

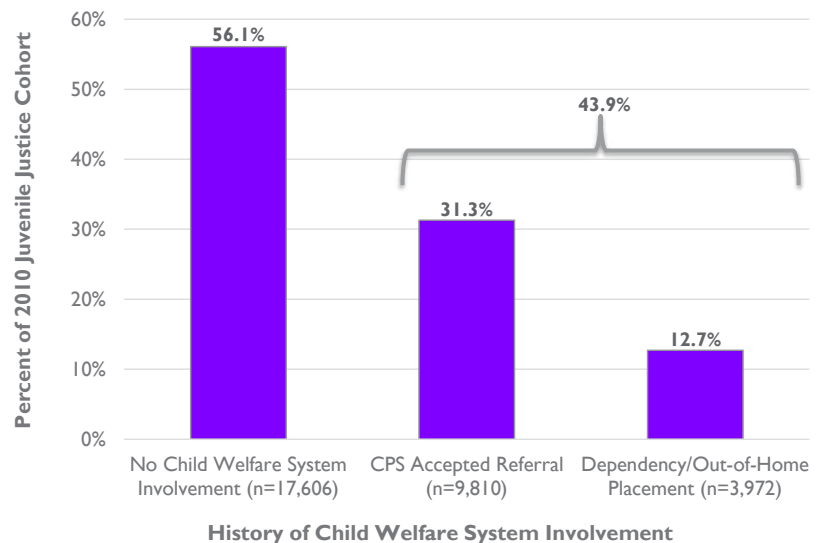
Overview

The Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) released its preliminary state-wide report on multi-system involved youth in 2014¹. Multi-system youth are broadly defined as children who have experience in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Prior research has identified multi-system youth as at higher risk for negative outcomes than their peers who are only involved with one system, including an increased rate of juvenile offender recidivism, a greater need for mental health treatment, and reduced educational success². While multi-system youth may be at higher risk for negative outcomes, additional research is necessary to enhance our understanding of the particular needs of this population within Washington State. The initial WSCCR multi-system prevalence report found that in Washington State, 43.9% of all youth referred to juvenile court in 2010 had a record of previous child welfare system involvement³ (Figure 1). All youth referred to juvenile court includes referrals on offender matters, as well as those petitioned as non-offenders through Truancy, At-Risk Youth (ARY) or Child in Need of Services (CHINS) (collectively known as Becca petitions⁴). The previous study also found that in Washington State, females and minority youth with a history of child welfare system involvement have a greater likelihood of subsequent referral to the juvenile justice system. The current report builds upon this initial state-wide analysis of multi-system prevalence and presents analysis by individual court. This approach sets the stage for an examination of how local system characteristics, programs and policies may contribute to varying regional rates of multi-system involvement.

Methods

This second report in a series on multi-system youth in Washington State seeks to further our understanding of the 2010 cohort of youth who were referred to the juvenile justice system, and identifies the jurisdiction where each youth was referred to juvenile court in 2010. A youth may be referred⁵ to court by more than one jurisdiction, yet for the purpose of this study, a youth's "home" court is determined by the location of the youth's initial offender

Figure 1. Percent of 2010 Juvenile Justice Involved Youth with a History of Child Welfare System Involvement⁶



1 Funding from the Federal Court Improvement Program helps support this research. The initial report can be found at http://www.courts.wa.gov/wscrr/docs/MultiSystemYouthInWA_Final.pdf

2 Pecora, P.J., Jensen, P.S., Romanelli, L.H., Jackson, L.J., & Ortiz, A. (2009). Mental health services for children placed in foster care: An overview of current challenges. *Child Welfare, 88*(1), 5-26.

3 "Previous child welfare system involvement" indicates the youth was previously reported to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration for alleged abuse and/or neglect or placed for any period of time in out-of-home care. The report or placement could have occurred at any age.

4 See RCW 28A.225 and RCW 13.32A for more detailed information on the Washington State Compulsory School Attendance and Admission Laws and the Family Reconciliation Act.

5 "Referred to the juvenile justice system" indicates the youth was referred to court on an offender matter or through a Becca petition. This does not automatically indicate that a case has been filed, nor does it imply the outcome of the case. All cases including those with an outcome of deferred, diverted, dismissed, or guilty are included in this study. Becca petitions include: At-Risk Youth (ARY), Child In Need Of Services (CHINS), and Truancy.

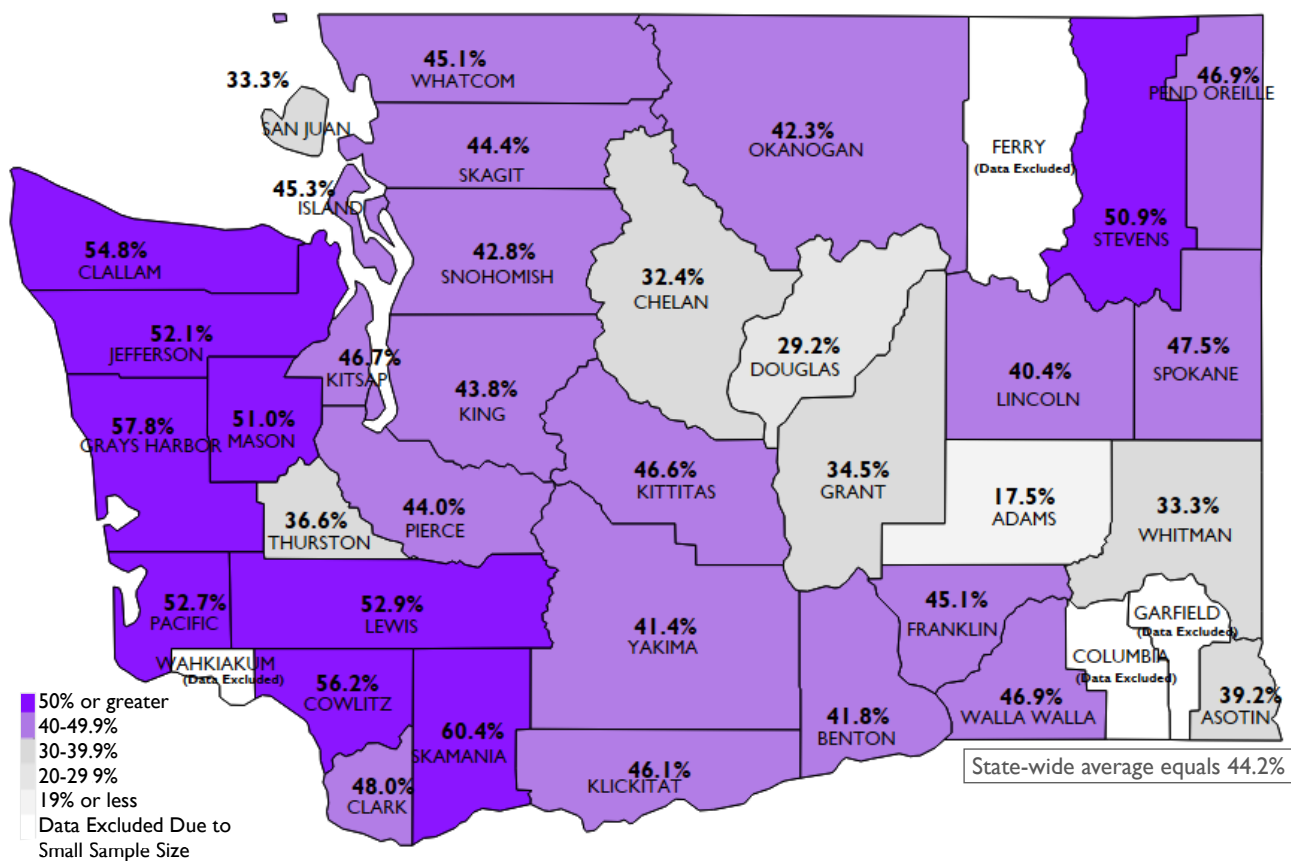
6 Youth are only assigned to their highest level of child welfare system involvement.

referral or Becca petition in calendar year 2010. Courts with fewer than 40 youth in their 2010 juvenile justice population have been excluded from the county-level analyses. Note that the youth's child welfare contact may have occurred in a jurisdiction that differs from the location of their offender referral or Becca petition, and at this time, data is limited to child welfare-related events that occur within Washington State. In this series of reports, for a youth⁷ to be considered child welfare system involved, the youth will have experienced, at minimum, a referral to Child Protective Services (CPS) that was accepted for investigation⁸. While a referral to CPS is the minimum criteria for youth to be considered as having involvement with Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration, this data also includes youth with a higher level of system involvement, such as those who have been removed from their home and/or progressed through the formal dependency court case process⁹.

Findings

Figure 1 presents rates by county, of multi-system prevalence for the full cohort of youth who entered the juvenile justice system in 2010. This cohort of 31,388 youth includes those who were referred to juvenile court through either offender matters or Becca petitions. The cohort is comprised of 21,684 youth who experienced at least one offender referral, and 9,704 youth who experienced only a Becca petition¹⁰. The state-wide multi-system prevalence for youth with an offender referral in 2010 was found to be 44.2% (Figure 2). The state-wide multi-system prevalence for youth with only a Becca petition in 2010 was found to be 43.4% (Figure 3). The 21,684 youth with an offender referral is inclusive of the 3,025 youth who experienced both an offender referral and a Becca petition in 2010. When looking exclusively at the 3,025 youth with both an offender referral and a Becca petition in 2010, the rate of multi-system prevalence increases to 55.1%.

Figure 2. Youth with an Offender Referral in 2010 with Prior Child Welfare System Involvement



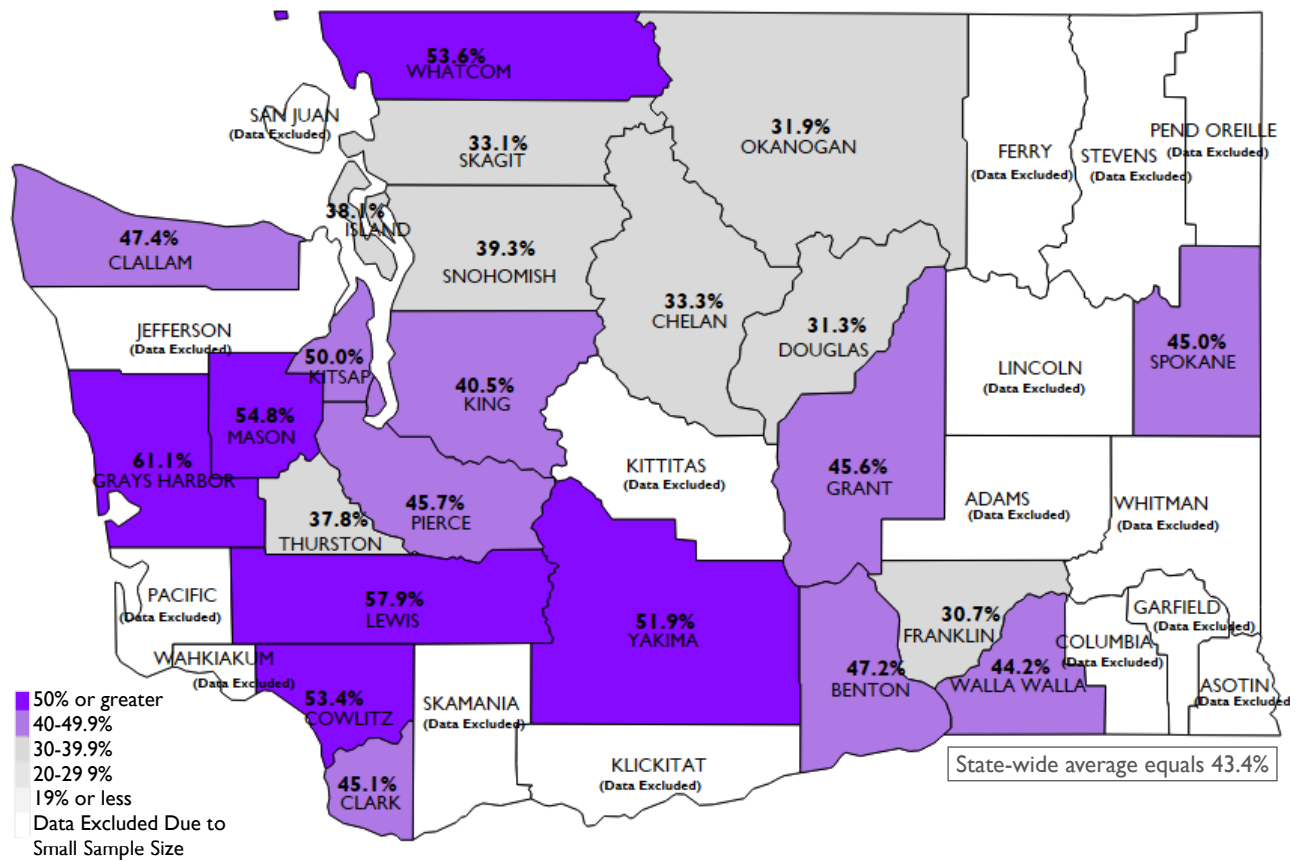
7 Youth above the age of 8 and under the age of 18 at time of referral to juvenile court in 2010 are included in this study.

8 A referral to CPS that was accepted for investigation does not mean the child was abused or neglected. If the referral was investigated and found to be true, it would meet the legal definition of abuse or neglect.

9 Current data limitations prohibit the determination of dates of active Children's Administration involvement, and it is unknown if the case remained active at the time of referral to the juvenile justice system.

10 The 2010 Annual Published Caseload Report from the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts documents 14,481 Becca petitions filed in the 2010 calendar year. The separation in the number of individuals with Becca petitions versus the number of Becca petitions filed is due to some youth experiencing more than one petition in 2010.

Figure 3. Becca Petitioned Youth in 2010 with Prior Child Welfare System Involvement



Disaggregating the data to the individual court level for youth with an offender referral in 2010 demonstrates a range of multi-system prevalence across Washington State, from a low of 17.5% in Adams County, to a high of 60.4% in Skamania County. Figure 2 demonstrates that higher rates of multi-system involvement (50.0% or greater) were found to occur in the western most area of the state. Moderate rates of multi-system involvement (40.0%-49.9%) were concentrated along the northern stretch of the I-5 corridor, and in the south-central portion of Washington State. The lowest rates for multi-system prevalence (17.5%-39.2%) were found to occur in the more central jurisdictions.

Findings from the study of county-level multi-system prevalence for youth with an offender referral in 2010 identify two outliers that are of particular interest. Thurston County falls within the lowest third of counties for rate of multi-system prevalence, and is one of the only courts with a lower rate that is bounded by counties with either moderate or high rates of multi-system involvement. Clark County is another location of interest, as it was found to have a moderate rate,

yet is surrounded by courts that were found to have a higher rate of multi-system prevalence. Figure 3 depicts only those youth who were juvenile court-involved in 2010 through a Becca petition (Truancy, At-Risk Youth, or Child in Need of Services). This map does not include youth with both offender matters and a Becca petition in 2010. Regional trends for rates of multi-system involvement for youth with a Becca petition are similar to the findings for youth with an offender referral in 2010, with a concentration of higher rates of multi-system prevalence found to occur in the most western jurisdictions, and lower rates found to occur in the more central jurisdictions.

Of interest are those courts found to have a much higher rate of multi-system prevalence for offender youth than for their cohort of Becca-petitioned youth (Skagit, Okanogan, and Franklin Counties). And on the other hand, two courts were found to have a higher rate of multi-system prevalence for Becca petitioned youth than for youth with an offender referral (Grant and Yakima Counties).

It is evident from this study that the rate of multi-system involvement varies across Washington State, yet this is only the first step in a process

of identifying indicators that may impact regional variation. The following list of factors may contribute to the variation in rates of multi-system involvement:

- This analysis only identifies child welfare system involvement that was initiated prior to the youth's referral to the juvenile justice system. It is possible that additional youth will be referred to the child welfare system after their referral to juvenile court, in particular those youth who first came into contact with the juvenile justice system at a young age. A future analysis of youth with the trajectory of juvenile justice contact prior to child welfare system involvement could demonstrate variations in jurisdictional prevalence for multi-system youth.
- Local programs and policies may impact the likelihood that a court files a Becca petition (Truancy, At-Risk Youth, Child in Need of Services). Prevention and intervention programs may impact the potential for a youth with child welfare system involvement to enter the juvenile justice system through a Becca petition.
- Variation in prevention and intervention programs that serve youth and families who are at risk of entering the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system may impact the probability of a youth entering one, or both, systems.

Next Steps

The goal of this report is to expand upon our knowledge of patterns of system involvement, and provide more detail on how often vulnerable populations come into contact with systems that have the opportunity to provide prevention and intervention services.

The question of what causes variations in multi-system prevalence must be explored through partnerships between agencies that come into contact with high-risk youth and families. A next step in this effort is to develop an inventory of available interventions for youth who are at risk of becoming, or are currently, multi-system involved. As demonstrated by the level of multi-system prevalence in Washington State, multiple agencies have often served the same clients. In order to improve our ability to assist youth and their families who are multi-system involved, we must increase our knowledge of how each system responds to the needs of their clients. A comprehensive inventory of services should include interventions offered through the courts, DSHS Children's Administration, other DSHS mental health and substance abuse services, and the educational system. Through the tracking of outcomes for multi-system youth, and the cultivation of our understanding for how each system responds to the needs of its clients, agencies can improve their ability to collaboratively provide timely, appropriate, and effective services.

Through funds provided by the Court Improvement Program, WSCCR will continue to explore trends in multi-system involvement. Upcoming reports will:

1. Provide detail for the type of offender referrals experienced by multi-system youth,
2. Provide educational outcomes for this high-risk population of youth, and
3. Provide a more focused analysis of multi-system prevalence across race, ethnicity, gender, and age of youth.

Recommended Citation

Pickard, C. (2015) Multi-System Youth in Washington State: Prevalence by Jurisdiction. Olympia, WA: Washington State Center for Court Research, Administrative Office of the Courts.