

Summary of Findings from the ALCANLink Project

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Contents

Introduction	2
Recent Analysis Results.....	2
Lifetime Incidence:.....	2
Change in Household Stress Load:.....	3
Education:	3
Peer Reviewed Publications.....	3
Time to Event:.....	3
Intimate Partner Violence:.....	4
OCS Trajectories:.....	4
Risk/Protective Factors:.....	4
Risk Factors for Child Maltreatment:.....	5
Risk/Protective Factor Predictors:	5
Risk/Protective Factor Outcomes:.....	6
Adverse Childhood Experiences (by age 3):.....	6
Other Publications	6
Dispelling Myths of Child Sexual Abuse among Indigenous People White Paper (PDF)	6
Child Abuse by Rural and Urban Alaskan Communities Analysis Brief (PDF).....	7
Dispelling Myths of Child Abuse among Indigenous People Analysis Brief (PDF)	7
Citations	7



Introduction

The ALCANLink project started with a group of Alaskan children whose mothers responded to the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) survey over a three-year period shortly after the children were born. Every year, project analysts check to see whether any of the children have been reported to child welfare or receive services from other public programs. As the children get older, we are able to calculate the percentage of children in each age group who have ever been involved with child welfare during their lifetime (“cumulative incidence”).

Using these data, we are able to explore information on pre-birth factors from their mothers’ PRAMS responses that increase or decrease the chance a child is reported to child welfare, as well as the early childhood family context of Adverse Childhood Experiences. This work has provided clear evidence for the need for early and continued efforts to prevent child maltreatment before birth and throughout childhood.

Recent Analysis Results

Highlighted below are preliminary results from ongoing analyses using the PRAMS survey data.

Lifetime Incidence:

1. Among children born in Alaska, before their 10th birthday:
 - 39% (± 4) experienced at least one report of alleged harm to OCS.
 - 32% (± 3) experienced at least one report of alleged harm to the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) that was screened in for evaluation.
 - 13% (± 2) experienced at least one report of alleged harm to OCS that was screened in for evaluation, and substantiated.
 - 7% (± 1) experienced at least one report of alleged harm to OCS that was screened in for evaluation and substantiated.
2. National comparisons of the cumulative incidence are not available. However,
 - a. After accounting for differences in population structure (race composition), relative to California, children born in Alaska have a 10% increased risk in being reported for maltreatment.
 - i. This adjusted relative increase appears to be in part due to an elevated risk detected among the Alaskan Asian/Pacific Islander group compared to California’s.
 - b. A recent study¹ used a synthetic cohort study design to estimate the cumulative incidence of investigated maltreatment in the U.S. These researchers estimated that by age 10, ~27% of children born in the U.S. will experience at least one investigated report of alleged harm and ~9% substantiated.



- c. Based on rough comparison to all children born in the U.S., those born in Alaska may be ~15%, and ~44% more likely to experience an investigated report of harm and confirmed report, respectively, by their 10th birthday.

Change in Household Stress Load:

1. The more household dysfunction components a mother reports during pre-birth and early childhood increases risk of OCS contact.
2. When the number of household dysfunction components decreases from pre-birth to early childhood, it is protective against OCS contact.
3. Certain high risk household dysfunction components, such as homelessness, tend to cluster together with other dysfunction components.
4. Among low-risk families, increasing the household stress load significantly increases the risk of a birth child being reported to OCS. However, among high-risk families, while adding additional stressors has little impact, reducing them significantly reduces the risk of future OCS contact.

Education:

64% of children born in Alaska scored Below/Far Below Progressing (BP/FBP) on the 3rd grade reading (PEAKS) assessment

1. Living in a rural setting (78% vs 56%), being born to mother with <12 years education (86% vs 60%) and born to a teen mom (79% vs 60%) all significantly increase the probability of poor reading performance.
2. Children born to mothers reporting Marijuana use during pregnancy are 1.3 times as likely to score BP/FBP on the 3rd grade PEAKS reading assessment.
 - a. Poor Maternal mental health and Maternal intimate partner violence (IPV) also increase the probability of poor reading performance.
3. 90% of children born to mothers who experienced homelessness before and/or during pregnancy scored BP/FBP on the 3rd grade PEAKS assessment.
4. Three-quarters of children born to mothers reporting they couldn't pay bills during the 12 months before birth scored BP/FBP on the 3rd grade PEAKS assessment.
5. Children born to mothers on Medicaid are 56% more likely to have scored BP/FBP on the 3rd grade PEAKS assessment compared to those born to mothers not on Medicaid.

Peer Reviewed Publications

Time to Event:

Austin AE, Parrish JW, Shanahan ME. Using time-to-event analysis to identify preconception and prenatal predictors of child protective services contact. Child abuse & neglect. 2018 Aug 31;82:83–91.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.05.025>



1. The average age of first OCS contact is 2 years old.
2. Significant predictors include: low socioeconomic status, maternal smoking during pregnancy, unmarried mother, urban residence, lower maternal education, maternal experience of intimate partner violence, Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) race, greater number of living children, greater number of stressful life events, and younger maternal age at childbirth.
3. Incidence of OCS contact is higher in Alaska than in other states.

Intimate Partner Violence:

Parrish JW, Lanier P, Newby-Kew A, Arvidson J, Shanahan M. Maternal intimate partner violence victimization before and during pregnancy and postbirth child welfare contact: a population-based assessment. *Child maltreatment*. 2016 Feb;21(1):26–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559515616704>

1. Children born to mothers reporting pre-birth IPV are nearly five times as likely to have OCS contact by age 2 compared with children born to women who don't report pre-birth IPV.
2. The protective effects of graduating high school are lost when a mother reports pre-birth IPV.
3. Regardless of race, age, marital status, or prenatal substance use, pre-birth IPV is a strong predictor of future OCS contact.

OCS Trajectories:

Austin AE, Gottfredson NC, Zolotor AJ, Halpern CT, Marshall SW, Naumann RB, Shanahan ME. Trajectories of child protective services contact among Alaska Native/American Indian and non-Native children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 2019 Sep 1;95:104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104044>

1. Native children experience: low/no OCS contact (75%), continuous OCS contact (20%), or early and decreasing OCS contact (5%).
2. Non-native children experience: no OCS contact (81%), low and increasing OCS contact (10%), early and rapidly declining OCS contact (6%), and high, decreasing OCS contact (3%).
3. Among both AN/AI and non-Native children, maternal substance use during pregnancy was the strongest predictor of AN/AI child membership in the continuous OCS contact class and non-Native child membership in the low increasing OCS contact class.

Risk/Protective Factors:

Austin AE, Gottfredson NC, Marshall SW, Halpern CT, Zolotor AJ, Parrish JW, Shanahan ME. Heterogeneity in Risk and Protection Among Alaska Native/American



Indian and Non-Native Children. *Prevention Science*. 2020; 21(1):86–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-019-01052-y>

1. We identified two groups among AN/AI children:
 - a. A high risk/moderate protection (29.1%) group
 - i. Risks include low socioeconomic status, maternal depression, parental incarceration, intimate partner violence, and OCS contact
 - ii. Protective factors include: regular father figure involvement, reading by parents, family meals
 - b. A low socioeconomic status/high protection (70.9%) group
 - i. Risk factors include: low socioeconomic status
 - ii. Protective factors include: regular father figure involvement, reading by parents, family meals, and interactions with peers
2. We identified two groups among non-Native children:
 - a. A moderate risk/high protection (32.9%) group
 - i. Risk factors include: low socioeconomic status, maternal depression
 - ii. Protective factors include: regular father figure involvement, reading by parents, family meals, and interactions with peers
 - b. A low risk/high protection (67.1%) group
 - i. No risk factors
 - ii. Protective factors include: regular father figure involvement, reading by parents, family meals, and interactions with peers

Risk Factors for Child Maltreatment:

Parrish JW, Young MB, Perham-Hester KA, Gessner BD. Identifying risk factors for child maltreatment in Alaska: A population-based approach. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2011 Jun 1;40(6):666–73.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2011.02.022>

1. Risk factors included: young maternal age, low maternal education, maternal experience of domestic violence and sexual assault, unmarried, maternal substance abuse, 2+ children, medically vulnerable, on public aid, and Alaska Native
2. These risk factors have an additive effect on risk of OCS contact

Risk/Protective Factor Predictors:

Austin AE, Gottfredson NC, Zolotor AJ, Halpern CT, Marshall SW, Parrish JW, Shanahan ME. Preconception and Prenatal Predictors of Early Experiences of Risk and Protection Among Alaska Children. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*. 2020; 24(1):82–89.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-019-02823-3>

1. Among AN/AI children, predictors of membership in the high risk, moderate protections cluster included: maternal partner and financial stress, education <12 years, and substance use



2. Among non-AN/AI children, predictors of membership in the moderate risk, moderate protections cluster included: maternal partner stress, education <12 years, substance use, younger age at childbirth, and a greater number of children

Risk/Protective Factor Outcomes:

Austin AE, Gottfredson NC, Marshall SW, Halpern CT, Zolotor AJ, Parrish JW, Shanahan ME. Patterns of Risk and Protective Factors Among Alaska Children and Differential Associations with Indicators of Maternal and Child Wellbeing. Child Development. 2020 (published first online).

<https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cdev.13356>

1. Among AN/AI children, children in the high risk, moderate protections cluster were more likely to have developmental risk, and their mothers were less likely to feel comfortable asking for help or to know where to go for parenting information.
2. Among non-AN/AI children, children in the moderate risk, moderate protections cluster were more likely to have developmental risk, and their mothers were less likely to feel comfortable asking for help.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (by age 3):

Rittman D, Parrish JW, Lanier, P. Prebirth Household Challenges to Predict Adverse Childhood Experiences Score by Age 3. Pediatrics. 2020;146(5):e20201303.

<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-1303>

1. By age 3, nearly 1 in 4 children born in Alaska will experience at least 2 ACEs.
2. There was a stepwise association between number of household dysfunction stressors and risk of higher ACE score.
3. On average, reporting 4+ pre-birth household dysfunction components was associated with an ACE score over 4 times that of those reporting 0 components.
4. Homelessness was associated with the greatest increase in ACE score (RR=3.0).

Other Publications

[Dispelling Myths of Child Sexual Abuse among Indigenous People White Paper \(PDF\)](#)

1. The relationship between being Indigenous and OCS contact for sexual abuse is attenuated by 60% when adjusting for modifiable and other risk factors.
2. Maternal substance use during pregnancy is the biggest attenuating factor in the relationship, and maternal Medicaid coverage was the second biggest attenuating factor.
3. Maternal Native status becomes insignificant in predicting OCS sexual abuse reports when adjusting for modifiable risk factors.



[Child Abuse by Rural and Urban Alaskan Communities Analysis Brief \(PDF\)](#)

1. The relationship between being born in a rural community and OCS contact for physical abuse is attenuated by 54% when adjusting for pre-birth risk factors.
2. The relationship between rural community status and OCS contact for sexual abuse is attenuated by 52% when adjusting for pre-birth risk factors.
3. Maternal substance abuse during pregnancy and economic challenges were the primary drivers of physical and sexual abuse disparities among children living in rural communities compared to those in urban environments.
4. After accounting for the above two factors, living in a rural community transitions from a risk to a protective factor against physical abuse.

[Dispelling Myths of Child Abuse among Indigenous People Analysis Brief \(PDF\)](#)

1. The relationship between Alaska Native/American Indian status and OCS contact is attenuated by 62% for child physical abuse and 60% for child sexual abuse when adjusting for social and behavioral risk factors.
2. Many of the risk factors, such as maternal substance use during pregnancy, are likely broader indicators of underlying factors that disproportionately burden the AN/AI population (e.g., intergenerational trauma, violence, and other social determinants of health).

Citations

1. Kim H, Wildeman C, Jonson-Reid M, Drake B. Lifetime Prevalence of Investigating Child Maltreatment Among US Children. *Am J Public Health*. 2017 Feb;107(2):274-280. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2016.303545. Epub 2016 Dec 20. PMID: 27997240; PMCID: PMC5227926.

