
Roca Young Mothers' Program (YMP): Data Brief

Prepared by Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research

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Introduction

With support from Roca, our evaluation team at Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research (TIER) at Tufts University is conducting a 3-year mixed methods evaluation of the Roca Young Mothers' Program (YMP). Using existing program and administrative data, as well as primary data, the evaluation aims to identify the unique population of young mothers who participate in Roca YMP; patterns in program participation; innovative features of the program that help to change life trajectories; and core outcomes associated with Roca YMP participation. This brief provides a snapshot of interim findings from Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation.

Work to Date

Key evaluation highlights to date include:

- ❖ Publication of a White Paper—How the Roca Young Mothers Program Supports Transformation.
- ❖ Analysis of program data from the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database; the current sample includes 509 Roca participants who were enrolled in the program between FY19–FY23.
- ❖ Ongoing communication with state agency partners in Massachusetts and Connecticut to establish data sharing agreements to access administrative data. To date, we have received data from the Department of Transitional Assistance (MA) and are awaiting data from the Court Support Services Division (CT) and the Department of Early Education and Care (MA). An agreement with the Preschool through 20 and Workforce Information Network (CT) is imminent.
- ❖ Interviews and focus groups with 53 individuals—35 program participants, 16 youth workers, and 3 managers across Chelsea, Springfield, and Hartford.
- ❖ Researched gender-informed risk and outcome assessments and measures to inform updates to Roca YMP's change assessment.
- ❖ Reviewed Roca YMP's referral form and created a new rubric to clarify program eligibility criteria and triage referrals.

Interim Findings

The findings presented are from:



An analysis of ETO program data



Qualitative insights from program participants and staff

Roca YMP Participants at Program Entry



Young women entered Roca YMP with high levels of trauma.

- ❖ 78% reported **housing instability**
- ❖ 72% had **four or more adverse childhood experiences**
- ❖ 65% experienced **domestic violence**
- ❖ 63% had challenges with **substance use**
- ❖ 56% had a history of **child welfare involvement**, and 53%, **criminal legal system involvement**

- ❖ 50% experienced **depressive symptomology** at baseline and 43% exhibited symptoms of **post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** significant enough to benefit from treatment

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is a way to group diverse participants into “classes” based on commonalities on select variables. We ran an LCA using Roca YMP participants’ risks at the time of enrollment as input variables. We looked at the following baseline risks and individual experiences:

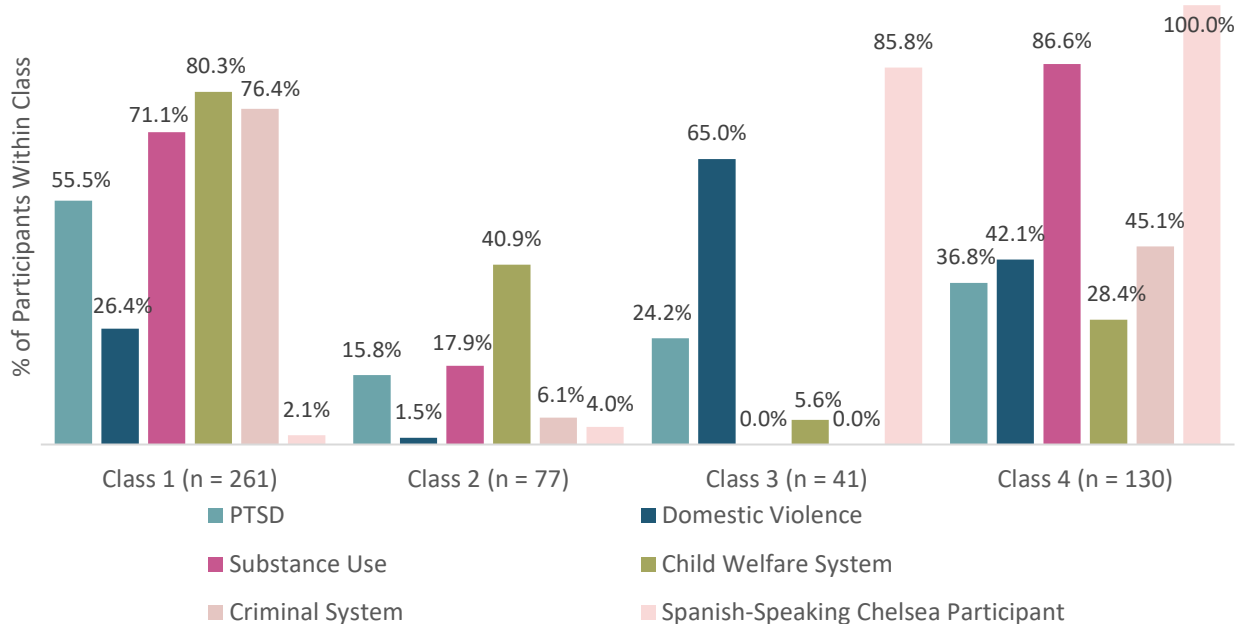
Whether (or not) a participant...

- ...exhibits symptoms of PTSD
- ...shows signs of domestic violence
- ...shows signs of problematic drug or alcohol use
- ...has a history of child welfare system involvement
- ...has a history of criminal or juvenile system involvement
- ...is a Spanish-speaking Chelsea participant

We found 4 classes of participants (see Figure 1).

- ❖ Class 1 includes participants with **high proportion of system involvement, problematic substance use, and PTSD.**
- ❖ Class 2 includes participants that have **lower risk levels** except for **moderate child welfare system involvement.**
- ❖ Class 3 includes a large proportion of **Chelsea participants** with **high exposure to domestic violence** and **moderate PTSD.**
- ❖ Class 4 includes only **Chelsea participants**, most of whom had **problematic substance use**, as well as **moderate exposure to domestic violence, system involvement, and PTSD.**

Figure 1. Roca YMP Participant “Classes” Based on Risk Factors and Experiences at Enrollment



Interview and focus group participants described young women joining the program with a range of difficult life experiences, including:

- ❖ **Challenging childhood experiences**—child welfare involvement or growing up in a home without positive role models
- ❖ **Lack of social support** or healthy relationships
- ❖ **Violence**—domestic violence, street or gang involvement, and human trafficking
- ❖ **Loss** of a loved one
- ❖ **Criminal legal system involvement**
- ❖ **Substance use and/or mental health challenges** that are unacknowledged or untreated
- ❖ **Dropping out of high school**
- ❖ **Having one or more child** at a young age
- ❖ **Problems engaging with other voluntary programs** supporting young women

Program Engagement

Relentless Outreach

YMP made **77,323 efforts to engage young women**, averaging 152 (median = 124) attempted or actual contacts per participant. Of the 77,323 efforts: 16,767 or **21.7% were attempted contacts** and 60,556 or **78.3% were actual touchpoints**. Almost **20% of these efforts occurred in the first year** of the program, when it is most important to build connections with participants.

Several youth workers commented that **the number of actual touchpoints with participants is higher than what is reflected in ETO**. Youth workers initially engaged young women through relentless outreach. Relentless outreach was described by interview and focus group participants as showing up for a young woman consistently for months, despite being shut out, ignored, or even yelled at. Youth workers shared how this **relentlessness often led to a breakthrough**—a “turning point” moment—where they were a support for a participant through a crisis or challenging situation; this led to the start of a trusting relationship. Participants shared how **relentless outreach demonstrated that Roca YMP was not going to give up on them**.

“At first, I thought it was just like a program, any type in [city]. ‘Oh, yeah, I’ll help you,’ and then they forget about you. Roca’s been, like, on stuff. They try to help you with what you need to do.” – Roca YMP Participant


Engagement Between Youth Workers and Participants

Youth workers aim to make two contacts per week per participant, especially in the early stages of the program. An average of **78% of participants received at least two weekly contacts with their youth workers in the first and second years of the program**. Weekly contacts declined in the third and fourth years when young women are expected to be on their path to independence.

We examined Roca YMP participants’ sustained engagement using Cox proportional hazard models, a type of survival analysis, which allows us to identify the average time in which participants withdraw from the program.¹ The median survival time for the sample was 188 weeks—more than 3 years. This is the time beyond which 50% of individuals are expected to “survive” (i.e., not withdraw early). This means that


¹ Survival analysis allows us to estimate time to withdrawal, accounting for the fact that we do not have “complete” information on the participants—notably, because many of them are currently enrolled and have not yet withdrawn during the period of observation.

about half of program participants are expected to stay in the program for more than 3 years. The 25th percentile is 54 weeks. This means **75% of participants are expected to stay in the program past 55 weeks—about a year.** This model will be updated with FY24 data.

 Many Roca YMP participants described their **relationship with youth workers** as the **most important program component.** They shared how youth workers “put up” with their behavior, constantly checked in on them, and encouraged and motivated them to move forward. They explained how they felt cared for and supported through this relationship.

“I talk to my youth worker every day. She calls me and sends me messages. She tells me, ‘Today such thing is going on. Come and bring the child.’... Or she tells me: ‘If you can’t come, I’ll pick you up’... They are always watching out for what we need and if we are well or if we want to talk to someone. They are always there to listen to us.” – Roca YMP participant

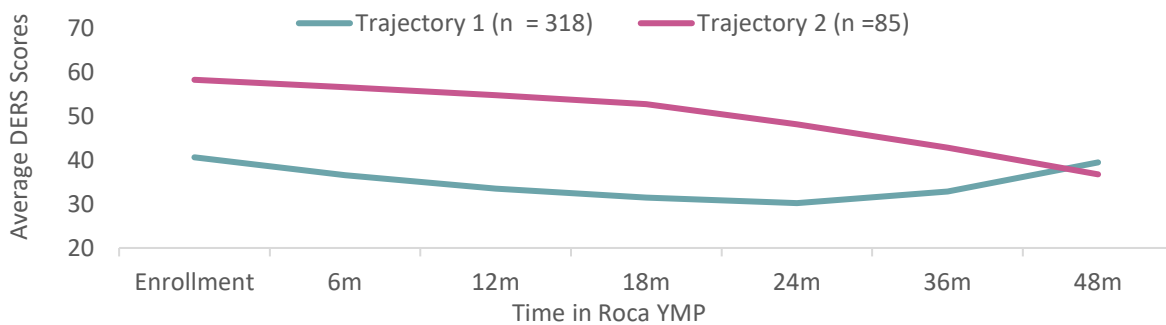
Program Outcomes

 The Roca YMP change assessment includes a series of measures that are completed upon program enrollment (“baseline”) and subsequently at 6, 12, 18, 24, 36, and 48 months. The change assessment includes measures on emotion regulation, drug and alcohol use, depression, PTSD, life distress, and relationship violence. Using available data, we examined shifts in change assessments scores from baseline to final administration for participants who were enrolled in the program for at least 12 months. There were **significant reductions in emotion dysregulation, depressive symptoms, PTSD, relationship violence and unhealthy relationships, and alcohol use.**

Roca YMP measures emotion regulation through the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS). Higher DERS scores are indicative of more dysregulation. DERS scores can range from 18 to 90. Among adolescent female samples, scores are typically around 40;^{1,2} they are higher among youth with moderate (49) or severe (56) depression.³ We looked at participant trajectories of DERS scores over time, starting at enrollment. Results indicated that the DERS scores among Roca YMP participants fit into two distinct trajectories (see Figure 2).

- ❖ Trajectory 1 includes participants with DERS scores that look similar to normative adolescent female samples and stay relatively stable over time.
- ❖ Trajectory 2 includes participants with DERS scores that start very high, indicative of significant dysregulation, and decline to normative ranges over time. Participant or programmatic factors related to being in Trajectory 2 include: more trauma and violence at baseline, more weekly staff engagement, and ReWire completion.

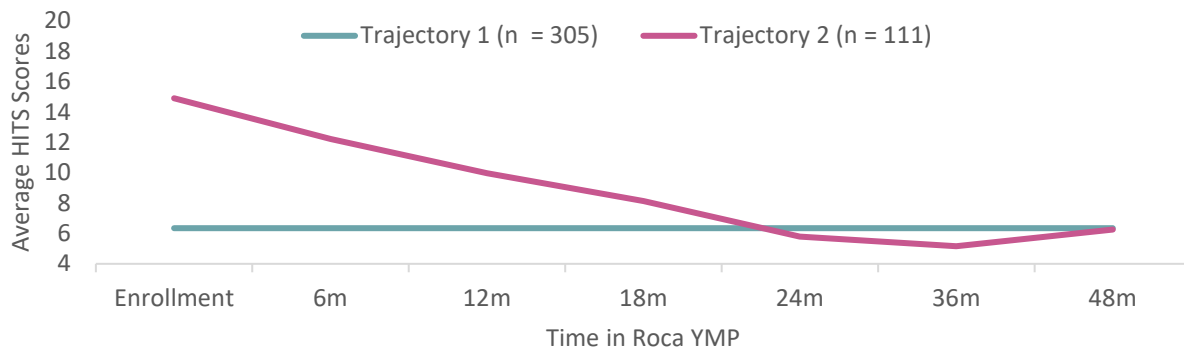
Figure 2. Participant Trajectories Based on Initial DERS Scores



Roca YMP uses the Hurt, Insult, Threaten, Scream (HITS) to screen for domestic violence.⁴ HITS score can range from 4 to 20, with HITS scores greater than 10 indicative of domestic violence. We looked at participant trajectories of HITS scores over time, starting at enrollment. Results indicated that the HITS scores among Roca YMP participants fit into two distinct trajectories (see Figure 3).

- ❖ Trajectory 1 includes participants with HITS scores that are stable over time and are not indicative of domestic violence.
- ❖ Trajectory 2 includes participants with HITS scores that start very high, indicative of domestic violence, and decline substantially over time. Participant or programmatic factors related to being in Trajectory 2 include: more trauma and violence at baseline and more weekly staff engagement.

Figure 3. Participant Trajectories Based on Initial HITS Scores



Interview and focus group participants identified the following positive outcomes associated with participation in Roca YMP:

- ❖ **Mental health improvements** around anxiety or depression and **feeling more like themselves**
- ❖ Feeling **less “stuck”** and able to **move forward from trauma**
- ❖ **Building and maintaining healthy relationships** and **gaining a support system through Roca YMP**
- ❖ Making **progress towards reunification** with their child
- ❖ **Staying out of jail**
- ❖ **Working towards and meeting self-determined goals** such as obtaining a GED or securing a job
- ❖ **Increased economic stability** through access to more public benefits
- ❖ **Increased confidence and independence** over the course of the program
- ❖ **Ability to self-advocate and problem solve** in more productive ways

Next Steps

This evaluation will continue through 2025. During this time, we will refresh the sample data, updating these findings and working on new ones. We will gain access to administrative data to document whether and how participants are navigating systems and programs and continue to collect qualitative data to complement the quantitative analyses. In addition, we will work on rapid research reviews on key topics of interest for Roca YMP.

References

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3. Burton AL, Brown R, Abbott MJ. Overcoming difficulties in measuring emotional regulation: Assessing and comparing the psychometric properties of the DERS long and short forms. *Cogent Psychology*. 2022;9(1):2060629.
4. Sherin KM, Sinacore JM, Li X-Q, Zitter RE, Shakil A. HITS: A short domestic violence screening tool for use in a family practice setting. *Family Medicine*. 1998;30:508-512.