

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY: Analysis of 2013 Cohort Utah Division of Child and Family Services

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INTRODUCTION

With the passing of the Intergenerational Poverty Mitigation Act in its 2012 General Session, the Utah Legislature identified the reduction of intergenerational poverty, or “...poverty in which two or more successive generations of a family continue in the cycle of poverty and government dependence (1),” as a significant priority for the state of Utah. In 2015 the Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission created by this Act released through the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) “Utah’s Plan for a Stronger Future,” a five- and ten-year plan to address intergenerational poverty within the state of Utah. This report incorporated data from multiple cooperating governmental agencies in order to better understand the challenges faced by those in poverty and to improve outcomes in multiple focus areas (2).

To assist in this initiative, Utah’s Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) provides this analysis of client data provided by DWS. This data, based on records of those who participated in certain governmental assistance programs in Calendar Year 2012, includes three cohorts, two experiencing intergenerational poverty (IGP) and one comparison group not experiencing IGP, which will be referenced frequently throughout this document:

- The IGP Adults cohort consists of adults who received at least one month of public assistance in 2012, and who have received at least twelve months of public assistance both as an adult and as a child.
- The IGP Kids cohort consists of children who received at least one month of qualifying public assistance in 2012, and for whom a parent or parents are in the IGP Adults cohort for 2012.
- The Comparison cohort, intended as a reference group to the IGP Adults cohort, consists of adults who received public assistance as children but have received fewer than twelve months of public assistance as an adult. This group can be argued to not be experiencing intergenerational poverty.

For 2019, member agencies providing data have been asked to expand and self-direct their analysis beyond the routine data provided in previous years. To this end the client data provided by DWS has been matched within the data system used by DCFS, and analysis performed to better understand how

the experience of IGP individuals within the child welfare system differs from that of Utahns on the whole, and the differences between adults who are and are not experiencing IGP (as measured by receipt of public assistance) within the dataset. We will begin with a demographic analysis of the cohorts, including victimization and perpetration data from DCFS. We will then test CPS referral-level data against two theories from child welfare research, which will be discussed in more detail in their respective sections.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Table 1
Study Clients Matched in DCFS Data System

Cohort	Client Count	Matched (DCFS)	Matched (DCFS Client)	Matched (Supported Victim)	Matched (Supported Perpetrator)	Matched (Foster Child)	Matched (Foster Provider)
IGP Adults	30,503	25,776 84.5%	23,116 75.8%	8,883 29.1%	10,472 34.3%	2,818 9.2%	1,672 5.5%
IGP Kids	44,261	31,725 71.7%	28,968 65.4%	16,843 38.1%	635 1.4%	4,566 10.3%	313 0.7%
Comparison	18,784	9,477 50.5%	7,444 39.6%	1,406 7.5%	2,805 14.9%	396 2.1%	406 2.2%
Total	93,548	66,978 71.6%	59,528 63.6%	27,132 29.0%	13,912 14.9%	7,780 8.3%	2,391 2.6%

Out of all clients receiving certain public assistance (Table 1), about 72% could be matched in DCFS’s data system. About 64% were matched as DCFS clients; these may have been served in relation to Child Protective Services (CPS) cases or foster cases, or as child or adult clients receiving in-home or other services. The two IGP cohorts were matched as clients at far higher rates, with 76% of the adults and 65% of the children having been clients, and only 40% of the comparison, non-IGP cohort having been clients. The IGP cohorts were also far more likely to have been confirmed by CPS investigation as a victim of child abuse or neglect as children, and to be or have been foster children. The IGP Adults cohort was more than twice as likely as the Comparison cohort to have been supported as a perpetrator of child abuse or neglect by CPS investigation, 34% to 15%. A small number of individuals in the IGP Kids cohort were also supported as perpetrators of child abuse or neglect, either as children or after aging out of the cohort at the age of 18.

The IGP Adults cohort was more than twice as likely as the Comparison, non-IGP cohort to have one measure of active participation in the DCFS system: About 6% were registered in the system as current or former foster providers.

Table 2
IGP Kids Cohort Race and Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Count	%	Utah**	%	Cohort proportion to state proportion (as a multiple)
Alaska Native / American Indian	864	2.7%	8,078	0.9%	3.03x
Asian	112	0.4%	13,464	1.5%	0.24x
Black	797	2.5%	9,873	1.1%	2.28x
Hispanic (of any race)*	6,722	21.2%	152,590	17.0%	1.25x
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	430	1.4%	8,976	1.0%	1.36x
Two or more races	570	1.8%	28,723	3.2%	0.56x
Missing data	3,327	10.5%			
White	18,903	59.6%	674,988	75.2%	0.79x
Total	31,725		897,590		

* All other races exclude children of Hispanic origin.

** Computed from 2013 American Community Survey estimates, US Census Bureau. Census estimates are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent, so group totals add up to slightly less than state population.

The ethnicity distribution of those matched within the IGP Kids cohort (Table 2) suggests that individuals with certain minority statuses are at greater risk of experiencing poverty (and are overrepresented in the child welfare system, most of those matched being clients). Because the IGP Kids cohort was calculated as of December 31, 2012, US Census data from Calendar Year 2013 was selected for Utah estimates.

While only a minority of any individual racial or ethnic population statewide was represented in the IGP cohorts (or was involved in the child welfare system), children identified as having Alaska Native / American Indian ancestry made up 2.7% of the IGP Kids cohort but 0.9% of the state population, a multiple of 3.03 to 1 as indicated. Black children were represented at a rate of 2.28 to 1. No other groups were represented at a higher rate than 1.5 to 1 from the cohort to the population, with Hispanic children of any race and Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander children somewhat overrepresented, and children recorded as White or Multiracial somewhat underrepresented. Asian children were the most underrepresented in the cohort of those who could be matched, with the proportion in the poverty cohort being less than a fourth of that in the Utah population.

Please note one limitation of this data: the US Census has no category for “Unknown” race/ethnicity, so nearly 11% of children in the IGP Kids cohort who could be matched but had no ethnicity data recorded by DCFS could not be categorized for ethnicity. This means that some groups may be represented at a higher rate than recorded in this data.

Table 3
All Cohorts By Sex, Percentage

Cohort	Male	Female	Unknown**
IGP Kids	51.0%	49.0%	0.03%
Utah Children, All*	51.3%	48.7%	
IGP Adults	30.4%	69.5%	0.05%
Comparison	50.4%	49.4%	0.20%

* American FactFinder, 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

** US Census is a binary for this question and catalogues assigned sex only, while "Unknown" for SAFE matches represents unknown data, not a recorded response.

The sex distribution between the cohorts reveals a high representation of women in the IGP Adults cohort, and relative balance in the other cohorts. Women as a group are more likely to face poverty (3), as are single mothers (4), a group likely to be well-represented in this dataset as mothers apply to family-centered public assistance programs on behalf of them and their children.

Table 4
IGP Kids Alleged and Supported Victim Rate, Compared to that of Utah Children*

Fiscal Year (FFY)	Alleged victims per 1,000, Utah**	Alleged victims per 1,000, IGP Kids Cohort	Cohort rate to state rate (multiplier)	Supported victims per 1,000, Utah**	Supported victims per 1,000, IGP Kids Cohort	Cohort rate to state rate (multiplier)
FFY2013	27.3	167.9	6.1x	10.4	71.8	6.9x
FFY2014	27.9	165.6	5.9x	10.9	65.4	6.0x
FFY2015	28.0	157.3	5.6x	10.5	58.4	5.6x
FFY2016	27.2	147.2	5.4x	10.5	57.5	5.5x
FFY2017	27.8	147.7	5.3x	10.7	59.6	5.6x

* Based on date of received referral alleging child maltreatment.

** As reported by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) based on State-submitted data.

Children in the IGP Kids cohort were far more likely than Utah children in general to be either alleged or supported (through CPS investigation) as victims of child abuse or neglect. These children were more likely to be referred as victims, and to be supported by investigation once referred.

REFERRAL ORIGINS AND IGP

Research has long interrogated poverty in child welfare settings and found that poverty is strongly correlated with the likelihood of child abuse and neglect internationally, for children with a wide range of characteristics (7). Poverty can create reliance on unstable social networks, expose parents to “severe and chronic stresses” which affect parenting capacity, and increase susceptibility to mental illness and substance dependencies, which increase the likelihood of both perceived and actual child maltreatment (6).

Here we test one related theory using DCFS data: That poor families’ higher rates of reported maltreatment may be partly explained by one factor related to poverty: their involvement in government services. Families experiencing poverty may, as a result of poverty, be more visible to professionals required to report abuse or neglect (6).

Table 5
Most Common Referral Sources, FFY2013 - FFY2017

Referral Source	Count (IGP Kids Cohort)		Count (State)	
	Count	%	Count	%
Law Enforcement	3,689	18.5%	20,448	19.2%
Family	2,709	13.6%	13,077	12.2%
School	2,704	13.6%	13,669	12.8%
Other [as recorded by DCFS]	1,953	9.8%	8,620	8.1%
Other Social Agency	1,312	6.6%	7,985	7.5%
Md/ Nurse/Hospital Staff	1,289	6.5%	9,802	9.2%
Neighbor	987	5.0%	3,993	3.7%
Relative	893	4.5%	3,589	3.4%
DCFS	858	4.3%	4,323	4.0%
Custodial Parent	598	3.0%	4,010	3.8%
Mental Health/Psych Hospital	591	3.0%	4,173	3.9%
Friend	569	2.9%	2,558	2.4%
Non-Custodial Parent/Spouse	535	2.7%	2,568	2.4%
All Others	1,201	6.0%	7,952	7.5%
Total	19,888	100%	106,767	100%

Table 6
Referrals by Referral Source Setting, FFY2013 - FFY2017

Cohort	% of Referrals Received from a Formal Environment	% of Referrals Received from a Service Setting
IGP Kids Cohort (n=19,888)	57.81%	22.67%
State (n=106,767)	62.58%	27.60%

Table 5 details the most frequent referral sources for the IGP Kids cohort and for children in the State of Utah. As all Utahns are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect, these categories were refined in Table 6 to examine the relative distribution of referrals from “formal environments” in which mandatory reporting laws are likely to be understood and formally implemented (such as schools and social agencies), and referrals received from “service settings” involving the receipt of public services, particularly those associated with poverty:

The IGP Kids cohort was relatively *less* likely than Utah children in general to have been referred to Child Protective Services as an inferred consequence of service involvement, and from formal “mandatory reporting” environments in general.

ALLEGATION GROUPINGS AND IGP

Some interpretations of child neglect are broad enough to encompass poverty in themselves. While most would agree with a definition of neglect as “the concept that one or more of the child’s basic needs... are not being met and as a result the child suffers harm or is at risk of harm,” such a definition is similar to common definitions of poverty, resulting in difficulty determining whether a child has been subjected to harm by caregivers, or merely to a harmful environment caregivers do not have the resources to leave (5). While courts in the United States do not generally allow for family separations due to poverty alone, facts used to justify a separation may still be primarily manifestations of poverty itself (5, 6).

Table 7
Referrals by Allegation Grouping, FFY2013 - FFY2017

Allegation Category	IGP Kids Cohort (%)*	State (%)*
Child Endangerment	62.6%	44.7%
Physical Abuse	31.6%	33.5%
Other Neglect	24.3%	17.9%
Domestic Violence Related Child Abuse	22.4%	19.2%
Physical Neglect	21.4%	16.8%
Sexual Abuse	21.2%	27.2%
Non-Supervision	14.7%	12.5%
Emotional Abuse	10.4%	11.7%
Other Abuse	1.3%	1.6%
Dependency	1.3%	1.5%
Medical Neglect	0.5%	0.5%
Fetal Exposure to alcohol or other substance use	0.3%	2.9%
NULL	0.0%	0.0%
Total Referrals	19,888	106,767

* Percentages are calculated as a proportion of totals referrals received. Because one referral can have more than one allegation, each column will add up to more than 100%.

The practice guidelines followed by Utah’s DCFS explicitly define neglect as “an action or inaction that causes harm or threatened harm (8),” and do not introduce this ambiguity. However, difficulty in evaluating neglect in poverty settings may persist. While a higher relative proportion of neglect-related allegations for the IGP Kids cohort would not in itself indicate that these children were not victims of neglect or that various factors make poor families more likely to be identified when maltreatment occurs, such a trend would warrant deeper study.

Referrals related to children in the IGP Kids cohort were more likely than Utah referrals in general to include one or more neglect-related allegations (Table 7), which includes Non-Supervision. These referrals were relatively less likely to allege many prominent forms of abuse (including Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse, and Other Abuse), and relatively more likely to allege some other forms of abuse (such as Domestic Violence Related Child Abuse or Child Endangerment, the latter of which was once classified as a form of neglect by DCFS but has since been classified as a form of abuse).

Next we examined the proportion of referrals between the IGP cohort and the state of Utah which were supported by CPS investigation for both neglect and non-neglect maltreatment, for either, or for neither. If children in poverty were more likely to be alleged victims of neglect for poverty-adjacent reasons and then supported as victims on this or some other criteria, a case could be made for poverty exposing families to scrutiny and child welfare interventions that others don’t face.

Table 8
Supported Referral Allegations by Neglect and Non-Neglect, FFY2013 - FFY2017

IGP Kids Cohort	Non-neglect allegation supported			State	Non-neglect allegation supported		
	Y	N			Y	N	
Neglect allegation supported	Y	4.5%	3.0%	Neglect allegation supported	Y	3.0%	2.1%
	N	25.2%	67.3%*		N	27.4%	67.5%

* Includes referrals rejected for CPS investigation, and referrals accepted for investigation leading to no supported findings

Investigation outcomes show that an individual referral within the IGP Kids cohort was only slightly more likely to be supported by CPS investigation. A referral within the cohort was somewhat more likely to be supported on allegations of neglect than for Utah children in general, and somewhat less likely to be supported for non-neglect allegations while not being supported for neglect.

As covered previously, an individual child in the IGP Kids cohort was more likely than Utah children in general to be supported as a victim once reported, and to a greater extent than the difference shown here. However, this appears to be largely a consequence of CPS referrals for the cohort having a higher average count of alleged victims per case than the state average.

CONCLUSION

An examination of Utahns experiencing intergenerational poverty reveals demographics traditionally identified as at risk for poverty in general. IGP cohorts were more likely to be involved in the child welfare system in multiple areas—as alleged and supported victims, as alleged and supported perpetrators, as clients for other services and even as foster providers serving the system.

Evidence was found against the hypothesis that the higher CPS involvement of the IGP Kids cohort is a result of their exposure to mandatory reporters while receiving public services, though this does not rule out this occurring in individual cases. The IGP Kids cohort was overrepresented among neglect allegation types (and relatively underrepresented among many abuse subtypes), which may warrant further research into whether neglect related to some Utah children in poverty ties more into the material circumstances of poverty than to caregiver maltreatment. While individual alleged victims in the IGP Kids cohort were more likely to be supported as victims once reported due to more alleged victims per case, individual referrals for this population were about as likely to be supported as referrals statewide.

Given that IGP demographics mirror those traditionally identified as at risk for poverty, we suggest that public interventions and supports intended to address poverty itself, and to control for its consequences in the lives of those who experience it, will also be effective at addressing intergenerational poverty. Indeed, given that nearly half of Americans raised in the poorest income quintile remain in that quintile as adults (9), the problem of IGP is strongly linked to the problem of poverty itself. In future years, we hope that deeper study of clients' entry into and movement through social services across multiple departments and divisions will highlight actions most effective at preventing intergenerational poverty and its related costs both personal and public.

SOURCES

- 1) Intergenerational Poverty Mitigation Act, Utah Code 35A-9-102.
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- 2) Utah Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission. (2015). *Utah's Plan for a Stronger Future*.
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- 8) Utah's Division of Child and Family Services. (2019). Definitions, Practice Guidelines (Section 200). <https://www.powerdms.com/public/UTAHDHS/documents/275074>
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