

## NSW child protection reports involving children with teenage parents in 2016–17

This brief presents an analysis of children who were reported to the NSW child protection system in 2016–2017 as being at risk of significant harm (ROSH), and had at least one teenage parent at the time of the report. The data analysed was from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (formerly Family and Community Services or FACS) client information system relating to child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC).

### Key messages

- This analysis highlights the vulnerabilities of a small but important group of children reported to child protection authorities every year: those with teenage parents.
- Around 1.4% of children reported in 2016–17 as being at risk of significant harm (ROSH) had a teenage parent (aged 15-19 years) at the time of their first report.
- Compared to the overall ROSH population, children with teenage parents were more likely to be assessed as unsafe, be reported at a younger age and enter out-of-home care (OOHC). Nine in ten parents of this group had experienced either a ROSH report or an OOHC placement as a child.
- The support needs and negative child protection outcomes associated with having teenage parents were greater among Aboriginal children.
- This cohort of children were generally brought to the attention of mandatory reporters at a young age, allowing for potential early identification and intervention. The targeting of services to better meet the needs of this cohort may lead to improved engagement with services and outcomes.
- Further analysis is needed to isolate the impact of having a teenage parent from other factors, such as intergenerational child protection history and age of child, in order to get a better understanding of the needs of this cohort.

## Introduction

FACS Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR) completed an analysis of child protection administrative data to add to the evidence base for the NSW Government's *Their Futures Matter* (TFM) reforms. This brief highlights the key findings from this analysis.

The analysis examined a cohort of children and young people who were reported to NSW statutory child protection authorities as being at ROSH during 2016–17 who had at least one teenage parent (defined as aged 15-19 years) at the time the ROSH report was made. This group of clients were likely to be at risk of poor outcomes due to increased risk factors associated with having young parents as well as intergenerational abuse and neglect.

Data from the previous five years (2012–13 to 2016–17) are examined in this brief to understand the size of the cohort over time and their interaction with OOHC services. Where possible, comparisons are made to the overall population of children reported at ROSH, and information is provided on the historical interaction of the cohort's teenage parents with the child protection and OOHC systems. Findings are also presented for Aboriginal children reported at ROSH with teenage parents.

The data presented in this brief provides a better understanding of the size, demographic composition, service use and needs of this group of clients.

## Background

### *Their Futures Matter* cohort approach

*Their Futures Matter* is the NSW Government's response to a 2015 Independent Review of OOHC. It is a whole of system reform designed to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

In meeting the recommendations laid out in the review, *Their Futures Matter* has implemented a cohort approach to identify and understand groups of vulnerable children and families, and to design and implement evidence-based wrap-around supports that better meet their needs.

Cohort evidence profiles drawing on primary data and existing research have been developed to increase understanding of the target cohorts and guide the development of interventions.

FACSIAR developed a dataset combining multiple operational data sources to support the development of several of the cohort profiles and provide rich data on children reported at ROSH who have teenage parents.

## Why focus on children with teenage parents?

Teenage parents are often subject to an intergenerational cycle of abuse and neglect. Parents who were themselves in OOHC are overrepresented in Australian statistics of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. A national study in 2006 based on the findings from four leaving care studies, estimated that one in four OOHC leavers had children soon after leaving care. This was approximately 24 times higher than the rate of teenage pregnancy in the population (Morgan Disney and Associates 2006, p.14).

A body of literature has identified risk factors associated with early parenting which include greater occurrence of child abuse and neglect, increased behaviour problems, cognitive delays and insecure attachment (Jacobs et. al. 2016).

While teenage parents (and/or their children) are not necessarily disadvantaged solely as a result of their teenage parent status, the development of the current dataset has identified a sizable group of clients where multiple vulnerabilities have likely contributed to continued contact with the child protection system. A closer examination of available data about this group of clients can support improved identification of vulnerable clients and increased understanding of their service needs.

## Method

FACSIAR analysed data on children who had a ROSH report in 2016–17 and had a parent who was aged 15-19 years at the time of that ROSH report. We examined data from 2012–13 to 2016–17 to explore the size of the cohort over time. We also explored the child protection and OOHC history of the parents of these children. The data were sourced from the Department of Communities and Justice (formerly Family and Community Services) client information system relating to child protection and OOHC (KiDS).

Where available data allowed, the cohort of teenage parents were compared with all children who were reported at ROSH in 2016–17, as well as with children who were reported at ROSH in 2016–17 and had an equivalent age profile (0-4 years) to the children of teenage parents. Findings are also presented for Aboriginal children reported at ROSH with teenage parents.

Care should be taken in generalising conclusions about this cohort to children with teenage parents who had no child protection history and who have a 'once-off' or less intensive interaction with the child protection system. See Appendix 1 for further information about the cohort and limitations of the analysis.

## Findings

### Key findings

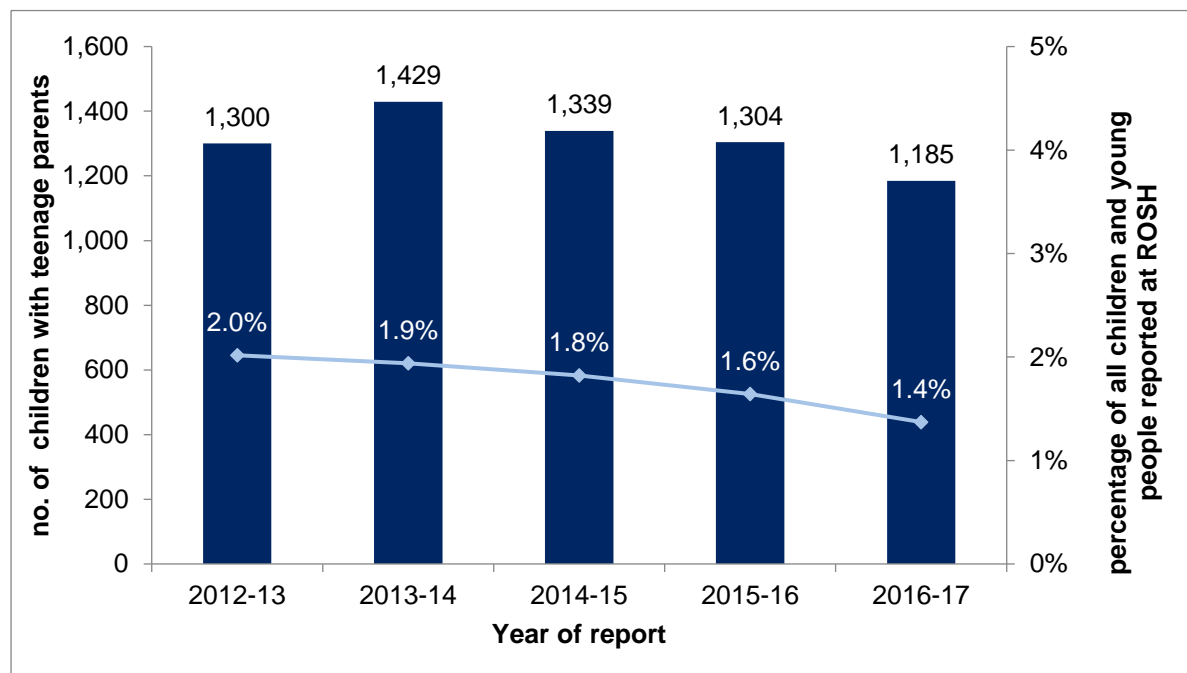
- In 2016–17, 1.4% (n=1,185) of children and young people reported at risk of significant harm (ROSH) had at least one teenage parent at the time of their first report in the period. Children who had a teenage parent at the time of the report accounted for 5.4% of all children reported at ROSH aged 0-4 years in 2016–17.
- Children of teenage parents came to the attention of Departmental (FACS) workers at an earlier age than other children.
- Children of teenage parents, similar to all children reported at ROSH aged 0-4 years, were most likely to be first reported by a health worker – making this group of workers an important touch point for early intervention. This differs for children of other ages reported at ROSH, who were most likely to be first reported by Education staff or 'Other' reporter types.
- Children of teenage parents were more likely to have a face-to-face assessment associated with their report and to be found 'unsafe' as a result of that assessment, compared with other children reported at ROSH.
- Compared to all children reported at ROSH in 2016–17 aged 0-4 years, children with teenage parents were more likely to be reported prenatally and were more likely to be reported for most categories of ROSH issue, including: caregiver mental health issues; other caregiver issues; children's risk taking behaviours; carer drug/alcohol abuse; domestic violence; and neglect. They were less likely to be reported at risk of psychological abuse.
- Children reported at ROSH with teenage parents were likely to be involved in a cycle of intergenerational abuse and neglect. Nine in ten of the parents of children in this cohort had a ROSH and/or out-of-home care (OOHC) history.
- Children reported at ROSH with teenage parents were substantially more likely to have ever been in OOHC compared to all children reported at ROSH.
- Aboriginal children who were reported at ROSH were more likely to have teenage parents than non-Aboriginal children. While Aboriginal children accounted for 22.0% of children reported at ROSH in 2016–17, 47.8% of children with teenage parents reported at ROSH were Aboriginal children.
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children with teenage parents differed in terms of their age at first report, the prevalence of reports, types of reported issues and service response. Aboriginal children with teenage parents were more likely to receive a face-to-face assessment, and Aboriginal teenage parents were younger than non-Aboriginal teenage parents.

### How many children reported at ROSH had teenage parents?

Children with teenage parents made up 1.4% of all children and young people reported at ROSH in 2016–17, and made up 5.4% of all children aged 0–4 years reported at ROSH during the same period. While children with teenage parents account for a relatively small proportion of the overall ROSH cohort, the number of clients is large (1,185 children).

Figure 1 below shows the proportion of children reported at ROSH with teenage parents has decreased from 2.0% in 2012–13 to 1.4% in 2016–17. Their number has also decreased over this time, from 1,300 in 2012–13 to 1,185 in 2016–17. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that the number of births to teenage mothers in the NSW population has decreased during the same period from 3,180 in 2012 to 2,079 in 2017 (ABS 2018).

**Figure 1: Number of children reported at ROSH with teenage parents and as a percentage of all children and young people reported at ROSH, 2012–13 to 2016–17**



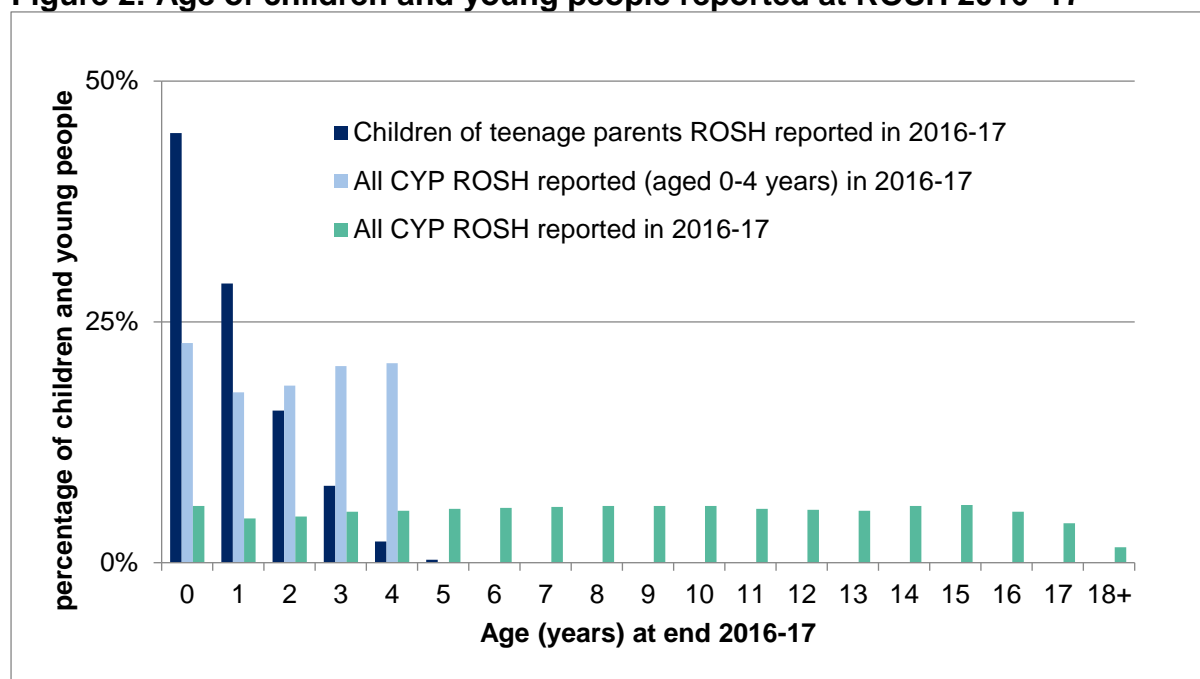
Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

### How old were these children?

The cohort of children with teenage parents was significantly younger than the overall ROSH population (see Figure 2). At the end of 2016–17, almost all (99.6%) of the children with teenage parents were aged four years or younger, compared with 26.0% of all children reported at ROSH. It is important to consider these differences when interpreting the results of this analysis. The age of the child is a vulnerability issue considered in assessments and decisions made by caseworkers. If the data show that the teenage parents cohort receives a different service response to the

overall ROSH population, this may be due to the younger age of the children in the cohort, rather than the age of their parents.

**Figure 2: Age of children and young people reported at ROSH 2016–17**



Note: Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH, (ANOVA  $F(1, 84921) = 2741.761$ ,  $p = 0.000$ )

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

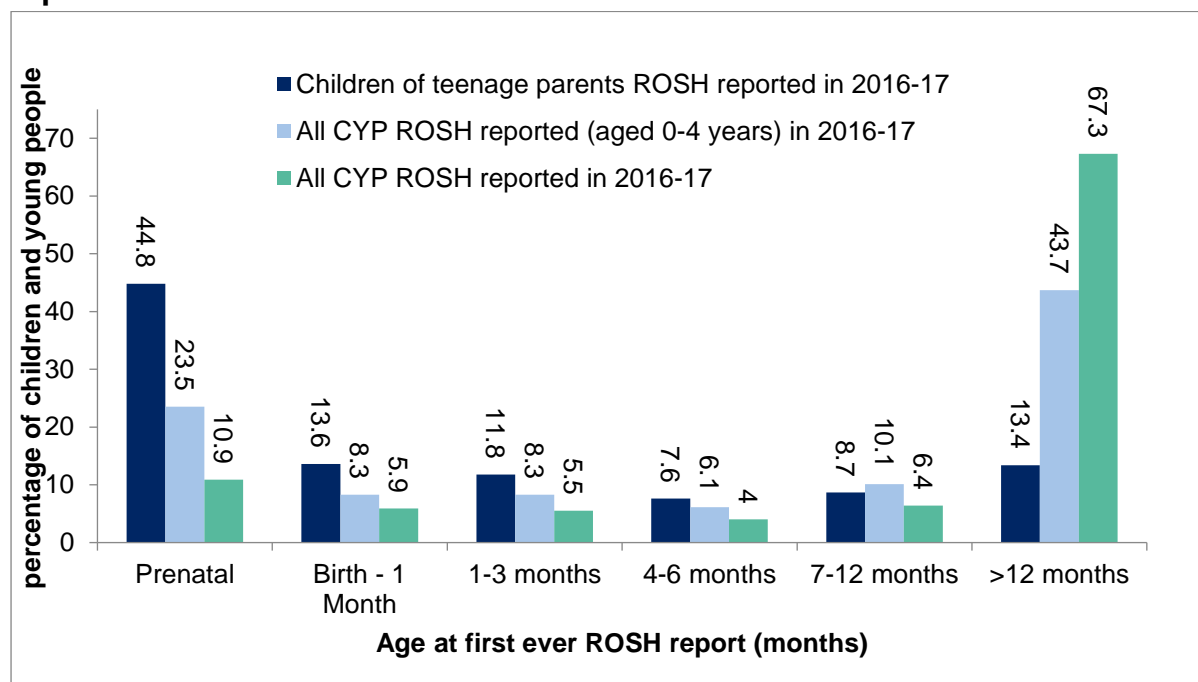
### When were they first reported at ROSH and who reported them?

Children with teenage parents reported in 2016–17 came to the attention of the Department at an early age. Children of teenage parents were significantly more likely to have their first ever ROSH report prenatally (44.8%), compared with all children reported at ROSH aged 0–4 years (23.5%), and compared with children of all ages reported at ROSH (10.9%) (see Figure 3).

Healthcare professionals were an important first touch point for the cohort of children with teenage parents; 28.4% of all ROSH reports for children with teenage parents came from this group, noting that Health was also the key reporter of all children reported at ROSH aged 0–4 years (25.9%), as shown in Figure 4. Further, children with teenage parents were less likely to be reported by police and schools/preschools compared with all children reported at ROSH, and were more likely to be first reported by NGOs or Departmental (FACS) staff.



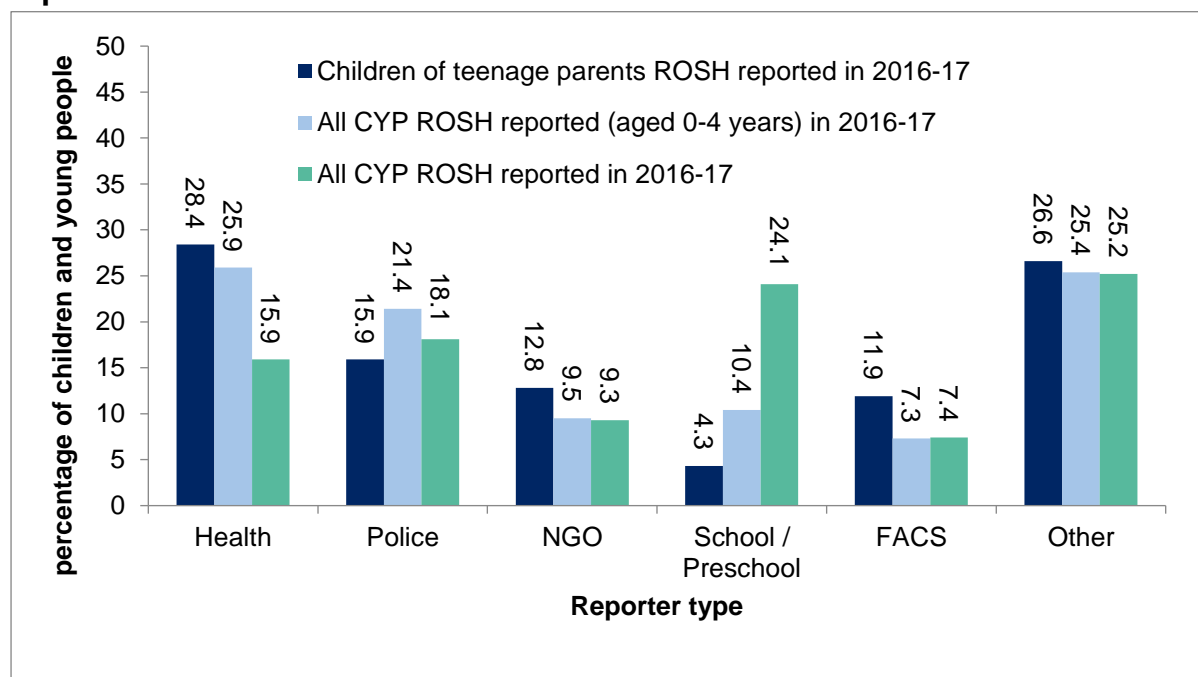
**Figure 3: Age of children at first ever ROSH report, children and young people reported at ROSH 2016–17**



Note: Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH, X2 (1, N = 22005) = 314.494,  $p < .001$ . Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH aged 0–4 years X2 (1, N = 84781) = 1411.958,  $p < .001$ .

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

**Figure 4: Reporter type for first ever ROSH report, children and young people reported at ROSH 2016–17**



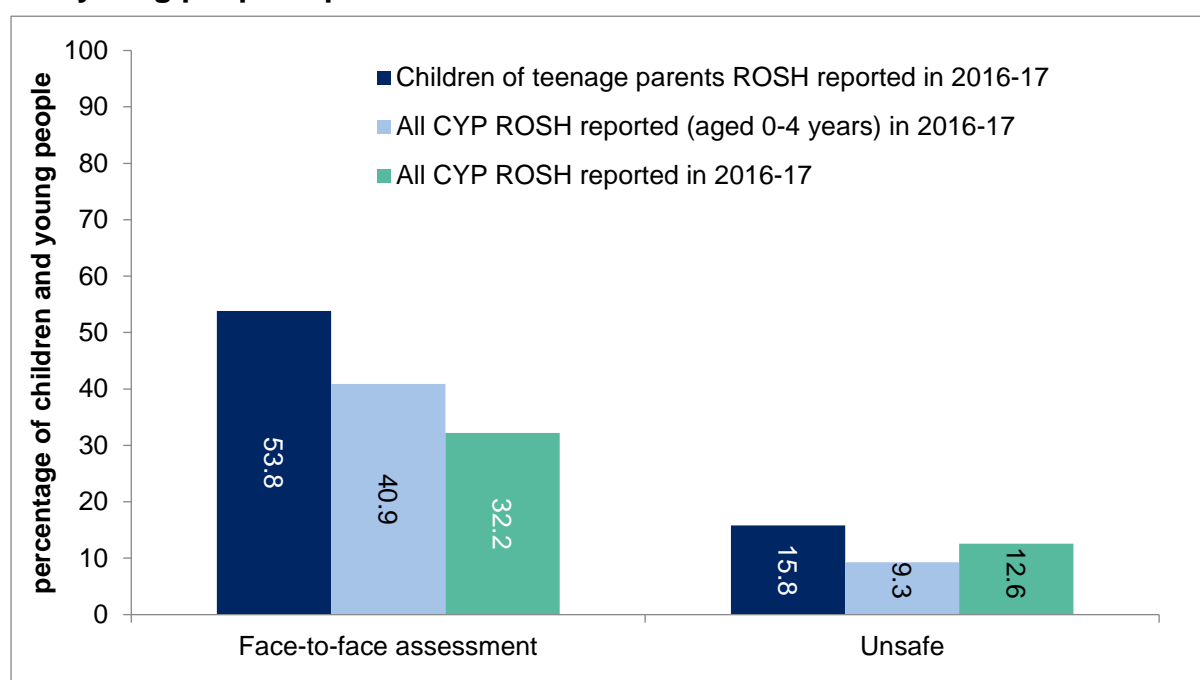
Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

### Was this group of children more likely to receive a face-to-face assessment?

Children of teenage parents were significantly more likely to receive a face-to-face assessment (53.8%) compared with all children reported at ROSH (32.2%) and compared with children reported at ROSH of equivalent age (40.9%) (see Figure 5).

Where a Safety Assessment was completed during the face-to-face assessment and recorded, children with teenage parents were significantly more likely to be found 'unsafe' than all children reported at ROSH and all children aged 0-4 years reported at ROSH (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Proportion of children and young people receiving a face-to-face assessment, and where last safety assessment finding was unsafe, children and young people reported at ROSH 2016–17**



Note: Face-to-face assessment - Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH,  $X^2(1, N = 86426) = 256.872, p < .001$ . Face-to-face assessment - Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH aged 0-4 years,  $X^2(1, N = 22051) = 85.608, p < .001$ . Safety Assessment - Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH,  $X^2(1, N = 32331) = 37.503, p < .001$ . Safety Assessment - Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH aged 0-4 years,  $X^2(1, N = 10598) = 7.232, p < .01$

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

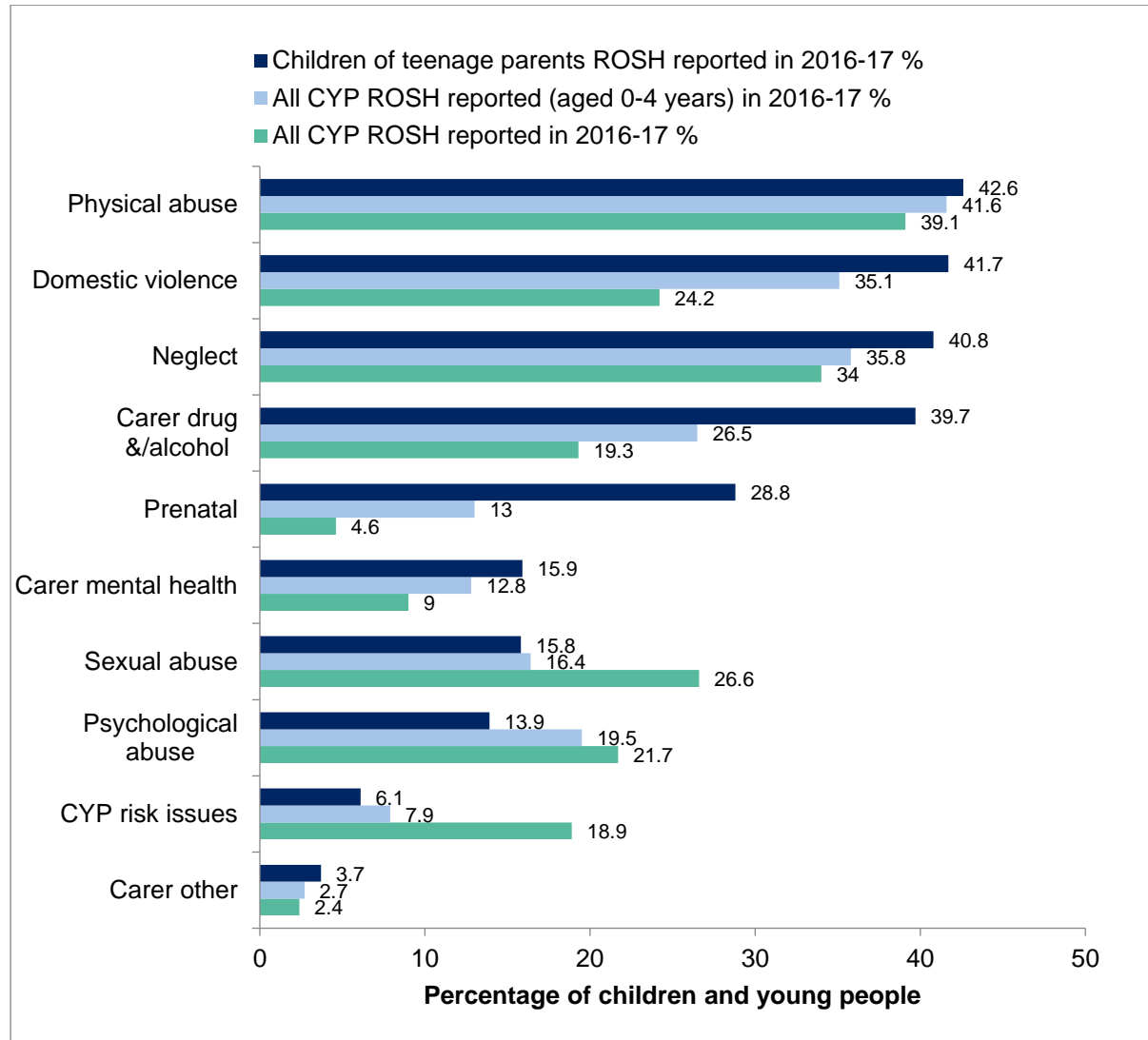
### What were the most common reasons for reporting?

The most common reasons for children with teenage parents to be reported at ROSH (reported at least once during 2016–17) included physical abuse (42.6%), domestic violence (41.7%), neglect (40.8%) and caregiver drug/alcohol abuse (39.7%) (see Figure 6).



Compared to all children aged 0-4 years reported at ROSH in 2016–17, children with teenage parents were significantly more likely to be reported prenatally for issues related to carer mental health, other carer issues, child and young person risk taking behaviour, neglect, domestic violence and carer drug/alcohol abuse. Children of teenage parents were significantly less likely to be reported at risk of psychological abuse.

**Figure 6: Reported issues for children and young people reported at ROSH 2016–17**



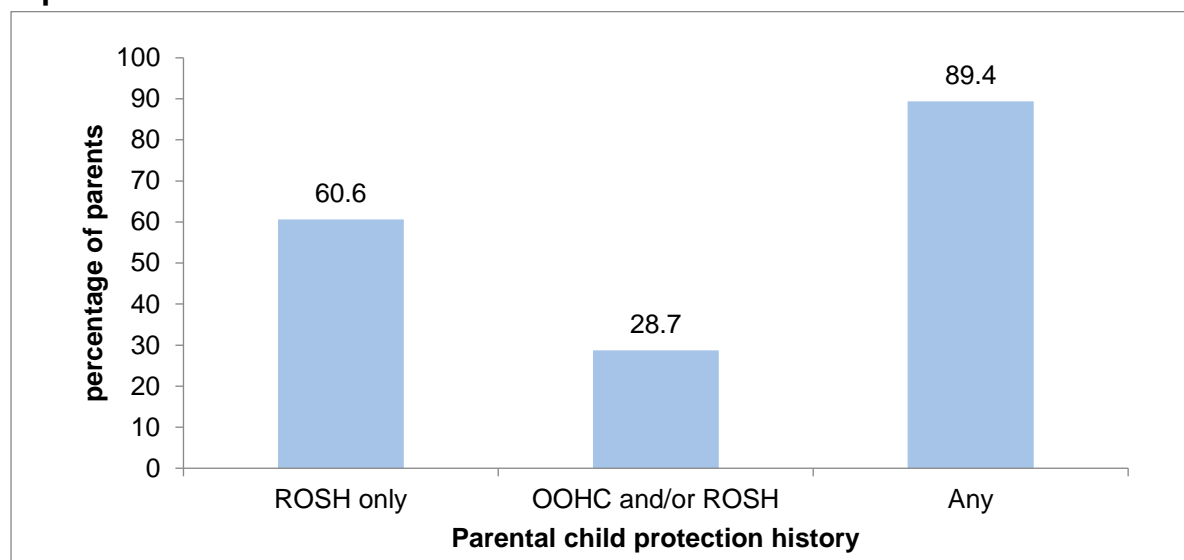
Note: Children with teenage parents Cf. All CYP reported at ROSH on - carer mental health, ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 10.766, p < .01$ ), carer other issues ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 5.230, p < .05$ ), CYP risk ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 5.983, p < .05$ ), Carer drug/alcohol abuse ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 111.258, p < .001$ ), DV ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 23.992, p < .001$ ), Neglect ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 13.637, p < .001$ ), Psychological Abuse ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 25.058, p < .001$ ), Prenatal Report ( $X^2(1, N = 1185) = 272.869, p < .001$ ).

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

### What was the child protection history of the teenage parents?

The analysis shows that a high proportion of children reported at ROSH with teenage parents were involved in a cycle of intergenerational abuse and neglect. As shown in Figure 7, 89.4% of the parents of children in this cohort had a ROSH report history and/or OOHC history.

**Figure 7: Parental child protection history of children with teenage parents reported at ROSH 2016–17**



Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

As noted in the method section, the cohort of children with teenage parents whose data was examined was likely to be over-represented by children whose parents have a child protection history, as the parents date of birth was more likely to be known. This limitation means that the exact number of children reported who had a teenage parent was unknown, but among those that could be identified, a large majority have had a child protection history.

The teenage parents of the children discussed in this analysis were highly likely to have their own child protection history. Sixty-one per cent of teenage parents had a ROSH report, but did not enter into OOHC. Over one quarter (28.7%) had at least one OOHC placement, and 89.4% had either a ROSH report and/or OOHC placement.

Of the 89.4% of teenage parents who had a child protection history, 19.6% had their first ROSH report before the age of one, and over three-quarters had at least one ROSH report by age 10 (see Appendix 2). Over half of the parents had 10 or more ROSH reports.

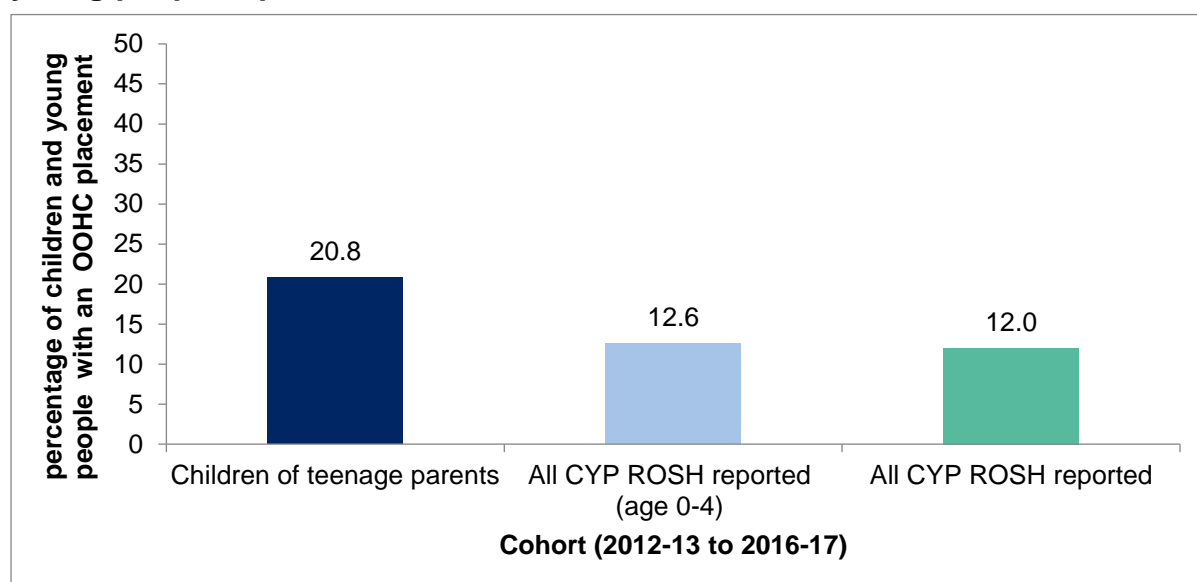
### What out-of-home care experiences did these children have?

This section examines whether children reported at ROSH with teenage parents had ever been in OOHC and how long they spent in OOHC. Having a history of OOHC was treated as an indication of a child's support needs, with children who had ever been in OOHC being assumed to be at greater risk and have higher support needs.

A period of five years was used for this analysis to allow for greater reliability, as the proportion of children reported at ROSH with an OOHC history is relatively low.

Children reported at ROSH with teenage parents were significantly more likely to have ever been in OOHC compared to all children with a ROSH report between 2012–13 and 2016–17, and compared to all children with a ROSH report between 2012–13 and 2016–17 aged 0-4 years at the time of the report (see Figure 8).

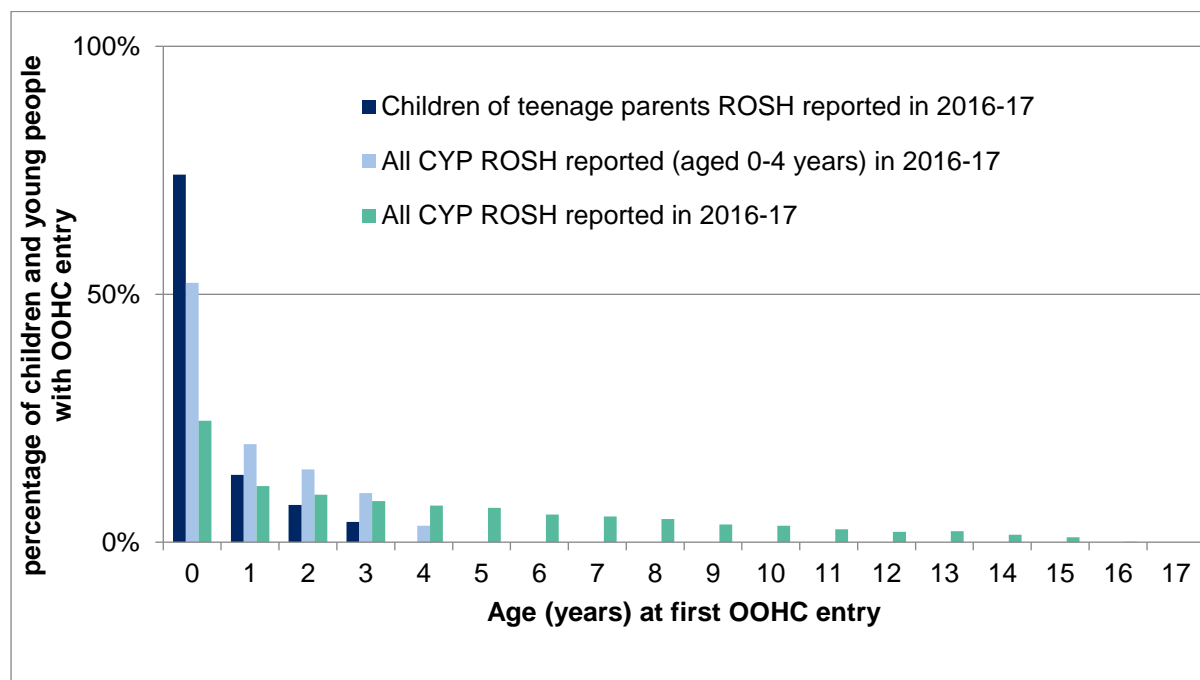
**Figure 8: Proportion of children who had an OOHC placement, children and young people reported at ROSH 2012–13 to 2016–17**



Note: Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 244571) = 354.422$ ,  $p < .001$ . Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH aged 0-4 years,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 72310) = 303.203$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

**Figure 9: Age at first OOHC entry, children and young people reported at ROSH 2016–17**



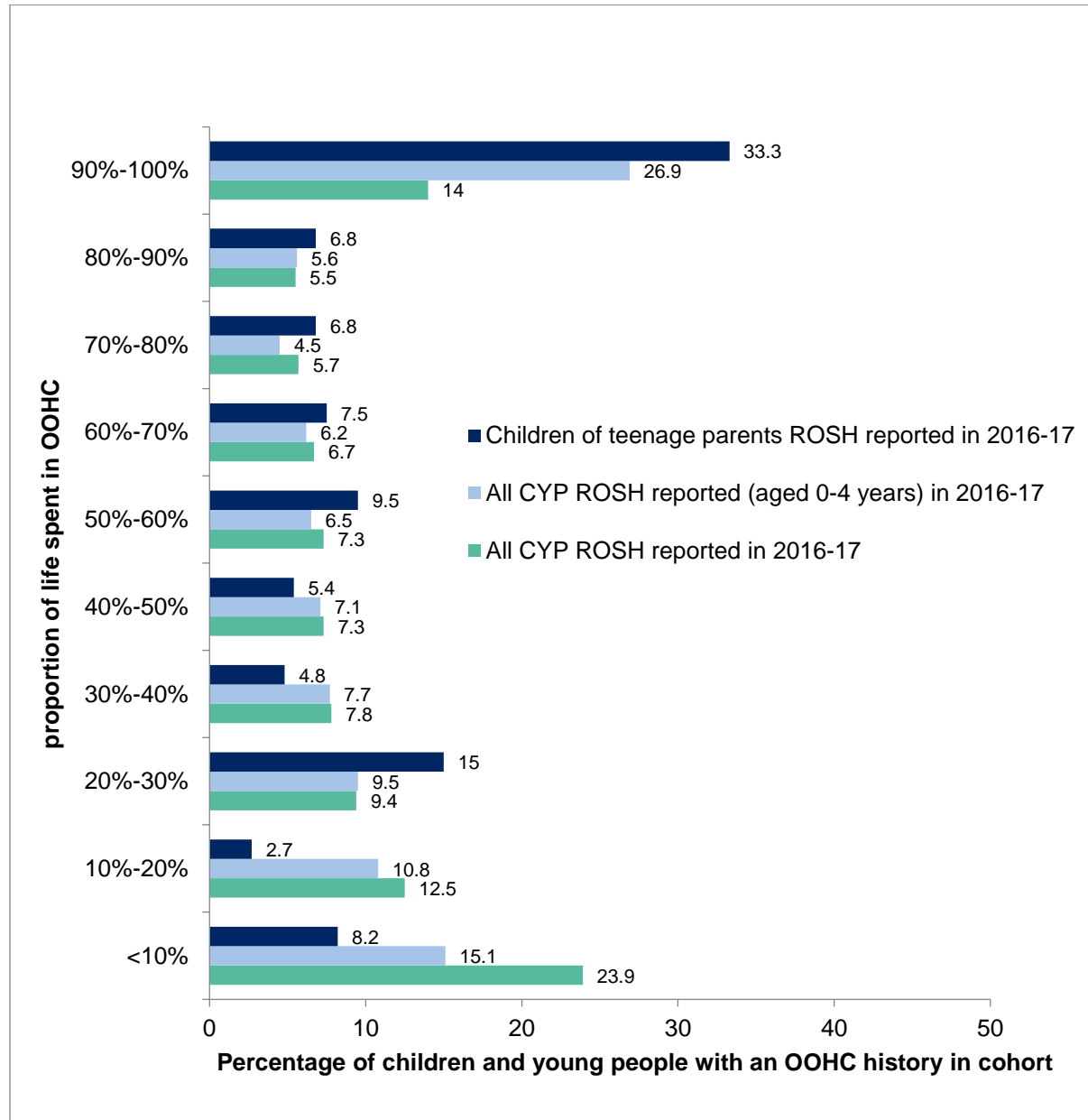
Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

Children with teenage parents who entered OOHC were significantly more likely to do so at an earlier age. Three quarters (74.1%) of children with teenage parents who entered OOHC first did so between birth and age one, compared with 52.3% of all children reported at ROSH aged 0-4 years, and 24.5% of all children reported at ROSH (see Figure 9).

At the end of 2016–17, a third of children with teenage parents who were reported at ROSH any time between 2012–13 and 2016–17 had spent over 90% of their life in OOHC.<sup>1</sup> This compares with 26.9% of all 0-4 year olds (see Figure 10). It is likely that this finding is due to the higher proportion of children of teenage parents who were first reported prenatally and were more likely to first enter care at a younger age.

<sup>1</sup> Time between OOHC care periods was excluded.

**Figure 10: Proportion of life spent in OOHC for children and young people with an OOHC history and a ROSH report in 2016–17**



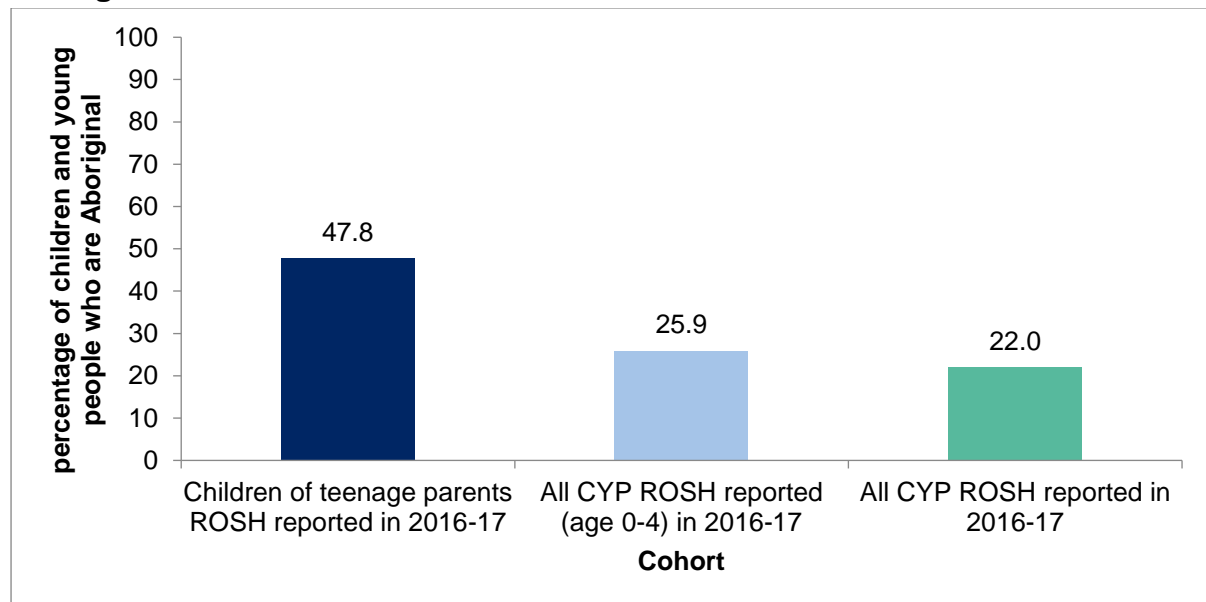
Notes: Proportion of lifetime spent in OOHC is calculated based on the time between a person's first OOHC placement start date and last OOHC placement end date in 2016–17 (or 30th June 2017, where they are still in OOHC) and excluding time between OOHC episodes, as a proportion of total days between birth and 30th June 2017.

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

### What were the findings for Aboriginal children with teenage parents?

Children reported at ROSH with teenage parents in 2016–17 were significantly more likely to be Aboriginal children. Almost half (47.8%) of children of teenage parents reported in 2016–17 were Aboriginal children, compared to 25.9% of all children reported aged 0-4 years and 22.0% of all children reported of all ages (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Proportion of children and young people reported at ROSH who are Aboriginal 2016–17**



Notes: Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH aged 0–4, X2 (1, N = 22051) = 310.469,  $p < .001$ . Children with teenage parents Cf. all children reported at ROSH, X2 (1, N = 86426) = 465.677,  $p < .001$ .

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

Compared to non-Aboriginal children of teenage parents, Aboriginal children of teenage parents were:

- Significantly younger at the time of their first ROSH report (see Figure 12).
- More likely to be first reported prenatally (50.2%) compared with non-Aboriginal children (39.9%) (see Figure 12).
- Less likely to receive their first report when aged one year or above (see Figure 12).
- Significantly more likely to receive a face-to-face assessment (see Figure 13).



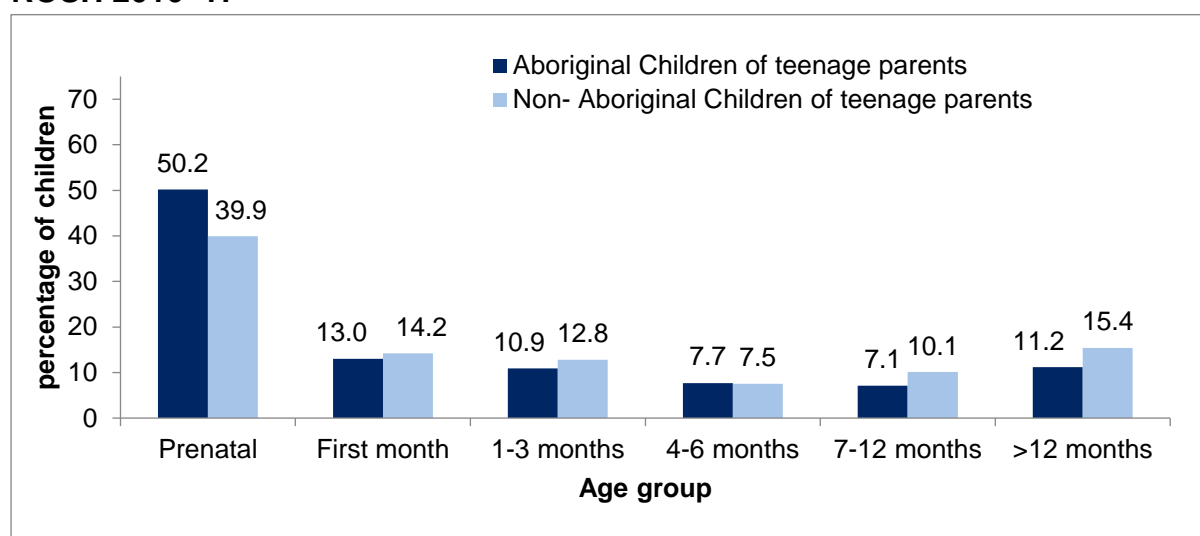
- More likely to be reported with CYP Risk Issues<sup>2</sup> (7.6% compared with 4.7% of non-Aboriginal children) and other carer related issues (4.9% compared with 2.6%) (see Figure 14).

There were further differences that were not statistically significant including:

- Aboriginal children of teenage parents were somewhat more likely to be assessed as 'unsafe' (see Figure 13).
- Aboriginal children of teenage parents were slightly less likely to be reported for issues related to 'sexual abuse', and 'carer mental health issues' (see Figure 14).
- Aboriginal children of teenage parents were slightly more likely to be reported at risk of 'carer drug and/or alcohol misuse' (38.8% compared with 35.9% of non-Aboriginal children with a teenage parent (see Figure 14).

When interpreting these results, it is important to note that rates of ROSH reporting were higher among Aboriginal children, irrespective of parental age.

**Figure 12: Age at first ever ROSH report by Aboriginality, children reported at ROSH 2016–17**

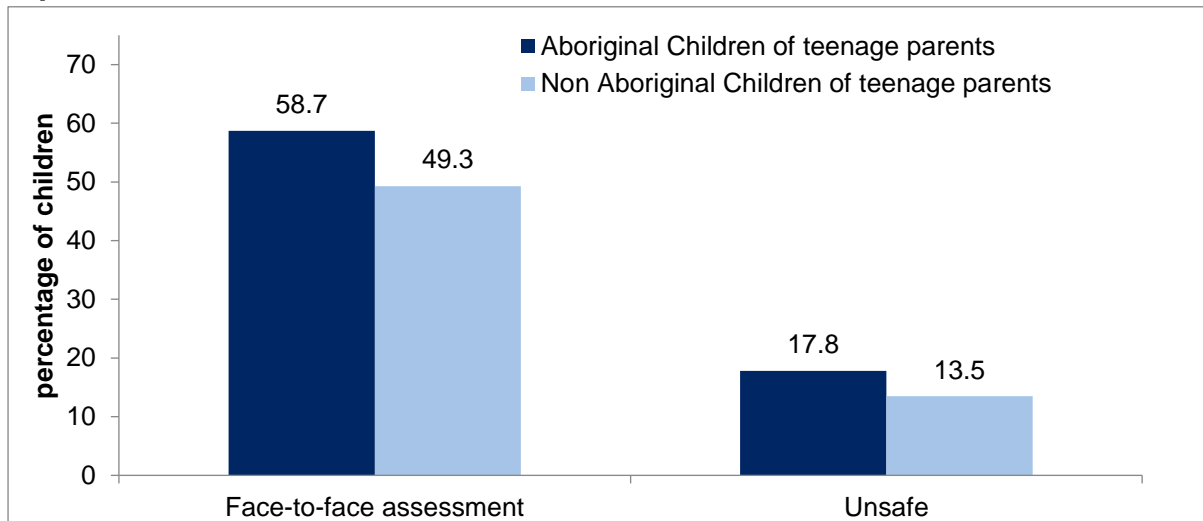


Note: Receiving first report >12 months, Aboriginal children with teenage parents Cf. non-Aboriginal children with teenage parents,  $\chi^2 (5, N = 1173) = 14.996, p < .05$

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

<sup>2</sup> Such as drug and alcohol use by the CYP, inappropriate sexual behaviour by the CYP, CYP running away from home, CYP at risk of suicide, CYP being considered a danger to self or others, CYP self-harming behaviour.

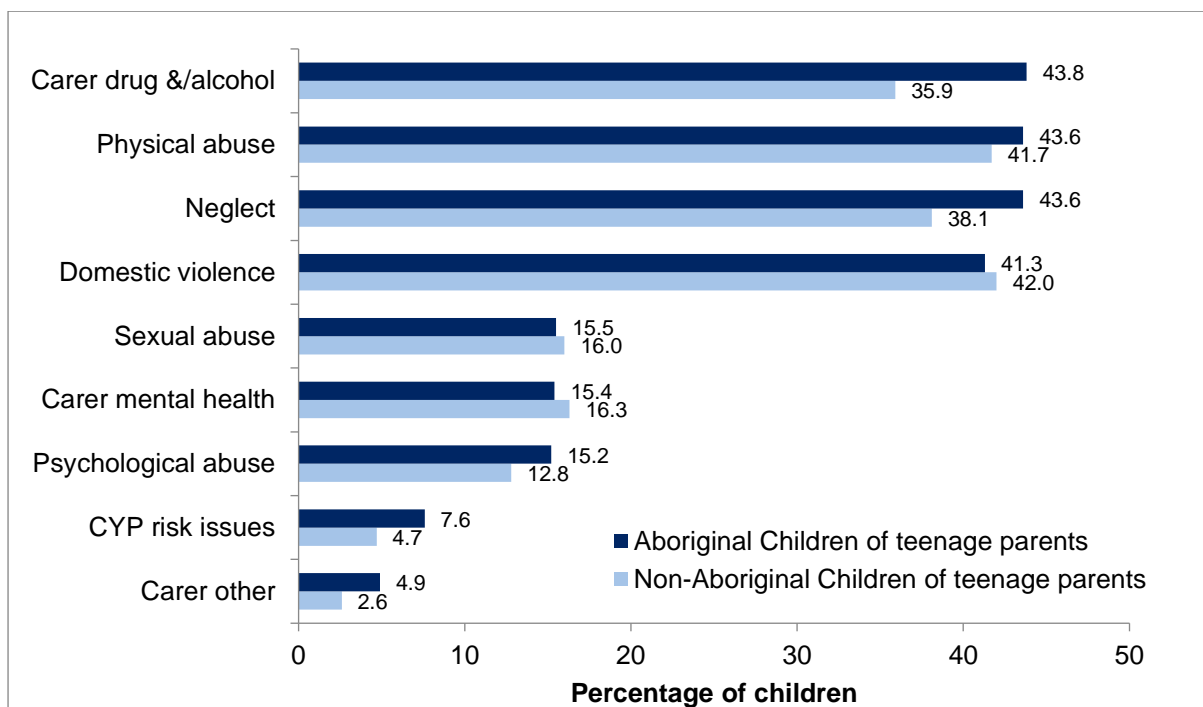
**Figure 13: Proportion of children receiving a face-to-face assessment, and where last Safety Assessment finding was unsafe, by Aboriginality, children reported at ROSH 2016–17**



Note: Receiving Safety Assessment, Aboriginal children with teenage parents Cf. non Aboriginal children with teenage parents,  $X^2 (1, N = 1185) = 10.474, p < .001$

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

**Figure 14: Reported issues by Aboriginality, children reported at ROSH 2016–17**



Note: Aboriginal children of teenage parents Cf. non-Aboriginal children of teenage parents on - carer other, ( $X^2 (1, N = 1185) = 4.614, p < .05$ ), CYP risk issues ( $X^2 (1, N = 1185) = 4.394, p < .05$ ), carer drug/alcohol abuse ( $X^2 (1, N = 1185) = 7.812, p < .01$ ).

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17

## Conclusion

While children with at least one teenage parent were a relatively small proportion of the overall cohort of children reported at risk of significant harm (ROSH) between 2012–13 and 2016–17, they continue to represent a numerically large and distinct group of clients requiring a targeted service response.

Literature suggests that while having teenage parents does not necessarily lead to poorer outcomes, it is a risk factor, and is likely to compound with other risk factors leading to poorer outcomes for children.

Children with teenage parents were more likely to be reported at ROSH across most categories of report type, be assessed as 'unsafe' following a face-to-face assessment, and to enter or have already entered out-of-home care (OOHC).

This cohort of children with teenage parents was affected by an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. The compounding effects of abuse and neglect associated with intergenerational disadvantage and with having younger parents led to poorer outcomes for children in the form of ongoing involvement with the child protection system.

Aboriginal children reported at ROSH were more likely to have teenage parents and to have received reports across most categories of abuse and/or neglect.

The analysis suggests that the cohort of children with teenage parents was identified earlier and received services earlier than children with older parents. This is an opportunity to provide a responsive and targeted service to meet the needs of this client population.

Further analysis is needed to isolate the impact of having a teenage parent from factors such as intergenerational child protection history, age of child and Aboriginality in order to get a better understanding of the needs of this cohort.

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## Appendix 1: Cohort data and limitations of the analysis

Where available data allowed, the cohort of teenage parents were compared with all children who were reported at ROSH in 2016–17, as well as with children who were reported at ROSH in 2016–17 and had an equivalent age profile (0-4 years) to the children of teenage parents. Findings are also presented for Aboriginal children reported at ROSH with teenage parents.

When presenting results, children of teenage parents were also included in the comparison groups, that is, all children aged 0-4 years reported at ROSH and all children reported at ROSH. This allows the results to be more readily interpreted in the context of existing knowledge about the entire cohort of children reported at ROSH. While this has the consequence of under-emphasising the differences between children of teenage parents and other groups, the large disparity in size between groups means that the impact on findings was negligible.

While this analysis drew on the entire (known) population of children and young people reported at ROSH and children of teenage parents in 2016–17, for the purpose of statistical tests these groups were treated as samples of the entire population of children reported at ROSH who had teenage parents, some of whom were unknown. Where statistical analysis was carried out, comparisons were made between children of teenage parents and all children reported at ROSH, excluding those of teenage parents, in order to satisfy independent group requirements of statistical tests.

A key limitation of this analysis is that while Departmental staff routinely collect names and contact information on the parents of children receiving ROSH reports, workers do not routinely collect the date of birth of parents. Caseworkers are more likely to collect date of birth information for parents only if the child has repeated reports warranting further investigation, progresses to assessment or further intervention, or when the parent is already known to the Department due to their own past child protection history. As a result, there are likely to be a number of children with teenage parents in the population of all children reported at ROSH who were not identified.

Teenage parents who were already known to the Department were also more likely to receive a prenatal report and birth alerts when their child was born, meaning their child was more likely to be reported at ROSH compared to a child of a teenage parent in the general population.

Because of these two biases, children with an intergenerational child protection history (i.e. who had a parent who themselves been reported as children or spent time in OOHHC) and children with a greater degree of interaction with the Department are over-represented in the sample of children of teenage parents.

## Appendix 2

**Table 1: Age at first ROSH report, parents of children with teenage parents reported at ROSH in 2016–17**

Age	All Parents		All Parents with Report History	
	N	%	N	%
N/A (Not Reported)	140	10.8%		
0	227	21.4%	227	19.6%
1	115	8.9%	115	9.9%
2	87	6.7%	87	7.5%
3	82	6.3%	82	7.1%
4	75	5.8%	75	6.5%
5	71	5.5%	71	6.1%
6	62	4.8%	62	5.4%
7	51	3.9%	51	4.4%
8	49	3.8%	49	4.2%
9	41	3.2%	41	3.5%
10	27	2.1%	27	2.3%
11	24	1.9%	24	2.1%
12	29	2.2%	29	2.5%
13	33	2.5%	33	2.9%
14	48	3.7%	48	4.2%
15	40	3.1%	40	3.5%
16	25	1.9%	25	2.2%
17	20	1.5%	20	1.7%
Total	1296	100.0%	1156	100.0%

Source: CIW - KiDS snapshot environment, 2016–17