

# Crossover Youth

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## Background

Crossover Youth include those who:

- enter child welfare system and later commit an offense while in custody of child welfare services such as the Missouri Department of Social Services-Children's Division
- have prior, but not current, contact in child welfare and enter the juvenile justice system by an act of delinquency
- have no prior child welfare system contact, enter the juvenile justice system by an act of delinquency and juvenile officers then refer the case to child protective services for further investigation of abuse

Known from research:

- CA/N (Child Abuse/Neglect) increases the risk of juvenile and adult offending.
- Children who experience multiple forms of family violence (child abuse, domestic violence, family conflict) are twice as likely to commit violent acts (Thornberry 1994).
- Abused children in out of home placement (disruptions) have a higher risk for delinquency than those treated in home (Ryan & Testa 2005).
- Disruptions/instability lead to mental health problems, weak attachments, feelings of insecurity, and delinquency.
- Group home placements have the largest effect on increases in delinquency via exposing youth to negative peers and peer contagion.
- The overrepresentation of African-American youth in the child welfare system contributes to Disproportionate Minority Contact with the juvenile justice system.
- The timing of CA/N is important for understanding delinquency; the more proximal the two events, the bigger the impact of CA/N on delinquency. CA/N restricted to early childhood seems to have less impact on delinquency (Thornberry, Ireland, & Smith 2001).
- From social control theory- investments in care, education and supervision of children as well as social bonds with parents and other socializing agents reduce the likelihood of delinquency. Attachment and commitment play a role in preventing crossover.
- School behavior problems and suspensions (as indicators of a lack of attachment and commitment) increase the risk of delinquency while religious affiliation decreases risk. (Ryan, Testa, & Zhai 2008)
- Adolescents with mental health problems involved in child welfare spend more time in foster care, experience more placements, and are less likely to reunify with family.

- Crossover youth are more likely to be placed in detention and get pushed deeper into the system and are less likely to be put in more effective community based (as opposed to institutional) programs and supervision (Herz & Ryan 2008).
- Crossover youth with mental health and substance abuse problems are more likely to get pushed deeper into juvenile justice system because of treatment service access issues.

What is not known:

- What is it about the CA/N experience or being treated as a CA/N case that increases the risk of delinquency?
- Does CA/N have a differential impact by gender on risk for delinquency?
- Does foster care allow for the development of adequate attachment to reduce risk of delinquency?
- What proportion of child welfare children become delinquent?

## Practice Considerations with Crossover Youth

More than with any other group of children, meeting the needs of crossover youth requires a high level of collaboration between child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

An ideal collaborative arrangement would include:

1. A multisystem assessment instrument completed at a centralized assessment and screening center and protocols for notifying agencies of dual involvement
2. A court case processing approach that includes one judge/one family, dedicated dockets for dual system cases, appropriately trained legal counsel
3. Case flow management that reflects the dual nature of the child's needs (joint pre-conference hearings, time certain scheduling, court control of continuances, joint court orders, and mandatory inter-agency court presence)
4. Coordinated case planning and supervision which could include joint case plans, interagency liaisons, multidisciplinary case planning, and family-centered interventions
5. Interagency collaboration including formal written agreements, shared funding streams, and integrated information systems. (Lord & Siegel 2004)

Practical matters to consider in developing a collaborative plan:

- Are crossover youth able to stay in the same school once in the system? (maintain school stability)
- How do juvenile justice programs address family violence and child safety?
- Staff training background: social work vs. criminal justice- how does this difference challenge achievement of an integrated approach to working with these youth? How might the differences actually enhance integration?
- What is the role of punishment in addressing youth problem behavior?
- The type of jurisdictional arrangement can impact the feasibility of developing a collaborative approach. Three types of jurisdictions are common: concurrent, separate,

- How do the systems react when a youth/active case crosses over from one to the other?
- What mechanisms are in place to facilitate coordination of a response? What resources are needed to improve coordinated responses?
- Is the level of communication, coordination, and cooperation adequate among the courts, agencies, and attorneys who work with such youth and their families?
- What alternative, safe housing is available for crossover youth?
  - How does housing availability impact the child's ability to satisfy the terms and conditions of probation?

Several jurisdictions around the country are pilot testing models for integrating agency approaches to working with crossover youth.

## **A Look at Crossover Youth in Missouri's Juvenile Justice System**

The first part of this brief used published research to establish that crossover youth have different individual and systemic needs than other youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system. Next, we will examine crossover youth in Missouri to determine their prevalence rates and how the needs of such youth compare to those reported in research studies. This information can inform a decision as to whether Missouri should enhance its approach for working with crossover youth.

### **Study Group 1: Delinquent Youth with a CA/N History**

First, we examined trends in youth crossing from CA/N over to delinquency. Looking at 74,448 (unduplicated) youth who have at least one status/delinquency case and at least one risk assessment recorded in JIS between 2002 and 2009, we found that:

- About 16% of delinquent youth have a CA/N history.
- Delinquent females are more likely (18.7% females vs. 14.6% males) to have a CA/N history.
- Black youth are over-represented among those with CA/N history: 25.8% of delinquent youth with a CA/N history are black; in comparison, 20% of those without a CA/N history are black.
- The majority of those with a CA/N history have moderate or severe school problems while the majority of those without a CA/N history have no or only minor school problems.
- Youth with a CA/N history had their first referral at a younger age; 47% of them had their first referrals at age 12 or younger.

## Study Group 2: A 2004 Cohort of Delinquent Youth with a New CA/N Case, 2004-2010

To determine the extent to which delinquent youth crossover into a new child abuse case, we tracked 10,364 delinquent youth in a 2004 cohort (all youth with a court case and complete records) to see whether any new CA/N cases were filed through April 2010. Please note that we did not have complete files on these youth to determine how many had a CA/N case prior to the 2004 delinquency/status referral.

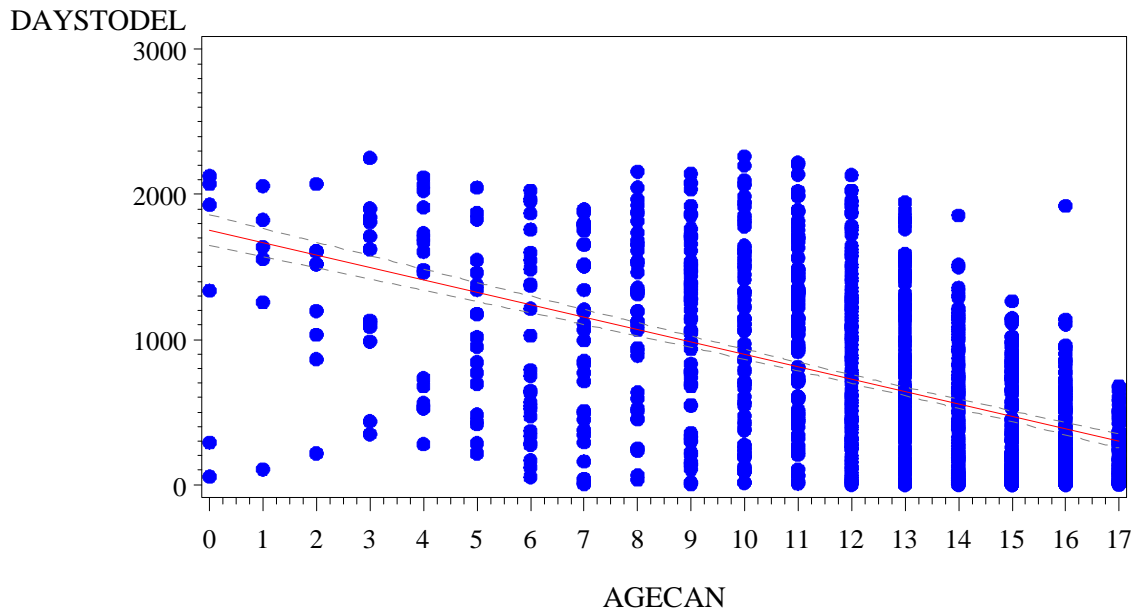
- 7.2% of the cohort had a new CA/N referral.
- 15.8% of 1,944 delinquent youth who had a CA/N history received a new CA/N referral, in contrast to only 5.3% of 8,420 delinquent youth who had no CA/N history.
- A higher percentage of delinquent female received a new CA/N referral 41% vs. 31% of males.
- Of relevance to the analysis of racial disparities, among this cohort of delinquent youth, white youth are over-represented among those with a new CA/N history. A higher percentage of white youth received a new CA/N referral compared to black youth, 7.8% vs. 5.8%.
- The majority of those with a new CA/N referral have moderate or severe school problems while the majority of those without a new CA/N referrals have no or only minor school problems.
- Delinquent youth with a new CA/N referral had their first referral at a younger age; 61% of them had their first referrals at 12 or younger.

## Study Group 3: A 2004 Cohort of CA/N Cases with a Subsequent Status/Delinquency Referral, 2004-2010

Next, we selected a child welfare cohort from 2004 and followed them to 2010 to determine how many of them had delinquency cases. We tracked 5,337 youth with CA/N cases in 2004. They ranged in age from newborn to 17 at the time of the abuse report. By 2010, 1,162, or 22%, of them had subsequent status and delinquency cases filed.

Other research has noted that the timing of abuse is important. In an analysis of the 2004 cohort, time to delinquency is inversely associated with the age when abuse/neglect cases were filed. So the older the youth when the abuse occurred, the shorter the time length until the delinquency case was filed.

## ‘Linear Regression of Age at Abuse/Neglect and Time to Delinquency’



### Study Group 4: Delinquency/Status Cases on DYS COASITE

Researchers have speculated that crossover youth are treated differently in the justice system when they present before the court for a delinquency referral. Researchers further speculate that this pattern of differential treatment leads to crossover youth getting pushed deeper into the system. While we did not have time series data on individual youth to use in determining patterns of system penetration, we could compare patterns of placement among crossover youth and other delinquent youth. We looked at 182,139 status and delinquent cases filed between 2002 and 2009 with DYS COASITE data that provide information on detention placement and case disposition, and found that:

- A higher percentage of youth with a CA/N history were detained, 17% vs. 12%.
- A higher percentage of youth with a CA/N history were put in non-secure placement, 4.6% vs. 2.3%.
- Considering case disposition, a higher percentage of youth with a CA/N history were disposed with an out-of-home placement, 9% vs. 4%, transferred to another agency, 6.7% vs. 3.4%; and a lower percentage of them were informally disposed without supervision, 22% vs. 31%.
- Considering placement type, a higher percentage of youth with a CA/N history were placed with the Children’s Division, 28% vs. 6%, while a lower percentage of them were placed with the Division of Youth Services, 41% vs. 57%.

A slightly higher percentage of youth with a CA/N history have no drug/alcohol issues, 77% vs. 75%.

## Study Group 5: Youth with at least one risk assessment in 2007-08

Finally, we tested a model of delinquency using a statewide dataset for 2007-08, the first year that all circuits were part of the statewide data system. The dataset includes all youth who had at least one risk assessment included in their file. The risk assessments are given to youth who have a referral for status and delinquency offenses which has met the definition of legal sufficiency, as well as youth proceeding to adjudication.

This dataset includes 9,069 youth. First, they were divided into two groups of crossover and non-crossover youth where their status as a crossover youth was determined by a CA/N history variable. Then the risk factors for the two groups were compared (see Table 1).

Significantly higher proportions of crossover youth have parents with:

- a mental health disorder
- a substance abuse history
- an incarceration history
- and a severely ineffective parenting style

The gender difference is minimal between the groups and a slightly greater proportion of the crossover youth are minorities.

In terms of their own behavior, particularly in regards to the justice system, significantly greater proportions of the crossover group:

- had a first referral at a younger age
- had one or more prior referrals
- and had an assault referral.

Longer histories of offending and violence are two behaviors associated with crossover youth. To see if such an association exists among Missouri's crossover youth, all risk variables were entered into models of prior assaults (an indicator of violent behavior) and prior referrals (see Table 2). Holding all other variables constant, a history of CA/N had a significant impact on the likelihood of having prior referrals but not on prior assaults. The assault model was generally not very robust. These results suggest that violence is not a major concern for crossover youth in Missouri but a long history of involvement in the justice system is typical among this group.

## A Few Conclusions

Missouri's juvenile justice population includes a significant proportion of crossover youth. The data provide us with some indication of their needs for more effective parenting, school engagement activities, and special consideration in placement decisions. The results of the final multivariate analysis indicate that the juvenile justice system has multiple opportunities to impact these youth given their association with prior referrals. Through initiatives like the Court Improvement Project, Fostering Court Improvement Initiative, and the Unified Family Court model programs, Missouri has the structures in place to enhance how we work with these youth who, along with their families, may be involved in multiple court cases and agencies.

TABLE 1  
Comparison of Delinquent Youth With and Without a CA/N History, 2007-08

	No CA/N History		CA/N History	
	n	%	n	%
Parent mental health disorder**				
No	8457	93	1515	74
Yes	612	7	540	26
Parent substance abuse history**				
No	7931	87	1240	60
Yes	1138	13	815	40
Parent style**				
Effective	3970	44	374	18
Moderately ineffective	4191	46	986	48
Severely ineffective	908	10	695	34
Parent incarceration history**				
No	7292	80	1029	50
Yes	1777	20	1026	50
Placement history**				
No	7779	86	730	36
Yes	1290	14	1325	64
Age at first referral**				
16	1584	17	129	6
13-15	5130	57	930	45
<=12	2355	26	996	48
Prior referrals**				
None	4677	52	511	25
One or more	4392	48	1544	75
Assault referrals**				
None	6040	67	1057	51
Misdemeanor	2696	30	871	42
Felony	333	4	127	6
Gender*				
Female	2499	28	628	31
Male	6570	72	1427	69
Race**				
Other	2251	25	621	30
White	6818	75	1434	70

NOTE: \* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .0001$ .

TABLE 2  
Logistic Regression Results  
With Prior Referral History and Prior Assaults as Dependent Variables

	<i>Prior referrals</i>			<i>Prior assaults</i>		
	b	SE	Exp(b)	b	SE	Exp(b)
Demographic variables						
Gender (male = 1)	0.233***	0.049	1.263	ns		
Race (non-White = 1)	-0.111*	0.051	0.895	-0.297***	0.047	0.743
Parent attributes						
Mental illness (yes = 1)	ns			0.176*	0.071	1.192
Substance abuse (yes = 1)	ns			-0.139*	0.062	0.870
Moderately ineffective parenting (effective = 0)	0.920***	0.047	2.510	0.336***	0.047	1.399
Severely ineffective parenting (effective = 0)	1.460***	0.080	4.307	0.692***	0.069	1.997
Youth risk						
Child abuse (yes = 1)	0.164*	0.069	1.178	ns		
Out of home (yes = 1)	0.906***	0.063	2.474	0.593***	0.054	1.810
Parent incarceration (yes = 1)	0.166**	0.059	1.180	0.135*	0.053	1.145
First referral at 13-15 ('<= 12' = 1)	-0.797***	0.051	0.451	-0.563***	0.046	0.570
First referral at 16 ('<= 12' = 1)	-2.363***	0.082	0.094	-1.284***	0.076	0.277
Constant	ns					
Model statistics						
$\chi^2$	2065.381***			950.162***		
-2log likelihood	12353.582			13484.799		
Nagelkerke R2	0.3172			0.1265		

NOTE: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .0001$

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