Early Childhood Court Comparative Analysis

The Early Childhood Court (ECC) initiative has been underway in Florida for approximately five years. To ensure continuous quality improvement (CQI), the Office of Court Improvement has collected data on ECC cases, and recently conducted a comparative analysis of Florida's ECC children to Florida's non-ECC children. Using Florida's Dependency Court Information System, Jielin Ming, former Senior Court Analyst II and doctoral student at Florida State University complied the data and developed findings regarding the permanency and safety of ECC children ages 0-3 (at time of removal) compared to a random sample of non-ECC children comparable to the ECC population over a 5-year period. She also made recommendations for improvements to support the CQI process.

Data Collection and Measurement
Sixteen counties were involved in the comparative analysis. Outliers were removed, and the subsample of children obtained via random sampling resulted in a comparison of approximately 360 children in each group (ECC and non-ECC).

Several two-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the success of *permanency* between the ECC and the non-ECC groups. The s*afety* of ECC children was measured with the percentages of re-removals.

Summary and Findings
- The average time to overall permanency for the ECC group (*M*=552.9, *SD*=222.55 days) was *significantly** *shorter* than that of the non-ECC group (*M*=695, *SD*=646.26days).
- The average time to reunification closure for the ECC group (*M* = 477.1, *SD*=148.59 days) was s*ignificantly shorter* than that of the non-ECC group (*M* = 736.2, *SD*=740.63days).
- The average time to adoption closure for the ECC group (*M*= 687.3, *SD*=248.46 days) was *not significantly shorter* than that of the non ECC group (*M* = 699, *SD*=285.2 days).
- The average time to permanent guardianship for the ECC group (*M*=453.1, *SD*=192.1 days) was *significantly shorter* than that of the non-ECC group (*M*=683.3, *SD*=742.0 days).
- *No significant association* was found between the group membership (ECC or non-ECC) and the status of re-removal (i.e., children re-removed versus not-re-removed), based on the chi-square test of independence, (χ2 (1) = 2, *p* = 0.157).
- Gender did not have any impact on the permanency timelines in the ECC group.

Recommendations for CQI
1. Add the reasons for re-removal to the data reporting system.
2. Include the option of Hispanic/non-Hispanic to the coding category of race in the data tracking system.
3. Standardize the method used to measure the number of ECC placements in the data tracking system to better align with the method used with the non-ECC placements.
4. Reduce the number of missing values in the raw data among different variables, like birthdate of parents.
5. Develop a dashboard for public use.

*Statistical significance means that a result from testing or experimenting is not likely to occur randomly or by chance, but is instead likely to be attributable to a specific cause.