



## Chapter 2 Reports Child Maltreatment 2007

Child protective services (CPS) agencies use a two-stage process for handling allegations of child maltreatment. Those stages are screening and investigation. During the screening stage, an initial notification—called a referral—alleging abuse or neglect is made to CPS. Agency hotline or intake units conduct the screening process to determine whether the referral is appropriate for further investigation or assessment. Referrals that do not meet the investigation or assessment criteria are screened out or diverted from CPS.

During the investigation stage, a screened-in referral—called a report—receives an investigation or assessment. The purpose of an investigation or assessment is to determine if a child was maltreated or is at-risk of maltreatment and to establish the appropriate intervention. During Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2007:

- Approximately 3.2 million referrals of child abuse and neglect that included approximately 5.8 million children were made to CPS agencies.
- About 62 percent (61.7%) of those referrals reached the second stage, became a report, and were either investigated or received an assessment.
- More than 25 percent (25.2%) of the investigations that reached the report stage determined that at least one child was a victim of child abuse or neglect.

This chapter presents statistics regarding referrals, reports, and investigations or assessments. National estimates for FFY 2007 are based on the child populations for the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

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### Screening of Referrals

The process of determining whether a referral meets a State's standard for an investigation or assessment is known as screening. "Screening in" a referral means that an allegation of child abuse or neglect met the State's standard for investigation or assessment and the referral reaches the second stage and is called a report. "Screening out" a referral means that the allegation did not meet the State's standard for an investigation or assessment. Reasons for screening out a referral include: The referral did not concern child abuse or neglect; it did not contain enough information to enable an investigation or assessment to occur; the children in the referral were the responsibility of another agency or jurisdiction, e.g., a military installation or a tribe; or the alleged victim was older than 18 years.

During FFY 2007, an estimated 3.2 million referrals, which included approximately 5.8 million children, were referred to CPS agencies. The national rate was 43.0 referrals per 1,000 children for FFY 2007 compared with 43.7 referrals per 1,000 children for FFY 2006.<sup>1, 2</sup>

During FFY 2007, CPS agencies screened in 61.7 percent of referrals and screened out 38.3 percent. These results were identical to FFY 2006 data, which indicated 61.7 percent were screened in and 38.3 percent were screened out.

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## Report Sources

NCANDS collects case-level information for all reports that received a disposition or finding within the year. The information includes the report source, the number of children in the investigation, and the disposition of the report.

Professionals submitted more than one-half (57.7%) of the reports ([figure 2-1](#)). The term professional indicates that the person encountered the alleged victim as part of the report source's occupation. State laws require most professionals to notify CPS agencies of suspected maltreatment. The categories of professionals include teachers, legal staff or police officers, social services staff, medical staff, mental health workers, child daycare workers, and foster care providers. The three largest percentages of 2007 reports were from professionals—teachers (17.0%), lawyers or police officers (16.3%), and social services staff (10.2%).<sup>3</sup>

Nonprofessional sources submitted 26.8 percent of reports. These included parents, relatives, friends and neighbors, alleged victims, alleged perpetrators, and anonymous callers. The three largest groups of nonprofessional reporters were anonymous (7.6%), other relatives (7.3%), and parents (6.1%).

Unknown or "other" report sources submitted 15.7 percent of reports. The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) uses the term "other" sources for those categories that States are not able to crosswalk to any of the NCANDS terms.<sup>4</sup> "Other" sources may include clergy members, sports coaches, camp counselors, bystanders, volunteers, and foster siblings. Unknown or "other" report sources are listed separately because either the data are missing or the data cannot be classified into either the professional or nonprofessional category.

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## Investigation or Assessment Results

CPS agencies assign a finding—also called a disposition—to a report after the circumstances are investigated and a determination is made as to whether the maltreatment occurred or the child is at-risk of maltreatment. For FFY 2007, 1,860,262 investigations or assessments received a disposition. Each State establishes dispositions by policy and law. The major NCANDS disposition categories are described below.

- Alternative Response Nonvictim: A conclusion that the child was not identified as a victim when a response other than an investigation was provided.
- Alternative Response Victim: A conclusion that the child was identified as a victim when a response other than an investigation was provided.
- Indicated: An investigation disposition that concludes that maltreatment could not be substantiated under State law or policy, but there was reason to suspect that the child may have been maltreated or was at-risk of maltreatment. This is applicable only to States that distinguish between substantiated and indicated dispositions.
- Substantiated: An investigation disposition that concludes that the allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment was supported or founded by State law or State policy.
- Unsubstantiated: An investigation disposition that determines that there was not sufficient evidence under State law to conclude or suspect that the child was maltreated or at risk of being maltreated.

Two alternative response categories are provided in NCANDS. The category that is most commonly used by States is alternative response nonvictim. Some States also use the alternative response victim category. During FFY 2007, 11 States used the alternative response nonvictim category and 2 States used the alternative response victim category.

For more than 25 percent (25.2%) of investigations, at least one child was found to be a victim of maltreatment with one of the following dispositions—substantiated (24.1%), indicated (0.6%), or alternative response victim (0.5%) ([figure 2-2](#)).<sup>5</sup> The remaining investigations led to a finding that the children were not victims of maltreatment and the report received one of the following dispositions—unsubstantiated (61.3%), alternative response nonvictim (6.1%), "other" (5.7%), closed with no finding (1.6%), and intentionally false (0.0%).<sup>6</sup> When the FFY 2003 investigation rates were analyzed in a 5-year trend, it was noted that by FFY 2007, the majority of States (29) had increased their investigation rates.<sup>7</sup> Three States were unable to submit the data needed for this analysis ([figure 2-3](#)).

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## Report Dispositions by Report Source

Report dispositions are based on the facts of the report as found by the CPS worker. The type of report source may be related to the disposition of a report because of the reporter's knowledge and credibility ([figure 2-4](#)). Case-level data submitted to NCANDS were used to examine this hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> Based on more than 1.8 million reports, key findings are listed below.

Approximately two-thirds of substantiated or indicated reports were made by professional report sources. The term professional means that the person had contact with the alleged child maltreatment victim as part of the report source's job. This term includes teachers, police officers, lawyers, and social services staff. About 25 percent of substantiated and indicated reports were made by legal staff and police officers. The remaining reports were made by nonprofessionals, including friends, neighbors, sports coaches, and relatives.

Professional report sources accounted for more than one-half of several categories of report dispositions in which the children were not found to be victims of maltreatment. Those included unsubstantiated (54.4%), "other" (62.3%), or unknown (62.3%).

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## Response Time from Referral to Investigation

Most States set requirements for beginning an investigation into a report of child abuse or neglect. The response time is defined as the time between the login of a call to CPS alleging child maltreatment and the initial face-to-face contact with the alleged victim, where appropriate.

While some States have a single timeframe for responding to reports, many States establish priorities based on the information received from the report source. Of the States that establish priorities, many specify a high-priority response as within 1 hour or within 24 hours. Lower priority responses range from 24 hours to 14 days.<sup>9</sup> The average response times reflect the types of reports that are received, as well as the ability of workers to meet the time standards.

The FFY 2007 median response time from report to investigation was 79 hours or approximately 3.3 days.<sup>10</sup> The FFY 2006 median response time was 66 hours or 2.8 days. The FFY 2007 average response time was 84 hours or approximately 3.5 days. This is comparable to an average response time of 86 hours for FFY 2006.

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## CPS Workforce and Workload

Given the large number and complexity of investigations and assessments that are conducted each year, there is an ongoing interest in the nature of the workforce that performs CPS functions. In most agencies, the screening and investigation are conducted by different groups of workers. In many rural and smaller agencies, one worker may perform both functions, and other functions not mentioned here.

States that reported significant numbers of specialized workers for intake, screening, investigation, and assessment were used to estimate the average number of cases that were handled by CPS workers.<sup>11</sup> The weighted average number of completed investigations per investigation worker was 66.4 per year. (This compares with 62.0 in FFY 2006.) It is important to note that these calculations did not consider other activities of these workers and that some workers conducted more than one function. Also, each investigation could include more than one child. A more accurate calculation of workload would require a systematic estimation of work for a specific timeframe.<sup>12</sup>

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## Tables and Notes

The following pages contain the tables referenced in Chapter 2. Unless otherwise explained, a blank indicates that the State did not submit usable data. Specific information about State submissions can be found in [appendix D](#). Additional information regarding methodologies that were used to create the tables is provided below.

### Table 2-1

- For those States that submitted the Child File, the screened-in number is the sum of the reports by disposition. For Summary Data Component (SDC) States, the number is taken directly from the State's report form.
- The national referral rate, 43.0 referrals per 1,000 children in the population, was calculated from the total number of referrals and the child population in the 37 States reporting both screened-in and screened-out referrals. Screened-out referral data are from the Agency File.
- States that reported screened-in referrals, but not screened-out referrals, are not included in this analysis.

### Table 2-4

- The investigation rate is calculated by dividing the total investigations number by the child population number and multiplying by 1,000.
- States that reported victim data, but not nonvictim data, are not included in this analysis.

### Table 2-5

- States that submitted an SDC file are not included in this analysis.

#### Table 2-6

- Data were reported by States in the Agency File.
- The PART target is a 5 percent decrease in the average response time across all reporting States each year. The baseline is from 2003, which had a median of 67 hours.
- States use different criteria to indicate the start of an investigation. Some States use the date the report was approved for investigation, while others use the date of attempted contact with the victim. According to the Children's Bureau, States are encouraged to use the date of successful contact with the victim. States are continuing to improve the reporting of this data element, which may account for some data fluctuations.

#### Table 2-7

- Only States that were able to report workforce data by screening and intake workers and investigation workers and that provided data for screened-in referrals were included in calculations for screened-in referrals per investigation worker.
- The average number of screened-in referrals per investigation worker is based on dividing the total number of referrals by the total number of investigation workers for the 33 States that submitted these data.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Supporting data are provided in [table 2-1](#), which is located at the end of this chapter. States provide aggregated data for the number of referrals. Based on data from 37 States, the national rate of referrals is 43.0 referrals per 1,000 children. A referral can include more than one child. Multiplying this rate by the national child population of 74,904,677 and dividing by 1,000 results in an estimated 3,220,901 referrals for FFY 2007. The estimate was then rounded to 3,200,000. Unless otherwise specified, all rates refer to children younger than 18 years in the national population. [back](#)

<sup>2</sup>The number of children included in all referrals was calculated by multiplying the average number of children included in a referral (1.81) by the number of estimated referrals (3,220,901). This results in an estimated 5,829,831 children, which was rounded to the nearest 100,000. The average number of children included in a referral based on data from 50 States was calculated by dividing the number of children reported (3,359,295) by the number of investigations that received a disposition (1,860,262). [back](#)

<sup>3</sup> See [table 2-2](#). [back](#)

<sup>4</sup>During the preparation of the NCANDS data file, each State establishes a crosswalk between its disposition terms and the categories used by NCANDS. [back](#)

<sup>5</sup> See [table 2-3](#). "Other" dispositions include those categories that States were not able to crosswalk to NCANDS dispositions. [back](#)

<sup>6</sup>Due to a change in Florida's State policy, reports with a disposition of "some indication" were mapped to the NCANDS category "other." In prior years, these reports were mapped to the NCANDS category indicated. This change increased the national percentage of "other" from 3.2 percent during FFY 2006 to 5.7 percent during FFY 2007. [back](#)

<sup>7</sup> See [table 2-4](#). [back](#)

<sup>8</sup> See [table 2-5](#). [back](#)

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families/Children's Bureau and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts: Review of State CPS Policy*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006). This document is also available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/cps-status03>. [back](#)

<sup>10</sup> See [table 2-6](#). This table uses data from the Agency File. [back](#)

<sup>11</sup> See [table 2-7](#). The number of screening and intake workers (2,395) and the number of investigation workers (15,792) were reported by 33 States. [back](#)

<sup>12</sup> A workload study in California estimated that an average monthly caseload for workers who exclusively conducted CPS Emergency Response investigations and no other services was 16.15 investigations per worker per month or approximately 194 per year. Each investigation could include more than one child. American Humane Association, 2000, *SB 2030 Child Welfare Services Workload Study Report* (Sacramento: California Department of Social Services). [back](#)

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