		2b		3a		3b	
<b>Violent</b>	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	2,528	70.1	2,381	63.0	49	67.1	52	37.7	714	45.4	42	44.7	506	48.1
<b>Yes</b>	1,079	29.9	1,401	37.0	24	32.9	86	62.3	858	54.6	52	55.3	545	51.9
Total	3,607	100.0	3,782	100.0	73	100.0	138	100.0	1,572	100.0	94	100.0	1,051	100.0

**Note.** Group 0a-3b=See Table 1 for definitions.

Arrest charge type is defined as the single most serious charge.

The geographic patterns of the dual involvement groups can be seen in the map below (Figure 1). It can be seen that the dually involved groups are a higher proportion of delinquency filings coming from Cleveland than from the surrounding suburban areas.

Figure 1. Density of dual involvement (child welfare and juvenile justice system, n=7,834): Residential location at the first petition date



## Conclusion

Dual involvement with DCFS is common among youth experiencing a juvenile delinquency filing in Cuyahoga County. There are a large number of youth with simultaneous involvement, and they can benefit from collaborative work between the two agencies to best serve this population. Moreover, the high prevalence of early child welfare involvement of youth who later become delinquent suggests that there may be potential points for prevention with this population. Finally, more information is needed about the kinds of situations that lead to child welfare involvement following a first filing of delinquency.



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