

Child Protection Across Generations: A Life-Course Scoping Review of Multigenerational CPS Involvement

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18
Included empirical studies

INTRODUCTION

Multigenerational CPS involvement occurs when childhood CPS contact reappears in the next generation once that child becomes a parent. The literature synthesizes recurrence rates but less clearly explains what those rates mean across systems and life stages. This review asked: how often is recurrence reported, and how does the literature explain it?

METHODS

- ◆ Scoping review following PRISMA-Scr (PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews).
- ◆ Eligible studies: CPS involvement across two or more consecutive generations.
- ◆ Databases: PsycINFO, MEDLINE, CINAHL, Social Work Abstracts, Scopus (1990–2024).
- ◆ All empirical designs; no geographic restriction.

PRISMA-SCR FLOW

43 **Records identified**

Database: n=26 · Grey lit & hand search: n=17

33 **Title / abstract screening**

After duplicates removed

23 **Full-text assessed**

5 excluded: wrong population or no CPS measure

18 **Studies included**

Qualitative: 4 · Quantitative: 14

RESULTS

5%–21%
Reported range in groups with prior CPS exposure

3%–6%
Reported rates in comparison groups without CPS exposure

KEY FINDINGS

01

CPS as a life-course institution

Contact often reappears at transition points rather than as a single episode.

02

Dual pressure on second-generation parents

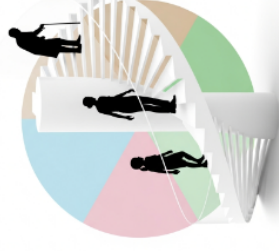
Vulnerability intersects with heightened surveillance and cumulative disadvantage.

03

Continuity is modifiable

Housing, income, support, and relational continuity can shift trajectories.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL



LIFE-COURSE TRAJECTORY OF CPS INVOLVEMENT

Childhood

First turn into CPS contact

Parenthood

Second turn, next generation

Grandparenthood

Third turn of CPS involvement

The spiral staircase represents overlapping lives in the system simultaneously; upward movement shows how CPS involvement can continue across successive generations.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When children with CPS histories become parents, their families re-enter the system at rates **3–4× higher** than the general population — reflecting both the intergenerational transmission of adversity and the structure of institutional responses.

This cycle is not inevitable. Early, sustained, relational support is the most promising lever for change.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

1 Intergenerational CPS involvement is measurable and recurrent, but rates vary substantially across study designs, definitions, and jurisdictions. Methodological heterogeneity limits direct comparison and calls for standardised measurement frameworks.

2 Recurrence reflects the structure of institutional responses — not simply family dysfunction. Families with CPS histories face heightened surveillance at precisely the moments they are most vulnerable: care exit, early adulthood, and first-time parenting.

3 Targeted, relational support during transition periods — particularly care exit and early parenting — represents the most promising window for interruption. Housing stability, adequate income, and sustained mentorship are consistently identified as protective factors.