



CHILDREN AND FAMILY  
| RESEARCH | CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

# What Will Happen to this Child if I Report? Outcomes of Reporting Child Maltreatment



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# Reporting maltreatment to child protective services

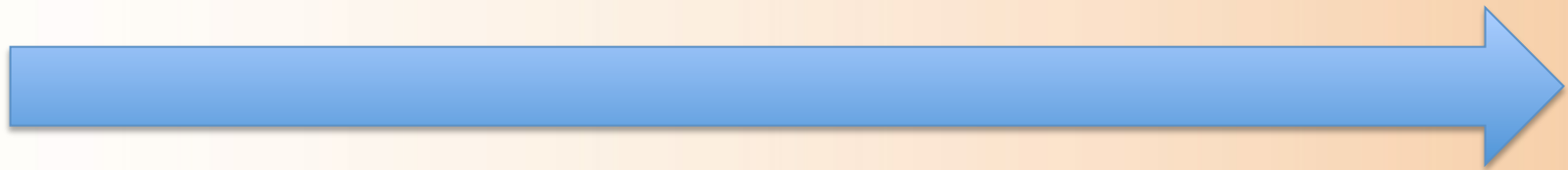
- Standard method of identifying and responding to child maltreatment since the 1970's
- Most common “treatment” for child abuse and neglect, but little systematic study of outcomes
- Those reporting maltreatment have little understanding of what outcomes are likely





# Wide continuum of outcomes

Screen out	Investigated -Not substantiated -No ongoing services	-Substantiated and/or -Ongoing services	Child placement
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- These outcomes have very different consequences
- Important to understand...
  - How frequent they are
  - What predicts different outcomes



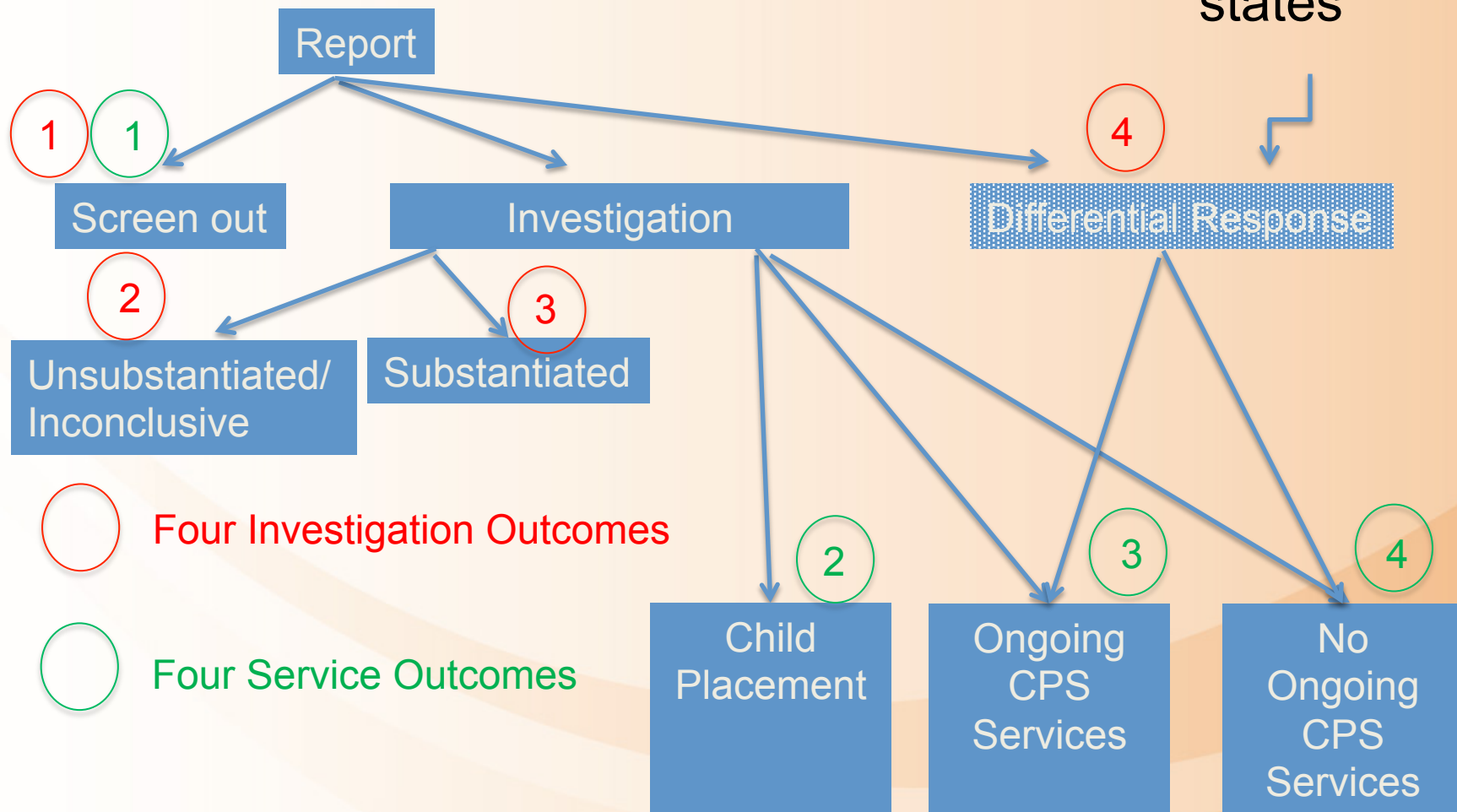
# Two categories of outcomes

Outcome Category	Decision to make
Investigation Outcomes	Was this child maltreated?
Service Outcomes	What child protective services, if any, should the child and family receive?



# Decision Points

In about 13  
states





# List of decision points

1. Screening
2. Differential Response
3. Substantiation
4. Ongoing CPS Service Delivery
5. Child Placement





# List of investigation outcomes

1. Screen out
2. Investigated – unsubstantiated
3. Investigated – substantiated
4. Differential response – assessment track –  
no investigation



# List of service outcomes

1. Screen out
2. Investigated – no ongoing services
3. Investigated – ongoing services
4. Child placement

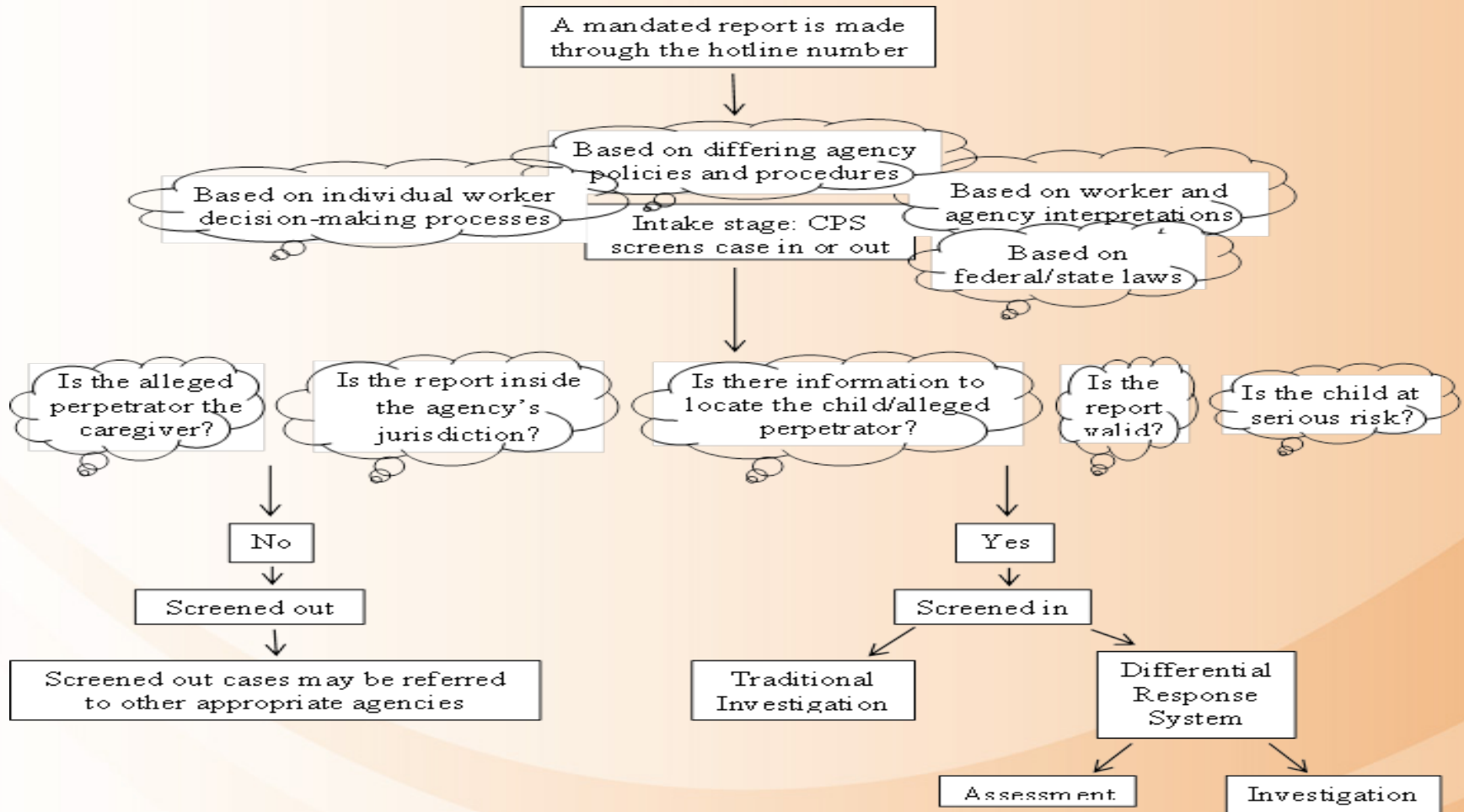


# Screening

- CPS has screening units to take reports and determine whether they should be investigated or screened out
- No further intervention/contact with screened out cases
- Can be a difficult decision; often information is “skeletal”



# Screening



(DePanfilis & Salus, 2003; Wells et al., 1995; Wells, 1997; Wells et al., 2004)



# State Rates of Screening In

- Average: 60.8%
- Range (in 2011):
  - Vermont 24.4% (lowest)
  - Alabama 98.6% (highest)

NCANDS data from *Child Maltreatment: 2011*,  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012





# Investigation and Substantiation

- Substantiation is CPS' determination about whether maltreatment occurred
- Three outcomes:
  - Substantiated
  - Not substantiated
  - Indicated/Inconclusive
- No substantiation decision in cases on differential response assessment track



# Why is Substantiation Important?

- Substantiation is important because:
  - Can lead to removal of children from home
  - Can involve families in court supervision
  - Families are more likely to receive CPS services
  - Substantiated cases are maintained in child protective services records
- However, substantiated and unsubstantiated do not differ on child well-being: both at risk



# State Rates of Substantiation

- Average: 18.5%
- Range:
  - Kansas 5.83%
  - Georgia 55.96%



# State Rates of CPS Service Delivery

- Range of rates of substantiated cases receiving services:
  - District of Columbia 21.5%
  - Three states 100%
- Range of rates of unsubstantiated cases receiving services:
  - District of Columbia 2.7%
  - Iowa 100%
- Range of rates of providing in-home services:
  - District of Columbia 0.21%
  - Three states 100%



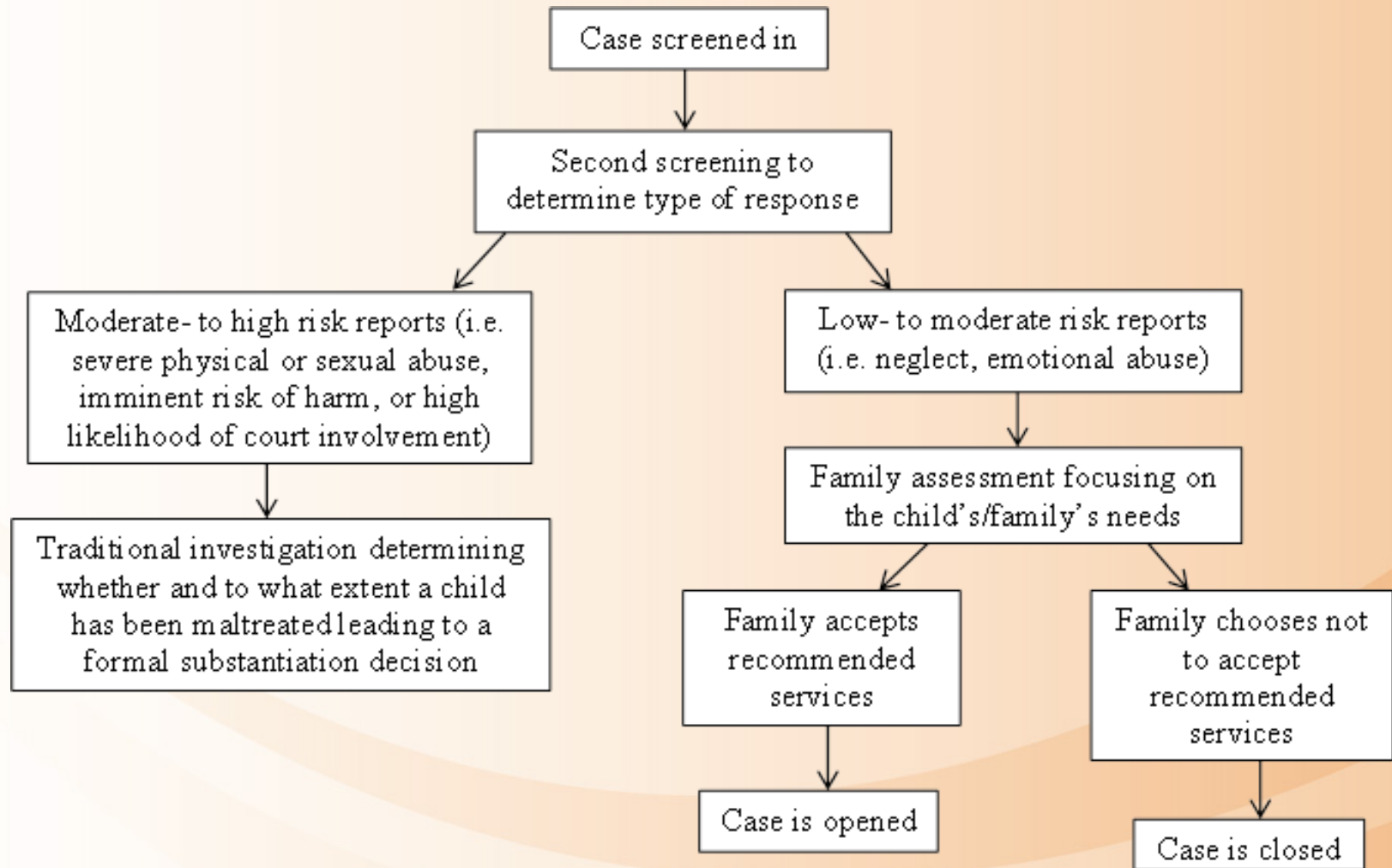
# State Rates of Child Placement

- Range:
  - Delaware and New Hampshire 2%
  - California 14%
  - Hawaii 28% (outlier)





# Differential Response





# State Eligibility for Differential Response Assessment Track

- Range:
  - Illinois 8%
  - Nevada 9%
  - Ohio over 50%
  - Minnesota over 70%



# Questions for our original research

1. How frequent is each investigation outcome?
2. How frequent is each service outcome?



# Data Sets We Used

Data Set	Description	How We Used It
National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)	Annual state child welfare statistics reported to federal government	Used percentages published in Children's Bureau's <i>Child Maltreatment 2011</i> report, with some recalculations
National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW)	National probability study of children involved in CPS investigations or assessments in 2008-2009; random sample of 5872 cases in 82 randomly sampled communities	New data analysis we conducted



# Child Maltreatment 2011



National Child Abuse and Neglect  
Data System



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families





**Table 6–3 Children Who Received Postresponse Services, 2011** *(duplicate count)*

State	Duplicate Victims	Duplicate Victims Who Received Postresponse Services		Duplicate Nonvictims	Duplicate Nonvictims Who Received Postresponse Services	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Alabama	8,781	4,472	50.9	18,913	3,349	17.7
Alaska	3,241	1,159	35.8	6,468	736	11.4
Arizona	9,148	9,022	98.6	63,290	52,722	83.3
Arkansas	12,043	9,885	82.1	59,129	9,471	16.0
California	86,412	72,320	83.7	377,954	238,685	63.2
Colorado	11,072	2,910	26.3	38,273	3,544	9.3
Connecticut	10,754	2,731	25.4	33,839	2,042	6.0
Delaware	2,552	1,038	40.7	14,836	690	4.7
District of Columbia	2,529	543	21.5	12,906	354	2.7
Florida	55,770	13,882	24.9	311,093	13,065	4.2
Georgia						
Hawaii	1,376	922	67.0	2,104	498	23.7
Idaho	1,515	1,224	80.8	9,072	2,773	30.6
Illinois	27,907	12,727	45.6	107,677	13,830	12.8
Indiana	19,300	7,495	38.8			
Iowa	12,590	12,590	100.0	28,312	28,312	100.0
Kansas	1,809	1,038	57.4	29,227	7,772	26.6
Kentucky	18,251	16,808	92.1	56,694	34,388	60.7
Louisiana	10,118	5,824	57.6	33,368	3,397	10.2
Maine	3,270	854	26.1	7,667	224	2.9
Maryland	14,928	5,367	36.0	22,068	395	1.8
Massachusetts	21,948	19,146	87.2	51,410	21,782	42.4
Michigan	36,577	22,692	62.0	175,441	12,045	6.9
Minnesota	4,552	3,127	68.7	21,151	4,746	22.4
Mississippi	7,246	3,503	48.3	25,576	4,761	18.6
Missouri	6,085	4,463	73.3	81,174	34,327	42.3
Montana	1,107	656	59.3	11,934	1,190	10.0
Nebraska	4,747	2,524	53.2	27,129	6,790	25.0

Example of a variable we used from the  
National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW)

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**C\_CI10a** [ CCI10a ] Outcome of investigation

What was the outcome of the investigation? Was it...

NOTE: CODE HIGH, MEDIUM, OR LOW RISK IF AGENCY DOES NOT C  
REPORTS/INVESTIGATIONS AS SUBSTANTIATED OR NOT.

*Question Type:* TOutcome

substan	1 substantiated,
indic	2 indicated, or
neither	3 neither substantiated nor indicated, or unfound
HIGH	4 HIGH RISK
MEDIUM	5 MEDIUM RISK
LOW	6 LOW RISK

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**C\_CI13a** [ CCI13a ] Level of harm to CH

For the next set of questions, please do not be concerned with whether or  
substantiated when offering your responses.



## Frequency of Different Investigation Outcomes

Outcome	%
Screened Out <sup>a</sup>	39%
Differential Response <sup>b</sup>	8%
Investigated – Unsubstantiated <sup>b</sup>	42%
Investigated – Substantiated <sup>b</sup>	11%

<sup>a</sup> from NCANDS    <sup>b</sup> % of investigated/assessed cases in NSCAW x 61%



## Frequency of Different CPS Service Outcomes

Outcome	%
Screened Out <sup>a</sup>	39%
No Services <sup>b</sup>	43%
In-Home Services <sup>b</sup>	14%
Child Placement <sup>b</sup>	4%

<sup>a</sup> from NCANDS    <sup>b</sup> % of investigated/assessed cases in NSCAW x 61%



# Variation by state, community, family

- The above analysis applies generally
- But the likelihood of outcomes of reporting for a given case depends on characteristics of:
  - which U.S. state the case is in
  - which community
  - which agency
  - which family
  - which child



## Research shows agency/community/case factors related to outcomes

Factor	Screening	Substantiation	CPS Services	Placement
Agency resources	X	?		X
Agency functioning/ workload	X	X		
Community poverty	X			
Mandated reporter	X	X		
Quality of information	X			
Type of maltreatment	X		X	X
Substantiation	NA	NA	X	X
Parental poverty		X		?
Parental problems		X		X
Race-ethnicity				X
Child age	X		?	X
Child development			X	





# Conclusions



# Most cases receive a modest response

- Child placement is rare
- Only one quarter of reports of maltreatment are substantiated
- Over half of families reported do not receive ongoing CPS services
- Yet many people choose not to report because of negative impact of a vigorous CPS response
- Some don't report because of modest response



Lee et al (2013)'s quote from a CPS investigator:

“I asked the (hospital) social worker, why didn't you guys call it in? Her exact word was, and my supervisor had me document it in my report, that the doctors do not want to call in because they don't want to testify in court” (p. 638).



# Information plays an important role

- Information makes a difference to every decision
- Many reporters provide fragmentary or unclear information
- However, expectations for reporters to provide more information may discourage reporting
- More training for mandated reporters would help



# States and communities differ

- Enormous differences by states and communities in rates of different outcomes
- These differences in NCANDS have not been studied or discussed



# Agency resources and functioning make a difference

- Limited resources associated with...
  - Lower substantiation rate
  - Lower ongoing services rate
  - Lower rate of child placement
- Analysis of outcomes of reporting could provide evidence for need for resources





# Outcomes of reporting differ by case characteristics

- Differences are magnified if a case characteristic affects several decisions in the response process
- E.g., child age:
  - Young children more likely to be screened in
  - Young children more likely to be placed out of home
- Different types of reporters likely to see different types of children—implications for training
- More research needed



# Final words

- Knowledge about outcomes should inform policy, practice and research
- However, most of the variation in outcomes is still probably unexplained
- Outcomes framework is useful for guiding new research



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