Allegations of Maltreatment and Delinquency: Does Risk of Juvenile Arrest Vary Substantiation Status?

Datasets include: administrative records from Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Department of Probation in Los Angeles County.

Child welfare records include all children (n = 352,765) involved with an allegation of maltreatment between 2002 and 2008. Delinquency records from Los Angeles County Department of Probation include all arrests (n = 451,954) for all minors (n = 171,928) in Los Angeles County between 2002 and 2008. Final sample includes 38,223 non-duplicated cases with an allegation in 2002. Propensity scoring (PSM) procedures were used to create one-to-one match for each child.

1. The decision to substantiate an allegation of maltreatment is complicated and is driven by clinical issues, the consideration of physical evidence, reliability of a witnesses, determination of intentionality, consideration of community/cultural standards, and interpretation of statutes (Trocmé, Knoke, Fallon, & MacLaurin, 2009).

2. Debate exists as to whether or not substantiated cases with substantiated or unsubstantiated allegations of maltreatment.

3. Prior research indicates that between 9% and 29% of maltreated children have official contact with juvenile justice involvement differs between cases with substantiated or unsubstantiated allegations of maltreatment.

4. Child welfare is a dummy variable.

5. Placement instability recoded (1 removal, 2 removals, and 3 or more placements), juvenile arrest is a dummy variable.

Our sample is limited to children between 5 and 16-yearsof age as 2002, so that each youth is eligible for an official juvenile arrest.

Case were divided into substantiated and unsubstantiated groups. Allegations with a finding of “inconclusive” were excluded.

Placement instability recoded (1 removal, 2 removals, and 3 or more placements), juvenile arrest is a dummy variable.

1. Relative risk ratio of arrest rate is 2.2 times greater for substantiated cases as compared with unsubstantiated cases of maltreatment.

2. Older children have greater risk of arrest and males are almost 2 times more likely to be associated with at least one subsequent arrest. African American youth are also more likely to experience at least one arrest as compared with White, Hispanic, or Asian youth.

3. Six types of maltreatment are categorized in our study (sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, substantial risks and other maltreatment). Relative risk ratio of arrest rate is 0.6 times for sexual abuse, 0.8 times for neglect, 0.7 times for emotional abuse and 0.7 times for substantial risk compared to “other types of maltreatment.” 4. Children removed from their home were 2.3 times as likely to experience at least one juvenile arrest. This risk increased as adolescent moved between various out-of-home placements (2.6 times for 2 removals; 3.8 time for 3 and more removals).

5. Compared to children without a subsequent allegations (recurrence), youth experiencing at least one additional allegation (substantiated or otherwise) were significantly more likely to experience an arrest.

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Conclusions

1. Substantiation does matter when modeling the risk of juvenile justice involvement. Children and adolescents with a substantiated allegation of maltreatment are significantly more likely to experience at least one juvenile arrests as compared with similar children associated with only an unsubstantiated report of maltreatment.

2. Placement instability is associated with a significant increase in the risk of juvenile arrest. Despite consistency with prior research, it is unclear whether placement increases the risk of delinquency directly or is a response to seriously inadequate investments made by parents in the care, education, and supervision of individual youth.

3. African American youth in child welfare are significantly more likely to experience at least one arrest, as compared with Hispanic, white and Asian youth.