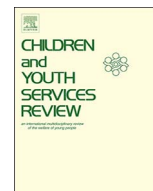




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Children and Youth Services Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth

Children returning from care: The challenging circumstances of parents in poverty

Elizabeth Fernandez^{a,*}, Paul Delfabbro^b, Ioana Ramia^c, Szilvia Kovacs^d

^a School of Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales, G56 Morven Brown Building, Kensington, NSW 2052, Australia

^b School of Psychology, University of Adelaide, Room 10, Floor 4 North Terrace, Adelaide, SA 5005, Australia

^c Centre for Social Impact, The University of New South Wales, Suite 16.01, Level 16, 6 O'Connell St, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia

^d School of Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales, G47 Morven Brown Building, Kensington, NSW 2052, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Poverty
Disadvantage
Maltreatment
Reunification
Children
Families

ABSTRACT

Children who enter care are frequently from families who are disadvantaged economically, socially and emotionally. Such disadvantage often co-exists with other risk factors including a history of abuse as well as socio-cultural differences such as being from minority of an Indigenous background where there can be additional issues such as social marginalisation or prejudice. Care systems can often compound these problems by exposing children to further loss and disruption or unstable placements, and often struggle in returning children home to parents experiencing a high burden of disadvantage and significant poverty. In this paper, we report the findings of an Australian study that examined longitudinal data on reasons for entry to care, trajectories in care and patterns of reunification and associated factors. Case-file reviews and placement tracking analyses were conducted for 502 children to identify predictors of reunification. Analytical techniques included cluster analysis, survival and proportional hazards models to examine the reunification trajectories of different groups of children and families. Most reunifications were found to occur within 12 months. Poverty in the form of financial problems and homelessness emerged as predictors of a lower probability of reunification status along with Indigenous status and family structure. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of policies and practices that could influence the child, family and environmental characteristics associated with entry to care and reunification.

1. Introduction

1.1. Relationship between poverty, maltreatment and out of home care: The international context

Child poverty is widely acknowledged as a problem of major proportions. It impacts on every aspect of a child's life. Apart from the harm done to children from a lack of material resources for full social participation their education and health are jeopardised (Badbury, 2007; Millett, Lanier, & Drake, 2011; Save the Children, 2011). The percentage of children living in poverty as identified through the child poverty rate (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2012) varies from 5 to 7% in the Northern European Countries to 10.9% in Australia, 12.1% in the UK and 23% in the USA. The impact of poverty is experienced in different ways during the life course and particular groups may be more vulnerable than others. Poverty during childhood is associated with a range of health, economic and social outcomes in their current and later lives including greater likelihood of impaired physical and mental

health, compromised educational outcomes and overall wellbeing. (Drake & Rank, 2009; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998; Fernandez & Ramia, 2015; Magnuson & Votruba-Drzal, 2009). The timing of poverty is also significant, adverse effects being most impactful in the preschool and early school years. Impoverished environments experienced by children in the early years affect early developmental outcomes and continue to impact on later years (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Melchior, Moffitt, Milne, Poulton, & Caspi, 2007). There is increasing recognition by researchers and policy makers of the considerable disadvantage children from low income families experience. As Ridge (2002) notes "Poverty brings uncertainty and insecurity to children's lives sapping self-esteem and confidence and undermining children's everyday lives and their faith in their future wellbeing" (pg. 29). Developmentally children's wellbeing is served when caregivers have adequate economic and social capital to buffer them against poverty and less than optimal care environments.

There are documented theoretical and empirical links that posit relationships between poverty and maltreatment, the main entry point

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: e.fernandez@unsw.edu.au (E. Fernandez), paul.delfabbro@adelaide.edu.au (P. Delfabbro), i.ramia@unsw.edu.au (I. Ramia), s.kovacs@unsw.edu.au (S. Kovacs).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.008>

Received 23 May 2017; Accepted 4 June 2017

0190-7409/ © 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

to child protection systems and out of home care. The link between poverty and maltreatment and the overrepresentation of socio economically disadvantaged families in child protection and out of home care systems is the subject of a wide literature. There is consistent evidence from studies undertaken at different periods in time using different methodologies that poverty and low income are associated with abuse and neglect and the severity of maltreatment (Drake & Zuravin, 1998; Pelton, 1989, 1994).

Though most impoverished parents do not maltreat their children, there is an overrepresentation of children from impoverished and low income families in the incidence of child abuse and neglect, and in the recipient of child protection interventions and removal to out of home care. The presence of multiple vulnerabilities and risk factors as well as the increased scrutiny of families accessing basic social services results in a seven fold increase in child protection investigation for families living in poverty (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

To illuminate linkages between poverty and child abuse and neglect theorists have drawn on an ecological framework (Belsky, 1980; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coulton, Crampton, Irwin, Spilsbury, & Korbin, 2007) to suggest that child maltreatment occurs as a result of transactions between individuals and their environments including families, neighbourhoods and communities, and that it is a multifactorial phenomenon triggered by proximal family as well as situational factors and broader societal processes. Maltreatment is multiply determined, and of the various extra familial factors implicated in the etiology of child abuse and neglect none has received greater attention than poverty and economic stress (Bywaters, Brady, Sparks, & Bos, 2014; Jack, 2000; Steinberg, Catalano, & Dooley, 1981).

A number of studies have supported a direct relationship between low income and child abuse and neglect. According to Sedlak and Broadhurst (1996) there are significant and pervasive differences in the incidence of maltreatment in relation to family income. They note that children living below the poverty line are 16–41 times more likely to be referred for abuse. The US National Incidence Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS) have linked the incidence of child abuse and neglect to a composite measure of low socio economic status (defined as having a household income below \$15,000, and/or parents' educational level being below a high school diploma, and/or a family member's participation in a poverty related program). Analyses based on this measure revealed an overall maltreatment incidence rate to be six times higher for children in low economic status families than for all other children, and the incidence rate for specific forms of abuse to be three times higher for physical and sexual abuse, and almost nine times higher for neglect (Sedlak et al., 2010).

There is also an accumulation of evidence that suggests that moderate losses or gains in cash income or in kind supports have had an impact on child abuse and neglect (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2002; Pelton, 2015). Ryan and Schuerman (2004) found that housing assistance, provision of clothing, furniture and other concrete amenities based on family need were associated with reduced risk of substantiated reports of maltreatment. Ghate and Hazel (2002)'s study of 1752 households in impoverished areas observed 'It is difficult to overstate the importance of financial difficulties as a source of stress in the daily lives of families in poor environments' (p. 65).

The impact of poverty permeates child welfare interventions including entry and exit decisions related to out of home care. Children in care come predominantly from impoverished families. Based on his analysis of a national sample Lindsey (1991) concluded the most critical variable related to the foster care placement decision was parental income. Studies of out of home care in the US have indicated that the main predictor of out of home care placement is parental poverty and the second highly related factor is single motherhood (Kamerman & Kahn, 1989). A national study by Barth, Wildfire, and Green (2006) found that half of the parents of children entering care had difficulty meeting the cost of basic necessities.

In the UK Bebbington and Miles (1989) found that 20% of looked

after children were from families receiving income support. Later research indicated that 75% of looked after children are from families relying on benefits (Becker, 1997 cited in Garrett, 2002). This is mirrored in Australian research (Delfabbro, Fernandez, McCormick, & Kettler, 2013; Fernandez, 1996). Poverty featured as a factor in decisions concerning reunification particularly in the context of whether there were adequate resources to care for children on return (Fernandez, 2013). Housing and homelessness have also received attention in the context of entry to care and reunification from care (Courtney, McMurtry, & Zinn, 2004; Eamon & Kopels, 2004; Hamburger & White, 2004). Russell, Harris, and Gockel (2008) report from their study that "the stress of attempting to meet children's needs in the context of poverty was such that parents, especially single parents, at times felt it necessary to relinquish child care to family members or foster care" (Russell et al., 2008, p. 91). Parents in their study further alluded to the impossible situation of having to meet child protection and reunification requirements that required housing with separate bedrooms for the children at a time when the system had removed their benefits when children were removed.

Several vulnerable demographic groups experience poverty that is substantially higher than the population average. African American children, minority ethnic families, Indigenous children, children in households with non-working adults, single parents, and families with children with disabilities experience a high level of vulnerability, with growing acknowledgement of racial disproportionalities in child welfare systems (Harris & Hackett, 2008; Miller, Cahn, & Orellana, 2012; Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996; Sedlak et al., 2010). A pervasive finding in the international research on child protection and out of home care is the overrepresentation of minority and indigenous children in child welfare systems relative to their prevalence in the general population. This trend is evident in children of African American background in the United States, ethnic minorities in the UK, First Nation's peoples of Canada, Indigenous populations in New Zealand, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) population in Australia who are disproportionately over represented and experience disparate outcomes at various points in the child welfare continuum, including reunification.

An extensive literature has documented the disparities at many points along the child welfare pathway: disparities at the point of referral/reporting (Chand, 2000; Harris & Hackett, 2008) at investigation (Zuravin, Orme, & Hegar, 1995) at the stage of substantiation (Hill, 2003) and at the point of entry to out of home care and subsequent reunification (Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin, & Blackstock, 2010; Harris & Courtney, 2003) with increased likelihood of longer stays in care than white children (Miller et al., 2012; Wulczyn, 2004).

Poverty, single parenthood, large families, receipt of benefits, parental unemployment, low parental education levels are consistently reported to be characteristics that disproportionately characterize minority and indigenous families in care systems suggesting causes of overrepresentation of minorities in child protection systems overlap with issues of poverty and social exclusion and attitudes and perceptions of workers (Drake et al., 2011; Stokes & Schmidt, 2011).

1.2. The Australian context of out of home care and reunification

The intervention of public social services in cases of child protection and where necessary, the placement of children at risk with alternative carers is a well-established practice across Australian child welfare. A significant population of children are subject to such intervention: the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reported that there were 43,009 children in care at 30 June 2014, a rate of 8.1 per 1000 children. The rate of children in care varied by State jurisdiction ranging from 6.1 per 1000 in Victoria to 14.3 in the Northern Territory, the trend in Queensland being 7.3 per 1000 in the preceding year. Nationally the rate of children in care in Australia at 30 June rose between 2010 and 2014 from 7.1 to 8.1 per 1000 representing an increase of 20%. Further analysis of these figures shows that the rate of children

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات