



## Lessons learned from a 10 year national study of Australian child protection data

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## Nature of the study

- **National study**, funded and supported by the federal government – this provided the impetus to obtain access to these primary government data; not normally made available in this format
- Collection, collation, analysis of data on notifications to CPS in each Australian State/Territory (**8 jurisdictions**), 2003-2012, for physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect
- **Data**: we accessed government CP agency administrative data of notifications of abuse / neglect (**not** child wellbeing reports), at the unique child level, deidentified
- **Form of data**: excel form showing variables of:
  - Date of notification; numerical child identifier; gender; age; reporter occupation/relationship to child; primary form of abuse suspected; whether investigated; if investigated, whether substantiated (**note: not** ethnicity; not whether services were provided, or their nature)
- **Differences in data provided by S/T**: some S/T systems had more extensive data (eg referral to services; unit record; 10 yrs); were more/ less willing to provide data; had more consistent data over time; were more **sensitive** to external analysis & publication (despite fed govt authority)
- Study allowed **identification of key trends in reporting and outcomes with more specificity than mere aggregation of notifications, outcomes** (ie more sensitive than data normally published by govt, AIHW)
  - **explored trends in notifications, and their outcomes**:
    - across jurisdictions, within jurisdictions
    - for all types of abuse/neglect; for distinct types of abuse/neglect
    - for all reporters combined (MR + NMR); MR only, NMR only; specific reporter groups
- Purpose under contract to explore trends in MR to indicate areas of potential harmonisation by

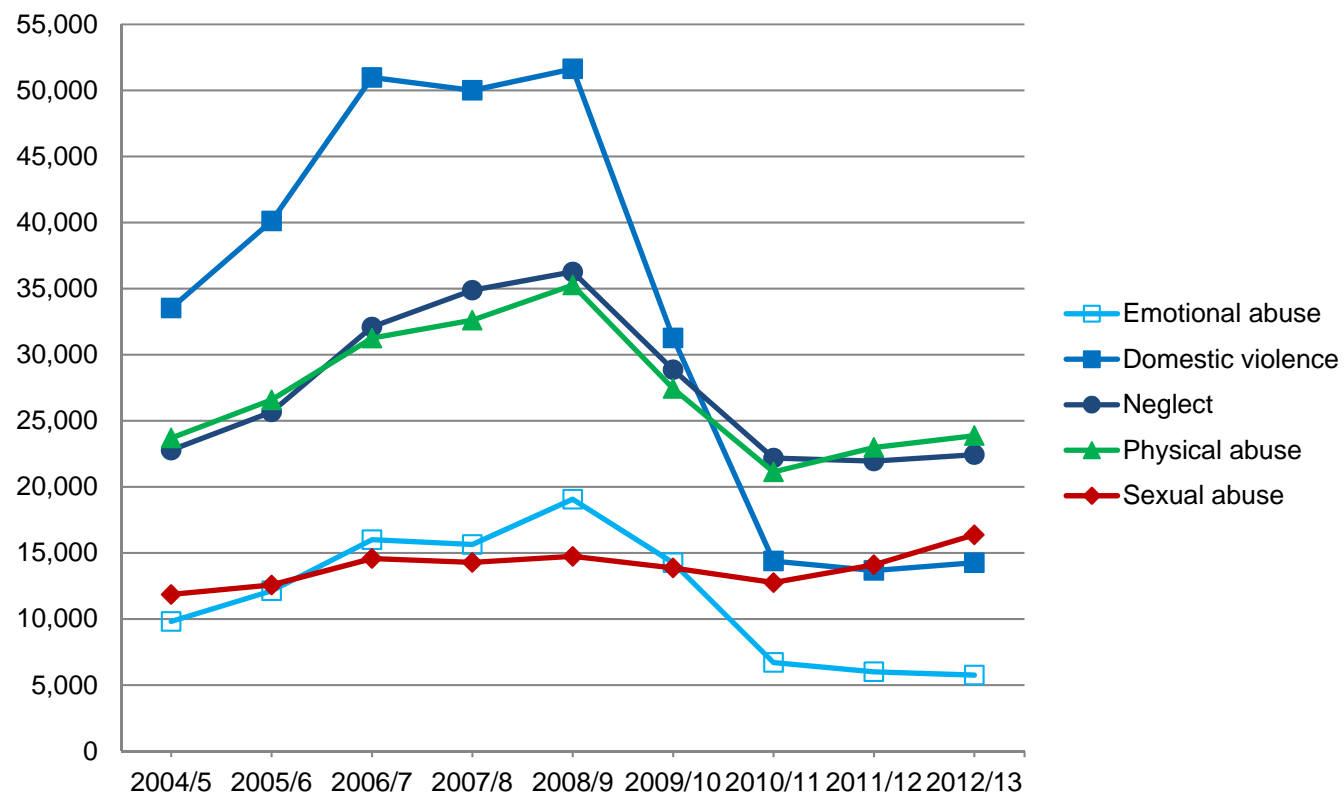


## Key messages

1. **Variance.** Data systems in Australia still have some variations across States and Territories, and within S/T over time (incl coding of abuse types (eg EDV); variance in coded groups of reporters; what qualifies as a “notification” - agency-defined intake vs caller-defined intake; investigation; whether outcome of report includes referral to services)
  2. **Response systems.** Agency responses can vary massively over time (esp investigations, substantiations); influenced by new injections of resources, new differential response systems
  3. **Political sensitivity.** Some governments extremely sensitive about sharing CP data, allowing research analysis, controlling public release
  4. **PH vs agency purpose.** Australian data systems normally established for agency purposes, rather than with a view to also enable research and comprehensive public health monitoring. In an ideal world, these data systems would be designed & refined with cooperative involvement of multiple sectors
  5. **Participation/cooperation.** To achieve consistency across jurisdictions to enable comparability even on some measures, need coordinated optimal approaches across State govt agencies
  6. **Advantages of research.** Despite limitations, detailed analysis of trends can at least inform a jurisdiction/s of hotspots of concern, and indications of policy and practice success
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**New South Wales – change in reporting, by abuse type  
(nb 155K to 80K : 08/09 – 12/13; Jan 2010 legislative changes)**

**NSW 1.2 Number of notifications by year, by abuse type, all reporter groups combined, 2004/05 - 2012/13**



**Victoria: reports of emotional abuse (incl EDV) by police, teachers, drs and nurses combined increased by a factor of 5 from 2006-2012, despite not being required to report – DR intro 2007 – reports to wrong agency**

**Victoria: Number of notifications of emotional abuse by police, teachers, drs and nurses combined, by year, outcome , Vic, 2003-12**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Emotional Abuse</b>										
Not Inv'd	2,951	2,863	3,443	<b>3,893</b>	2,772	4,780	7,464	10,315	13,088	<b>17,548</b>
Inv'd	1,539	1,655	1,626	<b>1,706</b>	1,230	1,510	1,807	2,232	2,547	<b>3,296</b>
- Inv'd and Subst'd	1,188	1,290	1,288	<b>1,305</b>	861	1,036	1,145	1,484	1,780	<b>2,241</b>
- Inv'd and not Subst'd	351	365	338	<b>401</b>	369	474	662	748	767	<b>1,055</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,490</b>	<b>4,518</b>	<b>5,069</b>	<b>5,599</b>	<b>4,002</b>	<b>6,290</b>	<b>9,271</b>	<b>12,547</b>	<b>15,635</b>	<b>20,844</b>





## Selected publications

1. Mathews, B., Lee, X., & Norman, R. (2016). Impact of a new mandatory reporting law on reporting and identification of child sexual abuse: a seven year time trend analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 56, 62-79.
2. Mathews, B., Norman, R., Walsh, K., Bromfield, L., & Cheng, Q. (2016). Child sexual abuse: a longitudinal study of reports of boys and girls over 20 years in Victoria, Australia (in progress).
3. Mathews, B., & Walsh, K. (2015). Submission to the Queensland Law Reform Commission Inquiry Into Childcare.
4. Report in 9 volumes for the Australian federal government, and each State and Territory Government, are accessible on a dedicated website at <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children/publications-articles/child-abuse-and-neglect-a-socio-legal-study-of-mandatory-reporting-in-australia>

Vol 1: Mathews, B., Bromfield, L., Walsh, K., & Vimpani, G. (2015). Child abuse and neglect: A socio-legal study of mandatory reporting in Australia - Report for the Australian Government. Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-8-4, 1-159.

Vol 2: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia – Report for the ACT Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-6-0, 1-236.

Vol 3: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the New South Wales Government. Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-0-8, 1-144.

Vol 4: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the Northern Territory Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-7-7, 1-237.

Vol 5: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the Queensland Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-2-2, 1-230.

Vol 6: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the South Australian Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-4-6, 1-228.

Vol 7: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the Tasmanian Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-5-3, 1-241.

Vol 8: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the Victorian Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-1-5, 1-232.

Vol 9: Child Abuse and Neglect: A Socio-legal Study of Mandatory Reporting in Australia - Report for the West Australian Government, Commonwealth of Australia, ISBN 978-0-9941872-3-9, 1-232.