

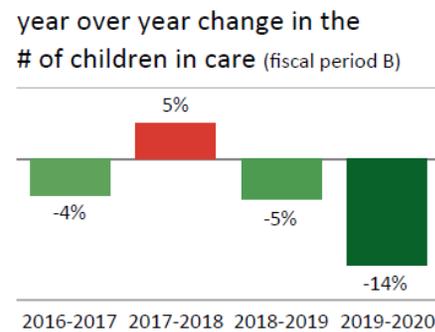
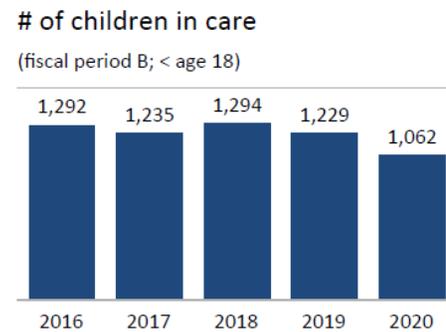
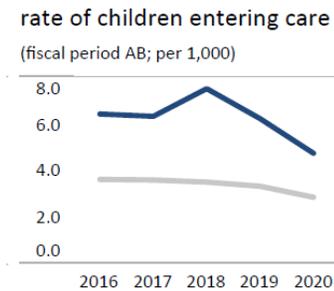
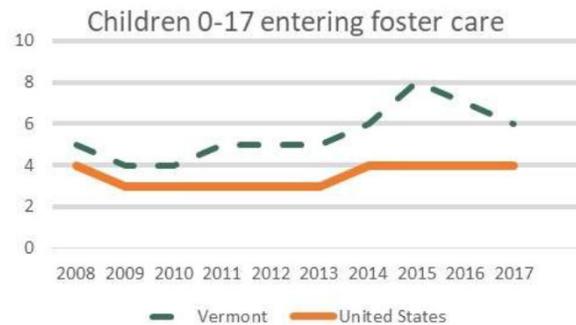
Drivers of Child Custody in Vermont



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
**EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL SERVICES**

Problem

Although trending down, Vermont's custody entry rates have been above the US average since 2008.

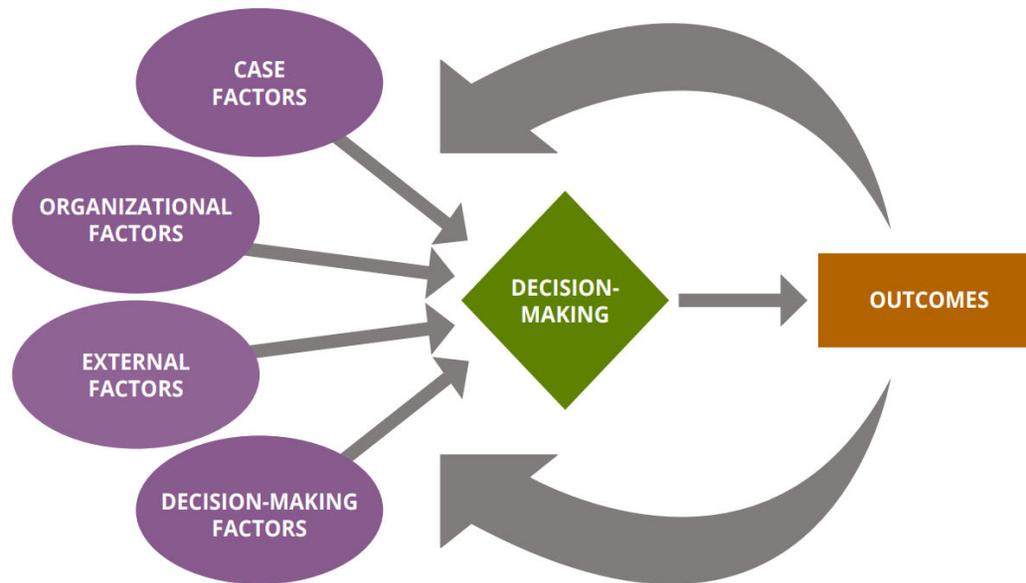


Research Question

What are drivers of child welfare custody in Vermont?

(with no comparison to other states)

Decision Making Ecology



Decision Making Ecology (Baumann, Dalglish, Fluke, & Kern, 2011)

Methods and Approach by Phase

Phase 1

- **Winter/Spring 2020** Systematic Literature Review

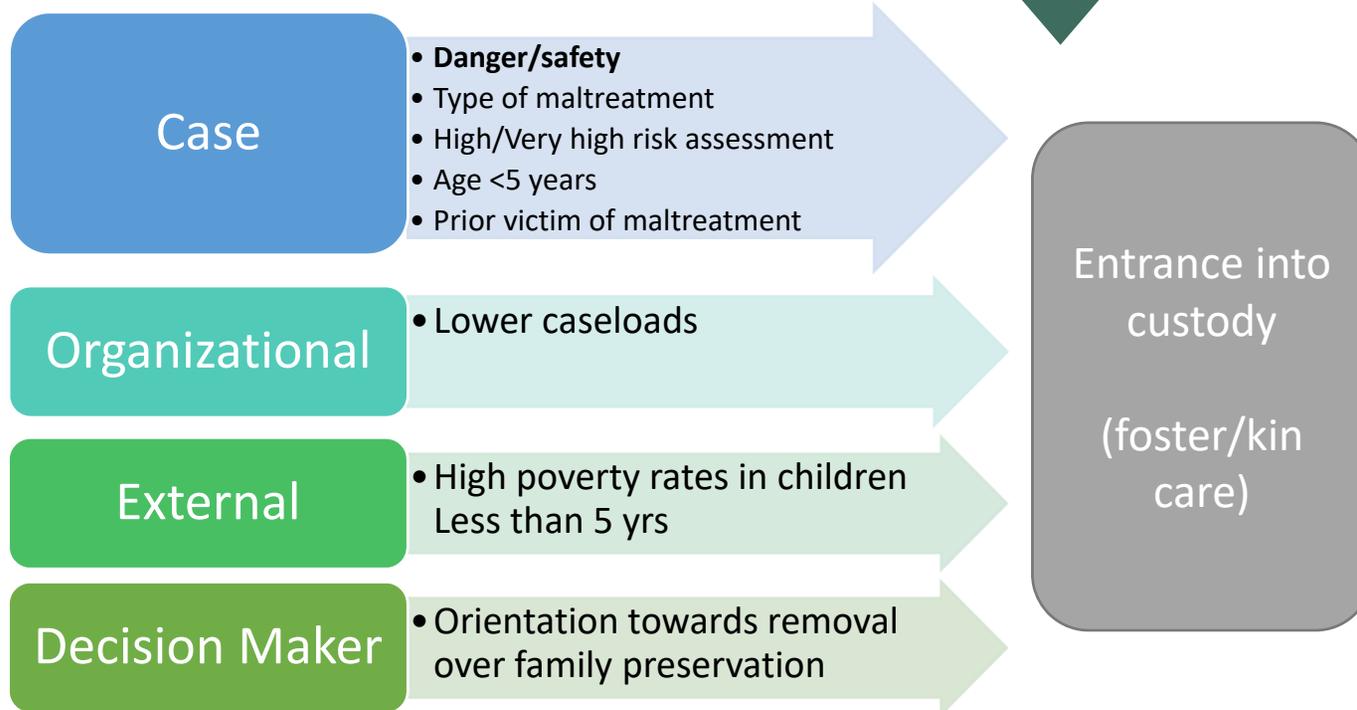
Phase 2

- **Spring-Fall 2020** Quantitative Data Analysis I (longitudinal case factors; 2010,2014,2018)
- **Summer 2020** Survey data collection
- **Summer 2020** Focus Groups with Stakeholders

Phase 3

- **Fall 2020-Spring 2021** Quantitative Data Analysis II (multilevel modeling)
- **Spring 2021** – Case reviews and safety data merge

Key Findings: Phase II Summary 2019



Caseworkers with proclivity toward family preservation over child removal...

- Demographics
 - Older, higher degrees, more years of experience
- Response to stress
 - Lower STS
 - Higher resilience
 - Less affected by parental hostility
- Decision making and collaboration
 - Rely more on case factors than personal beliefs/values
 - More use of SDM to guide decision making
 - Stronger collaboration with CFS providers

Phase III



- **26 random cases**
- **Safe/Safe with plan**
- **Entered custody within 12 mo.**

Key Findings: Phase III

No consistent evidence of children being removed without SDM danger

27% involved domestic violence as a factor impacting custody.

12% had a CCO that failed prior to entering custody

65% involved substance use as a driving factor in custody

Top 5 Identified dangers

42% #1. caregiver caused serious harm or is in imminent danger of causing serious harm

15% #9. Other concern “circumstances that pose an immediate threat of serious harm to a child not already described in 1-8.”
(*Should be rarely used.)

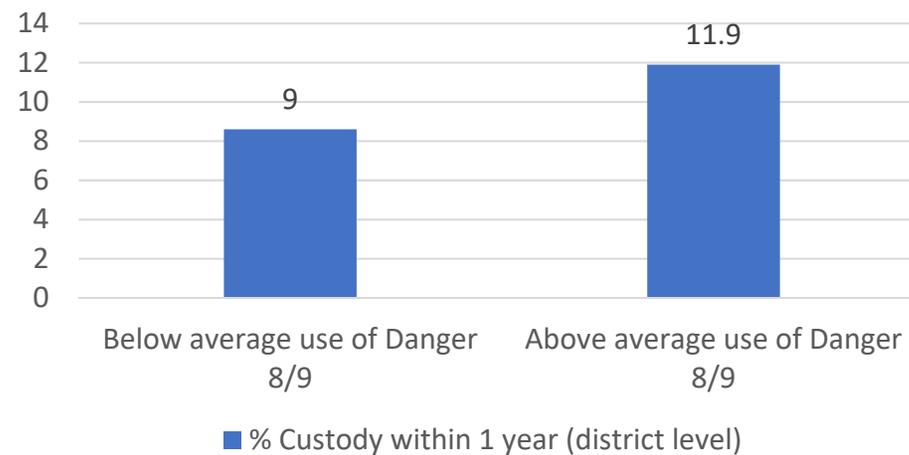
14% #8. previous serious concerns about and current circumstances that do not meet threshold of other danger item

13% #5. Caregiver unable to protect child from harm (i.e. Domestic Violence)

12% # 4. Hazardous Living Situation (i.e. extreme hoarding)

Subjective Danger (SDM #8 & 9)

% Custody within 1 year (district level)



Services to prevent custody

Residential
substance use
with children

Developmental
Services for
parents

Affordable
Housing

In home
intensive wrap
around services

Limitations

- Data reliability
- Lack of comparison to other state systems



Considerations



Family Services Division and Community Partners

Infrastructure and funding

- Upgrade data systems
- Utilize federal funding for workforce development
- Increase funding for family-based prevention services
- Equitably allocate funding among service districts

Policy and practice

- Minimize bias in decision making
- Develop expanded practice guidance for SDM
- Address STS in workforce
- Expand prevention service array

Court Systems

Request and incorporate documented evidence of immediate danger prior to making custody decisions.

Consider the match between family needs and the services they have received.

Legislature

Provide necessary funding to upgrade the data systems used by caseworkers and

Encourage DCF/FSD to utilize federal funding to expand the array of services

Provide necessary requirements and funding to ensure families' access to culturally responsive

Consider statutory changes that would revise mandatory reporting requirements.

Consider statutory changes that would revise mandatory reporting requirements.

Questions



Contact

Jessica Strolin-Goltzman, PhD, LMSW

jstrolin@uvm.edu

Hannah Holbrook, PhD

Hholbrook@uvm.edu

Tammy Kolbe, EdD

tkolbe@uvm.edu

Dean Katharine Shepherd, EdD

kshepherd@uvm.edu

University of Vermont