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Thinking Matters Symposium

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## Child Welfare Service Worker's Perspective of the Juvenile Justice System

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# Child Welfare Perception of the Juvenile Justice System

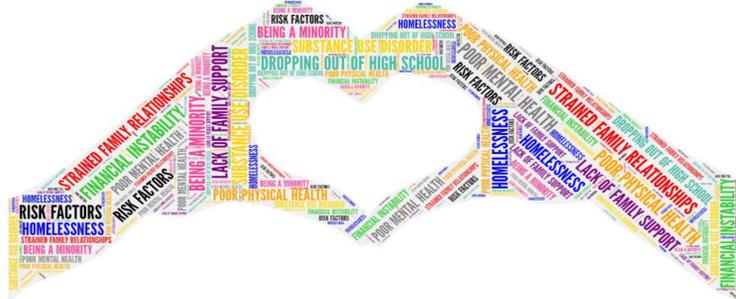
Valorie Antone, Alexander Comeau, Zoe Donovan, & Kathryn Whitehead, University of Southern Maine Faculty Advisor: Assistant Professor Rachel Casey, PhD.

## Abstract

Prior literature indicates youth who have had adverse childhood events or are diagnosed with a mental illness are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system (Chappard & Maggard, 2020). While research has been performed to involve juvenile justice workers and juveniles that have been involved in the system, there has been little involvement by the child welfare workers who have followed the trajectory of the youth from the beginning of involvement. This study investigates the perceptions of child welfare workers regarding youth involvement in the criminal justice system, addressing a current gap in the literature. In terms of recruitment, a post will be disseminated to multiple child-welfare related groups on Facebook, with the goal of voluntary participation. We will be collecting our data via an original questionnaire of 76 items, comprised of both multiple choice and open-ended questions, administered through Qualtrics. We hypothesize that participants will attach the most importance to factors that fall under Maslow's lowest level of basic needs, and that these factors will be identified as the most important risk factors associated with youth involvement in the foster care and Juvenile Justice System.

## Introduction

Prior literature regarding predecessors to juvenile justice involvement indicates youth who have had adverse childhood events and/or are diagnosed with a mental illness (Chappard & Maggard, 2020). While research has been performed to involve juvenile justice workers and juveniles that have been involved in the system, there has been little involvement by the workers who have followed the trajectory of the youth from the beginning of involvement. This information would be helpful to all providers that may become involved with youth that experience mental illness and involvement with child welfare services so assist with providing the most effective treatment to the individual in attempts to avoid juvenile justice involvement.



Word cloud of Participant Responses to Open-Ended Questions about risk factors

## Methods

- Mixed methods questionnaire created via Qualtrics and distributed via the social media platform, Facebook and sent to Facebook groups specifically for social workers.
- Analyzed data collected regarding youth risk and protective factors
- Quantitative data transferred to Statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis
- The survey included 41 Likert scale questions that ranged from 'Extremely important' to 'Not important at all', 3 demographic questions, 16 nominal questions, and 13 open-ended questions for a total of 73 questions.
- The measurement tool of the Likert Scale was designed with Maslow's hierarchy of needs in mind to focus on the basic needs of individuals and the role that plays in the emotional stability of youth.

## References

Chappell, A. T., & Maggard, S. R. (2020). The Impact of Victimization, Mental Health Problems, and Disabilities on Juvenile Justice Processing: Does Gender Matter? *Crime & Delinquency*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720950024>

Protective Factors:	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important at all
Having a place to live	69.2%	23.6%	4.9%	1.0%	.2%
Having Access to food	72.0%	21.9%	4.9%	1.0%	.2%
Having a positive role model	51.8%	35.5%	8.5%	3.2%	1.0%
A child's ability to form prosocial peer relationships	33.8%	47%	14.4%	4.4%	.2%
Living in a safe and stable community	33.1%	39.4%	23.1%	4.1%	.2%
Living with one or more biological parents	8.3%	26.3%	44.5%	15.6%	4.9%
Having established set of coping skills	46.7%	42.8%	8.0%	2.4%	0%
Involvement in extracurricular activities	11.4%	31.1%	41.8%	11.4%	4.1%
Financial stability	15.6%	38.7%	38.7%	6.6%	.2%

Table 1: Response Frequencies for Protective Factors (N=411)

Types of Abuse:	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important at all
Having experienced or witnessed domestic violence	38.1%	45.7%	14.2%	2.0%	0%
Having experienced emotional abuse	40.4%	45.3%	11.2%	2.2%	.2%
Having experienced sexual abuse	58.6%	29.9%	9.0%	1.9%	0%

Table 2: Response Frequencies for Risk Factors (N=411)

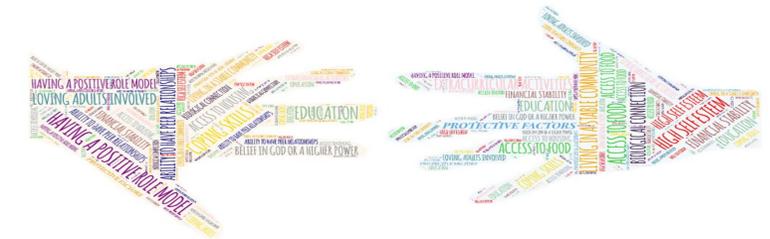
Risk Factors:	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important at all
Having a parent or guardian with a substance use disorder	40.6%	44%	12.4%	2.2%	.5%
Current Homelessness	46%	31.9%	18.5%	2.9%	.5%
Having one or more family members with poor physical health	6.3%	20.7%	42.1%	26.8%	3.9%
Having strained relationships with immediate family members	19.7%	41.1%	28.5%	9.5%	1.0%
The youth's family being unable to access welfare benefits	21.7%	34.5%	30.7%	10.2%	2.2%
Dropping out of high school	35.8%	35.0%	20.4%	5.6%	2.7%
A youth experiencing poor mental health	50.6%	37.5%	9.7%	1.7%	0%
Being Identified as a minority	16.5%	35.8%	30.9%	9.7%	6.6%

Table 3: Types of Abuse This chart indicates that children who are abused, physically, emotionally, or sexually, were more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. (N=411)

**Question**  
"How do child welfare workers perceive youth criminal justice involvement?"

Our supplementary research questions include:

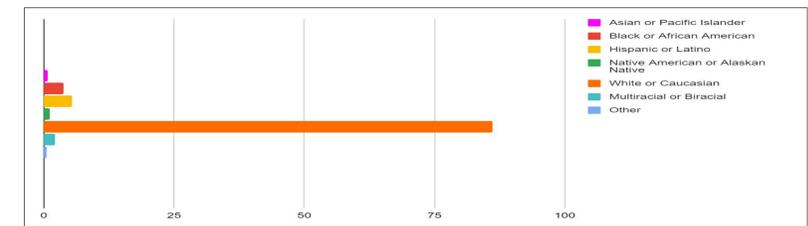
- What do child welfare workers identify as risk factors and protective factors for youth criminal justice involvement?
- How do child welfare workers perceive the potential impact of criminal justice involvement on youth behavior?



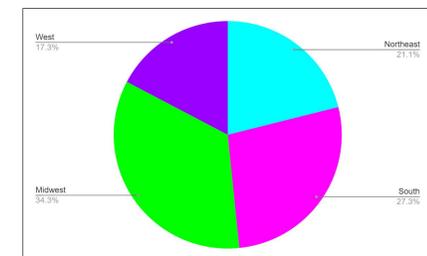
Word cloud of Participant Responses to Open-Ended Question about Protective Factors (N=411)

## Discussion/Next Steps

- The research study findings help to elaborate on the lack of prior findings by researchers, regarding risk and protective factors leading to youth criminal justice system involvement.
- The perceptions of child welfare workers are studied in order to fill a gap in previous literature.
- This study supports the hypothesis that risk and protective factors perceived by child welfare workers will align with the base level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.
  - Significant importance was placed on protective factors that fulfilled a child's physiological needs, while also attaching importance to a child's safety and security in terms of risk factors.
- A lack of diversity in study sample may be a limitation in terms of how respondents viewed the effects of race and gender.
- Future research should expand on the demographics of respondents as well to further address how perceived risk and protective factors can be addressed and prevented.
- Another limitation was the ability to ask questions to responses that were confusing such as the increase of social workers who thought their client deserved to be in the justice system.



Bar graph indicates race of participants. (N=411)



Pie Graph of the location of participants in the United States. (N=370)

## Acknowledgements

A special thank you to our classmates, professors (especially Dr. Rachel Casey), and friends at the University of Southern Maine.

Also, thank you to the subjects that participated in our study, all 411 of you!