

Child Maltreatment in Out of Home Care: What Do We Know Now?

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This research was supported by the Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which is funded in part by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

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Executive Summary

Children who are maltreated by their birth families are often removed from these families by the state to protect them from further harm. However, while under the care of the state, some foster children receive further harm. The Adoption and Safe Families Act requires that each state report the percentage of foster children who were maltreated by a foster parent or facility staff. While Illinois has done this using administrative data, there is anecdotal evidence that some of the maltreatment attributed to foster care may, in fact, be retrospective events that occurred before the child entered care.

This study attempts to identify the degree to which retrospective reports might be counted in a safety indicator of abuse and neglect of children in out of home care. A stratified random sample of 302 cases was drawn from the total of 691 indicated reports that occurred during FY2000 for children placed in relative care, non-related family foster care, specialized foster care, and child welfare institutions. Ten cases were removed from the sample: eight cases were of indicated reports that had been expunged, one case was of an adopted child, and one case was of an indicated report that caused the initial placement, leaving 292 cases.

The Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System (CANTS) computer database was accessed for these child cases. The CANTS computer data files were also accessed for certain cases to clarify information, as was placement data from the administrative database for a selection of cases in which the timing of the incident was unclear.

This study replicates a previous study conducted for FY1999 to examine the abuse and neglect of foster children while in the foster care system. By replicating the earlier study it is hoped that more precise data will be provided to create a clearer picture of the level,

circumstances, and types of child maltreatment that occur within foster care, as well as to identify incidents attributed to foster care that actually occurred prior to the child's placement in a foster family or child welfare institution.

The results from the previous study indicated that 16% of indicated reports of abuse and neglect in out of home care were retrospective reports that occurred prior to the placement of the child. The current study found that even higher levels of retrospective reporting with 27% of indicated reports being retrospective. Nearly a third (32%) of indicated reports in family foster homes were retrospective, with similar percentages in specialized foster homes (34%) and institutions (33%). The percentage of retrospective reports in relative foster homes was 18%.

Like the first report, sexual abuse was the overwhelmingly (74%) prevalent form of maltreatment. This was true for family foster care (74%), relative foster care (76%), specialized foster care (62%), and institutions (89%). Birth parents were the most frequent perpetrators of the abuse (45% of cases) followed by unrelated parent substitutes (20%).

The results of this and the previous study indicate that current recurrence rates significantly over estimate the amount of child abuse and neglect incidents for children in out-of-home care. Adjustment of recurrence rates needs to be done. Since it is nearly impossible to identify retrospective cases in the administrative database, one suggestion is to continue replications of these studies to identify a corrective factor. Ten replications are usually required to identify a reliable corrective factor. A second suggestion is to report recurrence rates for all types of abuse or neglect and then again for all types except sexual abuse. This results in a recurrence range where the true rate is between these two estimates.

Child Maltreatment in Out of Home Care: Replication of a Previous Study

Both the popular and professional literature indicate that the maltreatment of children occur while they are placed under state protection in out of home care. Together with the belief that foster children should be safe from harm while in care, federal legislation was enacted to attempt to hold the child welfare system accountable. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) mandates that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services develop a common set of child welfare outcome indicators to be the basis of annual reports to Congress. Among the indicators developed is a measure of abuse and neglect in out-of-home care. Child Welfare Outcome 2 asks, “Of all children who were in foster care during the reporting period, what percentage was the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff?” While this indicator appears to be straightforward, there are many potential difficulties in producing these data and understanding the results. For example, state systems vary widely in their definitions of abuse or neglect, policy regarding reporting, and responses to reports. State data systems also vary widely in what is recorded and maintained. These differences result in varying capabilities to accurately report safety results. This paper examines the maltreatment of children while under the guardianship of Illinois’ child welfare system and placed in out of home care. It is the goal of this study to provide insight into the occurrences of child maltreatment, including the types of incidents that are reported, the perpetrators of these incidents, and the types and prevalence of maltreatment that occur. This study illustrates the difficulties that arise from one state’s reporting system, a phenomenon certain to be occurring throughout state child welfare reporting systems.

Literature Review

While there has recently been a resurgence of interest in the popular media about the safety of children removed from their families and placed under state custody, there have been only a limited number of studies in the professional literature that give insight into these issues.

Previous studies have looked at maltreatment in foster care in various ways. Carbino (1992; 1991) focuses on the child welfare system's response to maltreatment reports involving foster families, emphasizing the need for responses specific to these families in contrast to the general population. She points out that foster homes are involved in only 1% of national reports of child maltreatment. Furthermore, she stresses that foster families are held to stricter standards for the treatment of children, are conspicuous and closely scrutinized in the community, are familiar with reporting procedures and are therefore more likely to report, and that community organizations, including the foster care agency, are concerned about legal liability regarding foster children.

Some studies have attempted to give greater insight into the dynamics of foster care that lead to maltreatment. A study by McFadden and Ryan (1991) discusses the nature and incidence of child maltreatment in foster care, factors within the family and the child welfare system that lead to maltreatment, characteristics of foster children at risk for maltreatment, and reasons for false allegations against foster families, giving an overview of the findings of previous studies. In this review, various dynamics, such as agency shortcomings in placing foster children in properly matched foster homes, lack of foster parent training or economic resources, and foster child characteristics, are shown to be factors which contribute to maltreatment. Daly and Dowd (1992) simply acknowledge that abuse in foster care does occur and offer methods to produce a harm-free environment for foster children. They suggest caregiver support, a model of care, a

focus on positive behavior, a consumer orientation, training, program evaluation, and an internal program audit.

As for studies that were conducted to assess safety of children in foster care, these vary in methodology, populations, and outcomes. Cavara and Ogren (1983) conducted a study using a new protocol that required that persons receiving allegations of abuse in foster homes immediately notify Child Protection Intake, rather than the previous practice of notifying foster care licensing workers or the child's social worker. Using the data from this protocol, they present a discussion of abuse that occurred in foster homes of a large urban agency in the Minnesota from May 1980 through November 1981. During this time, 125 investigations were conducted among the total of 570 foster homes in the county. Victims of child maltreatment were more likely to be male, aged 4-12. Abusing foster parents were more often single, longer-term foster parents, and did not have children of their own.

Bolton, Laner, and Gai (1981) conducted a study in Arizona that looked at maltreatment incidence reports between January 1, 1976 and December 31, 1978 to learn rates and characteristics of reported maltreatment. They used a 50% sample (every other child maltreatment report referred for investigation to the county of the study) and conducted a mixture of statistical analysis including discriminant analysis. In comparing foster homes to the general non-maltreating population of families with their natural children, they found a higher incidence of suspected child maltreatment in families with foster children. Approximately 7% of the total foster child population in this study was at risk for living with families reported for suspected child maltreatment.

A study involving 290 incidents of child maltreatment within Colorado's public social services system from January 1983 through December 1987 examined the characteristics of

reports and their seriousness (Rosenthal et al., 1991). Both quantitative, using incident report data, and qualitative methods, using brief vignettes of randomly selected cases, were used. Overall, of the 102 incidences of maltreatment in foster family homes, 49% were for physical abuse, 29% were for sexual abuse, and 22% were for neglect. The researchers point out that there is no typical maltreatment incident. The study presents the interesting observation that “the diversity of events stands out; there is no typical incident” (p. 255).

In other studies of maltreatment in foster care, several reports were of foster families in Baltimore. In their study using case record narratives and reports of the five-year study period of January 1, 1984 through December 31, 1988, Zuravin, Benedict, and Somerfield (1993) found that of their sample of 296 foster homes under the supervision of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, there were 62 families in which there was at least one confirmed report of maltreatment. Of these, 39% were for physical abuse, 48% for sexual abuse, and 29% for neglect. The perpetrator in sexual abuse incidents was the foster parent in 64% of cases. Regular foster homes were 2.4 times more likely to have confirmed maltreatment reports than either relative foster homes or specialized foster homes. In looking at CPS investigative records for 285 foster families in Baltimore in the same five-year period as the previous report, Benedict, Zuravin, Brandt, and Abbey (1994) found that 65% were for physical abuse, 10.7% for sexual abuse, and 17.4% for neglect. Foster parents were responsible for sexual abuse in 40% of those cases, with the remaining cases being perpetrated by foster siblings and others. In examining these foster children more closely, Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, and Brandt (1996) found that in 78 cases of substantiated maltreatment reports, the children had a multitude of health, developmental, and school problems that increased their risk for abuse. Of the sexual abuse cases in this sample, 20% were perpetrated by other foster children.

Spencer and Knudsen (1992), in their study using Indiana Department of Public Welfare data for fiscal years 1984 through 1990, found that child perpetrators were involved in 6% of foster home cases. Overall, physical abuse was found to be the most likely form of maltreatment in foster homes, with a rate of 9.3 indicated reports per one thousand children. Sexual abuse occurred in foster homes at a rate of 5.2 indicated reports per one thousand children in care, and neglect occurred at a rate of 2.4 indicated reports per one thousand children in care. Compared to the general population of full-time caregivers, sexual abuse was seen to be more likely to occur in foster homes, with sexual abuse in foster homes to be over twice as likely to be reported as in the child's own home. The caregiver was the perpetrator of sexual abuse in 78% of the cases. In looking at all cases, child perpetrators were involved in 6% of foster home cases.

In a retrospective study of medical reports of alleged physical and/or sexual abuse assessed and reported by pediatricians in Leeds, England over the six-year period 1990-1995, Hobbs, Hobbs, and Wynne (1999) discovered foster children were 7 to 8 times more likely to be assessed for abuse than a child in the general population. Foster parents were the perpetrators of abuse in 41% of the cases, as were birth parents in 23% of cases, and other children in 20% of cases.

In their study of children in foster care in Illinois using the statewide administrative database maintained by the state child welfare agency, Poertner, Bussey, and Fluke (1999) produced findings that the percent of indicated reports of abuse and neglect for children in out-of-home care ranged from a low of 1.7% to a high of 2.3% over the five-year period between July 1, 1992 and June 30, 1997, with an average rate of 2.0%. The largest category of abuse was found to be substantial risk of harm for family foster care (52% of cases), relative care (54.3%), and specialized care (52%). For relative care, lack of supervision and sexual abuse are most

frequent at approximately 20%. Sexual abuse rates were found to be higher in family foster care (36.9% of cases) and specialized foster care (45.2%). Neglect was less than 10% of cases in both family and specialized foster care. Poertner et al. reported that the perpetrator of the abuse was most likely to be the foster parent. However, birth parents were the perpetrators in 26.5% of relative care placements, 26.4% of family foster homes, and 19.8% of specialized foster care placements. Relatives were the next most likely perpetrator in relative care (24.2%), while other non-relatives were more likely in family foster care homes (24.5%) and specialized foster care homes (31.2%)

Garnier and Poertner (2000) discuss outcome reporting of child maltreatment for children in out of home care in Illinois using the statewide administrative database maintained by the state child welfare agency. In reporting recurrence of abuse or neglect of children in out-of-home care for fiscal years 1996-1999, percentages of children with indicated reports ranged from a high of 2.4 to a low of 1.5. To better measure child safety, it was believed that measures should be adjusted to account for the length of time a child is exposed to risk of abuse or neglect. Safety measures were recalculated and reported as rates per person(s) per year. Abuse/neglect rates for children in family foster care ranged from a high of 4.4 to a low of 2.7 per 100 children in care for one year. Rates of child maltreatment for relative foster care ranged from a high of 2.3 to a low of 1.6 per 100 children in care for one year. Specialized foster care abuse/neglect rates ranged from a high of 2.8 to a low of 1.8 per 100 children in care for one year.

While this study gives insight into the level of abuse in out of home placements, some limitations of the database and resulting data cloud the results. Due to the lack of a single identifier for each child across data systems (the placement data system and the child protection data system) used in the database, some children may be mismatched with placement history

reports. Even if the child is correctly matched with a report, insufficient information is available in the database to determine the actual date of the abuse. In some instances, a child may be revealing past incidents of abuse that occurred prior to placement in foster care. In Garnier and Poertner's study, 25% of perpetrators were found to be birth parents. While some of this may be attributable to incidents that occurred at parental visits, others may be retrospective reporting.

Methodology

This study attempts to identify the types of maltreatment reported for children in out of home care, both current and retrospective, the perpetrators of child maltreatment and the types of maltreatment most frequently reported. The concern as to the degree to which retrospective reports might be counted in a safety indicator of abuse or neglect of children in substitute care arose because the system under study includes a reporting date and not an abuse or neglect incidence date. Even if a reporting system does include an incidence date there is a strong likelihood that reporters would have great difficulty in recalling when the event took place. This study drew a stratified random sample of indicated reports of abuse or neglect for children in substitute care and examined the investigative reports to determine the incidents that occurred prior to the child's current placement, the perpetrator of the incident, and the type of abuse or neglect.

Study Sample

This study replicates a previous study of FY 1999 indicated reports of abuse and/or neglect of children in out of home care. The sample for this study, as in the previous one, was obtained from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) Integrated Database. This database represents a joining of the child protective services database that contains all reports of abuse and neglect investigations, and the child placement database

containing data on all children in state custody (Garnier and Poertner, 2000). For this current study, children in institutional care, including group homes and hospitals, were added to the population of children in family foster care, relative foster care, and specialized foster care during FY 2000. There were 691 indicated reports of child abuse or neglect and more than 51,000 children in these placement types during the fiscal year.

A stratified random sample of 302 cases of the indicated reports was drawn with the strata being the four placement types. The sample size was determined by estimating the number needed to be 95% certain that the mean reabuse rate would be within 5% of the true mean of the population. Eight cases were removed from the sample since the indicated reports had been expunged, one case was of an adopted child, and one case was determined to have caused the initial placement in foster care, leaving 292 cases. The state child protective services' reports were examined using the CPS computer data. Placement data from the foster care database was also obtained for several cases in which the timing of the incident was unclear.

Findings

Once again, determining culpability in many of these cases proved difficult. The actual circumstances of an incident of maltreatment were often ambiguous and confusing. However, using the Child Protection Service computer system, rather than relying on initial incident reports, proved to produce better information for this study than the previous one.

Types of Incidents Reported

In this study, as in the previous one, the majority of incidents attributed to the placement did occur while the child was officially placed in a family foster home, a relative foster home, a specialized foster home, or an institution. However, 80 of the 292 indicated reports (27%) were retrospective (Table 1). These incidents were circumstances where a foster parent, institution

Table 1

Retrospective and Non-retrospective Incidents of Abuse or Neglect

Responsibility	Placement Type				Total
	Family Foster Home	Relative Foster Home	Specialized Foster Home	Institutions	
Foster Care	71 (68%)	92 (81%)	31 (66%)	18 (67%)	212 (73%)
Retrospective	34 (32%)	21 (19%)	16 (34%)	9 (33%)	80 (27%)
Total	105	113	47	27	292

staff person, caseworker, or therapist called the hotline to report an incident of child maltreatment that occurred prior to the child being placed in care. This supports a common observation of investigators and workers that as the child becomes comfortable with his/her foster family or caseworker or participates in counseling he/she may reveal incidents from the past that occurred while the child was living with a birth parent.

However, some of the other incidents may, in fact, be situations beyond the control of the caregiver. In this study, in twelve cases, children were at risk of or were maltreated at a visit with their birth parents, either unsupervised or supervised. In these cases, it appeared that the visits were approved by the agency.

There are many ways to interpret this information and make judgments about culpability. However, one breakdown is evident: incidents that occurred while the child was in foster care placement and those that did not (retrospective incidents). For the purposes of this as in the previous study, all incidents that occurred during a substitute care placement are attributed to the child welfare system. This is to ensure that there is no question as to whether there is any under-reporting of incidents the state might be considered by some to be held accountable. Only the 80 retrospective cases, meaning incidents prior to the child being placed in care, are considered not the responsibility of the foster care system and are not attributed to it.

There is variation in the percentage of retrospective reports by type of placement. In non-related family foster homes, 32% of indicated reports were retrospective while prior incidents accounted for 34% of indicated reports in specialized foster homes and 33% in child welfare institutions. Just over 18% of indicated reports in relative foster homes were retrospective. As in the previous study, this may be lower due to the fact that relatives may not see the value in further reporting of past incidents or may have on-going relationships with the perpetrators. In

these cases, the child may also not be as forthcoming in revealing past incidents of maltreatment. It may also be the case that relative placement types are safer.

The Perpetrator

For those cases that were not retrospective, foster parents, either non-related or relative caregivers of the foster child, and institutional staff persons were the most likely perpetrators (64% of cases) (Table 2). Non-related foster parents accounting for 29% of the perpetrators, relative caregivers accounting for 29%, and institutional staff persons accounting for 6%. The next most frequent perpetrator was a birth parent (14% of cases). Other children, either siblings (2%) or unrelated children (6%), were noted as the perpetrator in 8% of cases.

For abuse or neglect in non-related foster family homes, perpetrators were most often the foster parents (61%). Birth parents were the perpetrators in 11% of reports. For children placed in relative foster care homes, 58% of the perpetrators were relative caregivers, 23% were birth parents, and 7% were children. In specialized foster care homes, 55% of perpetrators were foster parents, while 13% were other adults and 16% were children (non-related children and siblings). Perpetrators in institutions were most often staff members (67%). Other children were the perpetrators in 11% of incidents in institutions.

For retrospective cases birth parents were the perpetrators in 45% of incidents (Table 3). Unrelated parent substitutes accounted for 20% of incidents, children (non-related children and siblings) were the perpetrators in 13% of cases, and babysitters accounted for 11% of incidents. For retrospective reports in non-related family foster care, 47% of the perpetrators were birth parents. The next most frequent perpetrators were unrelated parent substitutes (20%) and babysitters (18%). In relative foster care, 57% of the perpetrators were birth parents. Unrelated parent substitutes were the perpetrators in 19% of incidents and children (unrelated and siblings)

Table 2Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child – Non-Retrospective Cases

Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child	Placement Type				Total
	Family Foster Home	Relative Foster Home	Specialized Foster Home	Institutions	
Foster Parent	43 (61%)	1 (1%)	17 (55%)	0	61 (29%)
Relative Caregiver	5 (7%)	53 (58%)	2 (6%)	1 (5%)	61 (29%)
Institution Staff Person	0	0	0	12 (67%)	12 (6%)
Birth Parent	8 (11%)	21 (23%)	0	1 (5%)	30 (14%)
Step Parent	1 (1%)	0	0	0	1 (.5%)
Unrelated Parent Substitute	0	1 (1%)	1 (3%)	0	2 (1%)
Paramour	0	1 (1%)	0	1 (5%)	2 (1%)
Other Adult Relative	0	3 (3%)	0	0	3 (1%)
Sibling	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	2 (6%)	0	5 (2%)
Other Child	2 (3%)	5 (5%)	3 (10%)	2 (11%)	12 (6%)
Other Person	5 (7%)	4 (4%)	4 (13%)	0	13 (6%)
Babysitter	5 (7%)	0	1 (3%)	1 (5%)	7 (3%)
Not Reported	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (3%)	0	3 (1%)
Total	71	92	31	18	212

Table 3Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child – Retrospective Cases

Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child	Placement Type				Total
	Family Foster Home	Relative Foster Home	Specialized Foster Home	Institutions	
Birth Parent	16 (47%)	12 (57%)	5 (31%)	3 (33%)	36 (45%)
Step Parent	1 (3%)	0	1 (6%)	2 (22%)	4 (5%)
Unrelated Parent Substitute	7 (20%)	4 (19%)	5 (31%)	0	16 (20%)
Paramour	0	0	0	1 (11%)	1 (1%)
Adult Relative	2 (6%)	0	0	0	2 (2%)
Sibling	2 (6%)	1 (5%)	1 (6%)	2 (22%)	6 (8%)
Other Child	0	3 (14%)	1 (6%)	0	4 (5%)
Other Person	0	1 (5%)	0	1 (11%)	2 (2%)
Babysitter	6 (18%)	0	3 (19%)	0	9 (11%)
Total	34	21	16	9	80

were in 19% of incidents. For those children in specialized foster care 31% of perpetrators were birth parents and 31% were unrelated parent substitutes. This was followed by babysitters, who were the perpetrators in 19% of incidents. In institutions, 33% of the perpetrators of retrospective incidents were birth parents, 22% were siblings, and 22% were stepparents.

Types of Maltreatment

It is not unusual for a child abuse or neglect report to contain several types of allegations and for more than one of them to be substantiated. Therefore when the type of abuse or neglect for a particular indicated report is of interest, it is necessary to develop decision rules for selecting the one to identify with the report. This report uses the most severe type of abuse or neglect by using the Testa-Bilavar Severity Index (Harris & Poertner, 1999). This index ranks types of maltreatment into the following categories, listed in order of severity:

- ~~☒~~ sexual abuse,
- ~~☒~~ physical abuse
- ~~☒~~ substance-exposed infants,
- ~~☒~~ emotional abuse,
- ~~☒~~ lack of supervision,
- ~~☒~~ environmental neglect,
- ~~☒~~ other neglect,
- ~~☒~~ substantial risk of harm.

For those indicated reports that were not retrospective, substantial risk of harm was the most severe incident in 31% of cases (Table 4). This was followed by physical abuse, which was the most severe allegation for 24% of cases, lack of supervision for 22%, and sexual abuse for 20%. One incident of death from abuse was indicated in this study.

Table 4Categories of Severity of Maltreatment – Non-Retrospective Cases

Allegation	Placement Type				Total
	Family Foster Home	Relative Foster Home	Specialized Foster Home	Institutions	
Death (Neglect)	0	1 (1%)	0	0	1 (.5%)
Sexual Abuse	17 (24%)	12 (13%)	9 (29%)	5 (28%)	43 (20%)
Physical Abuse	16 (22%)	20 (22%)	10 (32%)	4 (22%)	50 (24%)
Substance-exposed infants	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional Abuse	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of Supervision	14 (20%)	23 (25%)	4 (13%)	5 (28%)	46 (22%)
Environmental Neglect	0	2 (2%)	0	1 (5%)	3 (1%)
Other Neglect	0	2 (2%)	2 (6%)	0	4 (2%)
Substantial Risk of Harm	24 (34%)	32 (35%)	6 (19%)	3 (17%)	65 (31%)
Total	71	92	31	18	212

Substantial risk of harm accounted for the highest percentage of reports in foster family homes (34%) and relative foster homes (35%). In non-related foster homes, sexual abuse (24%), physical abuse (22%), and lack of supervision (20%) comprised the remaining types of maltreatment that occurred. In relative foster care, lack of supervision (25%), physical abuse (22%), and sexual abuse (13%) were the other substantially reported incidents. In specialized foster homes, physical abuse was the most frequent type of abuse (32%), followed by sexual abuse (29%). In institutions, sexual abuse and lack of supervision each accounted for 28% of incidents. Physical abuse followed with 22%.

In retrospective cases, sexual abuse was overwhelmingly (74%) the most prevalent form of maltreatment (Table 5). Substantial risk of harm was indicated in 19% of cases.

For children in institutions, 89% of the retrospective reports were for sexual abuse. Retrospective reports of sexual abuse accounted for 76% of incidents for children in relative foster care, 74% for those in non-related family foster care, and 62% for those in specialized foster care. Substantial risk of harm was the second most frequent type of abuse for family foster care (24%), relative foster care (19%), and specialized foster care (19%). Lack of supervision (11%) was the second most prevalent type of maltreatment in institutions.

Discussion

This study was undertaken to gain greater insight of maltreatment reported in out of home care by replicating. This was a replication of a previous study. With these two studies completed, it is hoped that outcome reporting can more correctly be reported by creating some means to account for retrospective reporting in foster care.

In contrast to the previous study, in which a single hard copy report was used to gather child abuse investigation data, this study involved the use of the child protective service

Table 5Categories of Severity of Maltreatment – Retrospective Cases

Allegation	Placement Type				Total
	Family Foster Home	Relative Foster Home	Specialized Foster Home	Institutions	
Death (Neglect)	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual Abuse	25 (74%)	16 (76%)	10 (62%)	8 (89%)	59 (74%)
Physical Abuse	0	1 (5%)	2 (12%)	0	3 (4%)
Substance-exposed infants	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional Abuse	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of Supervision	1 (3%)	0	0	1 (11%)	2 (2%)
Environmental Neglect	0	0	0	0	0
Other Neglect	0	0	1 (6%)	0	1 (1%)
Substantial Risk of Harm	8 (24%)	4 (19%)	3 (19%)	0	15 (19%)
Total	34	21	16	9	80

computer database, allowing for greater access to information about each case. This allowed for a clearer identification of perpetrators and circumstances about the incident. Where this becomes most apparent is in relative care where it can be determined more clearly whether the adult relative perpetrator was the caregiver or another adult relative. This affects the comparison between perpetrators in the earlier and present study.

These studies indicate that current recurrence rates significantly over estimate the amount of child abuse and neglect incidents for children in out-of-home care. The data derived from the current research reinforces the idea that recurrence rates need to be adjusted. Adjustment of recurrence rates needs to be done. Since it is nearly impossible to identify retrospective cases in the administrative database, one suggestion is to continue replications of these studies to identify a corrective factor. Ten replications are usually required to identify a reliable corrective factor. A second suggestion is to report recurrence rates for all types of abuse or neglect and then again for all types except sexual abuse. This results in a recurrence range where the true rate is between these two estimates.

Conclusion

The results from the previous study indicated that 16% of indicated reports of abuse and neglect in out of home care are retrospective reports that occurred prior to the placement. The current study found that even higher levels of retrospective reporting occurred, with 27% of indicated reports being retrospective. Of the 292 cases in this study, 32% of indicated reports in family foster homes, 18% of indicated reports in relative foster homes, 34% of indicated reports in specialized foster homes, and 33% of indicated reports in institutions were retrospective cases.

Once again, sexual abuse was the overwhelmingly (74%) prevalent form of maltreatment. This was true for family foster care (73.5%), relative foster care (76%), specialized foster care (62.5%), and institutions (89%).

Other findings from this study give some insight into the perpetrators and types of maltreatment that occur in out of home care. Perpetrators of child maltreatment in foster care placements are most often relative caregivers (29% of cases) or non-related foster parent (29%). The highest percentage (31%) of incidents are cases of substantial risk of harm, followed by physical abuse (24%), lack of supervision (22%), and sexual abuse (20%).

With this replication study reinforcing the findings of the previous study, it seems warranted that a method be derived to more accurately reflect the level of maltreatment that occurs to children in out of home care. Either repeated replications of this type of study are needed to establish a corrective factor for recurrence rates or a range needs to be established that brackets the true recurrence rate.

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