

"U. Illinois: Illinois State U. study examines parental meth use"

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By Erin Kelley, Daily Illini (U. Illinois)

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. -- Three years ago, Julia Miller and Linda Kingry, students at Illinois State University and child welfare workers, noticed an increase in the number of children coming into foster care because their parents were abusing methamphetamine.

The women recognized these children may experience more abuse than other children in foster care and had greater needs. The students approached Wendy Haight, an associate professor in social work, about studying the effects on children when their parents abused methamphetamine.

The study aims to help child welfare workers to find out the scope of methamphetamine abuse and determine if child services need to be changed in any way.

"(It is) to see a better understanding of the effects," Kingry said.

There are three steps to the study thus far, Haight said. "In these bleak days: Parent Methamphetamine abuse and child welfare in the rural Midwest" is a descriptive study of the context the children grow up in. The study included 90 hours of shadowing the Department of Children and Family Services on investigations in many rural settings across seven counties.

There seems to be a problem with drug use in poorer settings like trailers and homes in small towns. Law enforcement, professionals, educators and 18 children in the areas were interviewed to gain a sense of the community's knowledge of the drug and abuse.

The second report focused on a child's understanding of parent methamphetamine abuse, Haight said. The report used the experiences of rural, central Illinois children seven to 14 years old who were involved with public child welfare system.

The majority of children talked about situations when law enforcement and child welfare were involved with their family. They continued to express sadness, distress or resistance after being put in foster care because they did not want to be separated from their family.

"This is where children diverged from adults," Haight said. "While adults observed neglect, kids talked a lot about separation and loss, losing parents, going to foster care. They converged in a lot of areas but diverged on emphases of neglect and abuse."

The third study looked at children's mental health needs and perspectives when raised by methamphetamine abusive parents. The study is still under review, but Haight said those children had higher scores on the measure of trauma they experienced.

The next step is an intervention study, which focuses on prevention, education and intervention as well as finding intervention feasible in rural areas.

"One of the goals is to try to figure out ways of intervening to address mental health issues," Haight said.

A counselor is visiting the children using the "life story narrative theory" to find out what is important to the child, Kingry said.

The sessions are not focused on the methamphetamine abuse; instead children are allowed to share their feelings to a "support person," someone they know cares and is listening to them.