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“Parental Substance Use on Infant Foster Care Entries and Parental Outcomes in New Orleans”

Parents with substance use disorders (SUDs) have stifling effects on family dynamics. Children who are removed because of parental substance use disorders spend more time in foster care and are less likely to reunify with their parents as compared to children removed for other reasons [1]. In addition, research has observed increases in substance use and drug overdoses in the United States since the emergence of COVID-19, with a sharper increase in Louisiana. Such findings shed light on substance use prevalence in the greater New Orleans area. However, little research has been conducted to explore the consequences of these compounding effects on foster care permanency outcomes in the community.

This project analyzed parental substance use trends and their effects on family outcomes to gain insight into barriers on the length and rate of parent-child reunification for families fighting substance use disorders in the Greater New Orleans Area. This project also investigated COVID-19's impact on the pre-existing opioid epidemic in the community by analyzing SUDs foster care entries. We predicted that children with parents fighting substance use disorders would spend more time in foster care and would have lower parental reunification rates. We also hypothesized an increase in SUD foster care entry during the COVID-19 pandemic. To test this hypothesis, 274 families working with child protective services and the Louisiana State University (LSU) Infant Team between 1999- 2023 were examined. A hypothesis test, trend analysis, survival analysis, and multivariate statistical analysis were conducted to estimate the relationship between substance use prevalence and involvement in the child welfare system. In addition, 164 families working with child protective services and the LSU Infant Team between 2017-2023 were analyzed. A chi-square test was used to evaluate COVID-19's impact on SUDs foster care entry rates in the greater New Orleans area.

Analysis showed no significant difference in case length between mothers with SUDs and mothers without SUDs. There was no significant difference in SUDs foster care entry before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, mothers with substance use disorders showed lower rates of reunification with their children, and their children had higher rates of adoption by non-relatives as compared to children of mothers without SUDs. These results demonstrate new demands on child welfare and suggest more resources and support for families suffering from substance use to aid in recovery and family reunification. Additionally, the LSU infant team works with a subset of families entering the child welfare system. Further analysis should be completed to include DCFS's entire database for a more coherent representation of the New Orleans Greater Area.