



RESEARCH BRIEF

The Intersection of Child Protective Services and the Juvenile Court

Problem Statement: With some variation by geographical location, somewhere between 10-15% of all court-involved youth assessed through use of the Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD) are reported to have experienced placement in child protective services within the last calendar year.

Research Question

How do the risks and needs of youth who experienced a placement in child protective services compare to other court-involved youth?

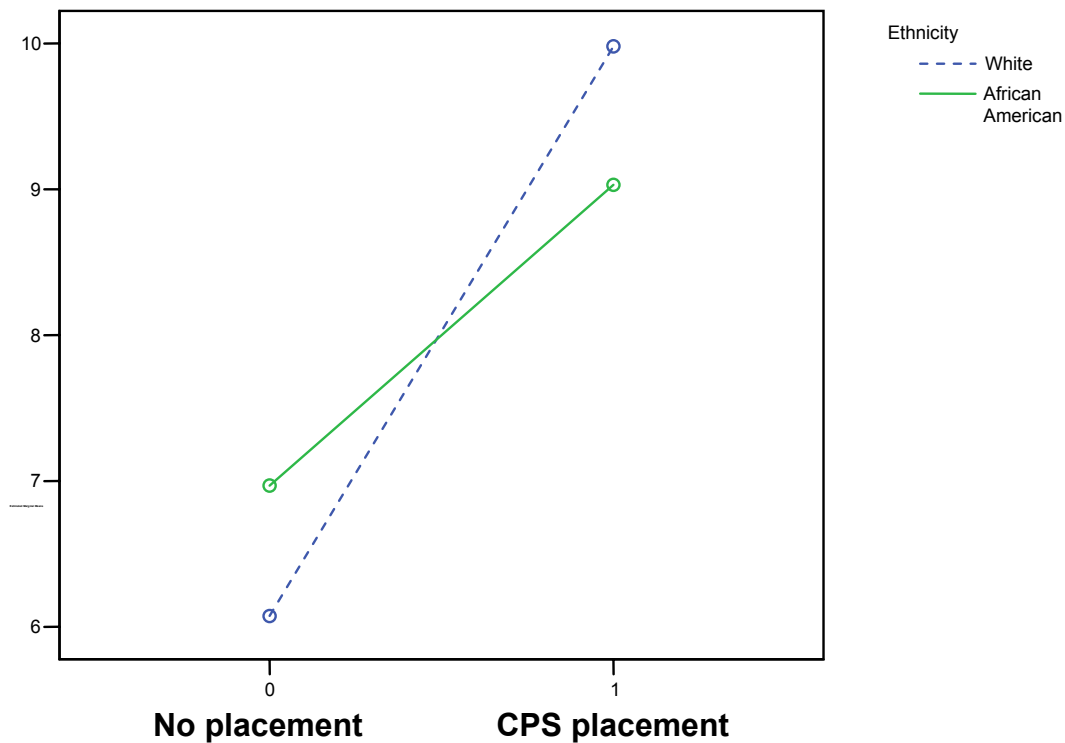
Methods: A sample of 2092 youth coming to the attention of five county juvenile courts in Ohio was used in this empirical inquiry. Information on these youth was gathered through use of the Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD: Gavazzi et al., 2003). The GRAD assesses potential threats to the numerous developmental needs of adolescents who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. This tool taps into eleven domains of risk/needs: prior offenses, family/parenting issues, peer relationships, substance abuse, traumatic events, mental health issues, psychopathy, sexual activity and other health-related risks, leisure activities, accountability, and education/work issues. For present purposes, GRAD scores from a sample of youth who experienced placement in child protective services (CPS) in the past year were compared to GRAD scores from an at-large sample of youth coming to the attention of juvenile court who did not experience such a placement.

Sample: The sample of CPS-placed youth was comprised of 298 youth (110 females and 188 males) with an average age of 15.5 years. Fifty-eight percent of the sample was African American, 26% White, and 16% Hispanic. The sample of detention facility youth was comprised of 1794 youth (649 females and 1145 males) with an average age of 14.9 years. Seventy-five percent of the sample was African American, 23% White, and 2% Hispanic.

Analysis of demographics: A greater percentage of African-American youth (68%) than White youth (32%) experienced placement in child protective services in the past year, a difference that was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 60.34$, $p < .001$). A slightly greater but non-significant percentage of females (14.5%) than males (14.1%) experienced CPS placement.

Analysis of GRAD scores: To determine the comparability of the groups, a 2 (ethnicity: African-American and White, non-Hispanic) X 2 (risk factor: experienced child protective services placement vs. no such experience) MANOVA was computed with the GRAD domains as the dependent variables. Results revealed significant multivariate main effects (based on Wilks' Lambda) for both ethnicity [$F(11, 2078) = 15.01, p < .001$] and risk factor of child protective services placement [$F(11, 2078) = 11.36, p < .001$], as well as a significant interaction effect [$F(11, 2078) = 2.58, p < .01$] regarding these two variables. Subsequent analyses were conducted in order to identify the source of the significant multivariate effects regarding ethnicity, the child protective services placement risk factor, and the interaction term. CPS-placed youth scored significantly higher than the comparison sample on all 11 GRAD domains. In turn, African American youth scored significantly higher than White, non-Hispanic youth on GRAD domains associated with psychopathy, peer relationships, prior offenses, and health-related risks, and significantly lower on the substance abuse domain. Finally, a breakdown of the significant interaction term indicated that White, non-Hispanic youth not experiencing a placement with child protective services reported the lowest risk scores on the GRAD domains, while White, non-Hispanic youth who did experience a child protective services placement reported the highest risk scores. Figure 1 displays the family/parenting risk scores of these youth as one example of the ethnicity and risk factor interaction.

Figure 1: GRAD Family/Parenting Risks



Analysis of other risk factors: CPS-placed youth were significantly more likely to be subjected to a wide range of other difficulties, including change of schools (52.3% versus 30.9%, $\chi^2 = 52.53$, $p < .001$), residential move (47.7% versus 24.7%, $\chi^2 = 66.86$, $p < .001$), death of a close family member (33.6% versus 20.7%, $\chi^2 = 24.29$, $p < .001$), and incarceration of a biological parent in the past year (21.5% versus 11.8%, $\chi^2 = 20.82$, $p < .001$).

Summary:

Youth experiencing placement in child protective services reported significantly higher risks/needs than did a comparison group of court-involved youth who did not experience such a placement. African American youth were significantly more likely to have experienced a CPS placement than White youth, and in general reported significantly higher risks/needs (with the exception of substance abuse). However, a complex association between ethnicity and CPS placement was indicated by the significant interaction terms.

The development of an instrument known as the Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD) was initiated in order to assist juvenile justice professionals in making recommendations and referrals that are based on reliable and valid information about risk factors in a wide variety of relevant domains. Currently, there are five publications that discuss the conceptual and empirical development of the GRAD. They are:

- Gavazzi, S. M., Yarcheck, C. M., & Lim, J. Y. (in press). Ethnicity, gender, and global risk indicators in the lives of status offenders coming to the attention of the juvenile court. **International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology**.
- Gavazzi, S. M., Novak, M., Yarcheck, C. M., & Distefano, L. T. (2004). Assessing and Tracking Youthful Offenders with the Web-Based Global Risk Assessment Device. **Corrections Today**, 64-67.
- Gavazzi, S. M., & Lim, J. Y. (2003). Advances in measurement of global risk indicators in lives of court-involved youth: brief evidence for concurrent validity. **Psychological Reports**, 93, 750-752.
- Gavazzi, S. M., Lim, J. Y., Yarcheck, C. M., & Eyre, E. L. (2003). A brief report regarding predictive validity evidence of global risk indicators in the lives of court-involved youth. **Psychological Reports**, 93, 1239-1242.
- Gavazzi, S. M., Slade, D., Buettner, C. K., Partridge, C., Yarcheck, C. M., & Andrews, D.W. (2003). Toward conceptual development and empirical measurement of global risk indicators in the lives of court-involved youth. **Psychological Reports**, 92, 599-615.