

Analysis of Methamphetamine and other drug/substance use and the impact on children in care

Purpose

This analysis outlines how methamphetamine (meth) and other drug/substance use affect tamariki and rangatahi in the Oranga Tamariki care and protection system. There is currently no data about meth usage by children in care specifically, however parental meth and other drug and alcohol use are known factors to place a child into Oranga Tamariki care. The analysis examines the number of parents of children in care who are known to use meth and other substances and identifies current service needs and gaps for these children.

Methodology

A statistical analysis was carried out in the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI)-data maintained by Statistics New Zealand. Table 1. shows the four measures that were analysed between January 2020 and January 2024.

Table 1. Tamariki and Rangatahi measures

1. Child has a parent with any substance usage finding in the last year
2. Child has a parent with any substance usage finding in the child's lifetime
3. Child has a parent with meth-related offences in the last year
4. Child has a parent with meth-related offences in the child's lifetime (mid-2009 onwards)

For measures 1 and 2 (other substance usage finding), the following IDI datasets were examined:

- Substance abuse detoxification services from the programme for the integration of mental health and addiction services (PRIMHD dataset), or
- The public funded hospital discharges for mental and behavioural disorders (PHO dataset) due to substance usage, or

- Substance description (PHARMA dataset)¹
- **Plus**, records of parents with drug related offences provided by the Police.

For measures 3 and 4 (meth-related offences), police data was analysed. Table 2. lists all offence codes that relate to meth possession and use, supply/dealing, and manufacturing/possessing equipment to manufacture.²

Table 2. Meth-Related Offence Codes and Descriptions

Offence code	Offence description
5951	Procure/Possess – Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5961	Consume/Smoke/Use– Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5982	Allows premises for use/supply/use– Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5985	Possess/Use utensils– Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5911	Import/Export– Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5931	Supply/Administer/Deal– Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5941	Possess for Supply – Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5991	Conspires to deal with Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5921	Produce/Manufacture – Methamphetamine and Amphetamine
5981	Allows premises for use/manufacture– Methamphetamine and Amphetamine

What we found

Substance usage and meth-related offences are higher for parents of children in care than the general population

Figure 1. showed children in care are more likely to have a parent with drug/substance use issues than the general population. While the lifetime measure continues to rise, the yearly increase has slowed between 2020 and 2024, reflecting a decline in the number of children entering care each year with a parent who has a substance use finding. Similarly, children in care are more likely to have a parent with a meth-related offence than the general population. Figure 2. showed while the lifetime measure continues to rise, the pace has slowed over time, showing a yearly decline in the number of children entering care with a parent who has a meth-related offence.

¹ Three IDI datasets from the Ministry of Health.

² Sourced from the appendix of Ministry of Justice meth-based line indicators report from 2009 onwards.

Figure 1.

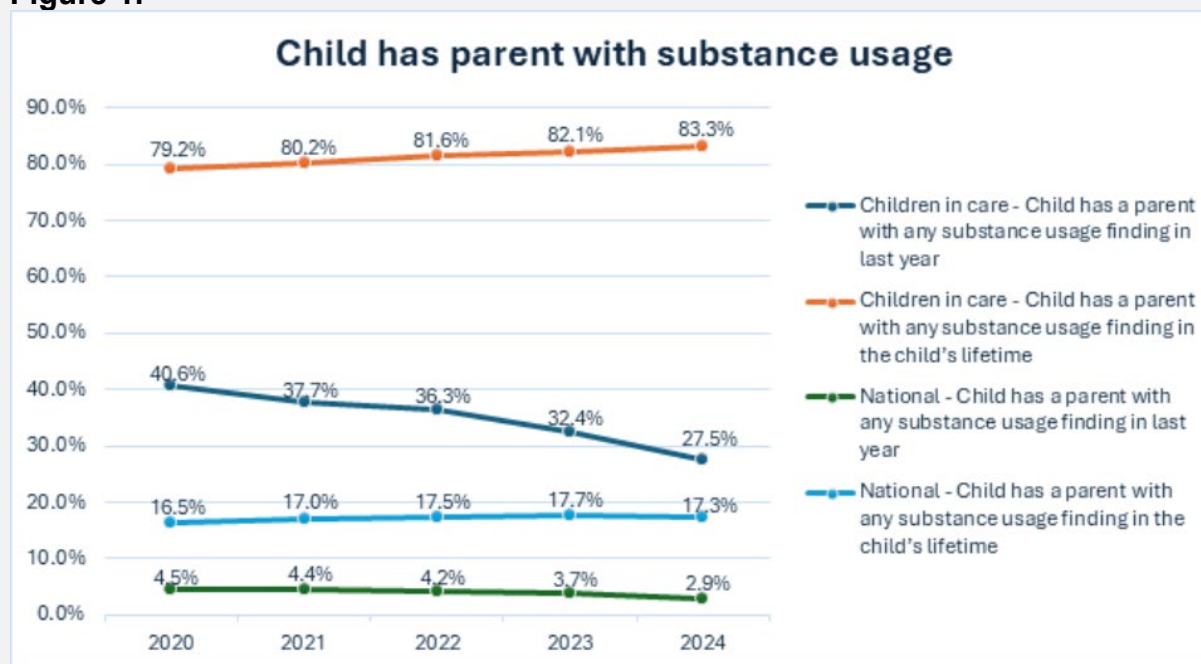
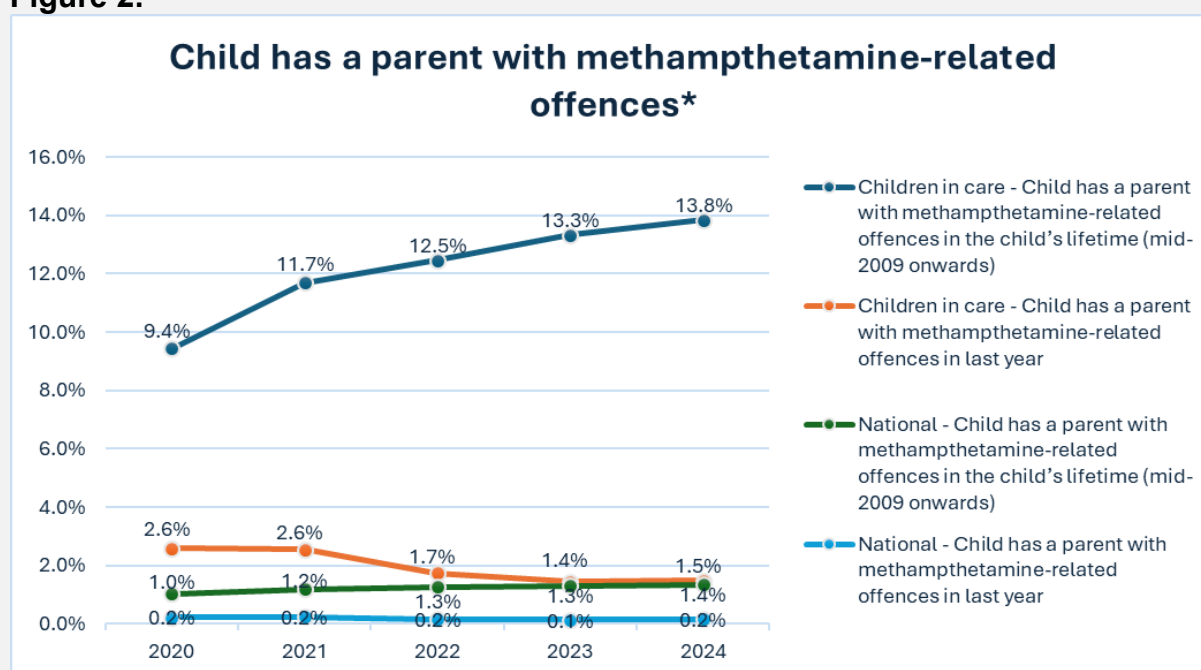


Figure 2.³



³ (*) in Figure 2 - Measures for children in out of home care were also analysed, and the trends for this cohort are very similar to that of children in care, therefore have not been plotted.

Te Tai Tokerau has the highest rates of drug and meth-related offences among parents, but the number of children in care or out of home care in this region is not necessarily the highest

The next set of tables show the three measures on either drug/substance usage finding or meth-related offence rate of children in care/out of home care in regions compared to the general population. Table 3. showed that children in care or out of home care in Wellington and Upper South had the highest proportion of parents with any drug/substance usage.

Table 3. Child has a parent with any drug/substance usage in last year

Care and Protection Region	All Regions	In care (all)	Out of home care
Te Tai Tokerau	5.1%	23%	25%
Auckland North, West, Central	2.2%	26%	25%
Auckland South	2.6%	21%	21%
Waikato and Bay of Plenty	3.4%	24%	24%
East Coast	3.3%	22%	23%
Taranaki and Manawatu	3.4%	25%	25%
Wellington and Upper South	2.6%	29%	30%
Canterbury and Lower South	2.8%	26%	26%
National	2.9%	24%	25%

In Table 4., Te Tai Tokerau region has significantly higher rates of the lifetime measure on the rate of a child having a parent with any drug/substance use finding across regions. However, the difference across other regions is similar.

Table 4. Child has a parent with any drug/substance usage in the child's lifetime

Care and Protection Region	All Regions	In care (all)	Out of home care
Te Tai Tokerau	29.3%	82.6%	82.6%
Auckland North, West, Central	15.3%	77.0%	77.3%
Auckland South	19.1%	78.8%	78.9%
Waikato and Bay of Plenty	23.0%	82.2%	80.7%
East Coast	23.8%	78.4%	78.5%
Taranaki and Manawatu	23.3%	80.2%	79.1%
Wellington and Upper South	16.5%	79.8%	82.0%
Canterbury and Lower South	17.3%	75.0%	76.3%
National	19.4%	78.8%	78.8%

Table 5. showed that Auckland North, West, Central and Canterbury and Lower South have the lowest meth-related offence rates in general. However, out of home care rates in Taranaki and Manawatu are significantly lower at 9% compared to other regions.

Table 5. Child has a parent with meth-related offences in the child's lifetime (mid-2009 onwards)

Child and Protection Region	All Regions	In Care (all)	Out of home care
Te Tai Tokerau	2.4%	17.4%	15.9%
Auckland North, West, Central	0.9%	12.2%	12.7%
Auckland South	1.3%	13.6%	12.2%
Waikato and Bay of Plenty	1.8%	14.1%	13.7%
East Coast	2.2%	15.7%	15.7%
Taranaki and Manawatu	1.5%	9.1%	9.1%
Wellington and Upper South	1.0%	15.1%	16.2%
Canterbury and Lower South	0.9%	11.8%	12.4%
National	1.3%	13.3%	13.3%

The meth-related offence rate among parents of children urgently uplifted into Oranga Tamariki Care and Protection under Section 78 orders has dropped significantly since 2021

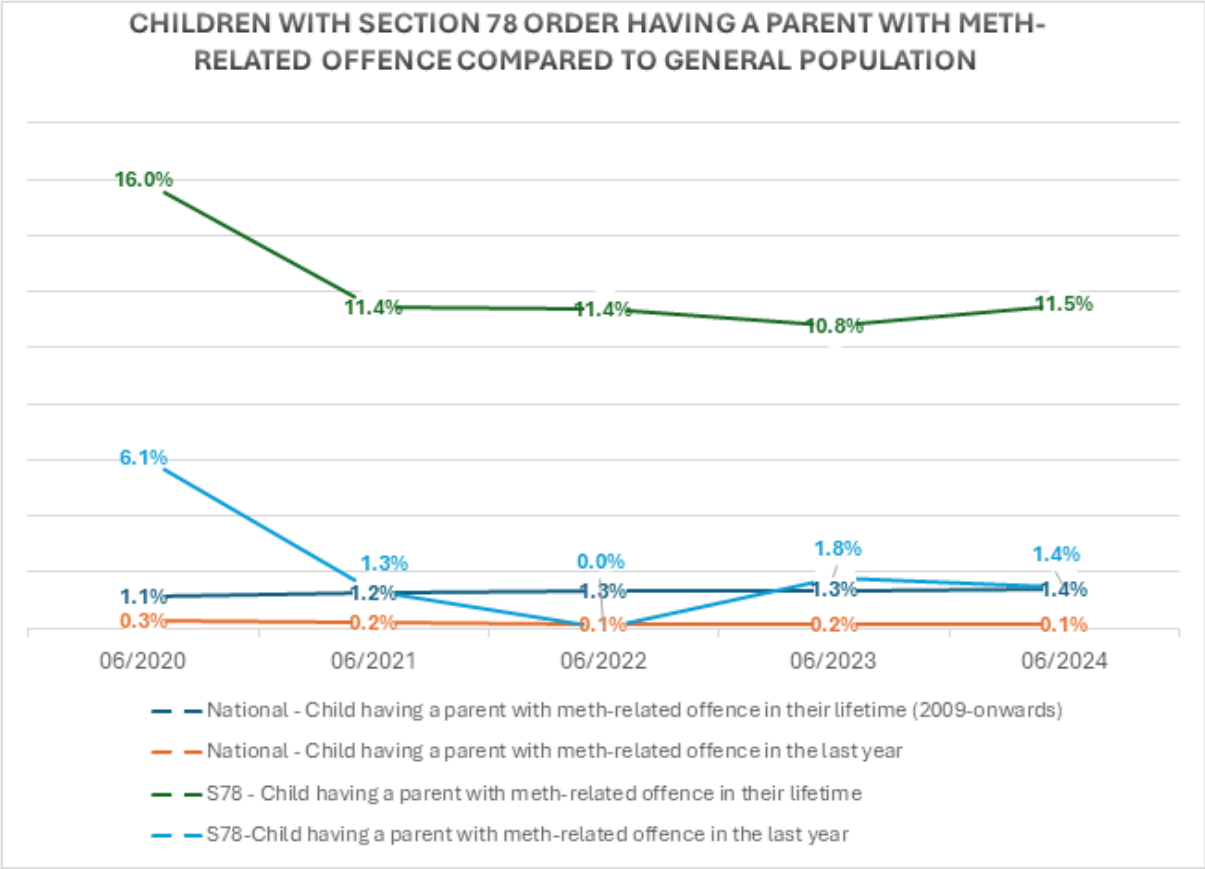
We looked at understanding the meth-related offence rate of parents of children coming to Oranga Tamariki under Section 78, regardless of whether meth usage was identified as the serious harm driving the action.

Figure 3. showed the rate of a parent having meth-related offences for children uplifted under Section 78 does not follow the same trend as that of children in care in general. There has been a significant drop since 2021, but there is no clear trend afterward.⁴

Note that the rate being 0% for the measure of children under Section 78 having parents with meth-related offences in the past year as of June 2022 is due to the count being too small to output. There was also a drop in the number of children under Section 78 during this year.

⁴ The analysis incorporates the most updated June 2024 data.

Figure 3.



Conclusion

Analysis shows that children in care are significantly more likely to have a parent with a substance use issue or a meth-related offence than children in the general population. While lifetime measures continue to rise, the yearly rate of new cases has slowed between 2020 and 2025. This trend may reflect progress in early intervention, but it does not diminish the need for targeted, ongoing support.

IDI Disclaimer

These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) which is carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>

Access to the data used in this study was provided by Stats NZ under conditions designed to give effect to the security and confidentiality provisions of the Data and Statistics Act 2022. The results presented in this study are the work of the author, not Stats NZ or individual data suppliers.

The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Stats NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994 for statistical purposes.

Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.



This report was prepared by the Strategy, Insights and Performance Group, Oranga
Tamariki. For more information, please email: research@ot.govt.nz