

Educational Outcomes for Children in Out-of-Home Placement

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational well-being of Minnesotan children whose out-of-home care experience occurred during the 2009-2010 academic year in conjunction with a child protection case.

METHODS

Through Minn-Link, DHS Social Services Information System (SSIS) data was used to identify children whose out-of-home placement experience occurred during academic year 2009-2010. (See Figure 1.)

Children's out-of-home placement records were then matched to their corresponding educational records. The final sample for this study was divided into four (non-mutually exclusive) groups for comparison purposes: children attending K-12 schools in MN (Education), children with child protection involvement (Child Protection), children who experienced out-of-home placement without school transfer while in placement (OHP), and children who experienced out-of-home placement with a school transfer while in placement (OHPT). (See Table 1 for group membership totals.)

OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

Out-of-home care (also referred to as "out-of-home placement" or "foster care") refers to a situation in which children are placed away from their homes for purposes of care and/or treatment (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 1999), and includes settings such as foster homes, placement with a relative or friend, group homes, shelter care, residential treatment centers, and medical facilities. Children may be placed out-of-home for a variety of reasons including, child abuse and/or neglect, child abandonment, parental or child substance abuse, parental incarceration, parental or child disability, child delinquency or status offenses, and child behavior problems (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 1999).

Children placed in out-of-home care have challenges that may affect their educational progress. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2007), poverty rates are high among children placed in out-of-home care. About half of children in out-of-home care lived in families where parents had trouble meeting the child's basic needs. Mental health issues are also common among children in out-of-home care. Among all non-urban children in out-of-home care, a vast majority had a borderline score on measurements of child behavior and mental health problems, which is only slightly higher than their urban peers (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

The total number of children who have experienced out-of-home care in Minnesota has decreased in the past decade. However, a large number of children are still affected each year. In 2010, 11,239 children spent some time in out-of-home care, whether by entering care that year or continuing in care from a previous year (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2011).

Research has demonstrated that children

who experience out-of-home care also experience more negative educational outcomes than their peers. For example, a study by Chapin Hall (the Midwest study) found that children who are placed out-of-home have higher school mobility rates than the general population of children (Courtney, Terao & Bost, 2004). Over a third of young adults in out-of-home placements reported having had five or more school changes. Further, the study revealed that children in placement have lower test scores and are also more likely to experience grade retention.

Figure 1. Sample Selection for the OHP Groups

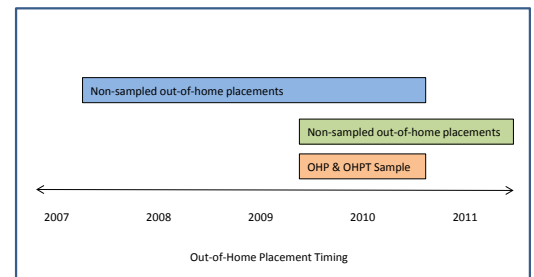


Table 1. Number of Children by Group

Gender	Education (N=822,056)	Child Protection (N=10,678)	Out-of-Home Placement (N=469)	
			OHP Only (N=430)	OHPT (N=39)
Female	398,617 48.5%	5,493 51.4%	248 57.7%	23 59.0%
Male	423,439 51.5%	5,185 48.6%	182 42.3%	16 41.0%

To investigate associations between out-of-home placement and educational well-being, rates of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) utilization, school mobility, and MCA II achievement scores were compared among the four groups. A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis was primarily used to describe differences among the four groups.

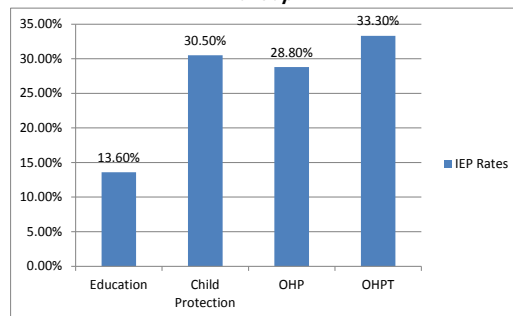
DISCUSSION POINTS

- Children who are involved in child protection, and especially children who experience out-of-home placement, struggle in their educational well-being.
- Although less than 10% of all children in out-of-home care experienced school mobility (i.e., transferring schools within Minnesota) during their placement, those that did experience school mobility during placement fared worst across all educational measures.
- Children involved in child protection, and children in out-of-home care especially, are significantly struggling in their performance on Minnesota's standardized assessments of academic achievement, which may jeopardize children's ability to graduate from high school.
- Proficiency on standardized tests may be an early indicator of the likelihood of children successfully completing high school.
- Research is needed to understand the effect of recent policy changes (such as Fostering Connections) on the educational well-being of children in out-of-home placement.
- Additional research is necessary to determine the effect of placement indicators, such as the number of placements, length of placement, and placement setting on children's educational outcomes.
- Once we know more about the relationship between child welfare and education outcomes, policies and interventions may be created to better support the educational well-being of children involved in child protection and those placed in out-of-home care.

FINDINGS

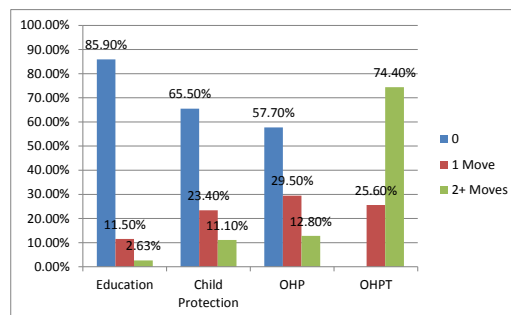
IEP. A disproportionate number of children with child protection involvement received IEPs as compared to the general population ($p < .001$). (See Figure 2.) Within the child protection groups, the disproportionality was most evident for the OHPT group (though all groups had significantly higher rates as compared to the general population ($p < .001$)).

Figure 2. Rates of Individualized Education Plans by Group



School Mobility. Differences in educational well-being also emerged amongst the four groups in regard to school mobility. (See Figure 3.) Children in child protection, regardless of whether they experienced OHP, faced significantly more moves than the general population ($p < .001$). However, a difference in school mobility was most pronounced in the OHPT group; 75% of children in the OHPT group experienced two or more school transfers while only 3% of the general population experienced this same level of school mobility.

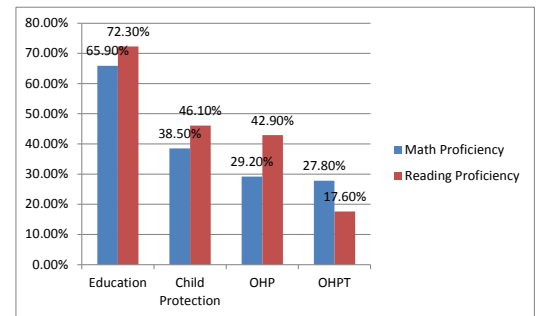
FIGURE 3. SCHOOL MOBILITY BY GROUP



MCA-II Proficiency. Large differences in proficiency on the MCA-II were found among groups in both Math and Reading. (See Figure 4.) In general, more children were proficient on the MCA II Reading than Math

test. This pattern emerged across all groups with the exception of the OHPT group. Proficiency rates decreased with child protection involvement, out-of-home placement, and school mobility during out-of-home placement; proficiency rates for these groups were significantly less than rates for the general population ($p < .001$).

Figure 4. Overall MCA II Proficiency by Group



LIMITATIONS

The sample of children included in this study only included those children who entered and exited out-of-home care during the 2009-2010 academic year. The sample was not inclusive of children entering prior to or exiting after the 2009-2010 academic year. Therefore children with other types of placements (e.g., longer placements) were not represented in this study. Outcomes of these children may look different than outcomes presented in this brief. In addition, the focus on only one year of out-of-home placements and educational outcomes limited any ability to look at patterns and trajectories over time.

For the original full report and complete list of references, visit the CASCW web site at <http://cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/research> and follow the link to Minn-LInk.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is a resource for child welfare professionals, students, faculty, policy-makers, and other key stakeholders concerned about child welfare in Minnesota. **Minn-LInk** is a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well being in Minnesota using integrated state administrative data from multiple agencies.

For more information, visit our website: <http://cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/research>, or contact **Kristine Piescher** kpiesche@umn.edu or **Saahoon Hong** hong0083@umn.edu