

## Research Brief: Connecticut's Crossover Youth (COY)

Policymakers, frontline staff, and researchers are well aware that there is overlap between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Crossover youth (COY) is a term to describe youth who are served by both systems.<sup>1</sup> To date, interventions are hampered by a lack of precise estimates of the number of COY, their characteristics, and how their involvement changes over time. In part, this is due to the fact that there are few public systems that routinely share information about involvement and timing. Learning more about these youth might facilitate early identification of youth in the child welfare system who are at risk for crossing over, enabling prevention and early intervention efforts among youth, families, communities, and within and across systems. This brief summarizes a recent UConn study in which the aim was to identify factors that increase the likelihood of crossing over and the characteristics of youth who do.

**Connecticut's Data Sharing Agreement.** A partnership among Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Child Protection (CP) division of the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters, and the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Juvenile Branch was formed to share data on youth served in their respective agencies. This resulted in a data set of 7,268 DCF-involved youth, 1,207 (16.6%) of whom had subsequent juvenile justice contact. This dataset was then provided to the University of Connecticut Center for Applied Research in Human Development (CARHD) for analysis. Dr. Kellie Randall is the lead researcher on this study.

### Predicting Crossover

We were interested in identifying factors that increased the odds of a youth having contact with the juvenile justice system. In the sample we found:

- Crossover rates were higher among:
  - Males (19.8%) than females (13.5%);
  - African American (21.2%) and Hispanic (19.5%) youth than White youth (13.5%);
  - Youth who experienced out-of-home placement/foster care (23.8%) than youth who were never removed from the home (14.5%).
- Youth with repeated involvement in DCF were more likely to cross over (24.1%) than youth whose involvement was limited to a single instance (12.8%); and
- Youth who are older at the time of their first DCF contact were more likely to cross over.

Previous research has found the timing of maltreatment plays a role. Specifically, later maltreatment has been found to increase the likelihood of crossing over,<sup>2,3,4</sup> however, most research has focused on the age at first maltreatment. Because subsequent reports are associated with an increased likelihood of crossing over, this study sought to more fully capture the timing and frequency of maltreatment. We used a trajectory based modeling procedure to analyze the data and identify a number of subgroups that characterize different pathways of maltreatment of COY. We found five distinct maltreatment trajectories.

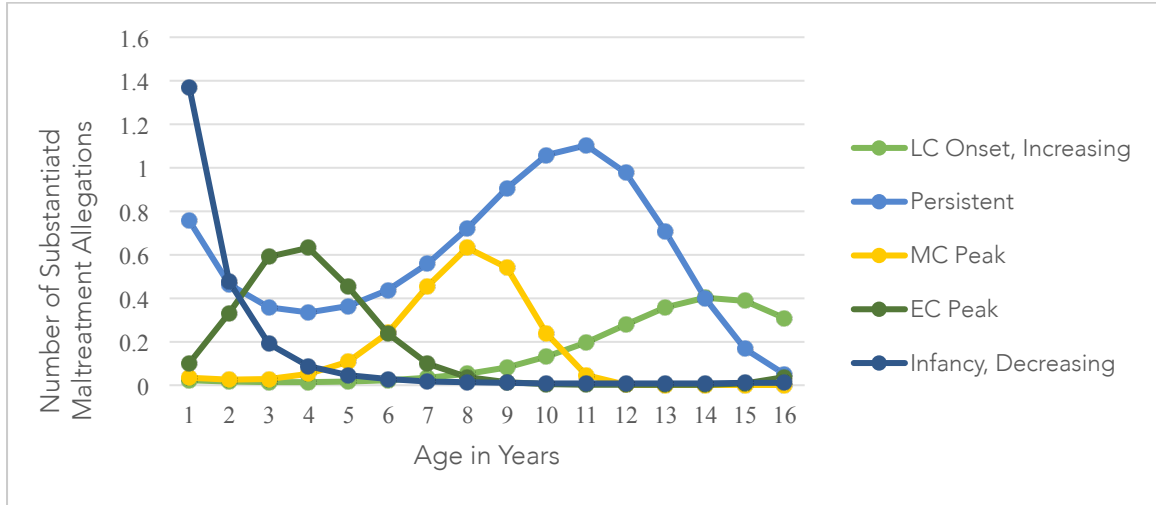
<sup>1</sup> Herz, D., & Ryan, J.P. (2008). *Building multisystem approaches in child welfare and juvenile justice*. Washington, DC: Center for Juvenile Justice Reform.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan, J. P., & Testa, M. F. (2005). Child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency: Investigating the role of placement and placement instability. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 227–249.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, C. A., & Thornberry, T. P. (1995). The relationship between childhood maltreatment and adolescent involvement in delinquency. *Criminology*, 33, 451-481.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, A., Livingston, M., & Dennison, S. (2008). Transitions and turning points: Examining the links between child maltreatment and juvenile offending. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32, 51–66.

## Child Welfare Involvement Trajectories



Timing of maltreatment distinguishes these five trajectories, which are depicted in the Figure above, along with the crossover rate for each. The **Late Childhood Onset** group crossed over at a significantly higher rate than the **Middle Childhood Peak**, **Early Childhood Peak**, and **Infancy Decreasing** groups. The **Persistent** group was the most likely to cross over. Although this group was the smallest, accounting for only 5.5% of the sample, the crossover rate was 30.8%. This suggests that, although timing of maltreatment is of consequence, it does not have a uniform effect. This finding matters because it suggests that the outcome of crossing over can result from varied experiences and timing. We know that interventions are best designed with characteristics and timing in mind, and these findings can inform future efforts.

**Child Welfare Trajectory Group, Size and Crossover Rate**

Trajectory Group	% of Sample	Crossover Rate
<b>Late Childhood Onset</b>	25.0	22.3
<b>Persistent</b>	5.5	30.8
<b>Middle Childhood Peak</b>	23.1	14.4
<b>Early Childhood Peak</b>	25.2	13.7
<b>Infancy, Decreasing</b>	21.2	12.0

### Next Steps

The partners are planning next steps for data analysis, including looking at how youth with “deep involvement” in child welfare become involved in juvenile justice compared to youth without a history of maltreatment. Additionally, efforts are being made to engage other systems that serve these youth, including mental health, education, and homeless supports. This information can be put to use in identifying youth at increased risk of crossing over and developing prevention efforts. The ongoing work of this project aims to inform how systems can better coordinate with one another to better serve some of the most vulnerable youth in our state, and in the nation.

**For more information:** Please visit the CARHD website at <http://appliedresearch.uconn.edu/> or e-mail [UConnCARHD@gmail.com](mailto:UConnCARHD@gmail.com)