

Investigating Racial Disparities Among Missing/Runaway Youth on a National Scale

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Overview

The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) has collaboratively overseen and housed several national data collection efforts aimed at better understanding child maltreatment in the United States (US). In particular, two datasets are central to the key goals of this GRACA proposal. First, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is a federally mandated data collection effort that includes all children covered by the protections of Title IV-B/E of the Social Security Act (Section 427). This project would utilize AFCARS reporting years 2010-2019 to understand system-involved youth who have been reported as missing or runaway. Second, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)—alternatively referred to as the “child file”—is a voluntary data collection effort that comprises child-specific data on child maltreatment in the US. As of 2018, all States voluntarily reported to the child file. This project would utilize reporting years 2010-2018 (2019 data has not been released yet). Importantly, these datasets can be linked through unique identification IDs that will give us a complete picture of prior maltreatment, system-involvement, and differences among race/ethnicities. Given the lack of prior research investigating racial disparities in system-involved youth who have been reported as missing/runaway, linking these datasets would provide answers to a host of novel research questions. For these reasons, the goals of my proposed GRACA application is to: (1) merge NCANDS and AFCARS datasets for reporting years 2010-2018 to explore the intersection between system-involvement, missingness/runaway status, and prior maltreatment, (2) explore potential reasons for missingness/runaway status (e.g., trafficking), and (3) contextualize these relationships in terms of their differences across race/ethnicity.

Background

When children are caught in unsafe, abusive, or neglectful living conditions, it becomes the important job of the State to provide safe living accommodations and resources to those minors—namely through the foster care system¹. Unfortunately, a portion of these youth who are experiencing maltreatment and subsequent system-involvement are in the system as being “missing” or “runaways”². In fact, runaway children comprise the largest segment of missing children in the US³. Furthermore, prior research has demonstrated that there are racial disparities

¹ Pears, K. C., Fisher, P. A., Kim, H. K., Bruce, J., Healey, C. V., & Yoerger, K. (2013). Immediate effects of a school readiness intervention for children in foster care. *Early Education & Development*, 24(6), 771–791. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2013.736037>

² Kim, M. J., Tajima, E. A., Herrenkohl, T. I., & Huang, B. (2009). Early Child Maltreatment, Runaway Youths, and Risk of Delinquency and Victimization in Adolescence: A Mediation Model. *Social Work Research*, 33(1), 19–28. doi:10.1093/swr/33.1.19

³ Hammer H, Finkelhor D, Sedlak AJ. *Runaway/Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; 2002. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/196469.pdf>.

among youth who experience maltreatment⁴ in addition to subsequent foster care involvement^{5,6}. Indigenous populations, for instance, report having children removed from the home by the foster care system at disproportionate rates⁷. Most recently, in a report released per the Legislative Bill 154⁸ a disproportionate number of missing persons were Indigenous children—especially boys—and many were thought to have runaway⁹. Additionally, among Nebraska’s reported missing persons, it was found that those who identified as Black—in addition to Native American—were disproportionately more likely to be “missing”¹⁰. It is important to note that, in any instance of missingness or runaway status, this indicates that the State does not know where the minor is, meaning they are presumably without capable guardianship. Subsequently, children who fit into this category are at increased risk of trauma, suicide and depression, substance abuse, and crime victimization such as sex trafficking¹¹.

This proposal would build upon my work with Drs. Tara Richards and Emily Wright (UNO SCCJ) regarding missing Native American persons in Nebraska. As part of this work, we used AFCARS reporting periods 2010-2019 to identify types of maltreatment and foster care placements for system-involved children and youth in Nebraska. In our preliminary analyses, we found significant racial disproportionalities that warrant examination on a national scale. In the project proposed here, I intend to use the linked, longitudinal data from NCAND and AFCARS to explore novel research questions related to racial disparities among system-involved youth who have been reported as missing or have run away from placement.

Methodology

For this project, I will complete three primary tasks: (1) connect the NCANDS (2010-2018) and AFCARS datasets (2010-2019) to explore the intersection of system-involvement, missingness/runaway status, and prior maltreatment, (2) attend the 2021 Summer Research Institute (SRI) hosted by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect to better understand how to effectively use these datasets, and (3) complete an analyses of these national data to assess racial disparities.

⁴ Kim, H., & Drake, B. (2018). Child maltreatment risk as a function of poverty and race/ethnicity in the USA. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 47(3), 780–787. doi:10.1093/ije/dyx280

⁵ Woods, S. & Summers, A. (2016). Technical assistance bulletin: Disproportionality rates for children of color in foster care: Fiscal Year 2014. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

⁶Putnam-Hornstein, E., Needell, B., King, B., & Johnson-Motoyama, M. (2013). Racial and ethnic disparities: A population-based examination of risk factors for involvement with child protective services. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37(1), 33-46.

⁷ Woods, S. & Summers, A. (2016). *Technical assistance bulletin: Disproportionality rates for children of color in foster care: Fiscal Year 2014*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

⁸ Legislative Bill 154 mandated a study be conducted investigating missing Native American women and children in Nebraska.

⁹ Sutter, M., gaiashkibos, J., Shafer, S., Weidner, E., Richards, T.N., Wright, E., & Nystrom, A. (2020). *LB 154 Report: Prevalence of Missing and Murdered Women and Children in Nebraska; Barriers to Reporting and Investigating; and Opportunities for Partnerships*. Submitted to the Nebraska Legislature, May 21, 2020.

¹⁰ Sutter, M., gaiashkibos, J., Shafer, S., Weidner, E., Richards, T.N., Wright, E., & Nystrom, A. (2020). *LB 154 Report: Prevalence of Missing and Murdered Women and Children in Nebraska; Barriers to Reporting and Investigating; and Opportunities for Partnerships*. Submitted to the Nebraska Legislature, May 21, 2020.

¹¹ Yates, G. L., MacKenzie, R., Pennbridge, J., & Cohen, E. (1988). A risk profile comparison of runaway and non-runaway youth. *American Journal of Public Health*, 78(7), 820–821. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.78.7.820>

Projected Timeline

Spring 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Complete NCAND applications requesting access to AFCARS and NCANDS datasets from 2010-2018.- Begin cleaning, coding, and organizing the data.- A writeup of the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology of a manuscript.
Summer 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Attend the 2021 Summer Research Institute (SRI) hosted by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect- Begin advanced data analysis- A writeup of Findings for a manuscript.
Fall 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A writeup of Discussion & finalizing the manuscript & submitting it for publication.- Prepare presentation for the UNO Student Research and Creative Activity Fair.
Spring 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Present findings at the UNO Student Research and Creative Activity Fair.

Student/Faculty Mentor Roles

As the student, I will take the lead on requesting the necessary AFCARDS and NCANDS datasets from the NCAND, cleaning and preparing the data, and data analysis. I will also take the lead in drafting the manuscript. Additionally, I will represent Dr. Richards and myself at the 2021 Summer Research Institute (SRI) hosted by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. Attending this research training will be vital to understanding how best to utilize these linked datasets. I will also develop the presentation for the UNO SRCAF. Dr. Richards will review, comment/revise, and approve of each of the tasks throughout. She will also be on-hand to assist with the data analysis and interpretations of findings in real time as needed.

Budget Justification

This would allow me to focus solely on this project between May-July, in addition to the first two weeks of August, in pursuit of the timely completion of this project. Additionally, IBM SPSS Statistics licensing will be required for data management and analysis.

Budget Item	Description	Cost
Summer Stipend	This stipend will cover the cost of living over the summer (May-August 2021). This project is estimated at 200 hours for completion.	\$4,700
Materials and Supplies	The student will use funds to purchase statistical software used to analyze data (STATA, SPSS) and materials associated with printing the poster.	\$300
Total Request		\$5,000

January 11, 2021

Dear GRACA application committee:

Please accept this letter of support for Caralin Branscum's application for a Graduate Research and Creative Activity Application (GRACA) to support her research efforts during 2021/2022. Caralin is a talented doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and currently serves as one of my research assistants in the Victimology and Victim Studies Research Lab.

This proposal builds upon on-going work by myself and Dr. Emily Wright (UNO SCCJ) regarding missing and murdered Native American women and children in Nebraska. As part of this work, we used AFCARS data to identify whether Native American children and youth are disproportionately engaged in the foster care system, their experiences with different types of maltreatment, and their likelihood to go missing or run away from their system placement. Our preliminary analyses found significant disparities among Native American youth in Nebraska that warrant attention using national data. While these proposed analyses go beyond the scope of the project co-led by myself and Dr. Wright, this will be a fantastic opportunity for Caralin to take the lead on her own project.

I would be pleased to continue to supervise and mentor Caralin in this research during the 2021 and 2022 academic years. I have the time and resources to supervise her and serve as a mentor/collaborator on the data cleaning and preparation, data analysis, manuscript development, and presentation. Caralin is incredibly capable and will excel in this research leadership role. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance on this matter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tara N. Richards