

Research to Practice Summary Chris Newlin

**ARTICLE:**

Berger, L. M., Slack, K.S., Waldfogel, J., & Bruch, S.K. (2010). Caseworker-perceived caregiver substance abuse and child protective services outcomes. *Child Maltreatment*, 15(3), 199-210.

**SUMMARY:**

Prior research suggests that anywhere between 40-80% of families involved with CPS may be affected by parental substance abuse. Lower rates of caregiver substance abuse have been found among CPS-involved families whose children remain in-home than among those whose children are removed from home.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a CPS caseworker's perception that a child's caregiver had a substance abuse problem is associated with a family's subsequent experiences with the child welfare system.

**Subjects/Design:**

The data for this study was taken from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), the first study in the United States to collect data from a national probability sample of children and families coming into contact with CPS. This study analyzed the data for 4,156 children for whom a baseline caseworker interview was completed and who had non-missing data on the caseworker-perceived caregiver substance abuse items as well as the six outcome variables.

Caseworker-perceived caregiver substance abuse assessed alcohol or drug abuse by either the primary or secondary caregiver (if applicable) and whether substance abuse services were provided to or arranged for the child's caregiver.

Outcomes – two measures of caseworker perceptions of maltreatment severity and four measures of CPS case outcomes

**Findings:**

1. 23% of the children had a primary or secondary caregiver who the caseworker perceived as having an alcohol or drug problem.
2. Caseworkers were considerably more likely to report that children whose caregivers were perceived as having substance abuse problems were at severe risk of harm and had been severely harmed as a result of the alleged maltreatment.

3. These families were also significantly more likely to have:
  - a. services arranged or provided for them
  - b. the initial maltreatment allegation substantiated
  - c. the child removed from the home
  - d. termination of parental rights pursued
4. These families were less likely to have been reported for physical or sexual abuse and more likely to have been reported for lack of supervision and other forms of maltreatment
5. Child maltreatment risk factors associated with an increased probability that the caseworker perceived the child as having experienced both severe risk of harm and severe harm:
  - a. Child-related risks
  - b. Parenting skills-related risks
  - c. Physical violence-related risks
  - d. Negative caregiver interactions with CPS

National Children's Advocacy Center (2014). Caseworker-perceived caregiver substance abuse and child protective services outcomes. Research to Practice Summary. Huntsville, AL: Author.

© 2014. National Children's Advocacy Center.

This publication may be reproduced electronically or mechanically in its entirety and distributed without permission from the copyright holder.

*Research to Practice Summaries* was supported by Grant No. 2012-CI-FX-K006 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of views or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.