

Understanding Safety Assessment in Illinois: CERAP Completion in Intact Family Services

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The Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) is a safety assessment protocol used in child protection investigations and child welfare service cases in Illinois. It is designed to provide workers with a mechanism for quickly assessing the potential for moderate to severe harm to a child in the immediate or near future and for taking quick action to protect children. Workers utilize the protocol at specified time frames, referred to as “milestones,” throughout the life of a case to help focus their decision-making to determine whether a child is safe or unsafe with their family,¹ and if unsafe, decide what actions must be taken to assure the child’s safety (Fuller & Nieto, 2012; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2013). Since 1997, the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) has conducted an annual evaluation of the CERAP that has examined a variety of topics related to its implementation, reliability, and impact. In FY2018, due to increased scrutiny of the safety of children served in intact family cases, the CFRC completed an analysis of caseworker compliance with safety assessment procedures among intact family cases. This research brief describes the major findings of the FY2018 CERAP annual evaluation.

Intact Family Services

DCFS policy defines Intact Family Services (IFS) as “short term voluntary services intended to make reasonable efforts to stabilize, strengthen, enhance, and preserve family life by providing services that enable children to remain safely at home” (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2016). An IFS case can be opened in several circumstances: 1) following an indicated investigation when no children are removed and the parents voluntarily accept services; 2) following an indicated investigation with a court order if the family refuses to accept the services; 3) during a pending investigation if the family has an identified service need; 4) when a child returns home after being in placement less than 30 days (protective custody lapse); and 5) following an unfounded investigation per DCFS request or court order. The goal of IFS is to mitigate the identified risk factors in 6 to 12 months (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2015; 2016).

¹ The CERAP is a family assessment and does not apply to the child protection investigation of foster homes, residential facilities, schools, or day care facilities.

CERAP Completion Among Intact Family Cases

Child welfare workers are instructed to complete the CERAP safety assessment at several critical time points during an intact family case. These case milestones include:

- 1) Within 5 working days after initial case assignment and upon any and all subsequent case transfers.
- 2) Every 90 calendar days from the case opening date.
- 3) Whenever evidence or circumstances suggest that a child’s safety may be in jeopardy.
- 4) Every 5 working days following the determination that a child is unsafe and a safety plan is implemented. Such assessment must continue until all children are assessed as being safe, the investigation is completed, or all children assessed as unsafe are removed from the legal custody of their parents/caregivers and legal proceedings are being initiated in juvenile court.
- 5) Within 5 working days of a supervisory approved case closure (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2013).

The FY2018 CERAP evaluation examined CERAP completion at each of these milestones among intact family cases that were opened between FY2014 and FY2017.² Intact family cases that were opened for 7 days or less were not included in the sample, nor were cases in which any child in the family entered substitute care within 30 days of the case open date.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the number of intact family cases opened each fiscal year between 2014 and 2017, the number and percentage of these cases that had at least one CERAP completed by a caseworker between the case open date and the case close date, and the number and percentage that did not have any CERAP completed. Between 84-88% of all intact family cases had at least one CERAP completed by a caseworker during the case.

FY	Intact Family Cases Opened	At least one CERAP		No CERAP	
		n	%	n	%
2014	5,459	4,594	84.2%	865	15.9%
2015	4,431	3,714	83.8%	717	16.2%
2016	4,151	3,560	85.8%	591	14.2%
2017	4,775	4,202	88.0%	573	12.0%

² Workers use their discretion in deciding if and when to complete a CERAP for Milestone 3; it was therefore not included in the analyses.

The average number of CERAP assessments completed during intact family cases was 3; most families had between 2 and 6 safety assessments completed by a caseworker during the case (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of CERAP Assessments Completed During Intact Family Cases

FY	Intact Family Cases Opened	Number of CERAP Assessments				
		Min	25 th percentile	Median	75 th percentile	Max
2014	5,459	0	2	3	5	158
2015	4,431	0	2	3	6	126
2016	4,151	0	2	3	6	69
2017	4,775	0	2	3	5	79

Milestone 1 – Within 5 Days of Case Assignment

After the investigation has been completed and the responsibility for the case has been assigned to a specific intact family services caseworker, the caseworker has 5 working days to complete a CERAP. Since the DCFS administrative database does not contain the date of case assignment, the case open date was used as an approximation. To measure compliance with this milestone, we assumed that case assignment occurred within 10 calendar days of the case opening date. CERAP completion should therefore occur within 15 calendar days of the intact family case opening date. Between 67% and 76% of intact family cases each year had a CERAP assessment within 15 days of case opening and the percentage has been increasing over time (Table 3).

Table 3. CERAP Completion Within 15 Days of Case Opening

FY	Intact Family Cases Opened	Cases with CERAP Completed	
		n	%
2014	5,459	3,649	66.8%
2015	4,431	3,092	69.8%
2016	4,151	3,038	73.2%
2017	4,775	3,643	76.3%

Milestone 2 – Every 90 Days After Case Opening

To examine this milestone, the sample was limited to intact family cases that were open more than 90 days. For each case, the number of 90-day intervals that the case was open was calculated. For example, a case that was open for 200 days would have two 90-day intervals and therefore should have two CERAP assessments completed. The number of CERAP completed was examined and Table 3 shows the percentage of intact family cases that had zero

CERAPs, at least one, and the appropriate number completed every 90 days. A low percentage of intact family cases (between 13-18%) had the appropriate number of CERAP assessments completed every 90 days during the time that the case was open. Around half of all intact family cases did not have a CERAP completed for this milestone (Table 4).

Table 4. CERAP Completion Every 90 Days After Case Opening

FY	Intact Family Cases Opened at Least 90 Days	Zero CERAPs Completed		At Least One CERAP Completed		All CERAPs Completed	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
2014	4,686	2,740	58.5%	1,306	27.9%	640	13.7%
2015	3,801	1,897	49.9%	1,219	32.1%	685	18.0%
2016	3,527	1,589	45.0%	1,339	38.0%	599	17.0%
2017	4,077	2,078	51.0%	1,280	31.4%	719	17.6%

Milestone 4 – Every 5 Days if a Child is Unsafe

If a child is determined to be unsafe during an intact family case, additional CERAP assessments must be completed every 5 working days until all children are assessed as safe, the investigation is completed, or all unsafe children are removed from the home. To examine CERAP completion for this milestone, the number of CERAPs in which children in intact family cases were determined to be unsafe was counted. The percentage that had an additional CERAP completed within 5 working days was then calculated (see Table 5). Between 56% and 65% of the CERAP assessments with a decision of “unsafe” were followed by another CERAP within 5 working days and the percentage has been increasing over time.

Table 5. CERAP Completion Within 5 Days of Unsafe Determination

FY	CERAPs with an UNSAFE decision	Additional CERAP Completed Within 5 Days	
		n	%
2014	7,812	4,340	55.6%
2015	9,678	5,775	59.7%
2016	8,736	5,275	60.4%
2017	8,059	5,234	65.0%

Milestone 5 – Within 5 Days of Case Closure

Once an intact family case is ready to close, the caseworkers should complete a final CERAP within 5 days of case closure. The timeframe for this analysis was expanded to 30 days of case closure rather than 5 days because the procedures involved in “officially” closing an intact

family case in SACWIS (the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System) can take more than 5 days. Between 64% and 71% of intact family cases had a CERAP completed within 30 days prior to the case close date or within 5 days after it, and the percentage has been increasing over time (Table 6).

FY	Intact Family Cases	CERAP Completed Within 30 Days Before or Five Days After Case Closure	
		n	%
2014	5,312	3,394	63.9%
2015	4,150	2,789	67.2%
2016	3,682	2,612	70.9%
2017	3,202	2,285	71.4%

Recommendations

Based on the results of these findings, the statewide CERAP Advisory Committee recommended that the Department of Children and Family Services increase their monitoring efforts for CERAP completion among intact family cases, especially for the “every 90 day” milestone, which had the lowest completion rate. In addition, since intact family caseworkers are expected to update the family’s service plan every 90 days, the CERAP Advisory Committee recommended that workers receive a reminder to complete a new CERAP assessment when the service plan is updated. Alternatively, it was suggested that CERAP completion for this milestone could be added as a requirement in the case management information system before the caseworker is allowed to proceed with updating the service plan.

Recommended Citation

Fuller T. L., Chiu, Y., Wakita, S., & Nieto, M. (2018). *Understanding Safety Assessment in Illinois: CERAP Completion in Intact Family Services*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Related Publications

Fuller, T. L., Wakita, S., Nieto, M. G., & Chiu, Y. C. (2018). *Illinois Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol FY2018 Annual Evaluation*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

References

Fuller, T.L., & Nieto, M. (2012). *Illinois Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol FY12 Annual Evaluation*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. (2013). *Procedures 300 Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect Appendix G—Child Endangerment Risk Assessment*. Springfield, IL: Author.

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. (2015). *Procedures 300.130 Referral for Services*. Springfield, IL: Author.

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. (2016). *Procedures 302.388 Intact Family Services*. Springfield, IL: Author.

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