

Parents with Disabilities in Minnesota's Child Protection System

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers, educators, and other professionals engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful dialogue about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue we were interested in understanding the representation of parents with disabilities as compared to parents without disabilities at various child protection system (CPS) decision-making points (i.e., involvement as an alleged offender in a CPS investigation [INV], out-of-home care [OHC], termination of parental rights [TPR]). We conducted descriptive statistics, chi-square analysis, disparity indices with decision-point enumeration, and logistic regression analyses using integrated administrative data from the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education through Minn-LInK. We found that parents with disabilities were disproportionately overrepresented in CPS compared to parents without disabilities. Our study also revealed differential patterns of representation across CPS decision-making points for parents with disabilities, and that parents with a history of EBD, specific learning disabilities, and IDD were significantly overrepresented across CPS decision-making points.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that parents with disabilities were disproportionately represented in CPS investigations and terminations of parental rights, but the overrepresentation decreased for families with children in out-of-home care. Do you see this phenomenon playing out in a similar way in your own practice? What may be some of the reasons for this decrease in overrepresentation when children are placed in out-of-home care as compared to when they are involved in a CPS investigation or termination of parental rights?
2. The similar rates of children in out-of-home care for parents with and without diagnosed disabilities discussed above may help us understand how to decrease overrepresentation of parents with disabilities at the other two decision-making points examined in this study. What are some ways mandated reporters and child welfare professionals might address overrepresentation of parents with disabilities in CPS investigations and at terminations of parental rights? Are there any existing practices or guidance in your workplace regarding working with parents with disabilities that might help?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Findings of this study have implications for practice and policy to better support parents with disabilities and reduce CPS disparities. What kinds of training have you received that supports you in working with parents with disabilities? What additional guidance or support would be helpful to you in working with parents with disabilities?
2. The Family First Prevention Services Act provides greater opportunities to implement prevention services in child welfare across the country. What preventative services are needed to further support parents with disabilities in your community? What resources do you know of in your community that could help prevent the overrepresentation of parents with disabilities in CPS investigations and termination of parental rights especially? What is needed to strengthen collaborations between your workplace and these supportive resources?
3. How might ableism (bias against those with disabilities and accepting "non-disability" as the "norm") contribute to disparate representation of parents with disabilities in CPS? In what ways do you see ableism show up in the policies at the agency, local, state, and/or federal level(s)? How might you engage with your colleagues and local, state, or federal-level policy makers to advocate for increased accommodation and modification within child welfare service provision for parents with disabilities?