



Human Services
Community Services

Estimate of NSW children involved in the child welfare system

Albert Zhou

**Evaluation & Statistics
Planning and Corporate Performance
Department of Human Services NSW, Community
Services**

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Executive Summary

This paper revisits and expands an earlier analysis of NSW children 'known to DoCS' carried out by the Economics and Statistics Branch in early 2006, and provides an up-to-date estimate of NSW children who were involved in the child welfare system.

Overall, 27 per cent of NSW children aged under 18 years were 'known to Community Services at 30 June 2009 - estimated to be between 10-33 per cent of all children (aged 0-17 years) at some time before they reached the age of 18, depending on the age of a child. The comparable finding four years ago was 19 per cent at 30 June 2005. It is also estimated that, by June 2009, 2 per cent of NSW children aged under 18 years had ever lived in OOHC - estimated to be between 0.8-3.2 per cent of all children at some time before they turned 18 years old.

In the past seventeen years, there was a continual increase in the number of NSW children who were reported to Community Services and who lived in OOHC. This upward trend is expected to be reversed with the implementation of the KTS reforms.

Introduction

In an earlier report, we estimated that around 1 in 5 NSW children under the age of 18 were 'known to DoCS' or ever reported to DoCS (now Community Services) by 30 June 2005. We also observed that there was an average of 900 'new' children and young people becoming known to DoCS each week in 2004/05 (Zhou, Robinson & Chilvers, 2006). Since then, the growth in child protection activities has continued and there was a notable increase in entry to out-of-home care (OOHC) in recent years. This report revisits the earlier analysis using the most recent administrative data (up to 30 June 2009) and includes an analysis of OOHC as well.

The present analysis is timely as NSW moves forward with the implementation of *Keep Them Safe* (KTS) reforms. The key aspects of the reforms, such as the raising of the mandatory reporting threshold from 24 January 2010, a greater focus on family preservation / restoration, and an increased investment in prevention and early intervention, will work to reduce, over time, the number of children who need statutory child protection and OOHC services. This provides an opportunity to review the historical data prior to the commencement of the current reforms and this report will serve as a baseline analysis for any future comparisons.

NSW children who were reported to Community Services and who were in OOHC in 2008/09

Table 1 shows the number and rate of children and young people, by age, reported to Community Services in 2008/09. Infants aged less than 1 year (including unborns) were the most frequently reported group with 16 per cent of the resident population reported – around twice the percentage for all children aged under 18 years. The rate of reporting varied with age, with high rates recorded for preschool aged children – an average 8.9 per cent for children aged 1-5, down to 8.2 per cent for the 6-11 age group. The lowest reporting rates (i.e. 5.3per cent) were recorded for post-14 year-olds.

Table 1 also shows that about 4 in 10 children and young people reported in 2008/09 were not previously reported to Community Services. Overall, 39.4 per cent (53,173) of all children and young people who were reported to Community Services in 2008/09 had no prior child protection reports. This translates to an average 2,600 individual children and young people reported each week during the financial year of 2008/09, 1,000 of them 'new' to Community Services.

The proportion of new reports (against re-reports) varied by age group. While a high proportion of first-time reports was observed, and expected, in the younger age-groups, there was still a relatively high proportion of new reports among older children. It is foreshadowed that the raising of the mandatory reporting threshold from early 2010 will reduce both the rates of reporting, and the numbers of new and re- reports across all the age groups.

Table 1: Children/young people reported to Community Services by age at first report, 2008/09

Age at first report in 2008/09	New report in 2008/09		Re-report in 2008/09		Total report in 2008/09	per cent of resident population reported
	No.	per cent	No.	per cent	No.	
<1	11,253	80.7	2,700	19.3	13,953	16.0
1	3,891	49.3	3,995	50.7	7,886	9.0
2	3,643	45.1	4,436	54.9	8,080	9.0
3	3,266	40.6	4,774	59.4	8,040	9.2
4	2,822	37.2	4,773	62.8	7,595	8.8
5	2,775	35.9	4,958	64.1	7,733	8.9
<i>1-5 Subtotal</i>	<i>16,397</i>	<i>41.7</i>	<i>22,936</i>	<i>58.3</i>	<i>39,333</i>	<i>8.9</i>
6	2,511	33.1	5,082	66.9	7,593	8.8
7	2,369	31.9	5,067	68.1	7,435	8.4
8	2,332	31.5	5,069	68.5	7,401	8.3
9	2,141	29.6	5,080	70.4	7,221	8.2
10	2,157	30.3	4,956	69.7	7,113	8.0
11	1,994	29.5	4,770	70.5	6,764	7.5
<i>6-11 Subtotal</i>	<i>13,504</i>	<i>31.0</i>	<i>30,023</i>	<i>69.0</i>	<i>43,527</i>	<i>8.2</i>
12	2,140	30.2	4,955	69.8	7,095	7.9
13	2,343	30.5	5,346	69.5	7,688	8.4
14	2,712	32.4	5,653	67.6	8,364	9.1
<i>12-14 Subtotal</i>	<i>7,194</i>	<i>31.1</i>	<i>15,953</i>	<i>68.9</i>	<i>23,147</i>	<i>8.5</i>
15	2,548	33.6	5,040	66.4	7,589	8.2
16	1,511	31.8	3,241	68.2	4,752	5.1
17	766	30.6	1,736	69.4	2,502	2.6
<i>15-17 Subtotal</i>	<i>4,825</i>	<i>32.5</i>	<i>10,018</i>	<i>67.5</i>	<i>14,843</i>	<i>5.3</i>
Total	53,173	39.4	81,630	60.6	134,803	8.4

Notes: 1) Missing information about age has been adjusted based on the known proportion of each age category.

2) NSW population figures are from ABS Estimated Resident Population by Age, Cat No. 3201.0, June 2008.

Information about children and young people currently in OOHC is presented in Table 2. As at 30 June 2009, 1 per cent of NSW children aged under 18 years lived in OOHC. Of the NSW children who were currently in OOHC, 3 in 7 children (5,042) newly entered OOHC in the most recent financial year (i.e. 2008/09). That was about 97 'new' children/young people being placed in OOHC each week in 2008/09¹. The rates of OOHC placement did not vary much with age, narrowly ranging from 0.6per cent to 1.2per cent, with children aged less than 1 year being the least and children aged 7 and 10-12 years the highest.

¹ This figure does not include those children who newly entered OOHC during the year, but exited OOHC before 30 June 2009.

Similar to what has been observed for child protection reports above, the proportion of new entries decreased as the age of children increased. The proportion of first-time entries was also high among the younger age groups. It is anticipated that the current OOHC reforms will reduce the proportion of new entries and will eventually reduce the rates of OOHC placement over time.

Table 2: Children/young people currently in OOHC by age at 30 June 2009

Age at 30/06/2009	New entry in 2008/09		Entry before 2008/09		Total CYP in OOHC at 30/06/09	per cent resident population in OOHC
	No.	per cent	No.	per cent		
<i>Under-1</i>	234	48.0	254	52.0	488	0.6
1	260	35.5	472	64.5	732	0.8
2	289	34.3	553	65.7	842	0.9
3	304	33.6	602	66.4	906	1.0
4	295	31.6	640	68.4	935	1.1
5	335	35.8	602	64.2	937	1.1
<i>1-5 subtotal</i>	<i>1,483</i>	<i>34.1</i>	<i>2,869</i>	<i>65.9</i>	<i>4,352</i>	<i>1.0</i>
6	317	33.5	630	66.5	947	1.1
7	315	30.5	719	69.5	1,034	1.2
8	325	33.2	655	66.8	980	1.1
9	297	29.9	695	70.1	992	1.1
10	310	29.3	747	70.7	1,057	1.2
11	306	28.0	788	72.0	1,094	1.2
<i>6-11 subtotal</i>	<i>1,870</i>	<i>30.6</i>	<i>4,234</i>	<i>69.4</i>	<i>6,104</i>	<i>1.1</i>
12	295	28.1	754	71.9	1,049	1.2
13	280	27.6	735	72.4	1,015	1.1
14	269	25.7	777	74.3	1,046	1.1
<i>12-14 subtotal</i>	<i>844</i>	<i>27.1</i>	<i>2,266</i>	<i>72.9</i>	<i>3,110</i>	<i>1.1</i>
15	276	27.8	716	72.2	992	1.1
16	196	24.2	615	75.8	811	0.9
17	139	20.8	527	79.2	666	0.7
<i>15-17 subtotal</i>	<i>611</i>	<i>24.7</i>	<i>1,858</i>	<i>75.3</i>	<i>2,469</i>	<i>0.9</i>
Total	5,042	30.5	11,481	69.5	16,523	1.0

Notes: 1) Age is missing for one child only and this is not included in the total.

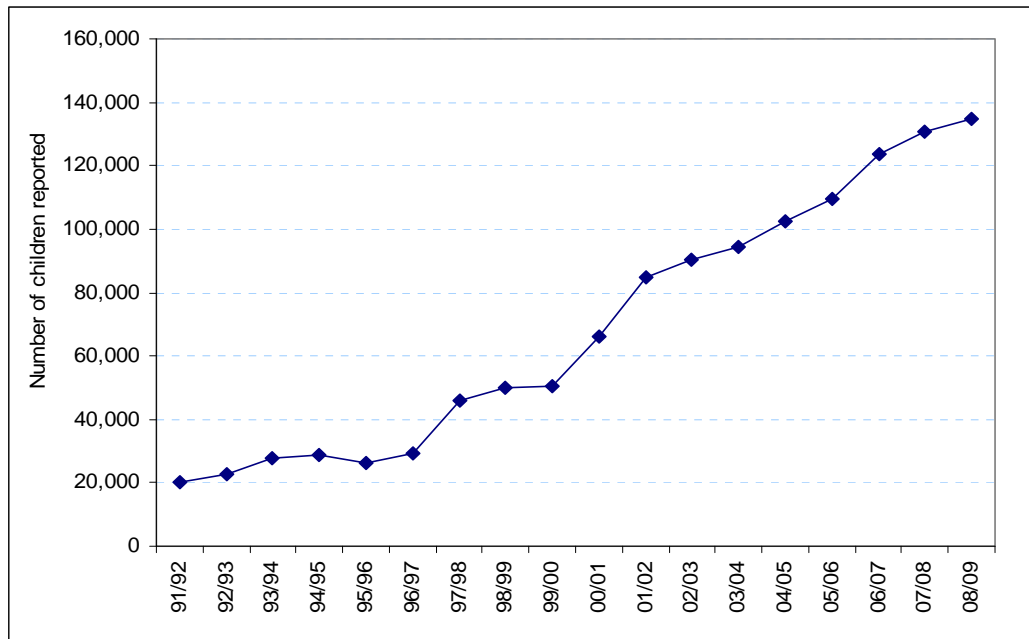
2) NSW population figures are from ABS Estimated Resident Population by Age, Cat No. 3201.0, June 2008.

Growth in the number of children who were involved in the child welfare system

Figure 1 shows that the number of children aged under 18 years reported to Community Services each year has increased considerably since 1991/92. The most significant increase occurred after the introduction of the new *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, which was

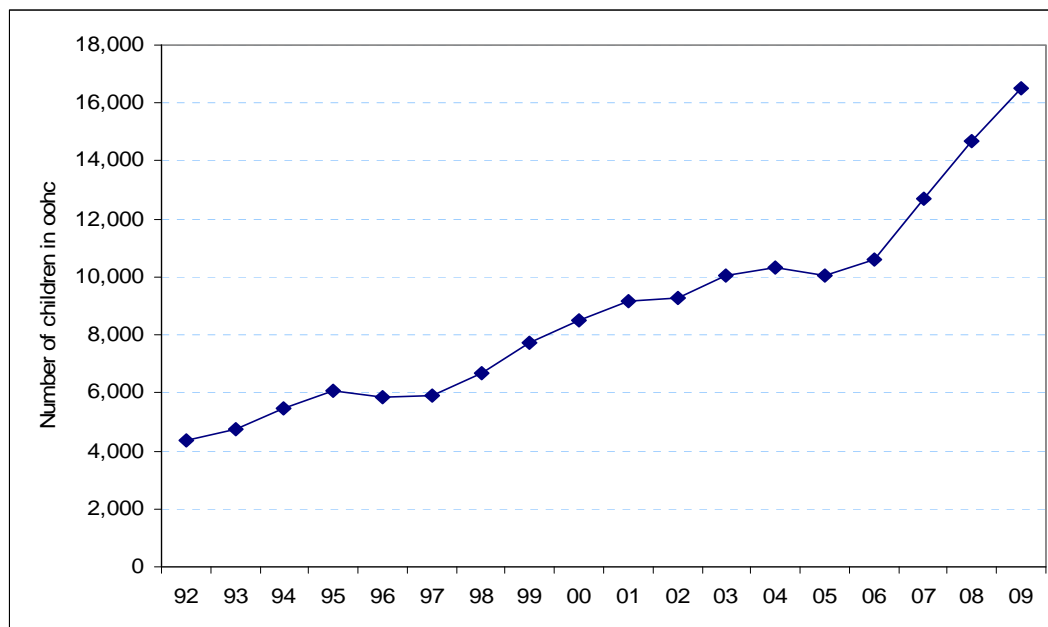
proclaimed in December 2000. The expansion of mandatory reporting, both in terms of what was to be reported and who were the mandatory reporters, pushed upward the reporting trend which has accelerated since then. During the seventeen-year period from 1991/92 to 2008/09, the number of children and young people reported each year has grown significantly from slightly over 20,000 in 1991/92 to almost 135,000 in 2008/09.

Figure 1: Number of children aged under 18 years reported to Community Services each year, 1991/92 – 2008/09



The number of children aged under 18 years who lived in OOHC at the end of each financial year since 1992 is shown in Figure 2. The number has increased over time and the most significant increase occurred in 2006/07. During the seventeen-year period from 1991/92 to 2008/09, the number of children in OOHC has grown more than threefold from below 4,500 children at 30 June 1992 to over 16,000 at 30 June 2009.

Figure 2: Number of children aged under 18 years in OOHC at 30 June, 1992-2009



NSW Children who were ever involved in the child welfare system

Table 3 shows that, overall, slightly more than 1 in 4 (26.7 per cent) of all NSW children and young people currently under the age of 18 were ever reported to Community Services by the end of 2008/09¹. This amounts to nearly 450,000 children and young people; less than half (47.2 per cent) of them had only been reported once during that time.

Not surprisingly, the proportion of children who have ever been reported varied with age. In general, the older a child was, the more likely he or she was known to Community Services². At 30 June 2009, only 10.7 per cent of children aged less than 1 year were ever reported to Community Services, compared to 32.1 per cent of young people aged 17 years. For all age groups from 6 years onwards, at least 1 in 4 children or young people in the NSW resident population were known to Community Services. Among all age

¹ In this analysis, a child who was reported to Community Services at any time from 1 July 1991 to 30 June 2009 is counted and classified according to his or her age at 30 June 2009. A child was only counted once even if he or she was reported on multiple occasions over time.

² It should be noted that the age in Table 3 was calculated using a reference date of 30 June 2009. This is different from Table 1 where age refers to age at the time of first report in 2008/09. Hence, the rates calculate in the two tables would not match. Note that the figures in this report will not exactly match those published in previous annual reports as data quality issues, such as unknown age, have been dealt with by imputation in developing the source data for the analysis.

groups, young people aged 15-16 years had the highest likelihood of ever having contact with the child protection system (33 per cent).

Table 3: Children/young people who have ever been reported to Community Services by age at 30/06/2009, 1990/91–2008/09

Age at 30 June 2009	Reported only once		Reported more than once		Children ever reported total	per cent of population ever reported to Community Services
	No.	per cent	No.	per cent		
<1	4,891	52.2	4,488	47.8	9379	10.7
1	5,849	47.0	6,608	53.0	12,457	14.0
2	7,113	45.6	8,478	54.4	15,591	17.0
3	8,168	45.8	9,674	54.2	17,842	19.9
4	9,162	46.9	10,393	53.1	19,556	22.0
5	9,732	46.2	11,326	53.8	21,057	23.5
<i>1-5 Subtotal</i>	<i>40,024</i>	<i>46.3</i>	<i>46,479</i>	<i>53.7</i>	<i>86,503</i>	<i>19.3</i>
6	10,528	46.0	12,354	54.0	22,882	25.6
7	11,460	45.5	13,743	54.5	25,204	27.5
8	12,376	46.1	14,476	53.9	26,851	28.9
9	13,000	46.3	15,064	53.7	28,064	30.4
10	13,560	46.8	15,421	53.2	28,981	31.2
11	14,090	47.0	15,916	53.0	30,005	31.9
<i>6-11 Subtotal</i>	<i>75,014</i>	<i>46.3</i>	<i>86,974</i>	<i>53.7</i>	<i>161,988</i>	<i>29.3</i>
12	14,154	47.3	15,776	52.7	29,930	31.7
13	14,448	47.5	15,950	52.5	30,397	31.4
14	15,080	47.6	16,627	52.4	31,707	32.7
<i>12-14 Subtotal</i>	<i>43,682</i>	<i>47.5</i>	<i>48,352</i>	<i>52.5</i>	<i>92,034</i>	<i>31.9</i>
15	15,703	48.3	16,776	51.7	32,479	33.0
16	16,169	49.0	16,820	51.0	32,989	33.1
17	16,088	49.4	16,494	50.6	32,583	32.1
<i>15-17 Subtotal</i>	<i>47,960</i>	<i>48.9</i>	<i>50,091</i>	<i>51.1</i>	<i>98,051</i>	<i>32.7</i>
Total	211,571	47.2	236,383	52.8	447,954	26.7

Notes: 1) Missing information about age has been adjusted based on the known proportion of each age category.

2) NSW population figures are from ABS Estimated Resident Population by Age, Cat No. 3201.0, June 2008.

As shown in Table 4, two in 100 NSW children and young people currently under the age of 18 had ever lived in OOHC by the end of 30 June 2009. This is equivalent to a total of 35,692 children and young people, almost three quarters of whom had only one care episode in OOHC during that time.

The proportion of children who had ever lived in OOHC in NSW varied with age. In general, older children had a higher chance of being ever placed in OOHC. At 30 June 2009, slightly less than 1 per cent of infants in the general

population had ever lived in OOHC. This proportion doubled when children reached the age of 7 years, and tripled by the age of 14 years and above. Among children of all ages, young people aged 15-16 years had the highest likelihood of ever having contact with the OOHC system.

Table 4: Children/young people who ever lived in OOHC by age at 30/06/2009, 1991/92-2008/09

Age at 30/06/09	One episode		More than one episode		Children ever in OOHC total	per cent population ever in OOHC
	No.	per cent	No.	per cent		
<1	667	98.8	8	1.2	675	0.8
1	887	95.3	44	4.7	931	1.1
2	1,054	91.0	104	9.0	1,159	1.3
3	1,105	86.9	167	13.1	1,271	1.4
4	1,187	84.2	223	15.8	1,410	1.6
5	1,232	81.8	273	18.2	1,505	1.7
<i>1-5 subtotal</i>	<i>5,464</i>	<i>87.1</i>	<i>812</i>	<i>12.9</i>	<i>6,276</i>	<i>1.4</i>
6	1,336	79.6	343	20.4	1,679	1.9
7	1,403	76.7	426	23.3	1,829	2.1
8	1,449	76.8	438	23.2	1,887	2.1
9	1,464	72.1	566	27.9	2,030	2.3
10	1,606	71.1	653	28.9	2,259	2.5
11	1,687	69.6	738	30.4	2,425	2.7
<i>6-11 subtotal</i>	<i>8,944</i>	<i>73.9</i>	<i>3,164</i>	<i>26.1</i>	<i>12,108</i>	<i>2.3</i>
12	1,724	67.6	825	32.4	2,549	2.8
13	1,694	65.8	881	34.2	2,575	2.8
14	1,844	65.5	973	34.5	2,816	3.1
<i>12-14 subtotal</i>	<i>5,261</i>	<i>66.3</i>	<i>2,678</i>	<i>33.7</i>	<i>7,940</i>	<i>2.9</i>
15	1,893	64.5	1,040	35.5	2,933	3.2
16	1,830	62.0	1,122	38.0	2,953	3.2
17	1,701	60.6	1,107	39.4	2,808	2.9
<i>15-17 subtotal</i>	<i>5,424</i>	<i>62.4</i>	<i>3,269</i>	<i>37.6</i>	<i>8,693</i>	<i>3.1</i>
Total	25,761	72.2	9,931	27.8	35,692	2.2

Notes: 1) Missing information about age has been adjusted based on the known proportion of each age category.

2) NSW population figures are from ABS Estimated Resident Population by Age, Cat No. 3201.0, June 2008.

Discussion and conclusions

At 30 June 2009, 27 per cent of NSW children aged under 18 years were 'known to Community Services'. The proportion of NSW children 'known to Community Services' was estimated to be between 10-33 per cent of children aged 0-17 years at some time before they reached the age of 18. This is compared with the finding of 19 per cent of all NSW children 'known to DoCS'

at 30 June 2005 in our earlier report. Four years on, an additional 6 per cent of the child population in NSW became 'known to Community Services'.

At the same time, 1 per cent of NSW children aged under 18 years currently lived in OOHC. This proportion increased to 2 per cent if we considered all NSW children who had ever lived in OOHC. Depending on the age of a child, the proportion of children who ever needed OOHC services is estimated to be between 0.8-3.2 per cent of all children at some time before they turned 18 years old.

In the past seventeen years, there was a continual increase in the number of NSW children who were reported to Community Services and who lived in OOHC. This increase has placed a significant strain on the child welfare service system in NSW. It is anticipated that this upward trend will be reversed with the implementation of the KTS reforms.

Reference

Zhou, A. Robinson, W. & Chilvers, M. (2006), *Reporting Trends and Estimate of NSW Children and Young People "Known to DoCS"*, NSW Department of Community Services: Sydney.