

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Research Services Branch

April 8, 2014

California State Prison-Child Welfare Data Linkage Study

Abstract

In an effort to enhance our understanding of foster youth engagement with the criminal justice system, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Research Services Branch (RSB), matched records from two datasets: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) prison inmate admissions data and CDSS Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) foster care data. The CDCR's dataset contained 133,149 unique counts of inmates born after January 1, 1982 and admitted to state prison between January 1, 2000 and July 31, 2013. The CWS/CMS dataset included 1,014,282 youth aged 15 and over as of July 31, 2013. An open source probabilistic record linking software was used to match records from the two datasets. Major findings from the analysis include: (i) 28 percent of the inmates had a case and/or placement history prior to their incarceration; and (ii) female inmates had a higher percentage of matched records in the CWS/CMS file than male inmates.

A secondary analysis recommended by University of California, Berkeley (UCB) researchers focused on young adult inmates with foster care placement history. For that analysis, CDCR's dataset contained 31,586 unique counts of inmates born on or after January 1, 1988 who were admitted to state prison between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2013. These records were matched to CWS/CMS individuals who were born before June 30, 1999 and had a placement episode that began or was open on or after July 1, 1998. The CWS/CMS had 405,670 cases meeting these criteria. This analysis found that 27 percent of young adult prison inmates had experienced a foster care placement.

Background

In any given year, more than 60,000 children live in a foster care setting in California. Little is known about what happens when youth emancipate or age out of the foster care system. However, many studies indicate that children who have suffered maltreatment have lower educational achievement and worse employment outcomes and are more likely than other children to be involved with the criminal justice system as adults.¹ For example, analysis of the Chicago Longitudinal Study identified a statistically significant relationship between child maltreatment and adult convictions for both males and females.²

According to a University of Chicago study, more than two-fifths (44.9 percent) of former foster males aged 23 or 24 who were tracked in three Midwestern states (Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin) reported having been incarcerated during the study period.³ This study examined youth who were in foster care at age 17 and had entered care before their sixteenth birthday for a primary reason of abuse and/or

¹ Caroline Danielson and Helen Lee, *Foster Care in California: Achievements and Challenges* (Public Policy Institute of California, 2010).

² James Topitzes, Joshua P. Merskey and Arthur J. Reynolds, "Child Maltreatment and Offending Behavior: Gender-Specific Effects and Pathways," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 38: 492-510 (May 2011).

³ Mark E. Courtney, et al., *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24* (Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2010).

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neglect. Two out of five young men with foster care history (42.8 percent) reported having been convicted as an adult during the study period, compared to just one out of ten of a comparison group of young men who did not have foster care experience (9.1 percent).⁴ Self-reported conviction rates for young women were 18.4 percent for former foster youth and 1.6 percent for the comparison group. Overall, youth with foster care experience were nearly six times as likely to report an adult conviction as were the comparison youth.

Some studies and policy discussions suggest that a significant share of California's adult prison population has experience with the state's foster care system. According to the Everychild Foundation, more than 70 percent of all California state prison inmates have spent time in the foster care system.⁵ However, a survey of the California inmate population conducted by CDCR in collaboration with the California Senate Office of Research found that only 14 percent of respondents had been in foster care at some point in their lives.⁶ Half of the respondents reporting foster care experience had been in a group home setting.⁷

Looking prospectively from foster care experience to adult incarceration, a UCB study found that 6 percent of males and 1 percent of females who emancipated from the CWS in 1993 were incarcerated in a state prison within seven years.⁸ Foster youth served by probation departments had much higher incarceration rates: 25 percent for males and 4 percent for females. Incarceration rates varied substantially by race/ethnicity within this cohort.

In an effort to improve our knowledge and understand the magnitude of problem, RSB conducted a data linkage analysis utilizing data obtained from CDCR and the CWS/CMS. The CDCR data were provided under a data sharing agreement executed in October 2013 targeted at identifying "the number of individuals in CDCR's offender population from 2000-2013 who received child welfare services." The agreement requires that reports from the analysis be provided to CDCR on request but does not stipulate any CDCR review of project reports.

⁴ The comparison group was a nationally representative sample of 21-year-olds surveyed in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

⁵ Cited in a statement for the hearing "Children Who Age Out of the Foster Care System," Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means, First Session of the 110th Congress, July 12, 2007, p. 106 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg43505/pdf/CHRG-110hhrg43505.pdf>). The statement refers to a May 12, 2006 Select Committee Hearing of the California Legislature but does not provide a source for the data point.

⁶ Sara McCarthy and Mark Gladstone, *State Survey of California Prisoners: What Percentage of the State's Polled Prison Inmates Were Once Foster Care Children?* (California Senate Office of Research, December 2011), (http://www.sor.govoffice3.com/vertical/Sites/%7B3BDD1595-792B-4D20-8D44-626EF05648C7%7D/uploads/Foster_Care_PDF_12-8-11.pdf).

⁷ Questions about inmate foster care history were offered on a voluntary basis over a two-week period in June 2008 to all inmates scheduled to be paroled within eight months, excluding those serving life sentences, on death row, sent to prisons outside of California or in small community facilities.

⁸ Barbara Needell, et al., *Youth Emancipating from Foster Care in California: Findings Using Linked Administrative Data* (University of California, Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, May 2002).

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PRIMARY ANALYSIS: CHILD WELFARE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG INMATES ADMITTED BETWEEN JANUARY 1, 2000 AND JULY 31, 2013

Data Source and Cleaning

The analysis began by linking two datasets to produce a single dataset with data on prison admissions and foster care history:

- CDCR Dataset: This dataset contained 1,085,793 records of offenders who were admitted to state prison between January 1, 2000 and July 31, 2013.
- CWS/CMS Dataset: This dataset contained 1,014,282 records of clients that had an open case and/or placement episode in the CWS/CMS through July 31, 2013. The placement episode criterion was used mainly to capture probation cases that may not have had case information entered into CWS/CMS prior to migration of probation data to the CWS/CMS application.

Prior to linking the two datasets, the following data cleaning was performed:

- Inmates with duplicate attributes such as inmate identification number, social security number, first and last name and date of birth were removed; only unique records were retained. This unique count of inmates totaled 529,991.
- The CWS/CMS system was implemented in 1998, and it was not until 2000 that all counties fully completed their data migration. As a result, inmates born before January 1, 1982, already would have exited the foster care system before the data was entered completely. Therefore, an age restriction was applied to the CDCR dataset which reduced the total population from 529,991 to 133,149.
- Any inmate born after July 31, 1998 was excluded from the CWS/CMS as the youngest CDCR inmate in this dataset was age 15.⁹ With this age restriction, the total CWS/CMS population for data matching equaled 1,014,282.

The gender distribution of the CDCR and CWS/CMS datasets was as follows:

Gender	CDCR	Percent	CWS/CMS	Percent
Female	10,493	7.9%	506,024	49.9%
Male	122,656	92.1%	507,174	50.0%
Unknown	N/A	N/A	1,084	0.1%
Total	133,149	100.0%	1,014,282	100.0%

⁹ Most states, including California, have multiple ways to impose adult sanctions on offenders of juvenile age (see <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/232434.pdf>).

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Data Linkage

Link Plus software, a probabilistic record-linking program, was used to match data for individuals in the CDCR and CWS/CMS datasets using four attributes: first name, last name, date of birth and social security number.

Major Findings

- Out of the total of 133,149 inmates, 37,300 (28 percent) had a matched record in the CWS/CMS dataset.
- Male inmates had more matched records than female inmates—3,784 female compared with 33,516 male inmates.
- However, female inmates had a higher percentage of matched records than male inmates—36 percent female compared with 27 percent male.

SECONDARY ANALYSIS: FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULTS INCARCERATED IN FISCAL YEARS 2011-12 AND 2012-13

Data Source and Cleaning

This analysis began with the matched dataset created for the primary analysis. An age restriction was applied to the CDCR dataset to limit the analysis to individuals born on or after January 1, 1988. This reduced the total population from 529,991 to 31,586.

The gender distribution of the CDCR and CWS/CMS datasets was as follows:

Distribution by Gender

Gender	CDCR	Percent	CWS/CMS	Percent
Female	1,445	4.6%	196,375	48.4%
Male	30,141	95.4%	209,148	51.6%
Unknown	N/A	N/A	147	0.0%
Total	31,586	100.0%	405,670	100.0%

Major Findings

- Out of the total of 31,586 inmates, 8,484 (27 percent) had a matched record in the CWS/CMS dataset.
- 7,989 male inmates (25 percent) had a matched record.
- 495 female inmates (34 percent) had a matched record.

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LIMITATIONS ON THE DATA AND ANALYSIS

- The CDCR dataset contained only inmates admitted to state prison during the specified time frame. Those who entered prior to 2000 were excluded, unless they exited and then returned during the study period.
- Generally, the inmate population is an older population. Prior CWS history may have been missing from the CWS/CMS dataset for some inmates.
- The CDCR data do not reflect out-of-state incarcerations.
- Counties began to enter or migrate data into CWS/CMS in 1998 and data was incomplete until 2000.

EXTRAPOLATION TO THE FULL INMATE POPULATION

Findings from these analyses may not be representative of the entire prison population, for a number of reasons.

- The analyses focus on very specific segments of the younger inmate population. This group of inmates may be different from the full inmate population.
- Changes in state foster care policy may have altered outcomes for foster youth transitioning to adulthood, with fewer (or more) being incarcerated.
- The share of California's youngsters who experience foster care is lower now than in the past. Rates of foster care experience could be higher for older inmates.
- Changes in laws and sentencing practices could make it either more or less likely that youth with similar experiences and behavior would be incarcerated today. These changes would likely also affect whether convicted adults are sent to jail or to prison.