Removals of infants by the child protection system: Examining their nature, extent and impact to guide prevention and early intervention

FACSIAR Research Seminar

Stephanie Taplin PhD
15 March 2018
Outline

- Research literature
- Prenatal reporting
- Infant removals
- Published data
- Policy questions
PROJECT TITLE: Removals of infants by the child protection system: examining their nature, extent and impact to guide prevention and early intervention.

AIMS: To increase our knowledge about the nature, extent and impact of the removal of infants (<1 year old) and newborns (<31 days old) from their mothers.

RESEARCHERS:
Assoc Prof Stephanie Taplin (NSW); Dr Melissa O’Donnell & Prof Rhonda Marriott (Aboriginal health and wellbeing) (WA); Prof Karen Broadhurst (UK); Dr Fred Wulczyn (USA)
Trends in number of children in OOHC
(AIHW national data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Children in OOHC</th>
<th>Rate per 1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>39621</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>40549</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>43009</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>43399</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>46448</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>47915</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of infants admitted to OOHC (AIHW national data)
Infants as a proportion of all OOHC entries (trends) %

(National data: AIHW)
Infants as a proportion of all OOHC entries by jurisdiction (AIHW data: 2016-17)
Indigenous and non-Indigenous children admitted to OOHC: Number per 1,000

National data as at 30 June 2017 (AIHW 2018)
Prenatal reporting: overview

- Most Australian jurisdictions have reporting of ‘unborn child’ in their legislation
- Aim is to work with the pregnant woman to reduce risky behaviours that may impact on the foetus or newborn and either prevent the need for the baby to be taken into care and protection once born, or to identify early the need for removal.
- Interventions provided prenatally are voluntary and require the consent of the pregnant woman.
NSW: *Children and Young Person’s (Care and Protection) Act 1998 – S. 25 Pre-natal reports*

A person who has reasonable grounds to suspect, before the birth of a child, that the child may be at risk of significant harm after his or her birth may make a report …..

**ACT: Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT) s.362 Prenatal reporting - anticipated abuse and neglect:**

A child who may be born as a result of the pregnancy may be in need of care and protection.
Prenatal reporting: trends by jurisdiction
(AIHW data)
Which pregnant women are reported to the child protection system?

- Young and disadvantaged
- Age at first birth: 19.5 yrs (median)
- Greater numbers of children (2.3 on average)
- Aboriginal
- Women who have children removed previously
- 37% reported during first pregnancy

When are pregnant women reported to the child protection system?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trimester first reported</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third trimester (within 3 mths of birth)</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second trimester</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First trimester</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Institute of Child Protection Studies

ACT study on prenatal reporting

Who reports?

- Hospital/health/medical
- Departmental/child protection officer
- NGO
- Parent/family
- Police
- Other
## Prenatal reports: reasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for all prenatal reports</th>
<th>No. reports</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future risk concern</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (domestic) violence</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse - neglect</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s mental health concern resulting in harm to child / young person</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s substance use concern resulting in harm to child / young person</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse – physical or emotional</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>216</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Child protection responses to prenatal reporting

• Approximately two-thirds were provided with some prenatal support (median 133 days, including post-natal).
• 12% of the ‘babies’ reported were removed within 100 days of their birth.
• Women with more CP reports were more likely to get service support but also to have their baby removed within 100 days.
Substance use in pregnancy and parenting

- Identifying and screening for substance use
- To identify risk to developing foetus and/or parenting capacity
- Risks in avoiding antenatal care and treatment
- Importance of engaging women in support and treatment

Policy and practice implications
kContact: a trial of a supervised contact intervention for children in out-of-home care and their parents

Investigators: Assoc Prof Stephanie Taplin (ACU), Prof Morag McArthur (ACU) Prof Cathy Humphreys (Uni of Melb)
NSW Project Managers: Dr Aino Suomi, Dr Debbie Noble-Carr (ACU)
Funding: Australian Research Council, ACT CSD, NSW FaCS, NGO partners
kContact study design

• Cluster RCT of an intervention to support contact between parents and kids in long-term OOHC
• Originally in two Australian jurisdictions: ACT and Victoria (ARC Linkage 2014-18)
• Additional 4 sites funded in NSW by FaCS (2017-18)
• Intervention currently being supported in 2 sites
• Follow-up interviews to start (parents, carers, workers)
• Data collection to conclude in August 2018
• Comparison sites to be offered training in intervention
Hypotheses

That the intervention will:

• reduce child distress related to contact (*primary outcome variable*);
• improve relationships between children and their parents;
• improve the ability of parents to support children at contact visits;
• reduce the proportion of contact visits cancelled.

Infant references


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