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. 3 examples (NSW EDV; Vic EA incl. EDV; Qld childcare)
New South Wales – change in reporting, by abuse type
(nb 155K to 80K : 08/09 – 12/13; Jan 2010 legislative changes)
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

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Selected publications


