

A Comparative Study of Older-Youth Families and Younger-
Youth Families in Placement Prevention and Reunification
Cases, Using Traditional Child Protection Services Measures
and NCFAS and NCFAS-R Assessment Data

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Executive Summary

This study compares the experiences of older youths (ages 12–17) and younger youths (ages 0–11) receiving placement prevention or reunification services from two service programs using Intensive Family Preservation Service models to achieve permanency for the youths and their families. Traditional CPS maltreatment codes, child welfare measures, and family assessment measures derived from the North Carolina Family Assessment Scales, as well as service outcomes relating to permanency comprise the data.

Although there are differences both across service types (placement prevention versus reunification) and age groups (younger versus older youths) that include race, gender, types of maltreatment, poverty, relationship with primary caregiver, and living arrangement at the close of services, there were no significant differences in the achievement of permanency. Both placement prevention and reunification outcomes were achieved at very high rates (88% for placement prevention of younger youths, and 92% placement prevention of older youths; 97% for reunification of younger youths, and 92% for reunification of older youths). Only the difference between service types for younger youths was significant.

Among the differences noted among the service types were that youths in the placement prevention sample were more likely to be male in the younger cohort and female in the older cohort; both older and younger youths were more likely to be White, although there was twice the likelihood of being Black as an older youth in the placement prevention sample; although relatively few in number (8%) there was a much higher probability of being adopted among older youths in the placement prevention sample; younger youths in the placement prevention sample were more likely to be living in poverty; older youths in the placement prevention sample were slightly more likely than younger youths to be living with relatives or guardians at the end of services.

Regarding child maltreatment, older youths among placement prevention cases were more likely than younger youths to be victims of physical and sexual abuse, and at risk for family violence; younger youths were more likely to be victims of neglect. Older youths were much more likely to exhibit behavior problems, be beyond parental control, exhibit school and delinquency problems (clearly age-dependent issues), and exhibit mental health issues, including substance use. Among the reunification sample, the maltreatment and other issues proportions are virtually the same as for the placement prevention sample, with the exception of increased substance use among younger youths.

NCFAS and NCFAS-R data were very reliable for both samples, using Cronbach's Alpha as the measure of reliability. NCFAS and NCFAS-R ratings closely tracked maltreatment types and other agency concerns. Families with older youths were significantly more seriously rated on Family Interactions at Intake, but not at Closure. The same was true to an even greater degree for Child Well-Being, with the difference maintaining at Closure. Among the reunification sample, families with older youths were more seriously rated on Child Well-Being, and families with younger youths made more progress on Well-Being during the service period than did families with older youths. Possible reasons for these differences and lack of other differences are discussed in the body of the report.

These findings suggest that although the mechanisms of entry into care may vary as a function of age (and other demographics) and types of maltreatment, the IFPS service model appears to address the differences, reduce problem ratings on the NCFAS, and is successful at achieving high rates of permanency in accordance with the service plans.

Older Youth Study

Introduction

This report presents findings from an analysis of data from two states, for which the primary research questions focus on the description of families with older youth who receive placement prevention or reunification services that employ IFPS-type models, and comparing those families to families with young children receiving the same services in the same agencies (when those data are available). Throughout the study, “older youth” is defined as ages 12 through 17, inclusive. “Younger youth” is defined as 0 through 11 years, inclusive.

Data were provided by the Institute for Family Development in Washington State, and Philadelphia Youth Services in Pennsylvania. The data used for description and comparison include child welfare measures and indicators and North Carolina Family Assessment Scale (NCFAS) Scale ratings. It is important to note that the unit of analysis changes depending on the source and meaning of particular measures. For example, the NCFAS is a family functioning scale, and the family is the unit of analysis whenever NCFAS data are being presented. Conversely, the type of child maltreatment is a child-specific measure, and may change from child to child within the same family. Because the units of analysis are subject to change, so too are the “Ns” for various portions of the sample. There are many more youths than there are families.

Description of Study Samples

Placement Prevention Youth Sample

This section compares characteristics of older youths and younger youths in the placement prevention study sample. The unit of analysis is youths, not families. A total of 648 youths comprised the placement prevention sample. There were 468 younger youths (ages 0

through 11 years) representing 72% of the total placement prevention sample, and 180 older youths (ages 12 through 17 years) representing 28% of the study sample. There are some interesting differences between the younger and older youths in the sample. These differences are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of younger youths and older youths in the Placement Prevention cohort.

Variable	Younger Youths	Older Youths	Chi ² value	df	P-value
Age (mean)	4.5 years (sd=3.5)	14.3 years (sd=1.6)	-	-	-
Gender (% Male)	55% Male 45% Female	45% Male 55% Female	5.58	1	p < .05
Race*	66% White 10% Black	58% White 18% Black	19.56	5	p < .01
Poverty (TANF assistance)	54%	29%	20.76	1	p < .001
Child's relationship with primary caregiver	86% bio child 1% adopted child	75% bio child 8% adopted child	34.1	4	p < .001
Child living arrangement at case opening	86% bio/adoptive 3% other relative 4% guardianship 7% CPS system**	74% bio parent 11% other relative 7% guardianship 7% CPS system	19.2	3	p < .001
Child living arrangement at case closure	83% bio/adopt 6% relative 3% guardianship 8% CPS system**	73% bio parent 9% other relative 6% guardianship 11% CPS system	8.55	3	p < .05
Achievement of permanent plan	88%	92%	2.68	1	ns

* Other race categories included Asian, American Indian, multi-racial and Other

** Foster Care, Group Home, Detention, Psychiatric Placement, Emergency Shelter, Inpatient Tx

The mean age of the younger youths in the placement prevention cases was 4.5 years (sd=3.5 years). The mean age for the older youths was 14.3 years (sd=1.6). The data in Table 1 show that while the younger youths in the study were predominantly male (55%), older youths were predominantly female by the same proportion (55%). This difference is statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 5.58, df = 1, p < .05$). With respect to race, two thirds (66%) of younger youths were White, and 10% were Black, or African American. Although the older youths were also predominantly White (58%), the proportion of Blacks among older youths nearly doubled, from 10% to 18%. This difference is statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 19.56, df = 5, p < .01$). All other race categories were represented by very small numbers and the proportions did not change when examined as a function of youth age. There were no ethnic differences between the samples (e.g., Hispanic versus non-Hispanic). The majority of younger youths (54%) were from families receiving TANF, whereas only 29% of older youth families were receiving TANF.

Interesting differences also were found in relation to the youths' relationships with caregivers and their living arrangements at intake and closure. In 86% of cases in the placement prevention cohort, youths were the biological children of their primary caregivers, and only 1% were adopted. However, three quarters (75%) of older youths were the biological children of their primary caregivers, and 8% were adopted. This difference is significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 34.1, df = 4, p < .001$), and suggests that as adopted children transition into adolescence the dynamics of being adopted may affect child behavior and family interactions. The other three relationship categories (step child, grandchild, and guardianship) were represented by small numbers of youths and no differences were observed between younger and older youths.

An examination of youths' living arrangements also revealed significant differences across categories, but the proportions represented in the distributions were not unexpected, and

changed little as a function of whether examined at case opening or case closure. The large differences were accounted for by the proportion of youths living with their biological parents or other relatives. Eighty six percent of younger youths were living with their biological parents at the beginning of the placement prevention cases, compared to 74% of older youths. Only 3% of younger youths were living with other relatives, compared to 11% of older youths. This difference may be due to families of older youths having sought intra-familial relief from family stress prior to CPS involvement, or intra-familial placement may be a priority placement early in the CPS intervention. Guardianship accounted for 4% of younger and 7% of older youths, respectively, and 7% of all youths (older and younger) were living in a CPS placement at the time of case opening. The overall Chi^2 for the distribution of living arrangements is significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 19.2$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p < .001$), but virtually all of the table differences are accounted for by the differences between youths living with biological parents and those living with other relatives.

In the placement prevention cases there is very little change in the distribution of living arrangement proportions when examined at the time of case closure. This is a positive finding because the objective of placement prevention services is to stabilize the child's living arrangement within the family of origin. The number of younger youths living with biological or adoptive parents dropped from 86% to 83%, and for older youths the number dropped from 74% to 73%. All other categories increased or decreased by a few percentage points except for the number of older youths in CPS placements, which increased from 7% to 11%. Again, the overall Chi^2 for the distribution of living arrangements at closure was significant, but the numbers did not change much as a function of receipt of services ($\text{Chi}^2 = 8.55$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p < .05$).

On its face, the changes in living arrangements after having received services may appear to be small. However, most jurisdictions define "placement prevention" in relation to the CPS

system (i.e., out-of-home placement), so all other living arrangements (biological/adoptive parent, other relative, and court-approved guardianship) may qualify as “placement prevention”, depending on where the child is at the beginning of services. And, because these were placement prevention cases, the large majority of youths were living in situations at intake that met the requirements of court-approved permanency. Indeed, the serving agency’s permanent plan for each child was achieved in 88% of younger youth cases, and 92% of older youth cases. This small difference between younger youths and older youths is not significant, and suggests that the placement prevention services were equally effective for both older and younger youths (see subsequent discussions of types of maltreatment, as a function of youth age).

Reunification Youth Sample

This section compares characteristics of older youths and younger youths in the reunification study sample. The unit of analysis is youths, not families. A total of 185 youths comprised the reunification services sample. There were 147 younger youths (ages 0 through 11 years) representing 79% of the total reunification sample, and 38 older youths (ages 12 through 17 years) representing 21% of the reunification sample. The total number of older youths available for analysis is not large enough to permit confident generalization of findings, and some clear trends failed to reach statistical significance due to the small sample size, and concomitant reduced statistical power. However, the findings are quite interesting.

As was true for the placement prevention sample, there are some interesting trends suggesting differences between the younger and older youths in the sample. However, few of these trends attained statistical significance, in part due to the smaller sample size (only 38 older youths in the reunification sample) and concomitant lack of statistical power. These data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of younger youths and older youths in the Reunification cohort.

Variable	Younger Youths	Older Youths	Chi ² value	df	P-value
Age (mean)	4.8 years (sd=3.5)	14.4 years (sd=1.5)	-	-	-
Gender	49% Male 51% Female	40% Male 60% Female	1.17	1	ns
Race*	51% White 11% Black 18% Multi-racial	79% White 10% Black 3% Multi-racial	14.47	5	p < .05
Poverty (TANF assistance)	44%	32%	1.18	1	ns
Child' relationship with primary caregiver	97% bio child	90% bio child	2.72	4	ns
Child living arrangement at case opening	56% bio/adoptive 12% other relative 2% guardianship 31% CPS system**	58% bio parent 8% other relative 0% guardianship 34% CPS system	1.37	3	ns
Child living arrangement at case closure	93% bio/adopt 1% relative 4% guardianship 1% CPS system**	84% bio parent 5% other relative 3% guardianship 8% CPS system	7.33	3	ns (p = .06)
Achievement of permanent plan	97%	92%	2.22	1	ns

* Other race categories included Asian, American Indian, multi-racial and Other

** Foster Care, Group Home, Detention, Psychiatric Placement, Emergency Shelter, Inpatient Tx

The mean age of the younger youths in the placement prevention cases was 4.8 years (sd=3.5 years). The mean age for the older youths was 14.4 years (sd=1.5). These mean ages of the two groups are essentially identical to those for the placement prevention cases. For younger youths, gender was evenly split (49% male, 51% female), but for older youths the sample was predominantly female (60%), although the apparent change is not significant. Race of youths was also interestingly distributed, and is the one trend in the table of comparisons that is significant. For younger youths, the sample was 51% White, 11 % Black and 18% multi-racial. However, for older youths, the sample was 79% White, 10% Black and only 3% multi-racial, thus having far larger proportions of Whites and lower proportions of multi-racial youths than the younger youth sample. Although these differences are significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 14.47$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p < .05$), the small sample size requires cautious interpretation of the differences. All other race categories were represented by very small numbers and the proportions did not change when examined as a function of youth age. There were no ethnic differences between the samples (e.g., Hispanic versus non-Hispanic).

In the reunification sample 44% of younger youths were in families who were receiving TANF, compared to 32% of older youths. This difference is not significant.

In almost all cases, both the younger youths and older youths in the reunification sample were the biological children of their primary caregivers (97% for younger youths, 90% for older youths) with the other relationship categories representing very small numbers of youths. None of the differences was significant.

Because this cohort of youths represents the reunification sample, it is not surprising that large numbers of them were not living with their biological or adoptive parents. However, small majorities of both age categories (56% of younger youths, 58% of older youths) were living with

the biological or adoptive parent at the time of case opening. This finding indicates that “reunification” may be determined by the legal status of the child (i.e. being under placement authority) rather than the living arrangement of the child at the time that the serving agency receives the referral. Whatever definitional influences are at work, the distribution of those youths not living at home at the time of case opening were fairly evenly distributed across the remaining categories, regardless of the ages (younger youths/older youths) of the youths: 12% and 8%, respectively were living with other relatives; 2% and 0%, respectively were in guardianships; and 31% and 34%, respectively were in CPS placements.

Living arrangements at the time of case closure indicate large shifts away from the CPS system to biological/adoptive parents, indicating successful reunification. For younger youths, the proportion of youths living with biological/adoptive parents increased from 56% to 93%, and for older youths, the number increased from 58% to 84%. For older youths, 8% remained in the CPS system (versus 1% for younger youths) and 5% were living with other relatives (compared to 1% for younger youths). These data suggest that the reunification services were slightly more effective for younger youths in this study than for older youths, and the between-age group differences approached statistical significance ($\text{Chi}^2 = 7.33$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p = .06$; with a larger sample size a similar array of data would likely have attained significance).

The child serving agencies reported that there was a very high degree of achievement of the permanent plan specified for these cases. Fully 97% of the plans were achieved for the younger youths, and 92% were achieved for the older youths. The small between-group difference was not significant.

Summary Comparison of Demographics: Placement Prevention and Reunification Samples

There were no differences between the case types (placement prevention/reunification) with respect to the mean ages of the younger and older youth cohorts. Youths in the placement prevention sample were more likely to be male in the younger cohort and female in the older cohort; while both older and younger youths were more likely to be White, there was double the likelihood (10% to 18%) to be Black in the older youth cohort of the placement prevention; younger youths were likely to be living in poverty (as defined by receipt of TANF) whereas older youths were not, with this difference being more pronounced in the placement prevention cases; although youths in both age cohorts were likely to be the biological children of their primary caregivers, there was a much higher probability (1% to 8%) of being an adopted child in the older youth cohort among the placement prevention cases; although both age cohorts were likely to be living with their biological or adoptive parents at case opening and at case closure (remember, these are placement prevention cases) older youths were somewhat more likely to be living with other relatives or to be in guardianship in the placement prevention cases, particularly at case closure.

In the reunification sample, gender was evenly split among younger youths, but became predominantly female (60%) among older youths; although the majority of both age cohorts were White, there was a much higher likelihood among reunification cases of being multi-racial if younger, and White, if older; fewer reunification families were living in poverty than placement prevention cases, but the numbers were not smaller in the reunification cases (44% younger, 32% older); in reunification cases the youths were more likely to be the biological children of their caregivers than was true of the placement prevention cases; reunification statistics suggest that placement with other relatives and guardianship accounted for some

“reunifications” that did not achieve reunification with biological parents; and older youths were much more likely to remain in the CPS system (8%) at case closure than were younger youths (1%).

Achievement of the stated permanent plan occurred at very high rates (ranging from 88% to 97%) across both case types and both age cohorts.

Types of Maltreatment and Agency Concerns for Youths

The preceding section highlighted several differences among the age cohorts and case types relating to demographics. As well, it is legitimate to inquire about the types of child maltreatment that might be associated with different ages of youths and that might lead to different classification of case types. Data in this section indicate that there are indeed differences within and between case types and age cohorts with respect to types of maltreatment. Unfortunately the data are limited to categorical labels, as there is no severity of maltreatment or frequency of maltreatment data available that might also very legitimately influence case-type assignment.

Maltreatment and Agency Concerns: Placement Prevention Sample

Types of maltreatment included physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, family conflict, and “other.” These data are presented in Table 3. The data in the table clearly illustrate that for the placement prevention cases there are large and compelling differences between the younger and older age cohorts with respect to various types of child maltreatment.

Among the differences, older youths were more likely to be victims of physical abuse than younger youths (36% versus 26%, $\text{Chi}^2 = 6.6$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .01$); older youths were more than three times as likely to be victims of sexual abuse as younger youths (18% versus 5%; $\text{Chi}^2 =$

29.7, $df = 1$, $P < .001$); and younger youths were more likely to be victims of neglect than older youths, although the majority of both are cohorts were so victimized (83% younger, 67% older, $Chi^2 = 17.9$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Older youths were nearly twice as likely to

Table 3. Maltreatment risks of younger youths and older youths in the Placement Prevention cohort.

Type of Maltreatment	Younger Youths	Older Youths	Chi ² value	df	P-value
Physical Abuse	26%	36%	6.6	1	$p < .01$
Sexual Abuse	5%	18%	29.7	1	$p < .001$
Neglect	83%	67%	17.9	1	$p < .001$
Family Conflict	27%	51%	32.9	1	$p < .001$
Other	0%	13%	60.6	1	$p < .001$

be involved in family conflict as younger youths (51% versus 27%, respectively; $Chi^2 = 32.9$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Only older youths in the placement prevention cases were assigned “Other” as a maltreatment category, but at 13% of the total, this is a meaningful difference ($Chi^2 = 60.6$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

Some of these differences track the demographic data and developmental stages of children. For example, regardless of case type (placement prevention/reunification) younger youths were more likely to live in poverty than older youths, invoking the likelihood of poverty-related neglect. As children age and mature sexually, they are more likely to be victimized by sexual predators. As youths transition into adolescence they are more likely to challenge authority and rebel against family rules and structures, leading to family stress and conflict.

Agencies also expressed other concerns about youths, other than risks normally associated with their CPS mandates. Types of concerns identified by serving agencies included child behavior problems, being beyond parental control, delinquency, school problems, child-centered violence, inappropriate sexual behavior, developmental disability, mental health issues, suicidal attempt or ideation, medical illness, child-centered alcohol/other substance abuse, The concerns for youths in the Placement Prevention cohort are presented in Table 4.

In every case where there is a significant difference between the age cohorts, the older youths were significantly more likely to be exhibiting these concerns. Older youths were more than twice as likely to be exhibiting behavior problems (57% versus 26%; $\text{Chi}^2 = 55.6$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$); 2.5 times more likely to be beyond their parent's control (78% versus 29%; $\text{Chi}^2 = 124.9$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$); more likely to engage in delinquency (not detected in younger youths; $\text{Chi}^2 = 67.4$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$); four times as likely to have school-related problems (50% versus 12%; $\text{Chi}^2 = 104.3$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$); four times as likely to be violent towards others (11% versus 3%; $\text{Chi}^2 = 18.2$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$); much more likely to exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior (1% versus 7%; $\text{Chi}^2 = 23.4$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$); and from twice to four times more likely to exhibit mental health related problems (some of which were undetected among younger youths; $\text{Chi}^2 = 56.8$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$). Again, many of these concerns track developmental stages of youths, particularly where status variables enter (e.g., being of school age and attending school; developing sexually, being exposed to the allure of alcohol or other drugs). The importance of these concerns is that they require case services that focus increasingly on child-centered issues and behaviors for older youths, whereas the concerns are more likely to focus on parent-centered issues for younger youths. These concerns do not occur solely among older or younger youths, however, and affect youths across the arbitrary age groupings used in this study.

Table 4. Agency concerns about younger youths and older youths in the Placement Prevention cohort.

Type of Concern	Younger Youths	Older Youths	Chi ² value	df	P-value
Behavior Problems	26%	57%	55.6	1	p < .001
Behavior beyond parental control	29%	78%	124.9	1	p < .001
Delinquency	0%	16%	67.4	1	p < .001
School Problems	12%	50%	104.3	1	p < .001
Child-centered Violence	3%	11%	18.2	1	p < .001
Inappropriate Sexual Behavior	1%	7%	23.4	1	P < .001
Developmental Disability	11%	13%	.7	1	ns
Mental Health Issues	9%	32%	56.8	1	P < .001
Suicidal attempt or ideation	0%	9%	38.3	1	P < .001
Physical handicap or medical illness	6%	13%	8.2	1	P < .01
Child alcohol or substance abuse	0%	17%	80.6	1	P < .001

Maltreatment and Agency Concerns: Reunification Sample

Types of maltreatment for the reunification cohort are the same as for the placement prevention cohort: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, family conflict, and “other.” These data are presented in Table 5. It is interesting to note that the proportions of older and younger

youths victimized by various types of maltreatment are virtually the same for the reunification cases as for the placement prevention cases (even though some of the within-table differences are not significant, due to the loss of statistical power associated with the smaller sample sizes in the reunification cohort). In every case except family conflict, the cell proportions in the reunification table (Table 5) are within two or three percentage points of those in the placement prevention table (Table 3). With respect to family conflict, 15% more (66% total) of older youths are victims of family conflict. Also, no youths in either age cohort were assigned “Other” as a maltreatment type among the reunification cases. There is no known explanation for this variation.

Table 5. Maltreatment risks of younger youths and older youths in the Reunification cohort.

Type of Maltreatment	Younger Youths	Older Youths	Chi ² value	df	P-value
Physical Abuse	25%	34%	1.3	1	ns
Sexual Abuse	6%	21%	8.1	1	p < .01
Neglect	84%	71%	3.6	1	ns p = .06
Family Conflict	23%	66%	25.3	1	p < .001
Other	0%	0%	-	1	-

Agencies also expressed other concerns about youths, other than risks normally associated with their CPS mandates. Types of concerns identified by serving agencies included child behavior problems, being beyond parental control, delinquency, school problems, child-centered violence, inappropriate sexual behavior, developmental disability, mental health issues, suicidal attempt or ideation, medical illness, child-centered alcohol/other substance abuse, The concerns for youths in the Reunification sample are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Agency concerns about younger youths and older youths in the Reunification cohort.

Type of Concern	Younger Youths	Older Youths	Chi ² value	df	P-value
Behavior Problems	29%	63%	15.06	1	p < .001
Behavior beyond parental control	24%	82%	43.9	1	p < .001
Delinquency	1%	24%	31.2	1	p < .001
School Problems	14%	53%	27.1	1	p < .001
Child-centered Violence	4%	18%	9.5	1	p < .01
Inappropriate Sexual Behavior	3%	8%	1.5	1	ns
Developmental Disability	8%	8%	-	1	-
Mental Health Issues	8%	26%	10.6	1	P < .001
Suicidal attempt or ideation	1%	5%	4.0	1	P < .05
Physical handicap or medical illness	6%	3%	0.7	1	ns
Child alcohol or substance abuse	11%	21%	27.1	1	P < .001

Like CPS-specified types of maltreatment, the concerns expressed by service agencies for youths in the reunification cases are very similar to concerns identified for the placement prevention cases. With few exceptions, the proportions in every cell of the reunification table closely resemble those for placement prevention, varying only two or three percentage points. The exceptions are delinquency, child-centered violence, and child alcohol/substance abuse.

In the case of delinquency and child-centered violence, older youths in the reunification cases were more likely to exhibit these issues than younger youths in the reunification cases, and they were also more likely than their age-cohort in the placement prevention cases. In the case of alcohol/substance abuse, older youth in the reunification cases were slightly more likely than their age cohort in the placement prevention cases, but younger youths increased from 0% in the placement prevention cases to 11% in the reunification cases. This suggests that alcohol and substance use is viewed as very serious in younger youths and may have been associated with the younger youths removal decisions, therefore appearing as they did in the younger youths age cohort in the reunification cases.

Summary Comparison of Child Maltreatment and Other Concerns: Placement Prevention and Reunification Samples

The types of maltreatment cited by reporting agencies are very similar when placement prevention cases are compared to reunification cases. With two exceptions, the proportions in the tables associated with maltreatment data for the two case types vary only two or three percentage points. The exceptions are family conflict and “other.” Family conflict was a factor in about half of the older youth placement prevention cases, but two thirds (66%) of the older youth reunification cases. Regarding “other,” the 13% of older youth assigned this category in the placement prevention cases stands in stark contrast to the 0% assigned in the reunification cases. There is no parsimonious explanation for this difference.

NCFAS and NCFAS-R Assessment Data and Reliability

Scale Reliability Analysis

A central part of the study is the use of NCFAS Scale ratings for families in the various databases combined for analysis. It is necessary to have confidence in the Scale data prior to using it for descriptive or comparison purposes, so Cronbach's Alpha statistics were computed for each of the NCFAS domains, based upon group identification of the families. These data are presented in the tables that follow. The group affiliations are identified in the table titles.

It is important to know that Cronbach's Alpha is a reliability measure that reflects the internal consistency of the scale, based on the actual application of the scale by the workers providing the data, and when used with the families included in the study. It is not uncommon for different workers, with different amounts of training or experience, working with divergent client populations to produce varying Cronbach's Alphas. Therefore, Cronbach's Alpha should always be computed for the workers and families of record, to assure that internal consistency is maintained.

The Cronbach's Alpha statistic ranges from 0 to 1.0, with higher Alphas indicating higher levels of reliability. By convention, Alphas above 0.4 are considered acceptable for purposes of scale development, but Alphas above 0.7 are desirable for clinical application, and Alphas above 0.8 indicate very good scale properties in the constellations of workers/families/treatment programs constellation.

For the NCFAS (Table 7), all of the Cronbach's Alpha statistics are well above .7, and 60% are above .8, with the exception of Family Safety at Intake. That Alpha is .61, which is understandable given the elements of the Family Safety Domain applied to a family about which

little is known, and for which the information may be difficult to obtain. This interpretation is supported by the Alpha obtained on this domain, at Intake, for the reunification cases using the NCFAS-R. That Alpha is .838, very high, and reflects the increased amount of exposure that the assessing workers have had with the families by the time the reunification assessment occurs. Taken together, these factors suggest that the lower Alpha at Intake on the placement prevention cases is due to insufficient information gathering on the part of the assessing workers, rather than a scale deficiency.

Table 7. Cronbach’s Alpha statistics for all families (including older and younger youths) in the study whose case plan was “placement prevention.”

NCFAS Domain	N at Intake	Cronbach’s Alpha at Intake	N at Closure	Cronbach’s Alpha at Closure	Number of Scale Items
Environment	369	.890	362	.759	10
Parental Capabilities	368	.759	364	.867	7
Family Interactions	247	.784	234	.818	5
Family Safety	259	.607	250	.806	6
Child Well-Being	240	.870	222	.904	8

“N” of all families = 377. Therefore it appears that workers are not always using all domains of the NCFAS; or, not all NCFAS domain data are being entered into the database from which the study data were obtained.

On the NCFAS-R, used with reunification cases, the Cronbach’s Alphas are all very high; thirteen of fourteen Alphas are above .8, and the one that is lower is .744, still adequate for clinical applications (see Table 8).

Table 8. Cronbach’s Alpha statistics for all families (including older-youth families and younger-youth families) in the study whose case plan was “reunification.”

NCFAS Domain	N at Intake	Cronbach’s Alpha at Intake	N at Closure	Cronbach’s Alpha at Closure	Number of Scale Items
Environment	128	.847	126	.868	10
Parental Capabilities	123	.744	123	.857	7
Family Interactions	76	.801	75	.880	5
Family Safety	85	.838	78	.838	6
Child Well-Being	58	.908	64	.912	8
Ambivalence	111	.911	109	.883	6
Readiness for Reunification	119	.889	115	.918	6

“N” of all families = 130. Therefore it appears that workers are not always using all domains of the NCFAS; or, not all NCFAS domain data are being entered into the database from which the study data were obtained.

Comparison of Older-Youth Family NCFAS Ratings to Younger-Youth Family NCFAS Ratings for Placement Prevention Sample

Within the placement prevention sample, 133 family records represent older youths (35% of families in the prevention sample), and 244 represent younger youths (65% of families). The NCFAS domain ratings were examined both between domains and within domains (i.e., the overarching domain ratings and the individual within-scale, 6-point ratings ranging from Clear Strength to Serious Problem). The purpose of these analyses was to determine if older-youth families and younger-youth families present at Intake with significantly different types of family issues, or different severities of issues, particularly given what was observed about the different

child maltreatment codes applied to youths in these families. All comparisons are discussed, and the tables in this section present the data for each comparison.

There were no significant differences between the older-youth families and younger youth families on the Overall Environment domain ratings at Intake ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.18$, $df = 5$, $p = .525$) or at Closure ($\text{Chi}^2 = 3.30$, $df = 5$, $p = .653$). The distributions of ratings for these families at Intake and Closure are presented in Tables 9 and 10, below.

Table 9. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Environment Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	4.5%	13.5%	23.3%	15.0%	25.6%	18.0%
Younger-Youth Families	4.6%	7.9%	22.1%	17.1%	31.7%	16.7%

$N_{\text{older}} = 133$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 240$

Table 10. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Environment Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	7.0%	20.9%	26.4%	29.5%	13.2%	3.1%
Younger-Youth Families	4.5%	16.5%	29.3%	28.1%	17.4%	4.1%

$N_{\text{older}} = 129$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 242$

There were also no differences with respect to whether movement occurred on the Overall Environment domain rating (positive change, no change, negative change) during the service period, or in which direction movement occurred ($\text{Chi}^2 = 2.04$, $df = 2$, $p = .361$).

There were no significant differences between the older-youth and younger-youth families on the Overall Parental Capabilities domain ratings at Intake ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.64$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .462$) or at Closure ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.40$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .494$). These distributions of ratings on Overall Parental Capabilities are presented in Tables 11 and 12, below.

Table 11. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Parental Capabilities Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	1.5%	3.0%	13.5%	21.8%	42.1%	18.0%
Younger-Youth Families	0.4%	3.3%	8.3%	24.6%	47.5%	15.8%

$N_{\text{older}} = 133$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 240$

Table 12. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Parental Capabilities Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	6.2%	13.2%	30.2%	28.7%	14.7%	7.0%
Younger-Youth Families	2.9%	9.5%	36.9%	28.2%	15.4%	7.1%

$N_{\text{older}} = 129$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 241$

There were also no differences with respect to whether movement occurred on the Overall Parental Capabilities domain rating (positive change, no change, negative change) during the service period, or in which direction movement occurred ($\text{Chi}^2 = 3.29$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .192$).

There were significant differences between the older-youth families and younger-youth families on the Overall Family Interactions domain at Intake. Nearly half (48%) of older-youth families were rated in the moderate to serious problem range compared to just under one third (31%) of younger-youth families ($\chi^2 = 17.11$, $df = 5$, $p < .01$). These assessment ratings on family interactions are consistent with the family conflict concerns registered by serving agencies. These Overall Family Interactions at Intake ratings are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Family Interactions Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0.8%	6.8%	21.8%	22.6%	35.3%	12.8%
Younger-Youth Families	3.8%	11.7%	25.0%	28.3%	27.1%	4.2%

$N_{\text{older}} = 133$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 240$

Table 14. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Family Interactions Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	6.3%	14.1%	36.7%	25.0%	13.3%	4.7%
Younger-Youth Families	6.3%	19.6%	40.8%	19.2%	9.6%	4.6%

$N_{\text{older}} = 128$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 240$

At the time of Closure, these differences observed at Intake had virtually disappeared: 18% moderate-to-serious for older-youth families compared to 14% for younger-youth families ($\chi^2 = 4.19$, $df = 5$, $p = .522$). These improvements in family interactions are consistent with

the high degree of achievement of permanent plans for the placement prevention cases. These Overall Family Interactions ratings at Closure are presented in Table 14.

Although older-youth families tended to be more seriously rated at Intake than were younger-youth families with respect to Family Interactions, the positive progress made by both groups resulted in the absence of differences between the two groups as Closure. The majority of both groups made positive change, relative to their Intake rating, and the changes made by each group were not significantly different ($\text{Chi}^2 = 2.98$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .226$).

Significant differences also were found between older-youth families and younger-youth families with respect to Overall Family Safety at Intake. However, the distribution of ratings was different than that for Family Interactions. In the case of Family Safety, 21% of older-youth families were rated at the serious problem scale point, compared to only 13% of younger-youth families. Conversely, 35% of older-youth families were rated at the moderate problem scale point compared to 45% of younger-youth families. Overall, older youth families tended to cluster at moderate and serious problem ratings, whereas younger-youth families tended to cluster at the mild and moderate problem scale points. ($\text{Chi}^2 = 14.66$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p < .05$). Absence of risk data or severity of maltreatment data from the serving agencies precludes deeper analysis of these issues with respect to the NCFAS ratings. The NCFAS data are presented in Table 15.

Like Overall Family Interactions, the differences observed at Intake with respect to Overall Family Safety were not present at the time of Closure ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.99$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .417$), suggesting substantial positive progress. Ratings across the full range of scale points were virtually identical for both older-youth and younger-youth families, with large reductions being observed at both the serious and moderate problem ratings (see Table 16). These closure ratings

are consistent with the high rates of achievement of the placement prevention plans for these cases.

Table 15. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Family Safety Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	3.0%	0.8%	21.8%	18.0%	35.3%	21.1%
Younger-Youth Families	0.8%	4.6%	14.6%	21.7%	45.0%	13.3%

$N_{\text{older}} = 133$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 240$

Table 16. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Family Safety Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	8.5%	7.8%	37.2%	27.1%	14.7%	4.7%
Younger-Youth Families	4.2%	11.3%	42.7%	25.5%	12.1%	4.2%

$N_{\text{older}} = 129$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 239$

Like Family Interactions, the large majority of both groups experienced positive change in family safety relative to their Intake rating (61% of older-youth families, 69% of younger-youth families), and the between group difference was not significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 2.77$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .250$).

The most notable differences between older-youth families and younger-youth families were those associated with Overall Child Well-Being. Many more older-youth families were clustered at the moderate and serious problem scale points; 69% of older-youth families were

rated at these scale points, compared to 39% of younger-youth families. These differences were statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 36.411$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p < .001$). These NCFAS ratings are notable because the traditional CPS maltreatment indicators (abuse, neglect, family conflict, “other”) do not address directly many issues associated with child well-being. However, progress on child well-being is now part of the CFSR reviews, and progress on child well-being is correlated with successful service outcomes. The complete distribution of Intake ratings on Overall Child Well-Being are presented in Table 17.

Table 17. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Child Well-Being Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	1.5%	3.8%	9.8%	16.5%	44.4%	24.1%
Younger-Youth Families	3.3%	10.0%	23.0%	25.1%	30.1%	8.4%

$N_{\text{older}} = 133$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 239$

Unlike Family Interactions and Family Safety, the differences between older-youth and younger-youth families did not disappear after treatment for Overall Child Well-Being. Both types of families experienced substantial progress, but significantly more older-youth families remained in the moderate to serious problem range than did younger-youth families; 28% and 13%, respectively. These differences were significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 21.965$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p < .001$). The complete distribution of ratings of Overall Child Well-Being at Closure for these families is presented in Table 18.

Table 18. Distribution of NCFAS Overall Child Well-Being at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Placement Prevention Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	1.6%	15.5%	20.9%	34.1%	20.9%	7.0%
Younger-Youth Families	5.1%	18.6%	36.0%	27.5%	10.6%	2.1%

$N_{\text{older}} = 129$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 236$

When observing the presence and direction of change in domain ratings for Child Well-Being, the majority of both types of families experienced positive change (66% for older-youth families, 54% for younger-youth families). However, because significantly more older-youth families had moderate-to-serious ratings on this domain at Intake, it could be argued that the opportunity for positive change was greater for the older-youth families. This imbalance is reflected in the differences between the two groups at Closure. These differences approached statistical significance, but the trend was not quite strong enough to be statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.75$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .093$).

The definition of the Baseline/Adequate scale point is “that point above which there is not a legal, ethical or moral reason to exercise a mandate to intervene.” Therefore, when using the NCFAS scales to examine different populations, it is worth noting differences in the proportion of families who are ‘at or above’ Baseline at the beginning and end of services (i.e., at Intake and Closure). Since this report focuses primarily on differences between the ages of youth in served families (older-youth families versus younger-youth families) and the types of cases served (placement prevention cases versus reunification cases), the issue of ‘case severity’ at Intake and ‘progress made during services’ are important covariates to those case types. Table

19 presents the proportion of families at or above baseline at Intake and Closure for the placement prevention cases, as a function of older-youth and younger-youth families.

The data in Table 19 indicate that for placement prevention cases there are very small difference (and no significant differences) between older-youth and younger-youth families with respect to the domains of Environment, Parental Capabilities, and Family Safety. One third (35%) to two fifths (41%) of both family types were above Baseline at Intake, and both types made similar progress (50% and 54% above Baseline at Closure, respectively). The large majority of both family types were experiencing problems relating to Parental Capabilities at Intake; only 18% of older-youth families and 12% of younger-youth families were at or above Baseline. However, both family types made about the same amount of progress, with 50% and 49%, respectively, being at or above Baseline at Closure. Very similar results were observed for Family Safety: 26% of older-youth families and 20% of younger-youth families were at or above Baseline at Intake, and 54% and 58%, respectively, were at or above Baseline at Closure. None of these differences was significant

However, significantly more younger-youth families (40%) were at or above Baseline at Intake than older-youth families (29%) suggesting that Family Interactions were a more defining feature of older-youth families than younger-youth families. Again, this is consistent with the child maltreatment codes when separated by age groups. However, both types of families made substantial progress during the service periods, with 67% of younger-youth families and 57% of older-youth families being at or above Baseline at Closure. While the trend remained (older-youth families being more affected by deficient family interactions than younger-youth families) the magnitude of the between-family type differences had diminished at Closure to the extent that the trend was no longer significant.

Table 19. Proportion of Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families At or Above Baseline/Adequate on the NFCAS Domains at Intake and Closure, Placement Prevention Cases

NCFAS Domain	% Older-youth families At/Above Baseline	% Younger-youth families At/Above Baseline	Chi ² value*	P-value
Overall Environment Intake	41.4%	34.6%	1.68	.195
Overall Environment Closure	54.3%	50.4%	.500	.480
Overall Parental Cap Intake	18.0%	12.1%	2.49	.114
Overall Parental Cap Closure	49.6%	49.4%	.002	.966
Overall Family Interx Intake	29.3%	40.4%	4.55	<.05
Overall Family Interx Closure	57.0%	66.7%	3.34	.068
Overall Family Safety Intake	25.6%	20.0%	1.55	.214
Overall Family Safety Closure	53.5%	58.2%	.744	.388
Overall Child Wellbeing Intake	15.0%	36.4%	19.03	<.001
Overall Child Wellbeing Closure	38.0%	59.7%	15.83	<.001

N_{older} = 129; N_{younger} = 236

* df = 1 in all cases

The largest difference between family types at Intake, and one that remained at Closure, was the difference associated with Child Well-Being. Only 15% of older-youth families were at or above Baseline at Intake, compared to 36% of younger-youth families. This suggests that child-centered issues are more of a defining feature of older-youth families than younger-youth families. This difference is significant (Chi² = 19.03, df = 1, p < .001). Again, these assessment ratings are important for case service planning because traditional CPS maltreatment codes do not relate closely to child well-being. Although both types of families made substantial progress on child well-being-related issues during treatment, older-youth families did not fare as well as did younger youth families. Only 38% of older-youth families ended services with Child Well-Being domain ratings at or above Baseline, compare to 60% of younger-youth families. Even at

Closure, this difference was significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 15.83$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < .001$), the only post-service difference to remain significant.

Comparison of Older-Youth Family NCFAS Ratings to Younger-Youth Family NCFAS Ratings for Reunification Sample

This section of the report presents the same comparisons between family types for reunification cases as were presented in the preceding section for placement prevention cases. The major difference is that the NCFAS-R, which is the version of the NCFAS used in reunification cases, contains two additional domains specifically relevant to reunification: Ambivalence, and Readiness for Reunification. Each of these domains comprises 5 subscales relating to the constructs represented by the domains.

Before presenting the comparisons, it is worth noting that placement prevention cases are typically found to be in crisis, with youths being at risk of imminent removal from home unless child safety concerns are immediately addressed and family functioning issues can be ameliorated to a level sufficient to reduce the risk of removal at the time of service completion by the family preservation program. This does not mean that all family functioning issues have been successfully resolved. Families may continue to receive services after the family preservation service period, but the services are likely to be much less intensive, and it has been deemed safe for the child to remain in the home while those services are being delivered.

Reunification cases are qualitatively different, in that there has been a period of time during which the child(ren) has been removed from the home. Thus, reunification cases are typically seen as cases where the family crisis leading up to the child's removal has been resolved or ameliorated to a substantial degree, and child-safety issues (similar to those considered in placement prevention cases) have been addressed, and it has been deemed safe to

return the child to the original caregiver (or other family caregiver). As with placement prevention cases, reunification families may also receive additional services after the return of the child.

The significance of the different types of family situations is that one does not expect to see families in crisis immediately prior to reunification, some (if not all) family functioning problems have been addressed at least to some degree, and the child is safe, at least immediately prior to reunification. Therefore, it is not expected that family problems will be rated to the same degree of severity on the domains of Environment, Parental Capabilities, Family Interactions, Family Safety, and Child Well-Being as are typically observed in placement prevention situations. The domains of Ambivalence and Readiness for Reunification are not rated in placement prevention situations.

The results of the analysis of the NCFAS-R data for the reunification families generally confirm the logical/theoretical arguments presented in the preceding paragraphs. Overall, many fewer families, whether older-youth families or younger-youth families, are rated in the problem range of the NCFAS-R domains. This is particularly true for families rated in the moderate-to-serious problem range. The only domain on which significant differences between older-youth and younger-youth reunification families was observed is Child Well-Being, where the traditional child maltreatment codes do not align well with variables associated with child well-being. These results will be discussed in detail, in turn, but generally speaking, older-youth families were more likely to be rated in the problem range on child well-being, and they did not make as much progress on this domain as did younger-youth families during the service period. Once again, child-centered problems (associated with the Child Well-Being domain) appear to

be defining characteristics of older-youth families, compared to younger-youth families, and they appear to be more resistant to amelioration than are problems in other domain areas.

The following tables present the distributions of within-domain ratings for older-youth families and younger-youth families experiencing reunification on the seven domains of the NCFAS-R. The sample for these analyses is 130 families; of which 34 are older-youth families (26% of the total sample) and 96 are younger-youth families (74% of the sample).

Table 20, below, presents the NCFAS-R ratings for both types of families with respect to the Environment domain at the time of Intake. Illustrative of families on most domains during reunification, very few families have serious problems relating to their environment (5% or 6%), with some families having moderate problems (21% older-youth families, 19% younger-youth families) there being virtually no difference between the two types of families.

Table 20. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Environment Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	2.9%	11.8%	20.6%	38.2%	20.6%	5.9%
Younger-Youth Families	0%	13.5%	21.9%	40.6%	18.8%	5.2%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

Table 21 presents the ratings of the reunification families on Environment at the time of Closure. Again, illustrative of most of the domains, about the same amount of progress is made by both types of families (older-youth, younger youth) during the service period. At the time of closure the ratings of the two types of families are so similar that they appear to be completely

independent of family type. None of the differences in the table are significant (Intake: $\chi^2 = 3.01$, $df = 5$, $p = .699$; Closure: $\chi^2 = 5.87$, $df = 5$, $p = .319$).

As was examined for placement prevention families, reunification family data relating to “direction of change“ (positive change, no change, negative change) were also examined. With respect to Overall Environment, 56% of older-youth families and 45% of younger-youth families experienced positive change, but this small difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.67$, $df = 2$, $p = .435$).

Table 21. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Environment Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/ Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	8.8%	11.8%	41.2%	23.5%	14.7%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	1.0%	16.7%	43.8%	20.8%	16.7%	1.0%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

Tables 22 and 22, below present the distributions of ratings for Parental Capabilities at Intake and Closure. Although a larger proportion of all families is rated in the problem range on this domain than on Environment, both types of families make approximately the same amount of progress. No differences are significant (Intake: $\chi^2 = 1.05$, $df = 5$, $p = .959$; Closure: $\chi^2 = 4.23$, $df = 5$, $p = .517$).

Table 22. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Parental Capabilities Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0%	2.9%	17.6%	26.5%	47.1%	5.9%
Younger-Youth Families	2.1%	4.2%	15.6%	29.2%	42.7%	6.3%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

The large majority of both older-youth and younger-youth families experienced positive change during the service period (62% and 72%, respectively), and this difference between family types is not statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 1.21$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .547$).

Table 23. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Parental Capabilities Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0%	11.8%	44.1%	26.5%	14.7%	2.9%
Younger-Youth Families	4.2%	22.9%	37.5%	20.8%	13.5%	1.0%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

Tables 24 and 25 present the NCFAS-R ratings at Intake and Closure for the Family Interactions domain. Again, there are no significant differences in the table (Intake: $\text{Chi}^2 = 5.15$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .389$; Closure: $\text{Chi}^2 = 3.87$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .568$). The majority of both types of families experienced positive change on Family Interactions during the service period: 59% for older-youth families and 51% for younger-youth families. The differences between family types are not significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = .664$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .717$).

Table 24. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Family Interactions Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	2.9%	8.8%	23.5%	32.4%	26.5%	5.9%
Younger-Youth Families	1.0%	15.6%	34.4%	31.3%	15.6%	2.1%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

Table 25. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Family Interactions Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	5.9%	14.7%	41.2%	23.5%	14.7%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	8.3%	22.9%	39.6%	18.8%	7.3%	3.1%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

Tables 26 and 27 present the NCFAS-R ratings at Intake and Closure for the domain of Family Safety. There is a slight trend for younger-youth families to make more progress than older-youth families on this domain, but as the results in the tables reveal, both types of families make substantial progress and there are no significant differences (Intake: $\text{Chi}^2 = 3.18$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .673$; Closure: $\text{Chi}^2 = 7.94$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .160$). A majority of both types of families experienced positive change during the service period, with respect to Family Safety (53% for older-youth families and 66% for younger-youth families). This difference is not significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 2.18$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .336$).

Table 26. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Family Safety Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0%	8.8%	26.5%	29.4%	32.4%	2.9%
Younger-Youth Families	3.1%	3.1%	27.1%	31.3%	30.2%	5.2%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

Table 27. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Family Safety Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0%	5.9%	64.7%	26.5%	2.9%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	6.3%	14.6%	56.3%	13.5%	7.3%	2.1%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

The domain of Child Well-Being is the only one where strong trends and the only significant difference between older-youth families and younger-youth families emerged in the NCFAS-R ratings for reunification families. Table 28 presents the NCFAS-R ratings for Child Well-Being at Intake. It is clear that substantially more older-youth families are rated as having moderate problems at Intake than younger-youth families (38% and 15% respectively). This trend is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 10.14$, $df = 5$, $p = .07$), but is very close to being so ($p = .07$), and with a larger sample size, it probably would be. Also, these assessment ratings are consistent with the other issues and concerns expressed by serving agencies.

Table 28. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Child Well-Being Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0 %	8.8%	11.8%	32.4%	38.2%	8.8%
Younger-Youth Families	2.1%	12.5%	25.0%	38.5%	14.6%	7.3%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 96$

The trend observed at Intake becomes statistically significant at Closure. Although both types of families make progress on the domain, younger-youth families appear to make more progress (move towards the strengths end of the rating scale) than do the older-youth families. A combined 62% of older-youth families remain in the problem range of ratings at Closure, compared with only 33% for younger-youth families. This difference is large and is statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 12.77$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p < .05$).

Table 29. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Child Well-Being Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	0%	11.8%	26.5%	41.2%	20.6%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	5.3%	20.0%	38.9%	27.4%	5.3%	3.2%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 95$

Although the difference in the proportions of families at each rating was significant at Closure, when direction of change, per se, is examined, there are no significant differences. Half (50%) of older-youth families experienced positive change, as did 52% of younger-youth families ($\text{Chi}^2 = .08$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .960$). Thus, it appears that although a virtually identical number

of both types of families experienced positive change, younger-youth families experienced more change (i.e., more scale points per family) than did older-youth families with respect to Child Well-Being.

The preceding five domains on the NCFAS-R are identical to those on the NCFAS. The domains of Ambivalence and Readiness for Reunification were added to the NCFAS to form the NCFAS-R. Therefore, the remaining two domains presented here are those that are unique to reunification cases. It does not appear that older-youth families and younger-youth families present differently on these two domains. Tables 30 and 31 present the distributions of NCFAS-R ratings on the Ambivalence domain at Intake and Closure. Looking first at Table 30, the distributions of ratings as a function of family type are virtually identical ($\text{Chi}^2 = 3.34$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .649$).

Table 30. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Ambivalence Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	14.7%	14.7%	38.2%	17.6%	11.8%	2.9%
Younger-Youth Families	15.8%	20.0%	36.8%	17.9%	9.5%	0%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 95$

Table 31 presents the Closure ratings on Ambivalence, and it is apparent that there is substantial progress made by many families, but there is no difference between older-youth and younger-youth families ($\text{Chi}^2 = 2.46$, $\text{df} = 4$, $p = .652$).

Table 31. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Ambivalence Ratings at Closure for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

CLOSURE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	17.6 %	20.6%	44.1%	14.7%	2.9%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	23.4%	28.7%	30.9%	12.8%	4.3%	0%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 94$

Because the large majority of both types of families were at or above Baseline at Intake (see Table 32), it is not surprising that fewer families experienced positive change on the Ambivalence domain than they experienced on other domains. About two fifths of both types of families (44% of older-youth families and 39% of younger-youth families) experienced positive change, and the small difference between them is not significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = .65$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .717$).

Table 32. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Readiness for Reunification Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	5.9%	5.9%	58.8%	17.6%	11.8%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	6.4%	19.1%	42.6%	19.1%	12.8%	0%

$N_{\text{older}} = 34$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 94$

The ratings relating to the Readiness for Reunification domain present a picture that is very similar to that of Ambivalence. There are no differences at Intake ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.28$, $\text{df} = 4$, $p = .369$), substantial progress is made by families of both types, and there is no difference between family types at Closure ($\text{Chi}^2 = 6.17$, $\text{df} = 5$, $p = .290$). Tables 32 and 33 present these data.

Table 33. Distribution of NCFAS-R Overall Readiness for Reunification Ratings at Intake for Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families: Percent of Families at Each Rating, Reunification Cases

INTAKE	Clear Strength	Mild Strength	Baseline/Adequate	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Older-Youth Families	6.1%	18.2%	60.6%	6.1%	9.1%	0%
Younger-Youth Families	11.0%	31.9%	37.4%	8.8%	8.8%	2.2%

$N_{\text{older}} = 33$; $N_{\text{younger}} = 91$

Direction-of-change data for Readiness for Reunification are virtually identical to those for Ambivalence. Two fifths of both types of families (39% for older-youth families and 40% for younger-youth families) made positive progress, and there were no significant differences in the table ($\text{Chi}^2 = .92$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p = .863$).

Recall that, in theory, reunification families should not be in crisis or have serious child/family safety issues immediately prior to reunification. However, as can be seen in Table 34 (which is similar to Table 19 for Placement Prevention cases), with the exception of Ambivalence and Readiness for Reunification, the majority of families are not ‘at or above’ Baseline at the time of Intake (with the exception of Family Interactions for younger-youth families, which registers 51% ‘at or above’ Baseline at Intake).

However, with one exception (Child Well-Being for older-youth families) a large majority of both types of families are ‘at or above’ Baseline at Closure. In fact, with the exception of Child Well-Being, the Chi^2 values in Table 34 suggest that even the small differences between family types that appear both at Intake and at Closure are well within the realm of chance and are not indicative of real differences. The exception, Child Well-Being, is worth examining in greater detail, as it has been throughout the study.

Table 34. Proportion of Older-Youth and Younger-Youth Families At or Above Baseline/ Adequate on the NFCAS-R Domains at Intake and Closure, Reunification Cases

NCFAS-R Domain	% Older-youth families At/Above Baseline	% Younger-youth families At/Above Baseline	Chi ² value*	P-value
Overall Environment Intake	35.3%	35.4%	0.0	.990
Overall Environment Closure	61.8%	61.5%	0.0	.975
Overall Parental Cap Intake	20.6%	21.9%	0.02	.875
Overall Parental Cap Closure	55.9%	64.6%	0.81	.368
Overall Family Interx Intake	35.3%	51.0%	2.50	.114
Overall Family Interx Closure	61.8%	70.8%	0.97	.328
Overall Family Safety Intake	35.3%	33.3%	.04	.836
Overall Family Safety Closure	70.6%	77.1%	0.57	.450
Overall Child Wellbeing Intake	20.6%	39.6%	4.00	<.05
Overall Child Wellbeing Closure	38.2%	64.2%	6.91	<.01
Overall Ambivalence Intake	67.6%	72.6%	0.30	.581
Overall Ambivalence Closure	82.4%	83.0%	0.01	.934
Overall Readiness Reun. Intake	70.6%	68.1%	0.07	.787
Overall Readiness Reun. Closure	84.8%	80.2%	0.34	.558

N_{older} = 34; N_{younger} = 96

* df = 1 in all cases

At Intake, although a majority of both older-youth families and younger-youth families are below Baseline, nearly twice as many younger-youth families as older-youth families are “at or above’ Baseline at intake (40% and 21%, respectively). This difference is significant, (Chi² = 4.00, df = 1, p < .05) and is the only significant difference between family-types in the table with respect to Intake ratings on the NFCAS-R. Furthermore, the Closure data for Child Well-Being indicate that older-youth families make less progress on this domain than do younger-youth

families during the service period. In fact, only 38% of older-youth families are ‘at or above’ Baseline at Closure, compared to 64% of younger-youth families. This difference is significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 6.91, df = 1, p < .01$), and is the only significant difference in the table with respect to Closure ratings on the NCFAS-R. This finding is further evidence that the child-centered issues relating to child well-being are defining characteristics of older-youth families, as compared to younger-youth families, be they placement prevention cases or reunification cases.

Summary

This study compares the demographics, child maltreatment, other agency concerns, family assessment ratings, and service outcomes of older youths and younger youths receiving Intensive Family Preservation Services to affect either placement prevention or family reunification following involvement in the CPS systems of two states where private, non-profit agencies provided the services and data for the study.

Demographic and child maltreatment data indicate that there are numerous differences between the members of the sample subgroups (child age/service type) with respect to demographics and maltreatment. For example, youths in the placement prevention sample were more likely to be male in the younger cohort and female in the older cohort; while both older and younger youths were more likely to be White, there was double the likelihood (10% to 18%) of being Black in the older youth cohort of the placement prevention cases; younger youths were likely to be living in poverty (as defined by receipt of TANF) whereas older youths were not, with this difference being more pronounced in the placement prevention cases; although youths in both age cohorts were likely to be the biological children of their primary caregivers, there was a much higher probability (1% to 8%) of being an adopted child in the older youth cohort among the placement prevention cases; although both age cohorts were likely to be living with

their biological or adoptive parents at case opening and at case closure (remember, these are placement prevention cases) older youths were somewhat more likely to be living with other relatives or to be in guardianship in the placement prevention cases, particularly at case closure.

In the reunification sample, gender was evenly split among younger youths, but became predominantly female (60%) among older youths; although the majority of both age cohorts were White, there was a much higher likelihood among reunification cases of being multi-racial if younger, and White, if older; fewer reunification families were living in poverty than placement prevention cases; in reunification cases the youths were more likely to be the biological children of their caregivers than was true of the placement prevention cases; reunification statistics suggest that placement with other relatives and guardianship accounted for some “reunifications” that did not achieve reunification with biological parents; and older youths were much more likely to remain in the CPS system (8%) at case closure than were younger youths (1%). Types of maltreatment included physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, family conflict, and “other.” Among the differences, older youths were significantly more likely to be victims of physical abuse than younger youths; older youths were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than younger youths; and younger youths were more significantly more likely to be victims of neglect than older youths, although the majority of both cohorts were so victimized. Older youths were significantly more likely to be involved in family conflict than younger youths.

Some of these differences track the demographic data and developmental stages of children. For example, younger youths were more likely to live in poverty than older youths, invoking the likelihood of poverty-related neglect. As children age and mature sexually, they are more likely to be victimized by sexual predators. As youths transition into adolescence they are

more likely to challenge authority and rebel against family rules and structures, leading to family stress and conflict.

In every case where there is a significant difference between the age cohorts, the older youths were significantly more likely to be exhibiting these concerns, indicating that older youths present with more issues that need to be addressed by any service plan. Each of the following differences is significant, and each affects older youths disproportionately. Older youths were more than twice as likely to be exhibiting behavior problems; more than twice as likely to be beyond their parent's control; more likely to engage in delinquency (not detected in younger youths); four times as likely to have school-related problems; four times as likely to be violent towards others: much more likely to exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior (although the numbers were very small in both cases); and from twice to four times more likely to exhibit mental health related problems (some of which were undetected among younger youths).

Again, many of these concerns track developmental stages of older youths, particularly where status variables enter (e.g., being of school age and attending school; developing sexually, being exposed to the allure of alcohol or other drugs). The importance of these concerns is that they require case services that focus increasingly on child-centered issues and behaviors for older youths, whereas the concerns are more likely to focus on parent-centered issues for younger youths. They are also concerns that are of interest to the programs providing services (and are covered by the NCFAS scales), and have been shown to affect placement decisions, but which are not closely aligned with traditional CPS maltreatment indicators (various forms of abuse and neglect).

Types of maltreatment for the reunification cohort are the same as for the placement prevention cohort: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, family conflict, and "other." The

proportions of older and younger youths victimized by various types of maltreatment are virtually the same for the reunification cases as for the placement prevention cases differing by only two or three percentage points, except for family conflict, where older youths were significantly more likely to exhibit this risk.

Agencies also expressed the same concerns about youths in the reunification sample other than risks normally associated with their CPS mandates (child behavior problems, being beyond parental control, delinquency, school problems, child-centered violence, inappropriate sexual behavior, developmental disability, mental health issues, suicidal attempt or ideation, medical illness, child-centered alcohol/other substance abuse), and the magnitude of those concerns was very similar to concerns identified for the placement prevention cases. The exceptions were delinquency, child-centered violence, and child alcohol/substance abuse,

In the case of delinquency and child-centered violence, older youths in the reunification cases were significantly more likely to exhibit these issues than younger youths in the reunification cases, and they were also more likely to than their own age-cohort in the placement prevention cases. In the case of alcohol/substance abuse, older youth in the reunification cases were slightly more likely than their age cohort in the placement prevention cases, but younger youths increased significantly from 0% in the placement prevention cases to 11% in the reunification cases. This suggests that alcohol and substance use is viewed as very serious in younger youths and may have been associated with the younger youths' removal decisions, therefore appearing as they did in the younger youths' age cohort in the reunification cases.

The types of maltreatment cited by reporting agencies is very similar when placement prevention cases are compared to reunification cases, although family conflict stands out as a

difference. Family conflict was a factor in substantially more reunification cases than placement prevention cases.

An analysis of the reliability of the NCFAS and NCFAS-R as used by the workers contributing the data, resulted in strong indicators of scale reliability, using Cronbach's Alpha as the measure of reliability. Therefore, the differences (and lack of differences) in family assessment ratings, as a function of youth age and case type, are meaningful. There were significant differences between the older-youth families and younger-youth families on the Overall Family Interactions domain at Intake. Older-youth families were significantly more likely to be rated in the moderate to serious problem range compared to younger-youth families. These assessment ratings on family interactions are consistent with the family conflict concerns registered by serving agencies. At the time of Closure, these differences observed at Intake had virtually disappeared, and were not significant. These improvements in family interactions are consistent with the high degree of achievement of permanent plans for the placement prevention cases.

Significant differences also were found between older-youth families and younger-youth families with respect to Overall Family Safety at Intake. Older-youth families were more likely to be rated at the serious problem scale point, compared to younger-youth families. Conversely, significantly fewer older-youth families were rated at the moderate problem scale point compared to younger-youth families. Overall, older youth families tended to cluster at moderate and serious problem ratings, whereas younger-youth families tended to cluster at the mild and moderate problem scale points. Like Overall Family Interactions, the differences observed at Intake with respect to Overall Family Safety were not present at the time of Closure, suggesting

substantial positive progress. These closure ratings are consistent with the high rates of achievement of the placement prevention plans for these cases.

The most notable differences on NCFAS ratings between older-youth families and younger-youth families were those associated with Overall Child Well-Being. Significantly more older-youth families were clustered at the moderate and serious problem scale points than younger-youth families. Again, these NCFAS ratings are notable because the traditional CPS maltreatment indicators (abuse, neglect, family conflict, “other”) do not address directly many issues associated with child well-being. However, progress on child well-being is now part of the CFSR reviews, and progress on child well-being is correlated with successful service outcomes. (The assessment items on the NCFAS scales relating to well-being are more inclusive than the current CFSR references to family involvement, educational needs, and physical/mental health.)

Unlike Family Interactions and Family Safety, the differences in child well-being between older-youth and younger-youth families in the placement prevention sample did not disappear after services. Both types of families experienced substantial progress, but significantly more older-youth families remained in the moderate to serious problem range than did younger-youth families. When observing the presence and direction of change in domain ratings for Child Well-Being, the majority of both types of families experienced positive change. However, because significantly more older-youth families had moderate-to-serious ratings on this domain at Intake, it could be argued that the opportunity for positive change was greater for the older-youth families. This imbalance is reflected in the differences between the two groups at Closure. The largest difference at Intake, and one that remained at Closure, was the difference associated with Child Well-Being. This suggests that child-centered issues are more of a

defining feature of older-youth families than younger-youth families; and these assessment ratings are important for case service planning because traditional CPS maltreatment codes do not relate closely to child well-being.

The families in the reunification sample present somewhat different overall family assessment ratings. In part, this reflects the fact that reunification would not be attempted if the family remained in crisis or had numerous unresolved risk factors at the time of referral. Many fewer families, whether older-youth families or younger-youth families, are rated in the problem range of the NCFAS-R domain ratings. The only domain on which significant differences between older-youth and younger-youth reunification families was observed is Child Well-Being, where the traditional child maltreatment codes do not align well with variables associated with child well-being. Generally speaking, older-youth families were more likely to be rated in the problem range on Child Well-Being, and they did not make as much progress on this domain as did younger-youth families during the service period. Once again, in the reunification sample as well as the placement prevention sample, child-centered problems (associated with the Child Well-Being domain) appear to be defining characteristics of older-youth families and they appear to be more resistant to amelioration than problems in other domain areas. The trend, observed at Intake, was statistically significant at Closure: although both types of families made progress on the domain, younger-youth families made more progress than did older-youth families.

In conclusion, for the families in this study receiving IFPS services from these particular providers, the efficacy of IFPS with respect to achieving permanency at the end of services does not appear to be affected by the ages of youths, or whether the IFPS services are provided to families labeled as placement prevention cases or reunification cases. High rates of permanency were achieved across family types and youth ages. However, older youths in both types of cases

tend to present with more problems, and more serious problems, than younger youths, and there is a high likelihood that those problems relate to child well-being, rather than traditional CPS indicators (except where family conflict is a recognized risk indicator). Since child-centered problems remain (especially those relating to child well-being) for many of these families, even when permanency is achieved, follow-up services may be required to reduce the likelihood of re-entry into the CPS system. All of these findings and interpretations are discussed in greater detail in the body of the report.