



North Carolina

Child Protective Services

Data Card

2002-2003

North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute

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Your statewide alliance ensuring the health, viability
and economic future of all children in North Carolina.

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The North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute (NCCAI) is pleased to provide this second edition of the North Carolina Child Protective Services (CPS) Data Card.

Background

Each year, approximately 5 to 6 percent of North Carolina's children (0 through 17 years of age) and their families are investigated by Child Protective Services (CPS) for suspected maltreatment. The incidence of child maltreatment in North Carolina is so high that if it were an illness, it would be classified as an epidemic. Too many North Carolina children are experiencing dangerous and damaging childhoods instead of safe and nurturing ones.

The starting point for CPS investigations in North Carolina is a citizen, professional or agency who reports a *suspected* case of child maltreatment (abuse or neglect) to their county *Department of Social Services (DSS)*. *North Carolina state law requires every person to report suspected child maltreatment. It does not require citizens to provide any proof.*

Each North Carolina County Department of Social Services is responsible for providing Child Protective Services. Determining whether a suspicion of child maltreatment is warranted is one fundamental role of CPS. North Carolina has a county-administered/state-supervised CPS system, with the state providing supervision, training, and some funding.

Child protective service workers are the "frontline" officials seeking to protect children who cannot protect themselves from harm at the hands of their own families and caretakers. It is stressful, heartbreaking, and rarely appreciated work, and an essential public role in our society. The data in this Card document the pressures on those workers and the system as a whole.

The Data

This CPS Data Card, with county-level data, will be useful to each county Department of Social Services, public officials, child advocacy and abuse prevention groups and the general public. Data are presented in a format which allows comparison among counties. This CPS Data Card provides a reference tool for viewing the interrelationships among social services, court interventions, and the Child Fatality Prevention Teams. Descriptions of the indicators and sources of data are included in the Data Notes and Sources.

It is important to note that these data do not represent all children maltreated during 2002–2003. These numbers report *only* those children who are suspected of maltreatment by a caretaker, and when incidents are

also reported to a county DSS office. Keep in mind that some incidents when children are maltreated by caretakers are never reported to authorities. In addition, many children are maltreated by people who are not caretakers. These children's situations are not always reported to law enforcement. Tracking the number of child victims is difficult because law enforcement victim records are not linked between victims and perpetrators, and even within a single family, last names differ. Unfortunately, there are no data systems that capture the full extent of maltreatment of children.

New within NC Child Protection Services

The Multiple Response System (MRS)

MRS reforms the entire continuum of child welfare in North Carolina, from intake through placement services. Begun in 2002–03, MRS was piloted in ten North Carolina county Departments of Social Services. During 2003–04, an additional 42 counties were added to those providing MRS services. The Division of Social Services plans to expand MRS to the other 48 North Carolina counties in 2005–06.

MRS reform is based upon the application of family-centered principles of partnership through seven strategic components:

1. A choice of two approaches to reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency;
2. A re-design of in-home services;
3. A strengths-based, structured intake process;
4. Coordination among law enforcement agencies and child protective services for the investigative assessment approach;
5. Implementation of Child and Family Team meetings during the provision of in-home services;
6. Implementation of Shared-Parenting meetings in child placement cases; and,
7. Collaboration among the Work First Family Assistance and child welfare programs.

Under this MRS approach, the DSS determines which reports are accepted in one of two tracks: the traditional investigative assessment track, or the MRS family assessment track. In the investigative assessment track, a determination is made of substantiation or non-substantiation. Allegations of physical and or sexual abuse are routinely placed in the investigative track. Some cases of neglect and dependency will be placed in the MRS track, in which social workers will engage the family in the assessment process and in finding solutions to problems. In 2002–03, among the ten MRS pilot counties, there were 6,042 children who were served

NC Child Protective Services Multiple Response Findings, for 10 Pilot Counties, for Fiscal Year 2002–03

County	Children Age 0–17 in County		
	Number of Children	In Need of Services Number	Rate
Alamance	33,582	203	6.0
Bladen	7,985	23	2.9
Buncombe	46,786	131	2.8
Caldwell	18,373	59	3.2
Craven	22,395	98	4.4
Franklin	12,896	49	3.8
Guilford	107,032	170	1.6
Mecklenburg	194,733	275	1.4
Nash	22,554	109	4.8
Transylvania	5,887	4	0.7
	472,223	1,121	3.2

Note: Rates are per 1000 children in county. Further detail was not available on the number or percent of children who were investigated and referred to the Family Services track vs. the Investigative Assessment track.

Source: Children's Services, Division of Social Services, NC Department of Health and Human Services. Available from: http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrenservices/stats/docs/cctables2002_2003.xls

in the MRS Family Assessment track. Of these, 1,121 or 19% of children were determined to be in need of services. It should be noted that 2002–03 was a start-up year for the ten MRS counties and that these data do not represent a full year of data relative to MRS.

Further study of the Multiple Response System is needed in order to determine the effect of the MRS system reform effort on overall child well-being and child outcomes. In the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy evaluation of the MRS program for calendar year 2003, for the ten pilot MRS counties, MRS was found to "provide families with the support they need without compromising children's safety or increasing instances of substantiated child abuse and neglect..."¹ As MRS expands into the whole state, such comprehensive evaluations will be important to monitor the effects of this innovative program.

Federal Outcomes Reports

The North Carolina Division of Social Services must report progress on seven mandated outcomes to federal officials each year. The most recent data available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications are for 2001. The Federal Outcomes include:

- Reduced recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect (i.e., repeat maltreatment) within 6 months;
- Reduced incidence of maltreatment in foster care;
- Placement stability—no more than 2 placements for a child in the first 12 months of being in DSS custody;
- Permanency for children in foster care within 12 months;

- Reduced time in moving from foster care to adoption; and,
- Less re-entry into the Foster Care system.

According to state DSS officials, since 2001, North Carolina has made progress on each outcome but needs to focus greater attention on placement stability. NCCAI anticipates using county-level Federal Outcome measures in the next CPS Data Card when these become available. These outcome measures will help determine whether services made a difference for maltreated children. Since the CPS Data Card currently reports primarily *process* measures (e.g., numbers of children investigated, the cases substantiated, or the numbers of cases that resulted in the termination of parental rights), outcome measures will provide a valuable addition in the future.

Additional Data Available Regarding Maltreated Children

Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody in North Carolina

Experience reports, available for each county on the DSS website (<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/stats/ctyexp.htm>), provide a comprehensive picture of all of the children in DSS custody over time instead of a snapshot of the children in custody at a single point-in-time. These longitudinal data show the experiences of children over the entire period of time that they are in DSS custody and track each cohort based on the year of entry into custody. The Experiences of Children Report provides an accurate and detailed picture of initial placement types regardless of whether children are placed in their own or relatives' homes or in out-of-home placements. Additionally, the report provides data on the median length-of-stay in DSS custody, placement stability as well as the re-entry rates for each cohort.

Due to the difficulty of comparing cohorts of children who enter the system in different years, in this CPS Data Card, NCCAI uses the number of children in custody on June 30, 2003. This allows a snapshot of the challenge foster care social workers face.

Repeat Maltreatment Reports and Substantiations

In this CPS Data Card, NCCAI reports only the unduplicated numbers of individual children who were maltreated. Data are available by special request from DSS regarding those children whose cases were substantiated more than once in a year. Data reveal that while there were 107,157 unduplicated (individual) children investigated, there were 144,867 investigations. These additional 37,710 cases required social work assessments, evaluations, and services. Similarly, while there were 30,016 individual children who were substantiated

as maltreated, there were a total of 39,498 times any child was substantiated as maltreated. In other words, there were 9,482 times that a child was maltreated more than once in the year. These duplicated numbers provide a more complete picture of caseloads for county-level CPS workers and more fully reflect the full incidence of maltreatment of children. The federal Child Maltreatment Report 2003 notes that 8.2% of North Carolina's children experienced repeat substantiated maltreatment within 6 months, which is close to the national average of 8.4%.²

Child Fatalities Due to Abuse or Neglect

- **Child Abuse Homicide**—Tragically, more than once every two weeks in North Carolina, a child is killed by the person who is responsible for his or her well-being. Data for these child abuse homicides are provided in the CPS Data Card. (See Data Notes and Sources)
- **Child Neglect Deaths**—Many more children die in circumstances in which a caregiver does not provide appropriate supervision or care than children who are killed by their caregiver. In 2002, the NC Medical Examiner's Office determined that 285 children died due to accidental causes. Accidental deaths include, among others, those due to unintentional drowning, motor vehicle crashes, and house fires. Of these deaths, some children died in circumstances involving negligence such as a child left in a hot car or a toddler left unsupervised near a swimming pool.

Exact numbers of child deaths caused by neglect are not available. There is no agreed-upon definition of neglect in North Carolina, making assessing data difficult, and determining the number of child neglect deaths challenging. NCCAI's working definition of a child neglect death adapted from Straus and Kantor is a *death resulting from behavior by the responsible caregiver that constitutes a failure to act in ways that are presumed by the culture of our society to be necessary to ensure the safety and physical well-being of a child*.³ Between 1994 and 1999 it was estimated that in North Carolina there were at least 40 to 80 fatalities of children each year from actions or lack of actions that could be considered "severe" neglect or child endangerment.⁴ NCCAI is currently conducting a study of this problem and has selected 23 cases from Medical Examiner records. These cases come from the following counties: Alamance, Catawba, Craven, Currituck, Davidson, Forsyth, Hoke, Iredell, Johnston, Lenoir, Mitchell, New Hanover, North Hampton, Orange, Person, Randolph, Scotland, Wake, and Wayne counties. A future NCCAI report will describe these selected neglect deaths, examine law enforcement responses and prosecutions, and make suggestions for an appropriate legal response. A review of these cases will lead to a better understanding of the current criminal justice aspects related to neglect fatalities.

Perpetrator Reports

Only persons meeting the legal definition of "caretaker" (NCGS 7B-101(3)) can potentially be designated as a

perpetrator of child maltreatment. North Carolina data for 2003 show that 85% of perpetrators of child maltreatment are the victim's natural parents. Of those, 74% are mothers. Mothers are likely to be over-represented due to the fact that they spend much more time with their children than fathers. In addition, cases may be substantiated against the mother for neglect when another perpetrator, for example, a boyfriend not living in the home, does not meet the legal definition of caretaker. Most perpetrators (82%) were below age 40. Almost half (45%) were under age 30. These data demonstrate the urgent need to support community-based prevention programs and interventions targeting young parents. Prevention programs involving home visits and education have proven effective and need to be promoted.⁵ MRS includes important tools for developing coordinated intervention and support services involving case management and inter-agency collaborative services to reach young parents.

Interpretation

NCCAI strongly discourages the use of these data to either criticize or congratulate individual counties. Why? There are alternative interpretations and explanations for each statistic. For example, a county's high "substantiation rate" may mean that the CPS workers have more training or skills. Alternatively, they could have more professional collaboration in gathering and corroborating the data, such as with law enforcement, which results in more comprehensive data for substantiation. Another county with a low rate could mean there is actually a lower incidence of maltreatment in the county.

These statistics regarding child maltreatment raise questions concerning the process of reporting how determinations are made regarding which cases to investigate and which to screen-out, the differences in types of abuse or neglect, the range in number of homicides per county and the differences in pay rates from county-to-county for social workers who provide the same basic services.

These data cannot be used to indicate accurately whether a particular statistic means that the reality is "better" or "worse" than the year prior, nor can they properly be employed for the evaluation of CPS policies or programs. Rather, they are stepping stones that may indicate areas needing further assessment. The differences noted among North Carolina counties should be used to prompt a closer look at CPS procedures and practices. Collecting and distributing comprehensive standardized data is the first step in monitoring and examining practices, not the last step.

The indicators will enable monitoring of certain trends over time as annual data are collected. These statistics may be used for descriptive purposes, to assist with setting goals, to aid in accountability, and to provide information that will foster helpful questioning of practices and services. Most importantly, they illus-

trate the enormous caseloads and challenges which our counties and state face in investigating, substantiating, and dealing with child maltreatment. NCCAI hopes this CPS Data Card brings new attention to the problems of maltreated children and will improve both public and governmental response.

NCCAI's goal is to encourage probing questions about CPS to be asked in each county. Good questions, in turn, should lead to greater attention and a richer understanding of what really is happening to individual children and within each local DSS. Ultimately, that heightened awareness and deeper knowledge will lead to better child protective services throughout North Carolina.

Recommendations to Improve NC's Child Protective Services

Funding challenges have impacted the delivery of protective services, such as the number, training and retention of workers and the recruitment and support for foster families. The burden of funding rests at the local level as less than 15.9 percent of county-level work is funded with support from the state. Funding shortfalls also compromise the ability to track and understand what happens in protective services. For example, the State Division collects data from the 100 counties and maintains the Central Registry of investigations and substantiations. Data on children in foster care are maintained in the Child Placement and Payment System. These data systems are hampered by old computer technology and software. One problem, for example, is that maltreated children who move from one county into another cannot be tracked. Additional data which are not currently collected are very important for planning purposes, especially the data regarding the screened-out reports from each county. There is a critical need for an electronic, statewide, standardized data collection system-called NCFast, which has yet to be funded adequately by the General Assembly. The absence of standardized data negatively impacts children's safety, assessment of the system, examination of outcomes for children, data-sharing among counties and the ability to develop appropriate programs and policies.

In order to better respond to the challenges represented in these data, NCCAI further recommends that North Carolina:

- Increase funding for the recruitment and retention of qualified child protective services workers through expansion of the Child Welfare Collaborative, which offers educational opportunities for social work students who will commit to public child welfare practice;
- Reduce caseloads for Child Protective Services workers;
- Increase training for social workers; and,
- Provide funding for the recruitment, retention and training of foster and adoptive parents.

We owe it to those most vulnerable among us to provide the best support network we can. Social Services

cannot fully meet this need without the adequate resources to do this urgent work. The North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute will continue to provide information to further the goal of making North Carolina a better place to be a child and to rear a child.

A web version of this card and additional data regarding North Carolina Child Protective Services is available at www.nccchild.org. For helpful additional sources of data and discussion about the use of child abuse and neglect data, visit the website for the North Carolina Division of Social Services at <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/stats/cw.htm> and Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina at www.preventchildabusenc.org/neglectdata.htm.

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Endnotes

1. Duke Center for Child and Family Policy. Multiple Response System (MRS) Evaluation Report to the North Carolina Division of Social Services. 2004. Available at <http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/news/MRS%20Report.pdf>.
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