

VDSS Research Brief: Parent Substance Abuse and Foster Care Entry by Region in Virginia

Context: Data on substance abuse for the Western region indicate that this area has high rates of illicit drug use and alcohol dependence as compared to other state regions. The Western region also has higher rates of CPS involvement and foster care entry than the other VDSS regions. Is there a connection between higher rates of substance abuse and higher rates of CPS involvement and foster care entry? If so, we would expect that social workers in the Western region would be more likely to indicate parental substance abuse as a reason for foster care entry.

Objective: To compare the proportion of foster care entries with indicators of parent substance abuse between VDSS regions and local departments of social services.

Data source: VDSS Online Automated Services Information System (OASIS) data from state fiscal years 2008-2010. The data were obtained from the Virginia Child Welfare Outcome Reports (VCWOR) version 3.55. During this time period, there were a total of 8,862 entries into foster care. The data are in the format of the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) and include 15 possible reasons for the child's removal. Social workers can indicate multiple reasons for removal for each child, but do not indicate a primary reason for removal.

Methods: Determine the number of children entering foster care in each year and calculate the proportion of those entries that had an indicator of parent substance abuse (alcohol abuse and drug abuse) in the child welfare information system. If a child re-entered care in a subsequent year, they were counted as an entry for each year. Of the children who entered care during this period, 210 exited care and re-entered during another year.

Caveats: The AFCARS fields do not include a primary reason for entry into foster care. Social workers typically indicated more than one reason for entry into foster care. Variation in the indication of parent substance abuse by local departments of social services may be due partly to differences in caseworker practice.

Results: The Western region had the highest percentage of foster care entries with parental substance abuse, and these differences were statistically significant compared to other regions. Other data sources showed the Western region has higher rates of drug-related deaths and higher rates of drug- and alcohol-related arrests than the rest of the state. Drug-related death rates were positively correlated with OASIS indications of parent substance abuse in foster care cases. Alcohol and drug-related arrest rates were not correlated with OASIS substance abuse rates. In general, local departments with high rates of foster care entries had high proportions of foster care entries indicating parent drug abuse.

Background

Drug and Alcohol Abuse Deaths and Arrests by Region

The Western region has the highest substance abuse rates for the state, based on drug-related deaths and arrests for drug- and alcohol-related offenses. Table 1 shows the regional drug-related death rates as well as the arrest rates for drug and alcohol-related offenses. Drug-related death rates are nearly three times as high in Western as other regions. Drug-related *arrest* rates varied less, with Western and Eastern having very similar rates, and Central and Northern being substantially lower.

Death rate data are from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, as reported to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Arrest rate data are from the Virginia State Police.

Table 1: Annual Drug-Related Deaths and Drug- and Alcohol-Related Arrests by Region, Rates per 100,000 persons

Region	Drug-Related Death Rate	Alcohol and Drug-Related Arrest Rate
Western	18.0	2,018
Eastern	6.4	2,008
Piedmont	6.5	1,873
Central	4.2	1,365
Northern	3.6	1,115

Sources: Death Rate developed from the Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA, Drug Abuse Warning Network, 2007 (08/2008 update); Arrest Rate developed from Virginia State Police data, as reported in Violence At Home: The FACT Report (Appendix A-13)

CPS and Foster Care Involvement by Region

The Western region also has relatively high rates of CPS involvement and high rates of children entering foster care. Table 2 shows that the region has substantially higher referrals, family assessments, investigations, and founded investigations per 1,000 children than any other region. The rates of CPS involvement in the Western region are more than double those of the Central and Northern regions. Children in the Western region are also much more likely to enter foster care than in other parts of the state. The Western rate of 1.6 foster care entries per 1,000 children is more than triple the rates of the Central, Eastern, and Northern regions.

Table 2: CPS Involvement and Foster Care Entry Annual Averages by Region, Rates per 1,000 Children

Region	Accepted Referral Rate	Family Assessment Rate	Investigation Rate	Founded Investigation Rate	Foster Care Entry Rate
Western	10.6	6.5	2.8	1.2	1.6
Piedmont	6.3	3.8	1.7	0.7	0.9
Eastern	4.5	2.3	1.8	0.7	0.4
Central	3.8	2.4	1.0	0.4	0.5
Northern	3.3	2.1	0.8	0.3	0.3

Sources: CPS indicators used OASIS, state fiscal years 2006-2010; Foster care indicator used OASIS, state fiscal years 2008-2010; Child population data from US Census (CC-EST2009-AGESEX-[ST-FIPS])

Foster Care Entries: Indications of Parent Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Do the higher rates of drug abuse, CPS involvement, and foster care entries in Western translate into a higher rate of foster care entry due to parental drug abuse? The answer is yes. Figure 1 shows that the percentage of foster care entries with parental drug abuse in the Western region (32 percent) was nearly double that of any other region.

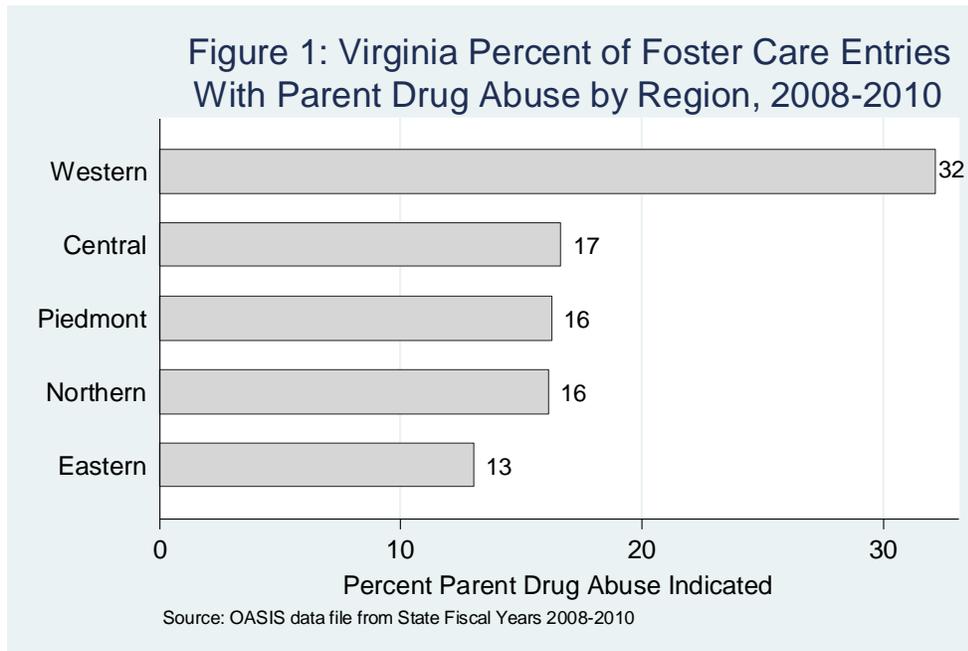
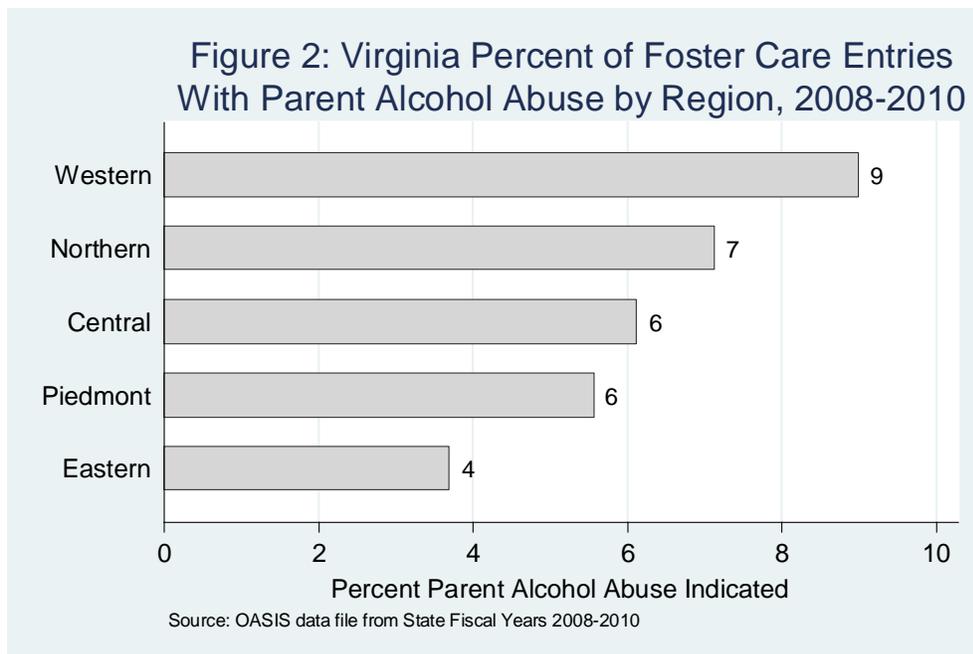


Figure 2 shows that the percentage of entries with parent *alcohol* abuse in the Western region (9 percent) exceeded the state average of 6 percent, but alcohol abuse rates did not differ statistically across regions.



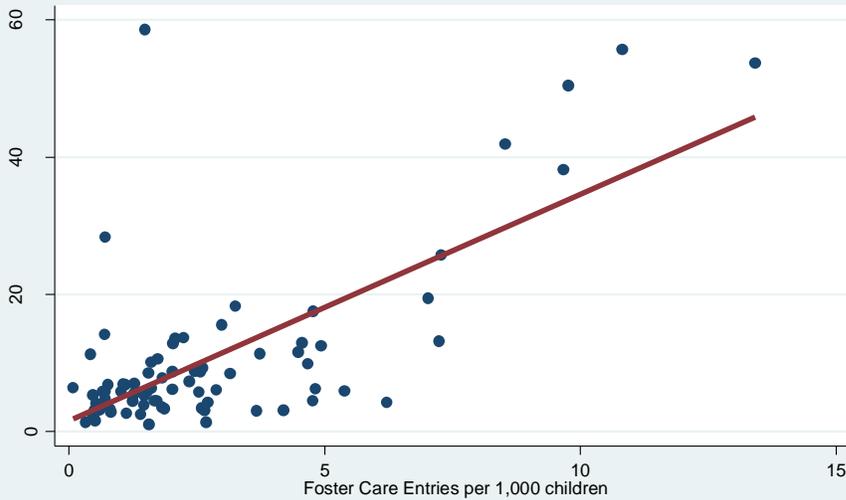
Indications of parental drug abuse as a reason for foster care entry differed widely across local departments of social services. The state average across local departments was 19 percent, but the departments with the twenty highest rates of indicated parent drug abuse ranged from 67 percent to 31 percent. Ten of the twenty highest local departments were from the Western region, with another ten evenly distributed across Piedmont, Central, and Northern regions. All of the departments in this list were relatively small, but a number of larger local departments also had rates higher than the state average. An examination of local agency data show substantial variation in the parent drug abuse indication rate within each region. For example, four localities in the Western region have rates *below* the state average.

The Relationship between Drug Abuse and Foster Care Entries

Recent national-level research has indicated that states with higher rates of substance abuse have higher rates of foster care admissions.¹ We examined the association between drug-related death rates and rates of foster care entry using locality-level data to check for similar effects within Virginia. As shown in Figure 3, drug-related death rates were strongly associated with foster care entry rates (correlation=0.57, p-value<0.01). Localities in Virginia with high drug-related death rates tend to have higher rates of foster care admissions as compared to areas with lower drug-related death rates. This is consistent with the hypothesis that parental drug abuse increases the likelihood of children entering foster care.

¹ A recent study found that methamphetamine use has led to growth in foster care admissions. See Cunningham and Finlay, "Parental Substance Abuse and Foster Care: Evidence from Two Methamphetamine Supply Shocks" (September 2010). Available from: <http://ideas.repec.org/p/tul/wpaper/1003.html>

Figure 3: Virginia Drug-Related Death Rates and Foster Care Entries, 2008-2010

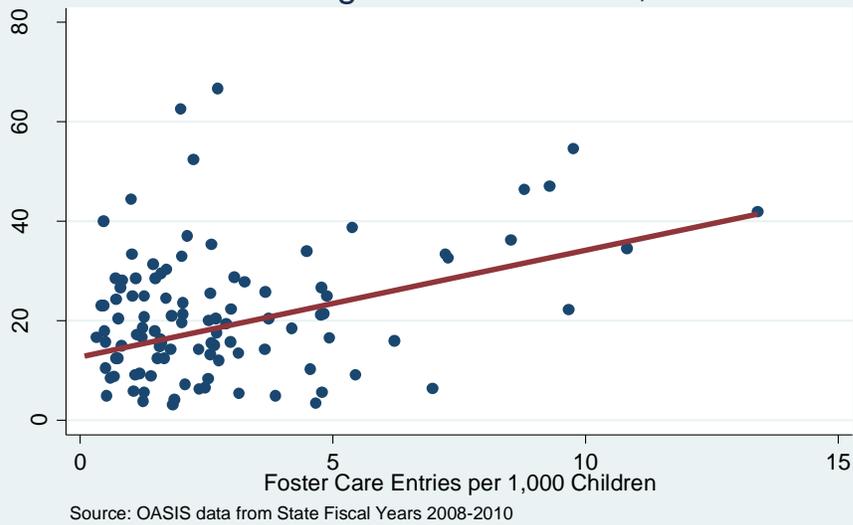


Sources: Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA Drug Abuse Warning Network and OASIS State Fiscal Years 2008-2010

We also examined the relationship at the locality level between drug-related deaths and worker indications in OASIS of parent substance abuse. Drug-related deaths had a significant association with the proportion of foster care entries indicating parent drug abuse (correlation=0.44, p-value<0.01). This result suggests that worker indications in OASIS of parental drug abuse have some validity.

Worker indications in OASIS of parent substance abuse were also related to foster care entries. Again, the correlation was positive and fairly strong (correlation=0.45, p-value<0.01). Figure 4 shows this relationship. Local departments with a higher proportion of foster care entries due to parent drug abuse tend to have higher foster care entry rates.

Figure 4: Virginia Foster Care Entry Rate and Parent Drug Abuse Indication, 2008-2010



On the other hand, foster care entries due to drug abuse were *not* correlated with alcohol and drug-related *arrest* rates (correlation=0.03). The lack of correlation with arrest rates could be due to the fact that the arrest rates are for either alcohol *or* drugs. It may be that alcohol abuse has a weaker link than drug abuse to foster care entry.