Substantiation:
Current Knowledge and Policy Options

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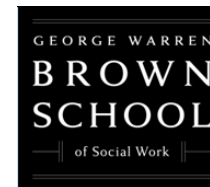
Presentation overview

- History

- Harm Evidence Model

- Validity of Substantiation

- Substantiation and Differential Response

Legalistic and social work perspectives

- Child Abuse and Neglect is a Multi-disciplinary Field with corresponding influences
  - Law
  - Medicine
  - Social work

- Main Issues in the Formation of Early Laws and Policies
  - Balance the tendency to prosecute with tendency to help families
  - Balance law enforcement facts gathering orientation with social work assessment
  - Early laws/policies were an attempt to achieve these sorts of balance
  - We are now able to see how this has played out to some extent in the manifestation of diverse CPS systems

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Is state child welfare more like "criminal justice" or "friendly visitors?"

A key dimension to consider is the evolving nature of Child Welfare practice. The continued emphasis on community engagement and multiple-track systems (Assessment vs. Investigation) have lent a more "Social Work" or "Public Health" quality to Public Child Welfare.

- Perhaps substantiation is a better fit with the Criminal Justice approach, being related to the "guilty/not guilty" dichotomy.

- What might a more service oriented, public health type construct look like? Perhaps some indicator of service need would provide useful information for families being assessed, rather than investigated? On the other hand, we still need information about child abuse and neglect.

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The Harm-Evidence model of substantiation

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An overview of the process

Report is made by mandated or permissive reporter (ratio is about 56/44)

Report is **screened in** or not (60% nationally, vast state variation)

SINGLE TRACK STATES:
Cases are investigated and substantiation determination is made. Gates services in 11 states.

TWO TRACK STATES:
"Assessment" or "investigation" track. Assessment tracks often <u>do not</u> make substantiation judgment.

"SUBSTANTIATED"
Higher rates of service delivery (60%), Employer-searchable central registry membership sometimes.

"UNSUBSTANTIATED"
Lower rates of service delivery (30%). No employer-searchable record, report destruction often happens.

What might people *think* substantiation means?

Substantiated

= "Child abuse happened"

= "Guilty Verdict"

Unsubstantiated

= "Nothing happened," and maybe "the state child welfare
agency hassled innocent people for no reason"

= "Not Guilty"

We could draw it like this:

Unsubstantiated cases
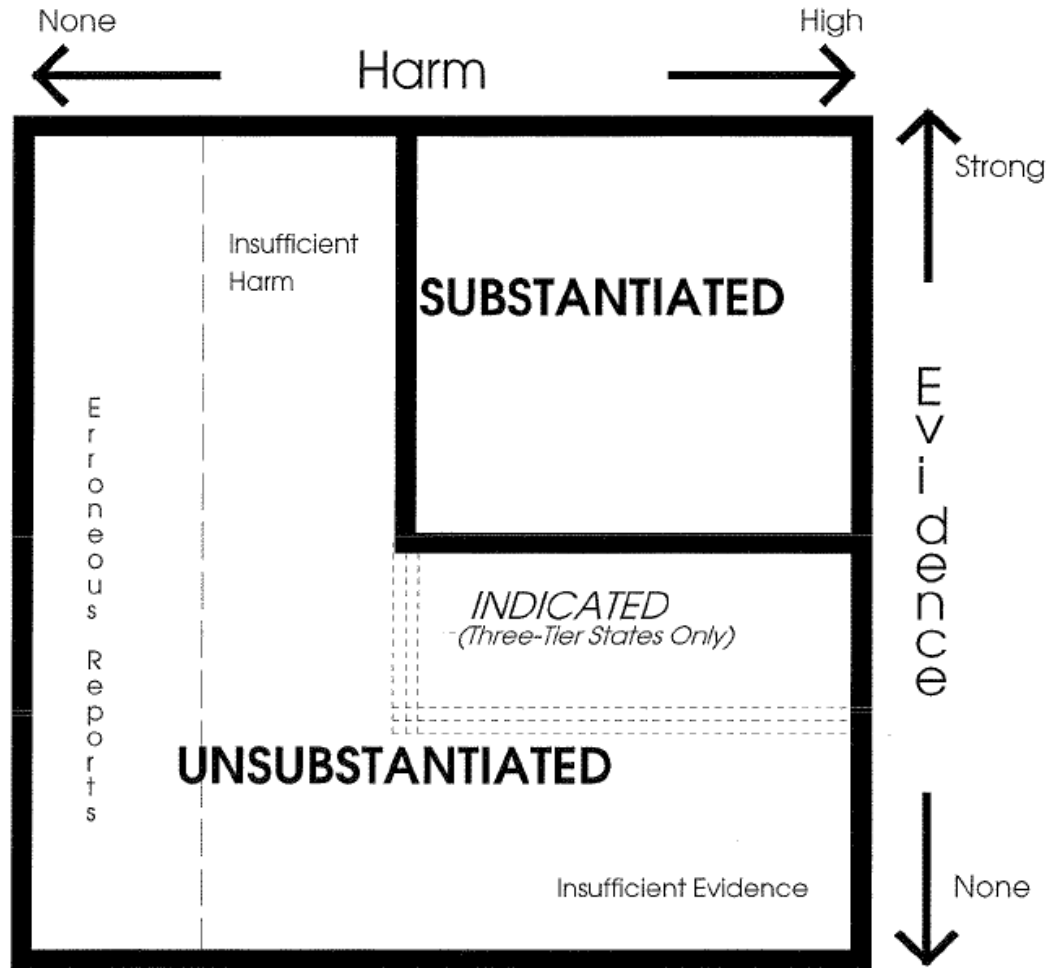from families in which
nothing really happened.

Substantiated cases
from families in which
something serious happened.

Families should have
- Low risk for maltreatment
- Low rate of re-report
- Low rates of other problems in the family

Families should have
- High risk for maltreatment
- High rates of re-report
- High rates of other problems in the family

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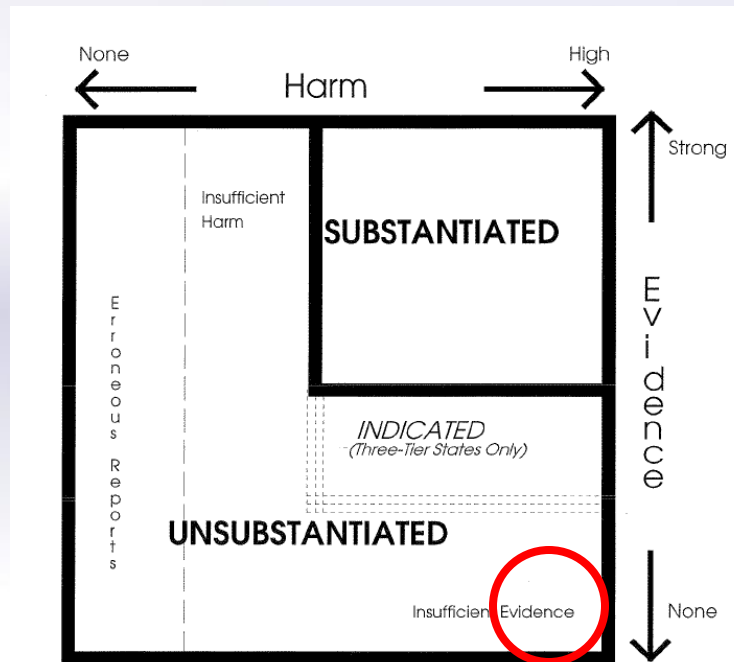of Social Work

The "Harm/Evidence" Model:

Example: Kid with belt bruise

Child has bruising in the shape of father's belt buckle, tells credible story, father admits.
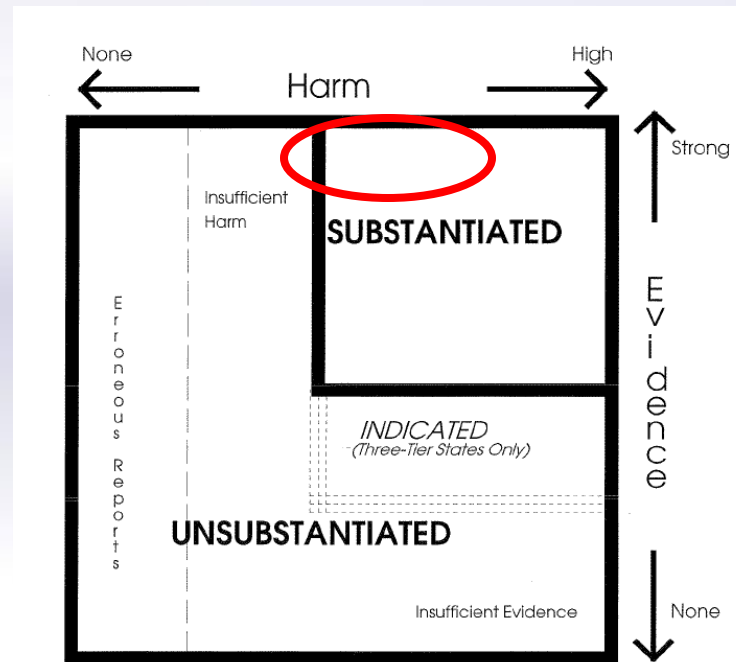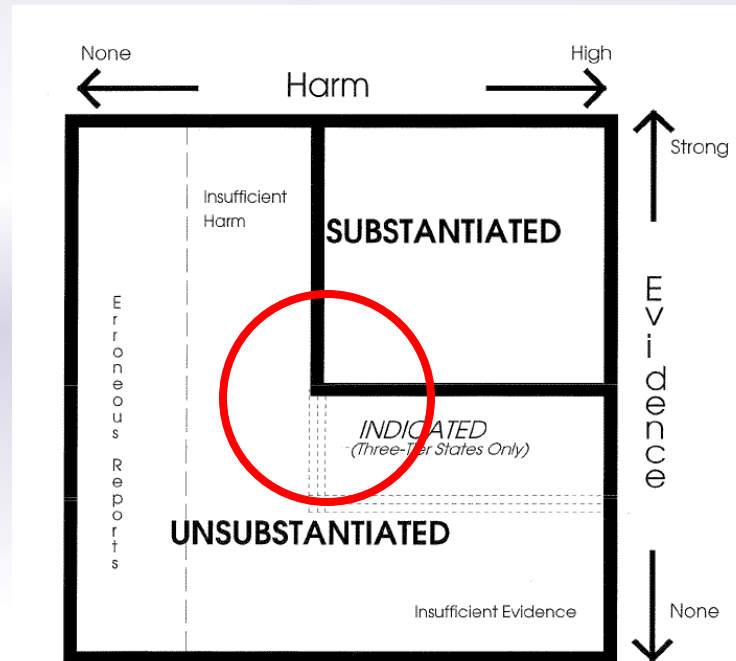
Possible SIDS case

Family has history of neglect, 2nd child in family dies, diagnosis given is possible SIDS.
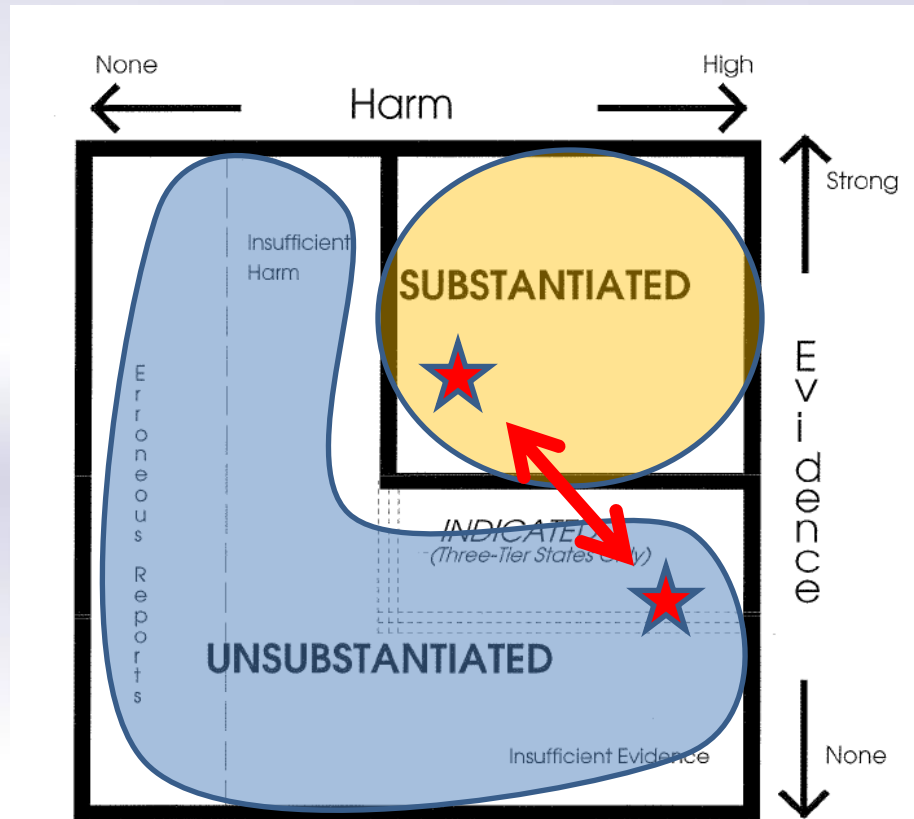
Preteen injury

11 year old child in tumultuous home has repeated minor bruising which appears consistent with abuse. Reports that injury was from discipline, but gives somewhat unclear and conflicting history.

What implications can we draw from this model?

The main implication I draw is that substantiated and unsubstantiated cases may not be <u>as</u> different as we think. On the whole, you would expect substantiated cases to represent somewhat more serious situations than unsubstantiated cases, but perhaps this difference will not be very great

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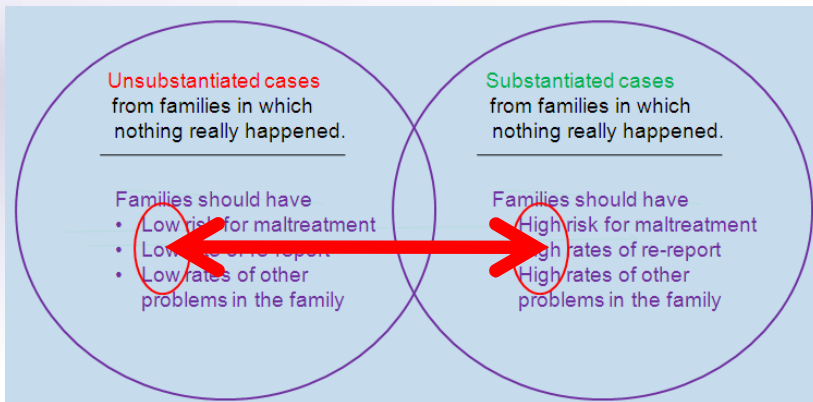BROWN
SCHOOL
of Social Work

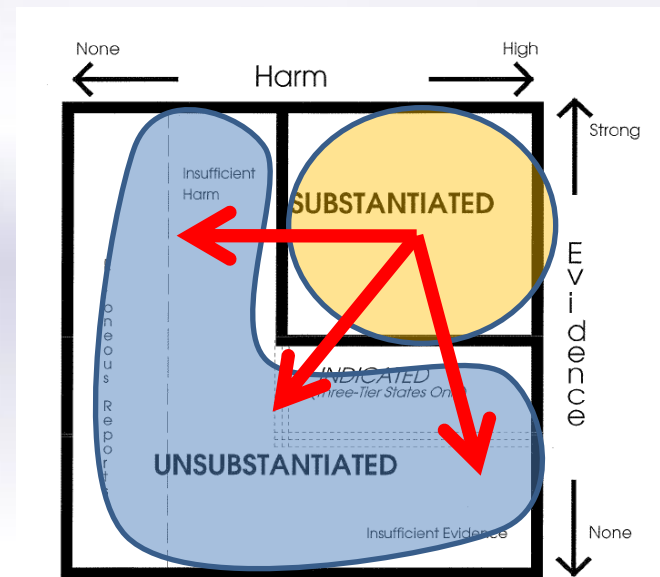# It is easy for an unsubstantiated case to be far more serious than a substantiated one.

The H/E model suggests that the Sub/Unsub difference is less important than we thought.

Old Model:
Big Harm Differential

Harm/Evidence Model:
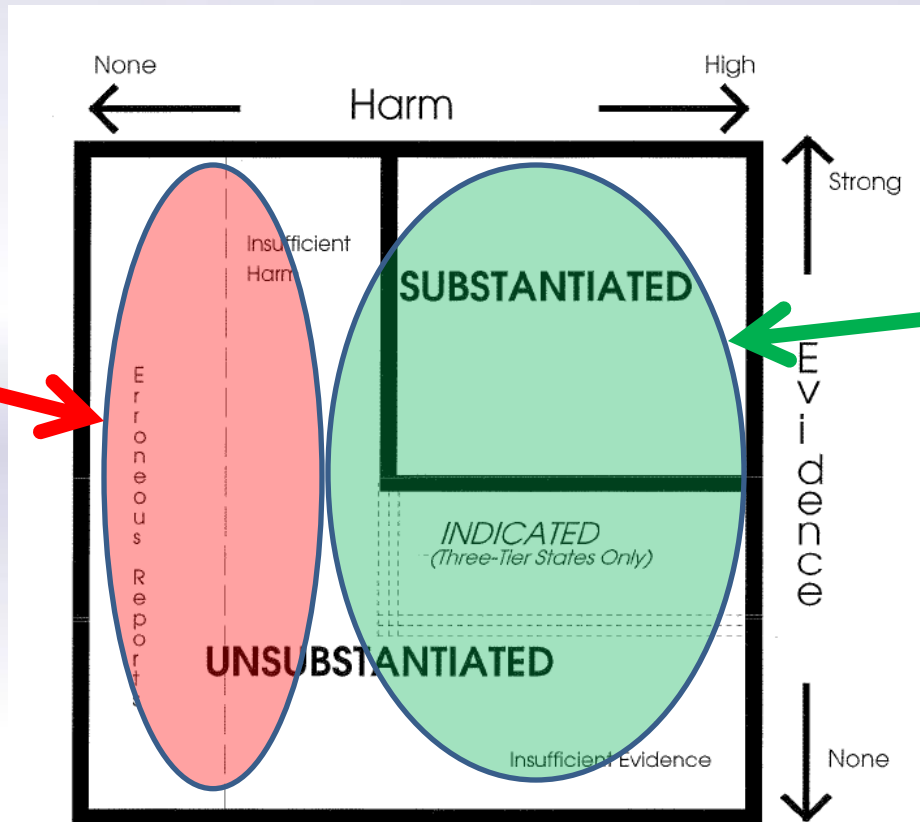### Lower Harm Differential

Let's back up and think about <u>service need</u>, which has <u>nothing whatsoever to do with evidence.</u>

No Service Need Present

Service Need Present

If you only serve substantiated cases, you miss all the needy (green) people in the lower right. That isn't good if your agency has a prevention mission.

No Service Need Present
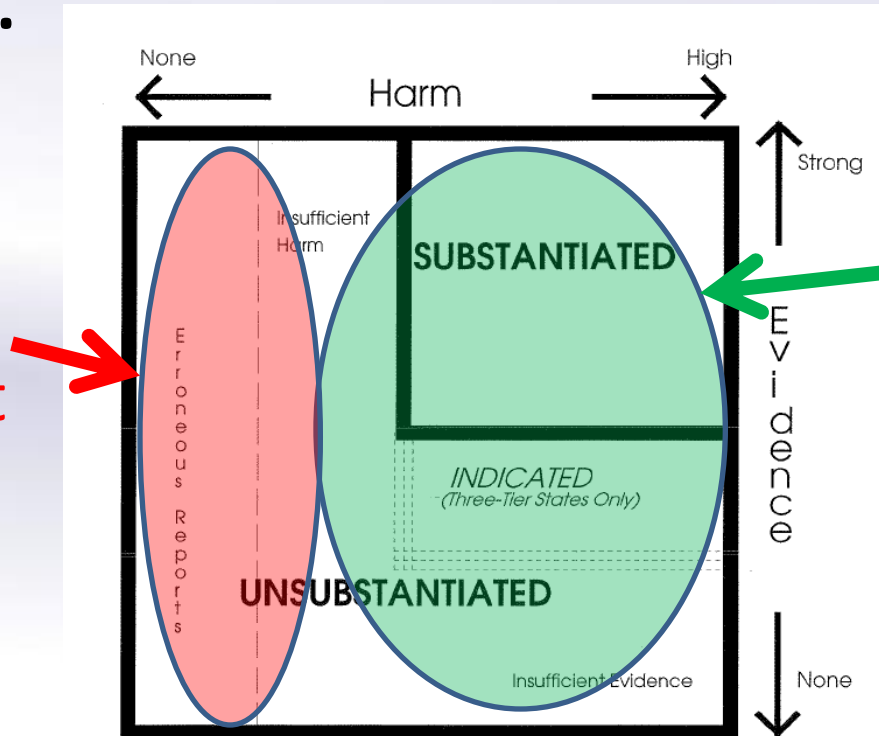
Service Need Present

Summary:

- The Harm/Evidence Model gives us a new way to look at substantiation.

- It implies that the differences between substantiated and unsubstantiated cases may not be that large.

- It implies that services must be gated by actual service <u>need</u>, not by substantiation status.

How well does Brett's model fit actual decision-making?

• Data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, a national study of child welfare

• Used Drake's model to look at relationship between caseworker judgments and substantiation

Cross, T.P. & Casanueva, C. (2009). Caseworker judgments and substantiation. *Child Maltreatment*, *14*, 38-52.

Results on harm, evidence and substantiation per 100 children

	Little or no harm	Moderate to severe harm
Probably to clearly sufficient evidence		
	Each figure represents 1 out of 100 children Red = substantiated	
No to probably insufficient evidence		

How well did Brett's model fit these 100 children?

- The substantiation outcome matched Brett's model in 85 out of 100 cases
- The model is mostly accurate but some decisions that are hard to predict

Key results

- Evidence was a stronger predictor of substantiation than harm

- In 9 out of 100 cases, children were judged to be harmed but reports were **not** substantiated
  - Evidence was judged insufficient in 5 of these cases
  - Evidence was *judged sufficient in 4 of these cases and the case was still not substantiated*

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Validity and substantiation

Validity and substantiation

- Validity
  - Form of validity, e.g., face, content, concurrent, predictive/criterion, etc.
  - Fundamental Question - Is it maltreatment?
    - Evidence – Harm Framework
    - Risk of Harm
    - Safety
  - If it's maltreatment, how sure are we (precision)?
  - If it's maltreatment, what we have to do about it may confound things.

- Rereporting and recurrence and evidence of predictive validity for substantiation
  - If it happened before is it more likely to happen again?
  - If it didn't happen but the child was at risk did it happen later?

Substantiation and maltreatment recidivism: A propensity score analysis

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Previous research

- Early studies looked at the bivariate relationship between substantiation and recidivism; results were mixed

- More recent studies have used multivariate analytic methods to examine recidivism while "accounting for" the effect of other child and case characteristics, such as age of child and type of maltreatment

Research question and methods

The current study uses a sophisticated methodology known as Propensity Score Matching (PSM) to answer the question: Are initially substantiated cases more likely to be re-reported to child protective services within 12 months of the initial investigation when compared to initially unsubstantiated cases?

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Study sample

- Sample data taken from IDCFS administrative database
- Started with population of all child reports 1999-2004 (n=605,026)
- Sample limited to children with no prior investigations (n=386,231)
- Sample excluded cases opened for intact family services or substitute care (n=325,209)
- If household had more than one investigated child, one child was randomly chosen (n=203,768)
- Children with missing data excluded (n=188,471)

Comparison of sample before and after matching

Matching variables	Before Match	After Match
Gender	More females unsubstantiated	No difference
Child's Race	No difference	No difference
Child's Age	Lower % under 3 Substantiated	No difference
Geographic region	Lower % substantiated in Cook	No difference
Type of maltreatment	Lower % sexual & physical abuse among substantiated	No difference
# of allegations	Higher % among substantiated	No difference
Maltreatment reporter	Higher substantiated: Law officers & medical personnel	No difference
# of other children	Higher % none substantiated	No difference
Mother as perpetrator	Higher among substantiated	No difference

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Survival analysis

Variables in the model	Risk of Re-report
Gender	No significant effect
Race	Caucasian > Latino, African American
Child's Age	Linear relation with highest for under 3
Geographic region	Cook County < rest of the state
Type of maltreatment	Sexual abuse < physical abuse, neglect
Number of allegations	Two or more allegation > One allegation
Maltreatment reporter	social service worker > family & neighbors, law enforcement, medical personnel
Number of other children in home	one or more child in home > only child
Perpetrator	Mother > all other adults in home as a group
Initial Substantiation Status	**Substantiated > Unsubstantiated**
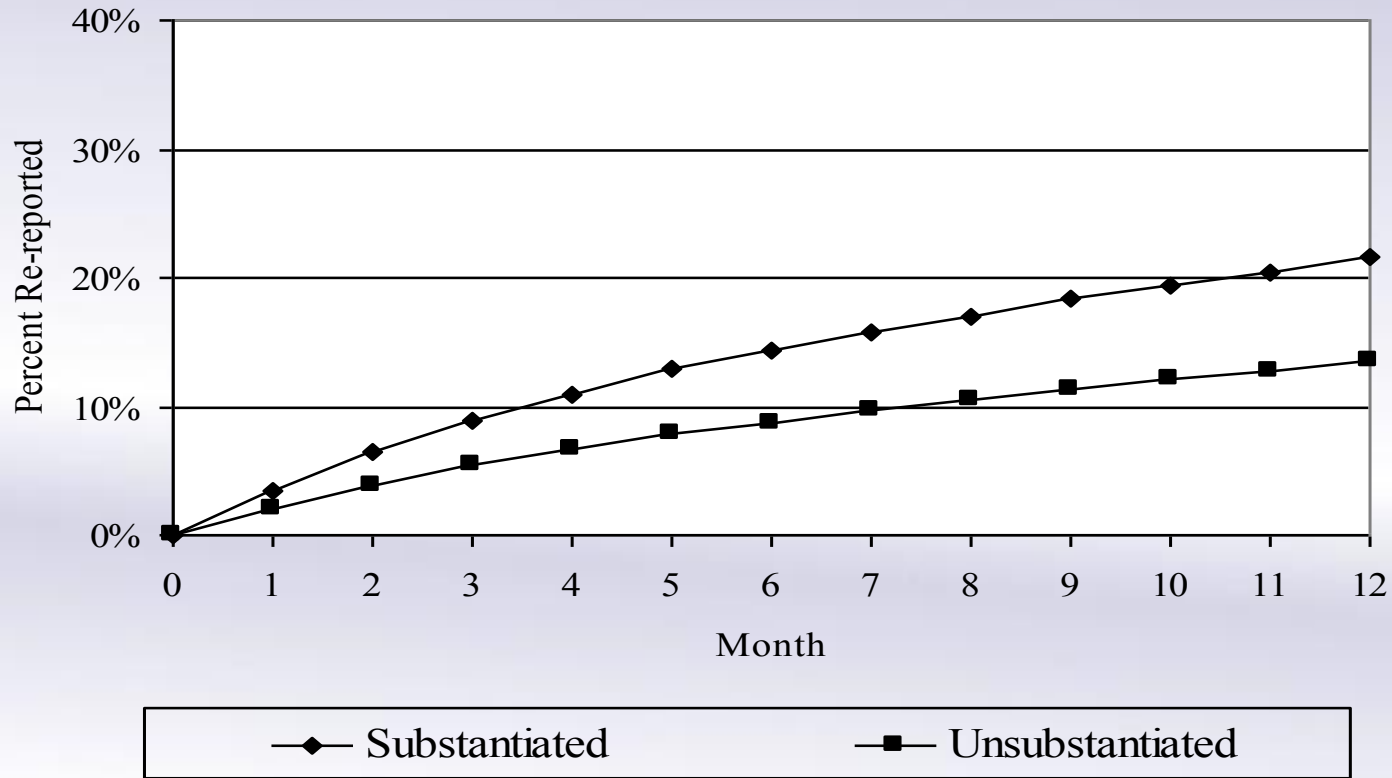
Implications of results

What function should substantiation have in child welfare?

- Gatekeeper for services?
- What is the best way to target limited services when almost all investigated families have some level of service need?
- Targeting more intensive services to substantiated cases makes sense in a system where resources are limited

Implications of results

- It has been argued that although recidivism rates among substantiated cases are higher, the volume of unsubstantiated cases that return to the system is greater

- This is true, but only because the vast majority of all investigations are initially unsubstantiated (about 75%)

- These two issues of high unmet service needs and high volume of cases that return to the system have led many states to implement differential response systems

Synopsis of findings on substantiation and recidivism

Using NSCAW Data

Brett Drake, Patricia Kohl, Melissa Jonson-Reid
Washington University in St. Louis

Time to Leave Substantiation Behind

Findings From A National Probability Study

Patricia L. Kohl
Melissa Jonson-Reid
Brett Drake
Washington University

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What this talk is about:

We will be over-viewing findings from a paper using NSCAW data. This paper tries to determine if substantiated and unsubstantiated cases are at similar or different risk of recidivism.

Synopsis of findings on substantiation using NSCAW data

So what is NSCAW anyway?
It's the "National Survey of Child and Adolescent Wellbeing." We use the NSCAW I data (II is still ongoing)

- It is a $74M federally funded study on child maltreatment, the largest ever.
- NSCAW I has a carefully constructed sampling procedure using about 6,000 kids, intended to make the study's results representative of the USA in general.
- The sample is composed of children who were contacted by state child maltreatment agencies.

http://www.rti.org/page.cfm?objectid=D688C979-8B27-456E-AD0AF638862E7365

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Why did we write this article?

It was partly as a follow-on to another article, based on a different large child welfare consortium study: LONGSCAN

Pergamon

Child Abuse & Neglect 29 (2005) 479–492

Child Abuse & Neglect

Defining maltreatment according to substantiation: Distinction without a difference?

Jon M. Hussey [a,*], Jane Marie Marshall [a], Diana J. English [b], Elizabeth Dawes Knight [c], Anna S. Lau [d], Howard Dubowitz [e], Jonathan B. Kotch [a]

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Our NSCAW sample:

We looked at the 6,000 NSCAW kids and kept the 1,820 kids who:

- Remained in the home following the index (first) investigation

- Had no known prior maltreatment reports (this cut our sample by more than half)

- Had data available on all outcome measures.

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Our analyses

NSCAW uses a complex sampling design and requires weighting to be carefully accounted for in the analysis. This necessitated use of SUDAAN (version 9.01).

Since our question was simple, we decided to use simple statistics to show our results. You will see that we use Chi-Square tests (bivariate tables) and event history analyses (multivariate Cox regression models). We also present survival curves.

Recidivism as <u>Any Re-Report (17.4%)</u>

Bivariate Results

Red predictors are nonsignificant, Green predictors are p<=.05

Substantiation Status (NS, 15.3% of Sub'd vs. 18.0% of Unsub'd)
Gender
Race
Child Age
Family Income (Below poverty families about 2x as likely)
Caregiver Education
Child Developmental Problems (almost 2x as likely)
Caregiver Mental Health Problems
Caregiver Substance Abuse Problems
Maltreatment type

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Recidivism as <u>Substantiated Re-Report (5.3%)</u>

Bivariate Results

Red predictors are nonsignificant, **Green predictors are p<=.05**

Substantiation Status (NS, 8.1% of Sub'd vs. 4.5% of Unsub'd, p=.09)
Gender
Race
Child Age
Family Income
Caregiver Education
Child Developmental Problems (still almost 2x as likely)
Caregiver Mental Health Problems
Caregiver Substance Abuse Problems
Maltreatment type

Recidivism as <u>Foster Care (4%)</u>

Bivariate Results

<u>Red predictors are nonsignificant,</u> <u>Green predictors are p<=.05</u>

Substantiation Status (NS, 5.3% of Sub'd vs. 3.7% of Unsub'd, p=.09)
Gender
Race
Child Age
Family Income
Caregiver Education
Child Developmental Problems
Caregiver Mental Health Problems
Caregiver Substance Abuse Problems
Maltreatment type

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What about multivariate results?

They're up next, and use "Hazard Rates." A Hazard Rate is how much increase one thing shows over another. If you believe that Women are twice as likely to ask directions as Men, then the "Hazard Rate" for asking directions is 2 for Women (twice as likely = 2:1 = HR of 2).

Cox Regression Models of Recidivism

	Any Rereport $\chi^2 = 39.3$, 12 df, $p < .001$		Substantiated Rereport $\chi^2 = 59.9$, 12 df, $p < .001$		Foster Care Placement $\chi^2 = 68.8$, 12 df, $p < .001$	
	Hazard Rate	p Value	Hazard Rate	p Value	Hazard Rate	p Value
Substantiation status	—	.307	—	.107	—	.343
Substantiated	0.8	—	1.8	—	1.4	—
Unsubstantiated	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Gender	—	.219	—	.703	—	.616
Male	1.3	—	1.1	—	0.9	—
Female	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Race	—	.070	—	.960	—	.435
White	0.7	—	1.0	—	0.7	—
Non-White	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Child age	.09	.071	1.0	.717	1.0	.749
Family Income	—	.033	—	.205	—	.016
Below poverty	1.6	—	1.7	—	2.9	—
Above poverty	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Caregiver's education	—	.089	—	.703	—	.261
Completed high school	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
No high school completion	1.5	—	1.2	—	1.7	—
Child developmental problems	—	.004	—	.002	—	.077
Yes	2.0	—	2.4	—	2.2	—
No	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Caregiver mental health problem	—	.114	—	.142	—	.284
Yes	1.6	—	2.0	—	1.7	—
No	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Caregiver substance abuse problem	—	.411	—	.752	—	.774
Yes	1.3	—	1.3	—	1.2	—
No	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Maltreatment type	—	.484	—	.320	—	.225
Physical abuse	1.0	—	1.0	—	1.0	—
Sexual abuse	1.5	—	1.9	—	0.3	—
Neglect	1.3	—	1.4	—	0.8	—
Other/unknown	1.7	—	2.2	—	2.3	—

Note: Inclusion of cases with prior reports did not substantially change the findings.

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Comparison to prior work:

These survival curves are similar to those found in a single state (Missouri) sample using far more subjects (60,000 children from the mid 1990's). In that study, no difference was found at the any rereport level, and moderate differences were found at the substantiated rereport and the foster care levels.

Drake, Jonson-Reid, Way, & Chung, (2003)

So the takeaway message is….

- We found no real differences in terms of any re-report. Sub'd and Unsub'd cases come back at about the same rates.

- We found that substantiated might possibly have higher rates of (substantiated) re-report, but this was not statistically significant, probably due to power issues.

- We found smaller, also nonsignificant differences terms of recidivism resulting in foster care.

Based on these data, it looks like the chance of future Child Welfare contact does not vary radically based on substantiation. We suggest that since unsubstantiated cases are at high risk of recidivism, they are logical candidates for service provision.

Summary/Implications

- Drake's conceptual model of substantiation based on threshold levels of harm and evidence fits most cases
    - Doesn't fit every case
    - Most worrisome are cases with moderate to severe harm that are not substantiated (9% of cases in the NSCAW sample)

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Summary/Implications

- Mixed evidence on validity of substantiation
  - Fuller & Nieto study of Illinois cases 1999-2004 found that substantiated cases had a significantly higher risk of re-report
  - Kohl, Drake et al NSCAW study found that substantiation was not significantly related to re-report, substantiated re-report or foster care placement

Summary/Implications

- Current status of substantiation
  - Debate continues over value of substantiation as a gatekeeper for services and measure of maltreatment
  - The role of substantiation is likely to change with the increasing implementation of differential response system

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