

Trends in the removal of Aboriginal children in Western Australia.

Benjamin Harrap¹, Alison Gibberd¹, Melissa O'Donnell², Koen Simons¹, and Sandra Eades¹

¹The University of Melbourne

²University of South Australia

Objectives

To understand in greater detail the rates of interaction Indigenous children have with the child protection system in Western Australia and how they vary by birth year, geographic region, and between family units.

Approach

We used data linkage between the Western Australian Department of Communities (child protection data), the Midwives Notification System, and Deaths Registry. Our cohort consisted of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children born in Western Australia between 2000 and 2013, with child protection data available from 2000 to 2015. We used cumulative incidence curves to visualise the overall rates of interactions with the child protection system and decompose interactions using seven two-year birth cohorts, geographic child protection regions and family units.

Results

Overall, the cohort there was a high level involvement of Indigenous children in the child protection system, with over 50% having at least one notification, 27% having a substantiated notification, and 15% ever having a placement in out-of-home care. When examining by birth cohort, the more recently born the birth cohort the earlier their first interactions with the child protection system tended to be. Results for the geographic and family unit analyses will be presented as this work is ongoing.

Conclusions

Increasing interactions occurring at earlier ages coincides with legislative and policy changes. The increase in placement in out-of-home care before the age of 1 for the most recently born cohorts warrants further investigation into whether this is occurring across the system or within particular communities or regions.

