

Involvement of Somali and Oromo Youth in Minnesota's Child Protection System

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we examined the proportion of Somali and Oromo children with a history of CPS involvement, the experiences of Somali and Oromo children and families involved with CPS, and the strengths and needs of Somali and Oromo families as identified by workers. Overall, findings indicate that Somali and Oromo youth had low rates of CPS involvement (3.7%). Resident treatment facilities were the most commonly used placement settings for Somali youth (41%) due to mental health needs. Almost a third of placements for Oromo youth were in correctional facilities (31.6%). Family strengths noted by CPS workers included low levels of substance use and few physical health issues; areas of need included social support, mental health/coping support, and parenting skills.

Discussion on Practice Implications

- 1.** This study found that more than half of all out-of-home placements for Somali and Oromo youth were in restrictive placement settings like group homes, residential treatment centers, and correctional facilities. What factors do you believe lead to these restrictive placement settings? Have you seen this phenomenon in your own practice? How can you help reduce the number of Somali and Oromo youth in restrictive placement settings?
- 2.** This study also identified strengths (low levels of substance use, few physical health issues) and needs (social support, mental health/coping support, parenting skills) of Somali and Oromo families. What are some ways we can help address families' needs while operating from a strengths-based perspective? Are there existing programs in your area that can help?
- 3.** This study found high rates of Family Investigation responses, and the authors noted several possible explanations including the presence of high-risk physical abuse allegations or documented racial disparities at multiple decision points in CPS. What can you do to reduce these racial disparities in your own practice? What strategies do you currently use to reduce the influence of racial bias in decision-making? What new strategies could you incorporate?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

- 1.** The authors suggest that one possible explanation for low rates of CPS involvement for this population is that rates of maltreatment are underreported because social workers may fear that legal charges could threaten families' immigration status. How might shifting immigration policies and current social attitudes impact these fears? What policy changes would be needed to address these fears?
- 2.** Needs of Somali and Oromo families identified in this study included social support, mental health/coping support, and parenting skills. What community and systemic supports can help address these needs? How can we advocate for increased resource allocation for these types of programs at the county, state, and federal level?
- 3.** The authors of this study note that relative foster care is infrequently used in out-of-home placements for Somali and Oromo youth. What barriers exist that contribute to the low rates of relative foster care? How can county systems address these barriers and promote the use of relative foster care in out-of-home placements for Somali and Oromo youth?