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Placement Decision Making in Child Welfare: Child, Family, Household, and Case Factors

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Background Information: Out-of-home placement is described as being the most costly and intrusive response to a child protection investigation (Knoke, Goodman, Leslie, & Trocme, 2007), and is the largest single expenditure for most child welfare jurisdictions in Canada (Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare, 2012). There is limited understanding on the benefits of this costly intervention, and for which children placement is best suited. Children in care are reported to experience greater behavioural problems (Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007), be less willing to be engaged in relationships (Stott & Gustavsson, 2010), and possess decreased cognitive skills (Berger, Bruch, Johnson, James, & Rubin, 2009). While the national trend for rates of placement has seen a general decrease over the past 10 years (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010), Alberta has been an exception. In 2008, 9% of all child welfare investigations resulted in a child welfare placement compared to 7% in 2003 (MacLaurin et al., 2013). The Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 is a provincial on reported. Based on a secondary data analysis of the AIS-2008, this poster will highlight factors associated with child welfare placement compared to no placement in Alberta in 2008.

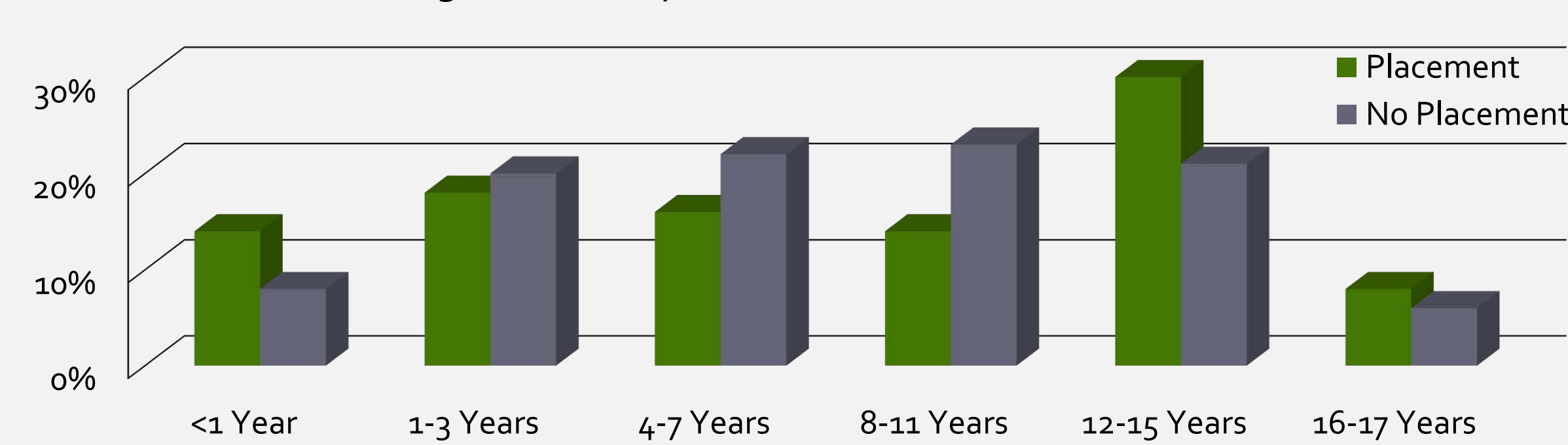
Method

The Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (AIS-2008) is the second cycle of a provincial study that examines reported incidents of child abuse and neglect. This poster is based on a secondary data analysis of 27,417 child maltreatment investigations from the AIS-2008 dataset comparing characteristics of cases where placement was noted (n=2,383), and cases where no placement was noted (n=24,764). Bivariate analysis and Pearson's chi-squared tests were conducted to compare select child, household, and case characteristics of these two types of cases.

Child Factors

- Age of child varied considerably (refer to Table 1). A higher percentage of placement investigations involved children younger than 1 year old (14%) compared to no placement investigations (8%).
- At least one child functioning concern was noted in 76% of placement child investigations and in 42% of no placement child investigations.
- A higher percentage of placement investigations involved children of Aboriginal heritage (33%), than no placement investigations (30%).

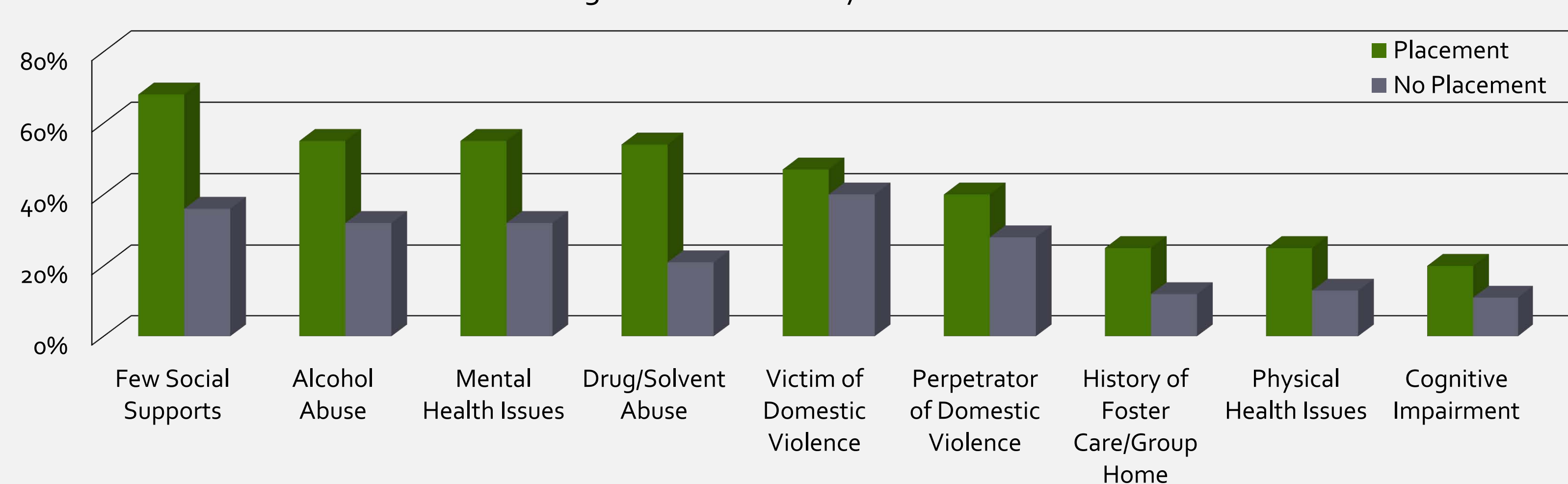
Table 1: Age of Child by Placement and No Placement Cases



Family and Household Factors

- For placement cases, caregiver risk factors included few social supports (68%), alcohol abuse (55%), and mental health issues (55%) (refer to Table 2). For no placement cases, risk factors included victim of domestic violence (40%), few social supports (36%), and alcohol abuse (32%).
- Ninety-three percent of placement investigations noted at least one caregiver risk factor, compared to 75% of no placement investigations.
- At least one household safety factor was noted in 31% of placement cases and in 12% of no placement cases.
- Twenty percent of placement cases noted the home was over-crowded, compared to 12% of no placement cases.
- Thirty-six percent of placement investigations identified that families ran out of money for basic necessities at the end of the month, compared to 23% of no placement investigations.

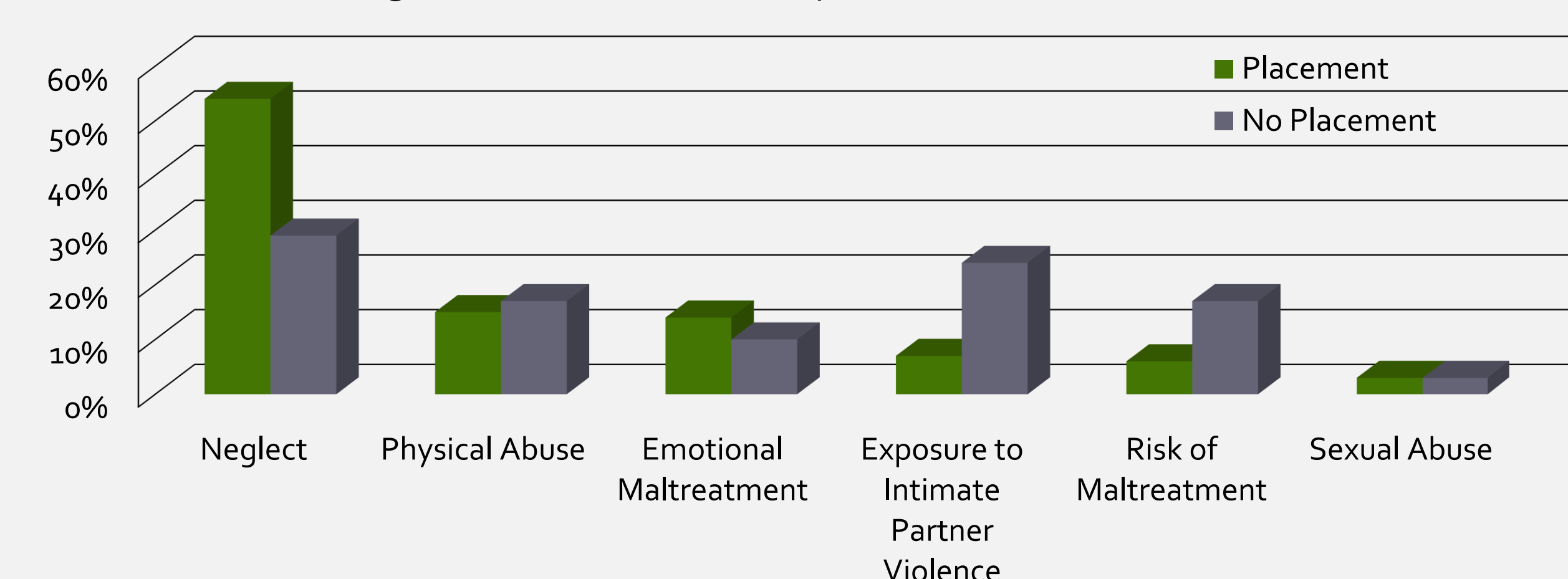
Table 2: Household Caregiver Risk Factors by Placement and No Placement Cases



Case Factors

- Categories of maltreatment varied by placement decision (refer to Table 3). Neglect was noted in 54% of all placement cases followed by physical abuse (15%), emotional maltreatment (14%), exposure to intimate partner violence (7%), risk of maltreatment (6%), and sexual abuse (3%). Categories of maltreatment for investigations that had no placement were neglect (29%), exposure to intimate partner violence (24%), physical abuse (17%), risk of maltreatment (17%), emotional maltreatment (10%), and sexual abuse (3%).

Table 3: Categories of Maltreatment by Placement and No Placement Cases



- Forty percent of placement cases noted emotional harm requiring therapeutic treatment, compared to a significantly lower percentage for no placement cases (12%) (refer to Table 4).
- Placement cases noted a higher percentage of severe physical harm requiring treatment (7%), compared to no placement cases (1%) (refer to Table 5).

Table 4: Severity of Emotional Harm by Placement and No Placement Cases

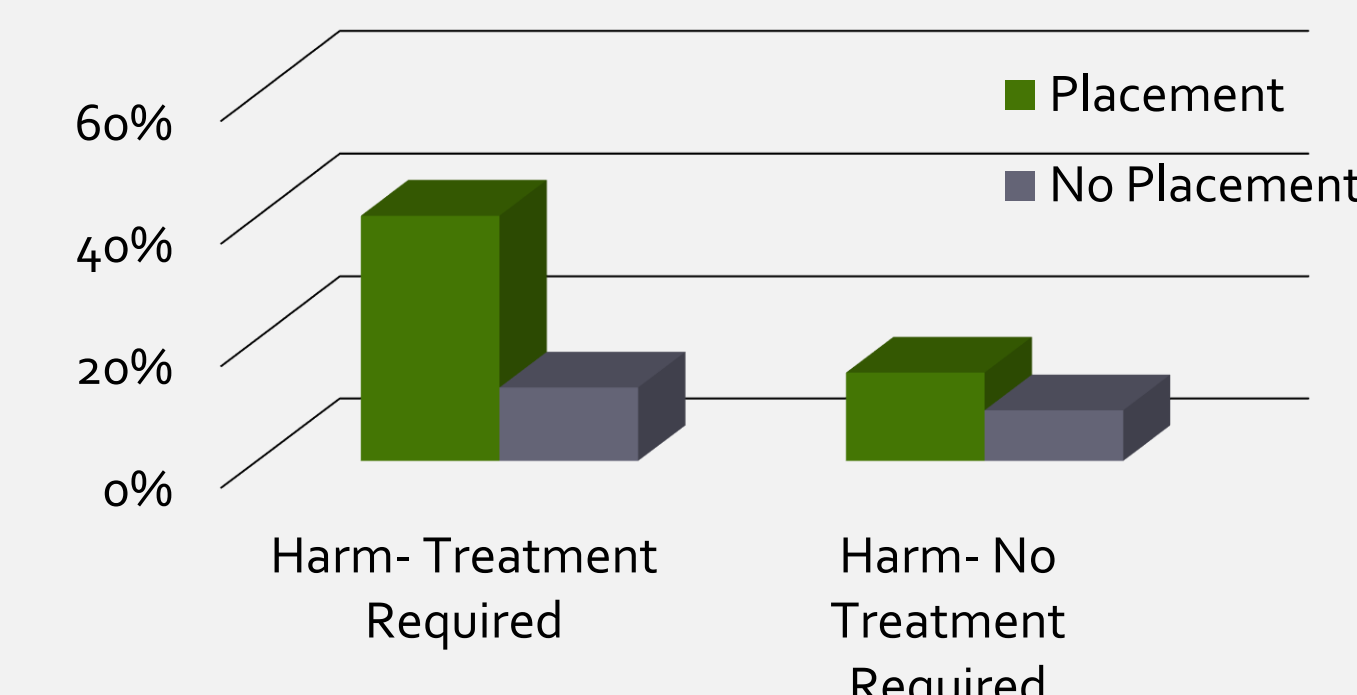
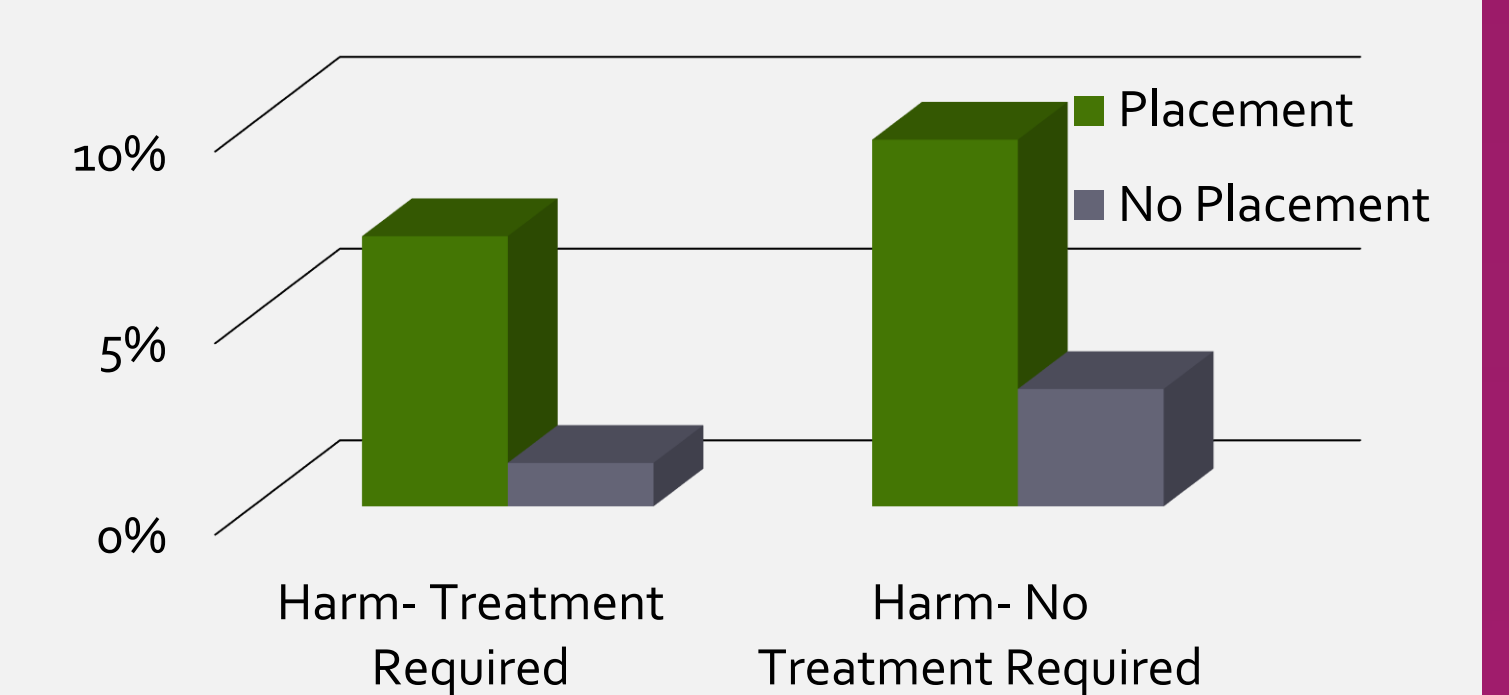


Table 5: Severity of Physical Harm by Placement and No Placement Cases



- Seventy-four percent of placement cases noted the duration of a suspected or substantiated maltreatment event occurring over multiple incidents, compared to 41% for no placement investigations.
- Seventy-seven percent of families involved in placement cases were previously reported to child protection services and 57% of no placement cases.
- Placement cases had a significantly higher percentage of 28% for police involvement related to child maltreatment, compared to no placement cases (8%).

Conclusion

This analysis highlights the child, family/household, and case factors associated with the decision to place a child in care in Alberta in 2008. Findings from this study are consistent with findings from current literature where risk factors associated with placement include children under the age of 1, increased levels of child function concerns, and increased caregiver and household concerns. Placement cases noted higher percentages for physical abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment and lower percentages of exposure to intimate partner violence and sexual abuse. This poster was created as part of a two stage exploration of factors associated with placement. The second analysis will explore predictive factors of child welfare cases involving children placed in care.

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