Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

Measuring Child Maltreatment Benchmark Constructs:
Tips on Using Administrative Data Sources[1]
January 2013

Introduction

Program guidance from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)[2] discusses the requirement that programs funded by the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program must collect measurable and quantifiable data across six benchmark areas for all eligible families enrolled in the program. Administrative data sources are a rich source of data for several of the benchmark areas.

This brief focuses on the measurement of three benchmark constructs related to child maltreatment using child welfare (CW) agency administrative data sources. Official child abuse and neglect data from CW agencies are recommended to be used in assessing the three child maltreatment benchmark constructs because they provide the most accurate measures of child maltreatment.

In order to obtain such data, each grantee will need to establish a working relationship with the CW agency and understand the key concepts underlying these constructs. This brief provides an overview of these concepts and describes some of the topics that may arise in working with the CW agency. The information in this brief is being provided in order to support the MIECHV grantees as part of the provision of technical assistance (TA) to funded grantees.

Benchmark Constructs

Specifically, the three child maltreatment benchmark constructs are:

1. <u>Reported suspected maltreatment of children in the program.</u> This construct refers to children who were subjects of allegations of child maltreatment that were reported to and **screened in**[3] by the CW agency. Children who were screened in may or may not have had a previously screened-in report. In this brief, this construct will be referred to as *suspected maltreatment*.

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[1] This brief is intended to provide guidance to MIECHV grantees in carrying out HRSA/ACF policies. It does not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[2] The "Supplemental Information Request for the Submission of the Updated State Plan for a State Home Visiting Program" is available at url: http://www.hrsa.gov/grants/manage/homevisiting/sir02082011.pdf

[3] Terms defined in the Glossary of Terms that appears at the end of this brief are shown in **bold** the first time they are used.

2. <u>Reported substantiated maltreatment of children in the program</u>. This construct refers only to children who were the subject of a substantiated, indicated, or **alternative response victim disposition** for one or more alleged maltreatments.[4] These children are considered victims of maltreatment and are a subset of the children in the first construct. The remainder of children under the first construct will not have been found to be victims of maltreatment. In this brief, this construct will be referred to as *substantiated maltreatment*.

3. <u>First-time victims of maltreatment of children in the program</u>. This construct refers only to those victims who have not previously been found to be a victim of maltreatment. These children are a subset of the children in the second construct. The remainder of the children in the second construct will have been previously found to be victims. Each year, approximately 75 percent of all victims of maltreatment are first-time victims. In this brief, this construct will be referred to as *first-time victim*.

Administrative Data Sources

As stated earlier, the preferred data source for the three child maltreatment constructs is the administrative data maintained by the State, local, or tribal CW agency or the umbrella human services agency that includes child welfare. In order to obtain and use data that are informative and accurate, funded grantees will need to work closely with their CW agencies on definitions, record specifications, and computational procedures.

Many staff members in State CW agencies are familiar with these constructs as their States participate in the federally sponsored **National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)**, which collects such data.[5] Staff in local CW agencies may be familiar with these constructs if they have actively worked with the State agency on either NCANDS or the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR), which also uses these constructs. At the present time, tribal CW agency staff may be less familiar with these constructs as Tribes do not participate in either NCANDS or the CFSR.[6]

Because these constructs have been used in reporting and analyzing NCANDS data, each State has CW information and programmatic specialists who are familiar with the established procedures for computing these constructs. A list of State CW staff members who are the primary contacts for participating in NCANDS is attached as Appendix A. These personnel are very knowledgeable about their State's maltreatment data and are familiar with the capacity of their information systems and the reporting and computational conventions established under NCANDS. To receive State data that can address these constructs, grantees will need to

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[4] Some States may use the terms "family assessment response" (FAR) or "differential response" (DR) instead of alternative response victim.

[5] The District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are the only two territories that report data to NCANDS and are included in the term "States" when referring to NCANDS. Throughout the rest of this brief, we use "State" to be an umbrella term that includes Territories and Tribes, where appropriate.

[6] A separate document on the measurement of child maltreatment benchmark constructs in tribal entities is being developed specifically for Tribal MIEHCV Grantees.

select a person in their agency to contact the appropriate State NCANDS person to discuss the need for data. Tribal grantees will need to contact their child welfare program directors to determine the most appropriate person with whom to discuss these needs. It may be useful to share this brief with the CW agency contact.

Please note that if the grantee agency is not part of the CW agency or does not already have a data-sharing agreement in place with the CW agency, it may take several months to finalize agency-to-agency data-sharing agreements.

Overview of Key Data Concepts

In order to collect data on the three child maltreatment constructs, an understanding of certain key concepts will be useful.

Child-Specific Data
The annual reporting requirement to HRSA is at the aggregate (group) level.

However, for maximum benefit to each grantee, it is recommended that grantees obtain child-specific data. If child-specific data are obtained, the grantee will be able to use the data in multiple ways to track outcomes for individual children and assist in improvements to program design and service delivery. Child-specific data could include additional data such as the type of reporter, the relationship of the perpetrator to the child, age of the child, and type of maltreatment. These additional data elements could enhance the usefulness of the data to the grantee and support plans for continuous quality improvement of the home visiting program.

Children Served by the Program
For these benchmark constructs, grantees must select an index child or children as the focus of tracking of outcomes. An index child is a child, younger than 6 years old, who will be followed over time when tracking performance on the benchmarks. Most grantees will likely choose one index child per family, but more than one child per family is acceptable. Using home visiting program and model specifications, each grantee will determine the rules by which a child in a family is counted as an index child or not. Identifying characteristics about each index child will need to be used to match children in the home visiting program with children in the CW information system in order to obtain information on the three constructs.

Events
To interpret the CW agency's maltreatment data, it will be helpful to understand the concept of an "event." The three maltreatment constructs (suspected maltreatment, substantiated maltreatment, and first-time victims) focus on events, which have dates associated with them.

1. Making a report of suspected maltreatment to the CW agency. The **report date** associated with the reporting event refers to the date that the CW agency was

notified about the suspected maltreatment. A single report can include multiple children and multiple reports of suspected maltreatment.

2. <u>Determining that a child is a victim of maltreatment</u>. In most information systems, the determination that one or more maltreatments were substantiated is associated with a report **disposition date**. In order for an event to have a disposition date, there must be a report date. Usually all maltreatments associated with one report have the same report date and the same disposition date. If different report dates are associated with a child, there are likely to be different disposition dates.

3. <u>Determining that a child is a first-time victim of maltreatment</u>. To determine if a child had been a prior victim, we recommend grantees compare the date of the child's current report to the date of any previous reports for that child. If any of the child's previous report(s) were substantiated, the child is not a first-time victim.

<u>We recommend the report date be used to determine whether an event would be counted</u>. Although a disposition date may be used in instead of a report date, using a report date simplifies the computation of the three constructs. This is explained further after the discussion of time periods of interest.

Report-Child Pairs
CW agencies that participate in NCANDS are familiar with the concept of a **report-child pair**. A report-child pair uses two unique identifiers: one identifier is for the report, and a second identifier is for the child.

A child can be associated with more than one report. Conversely, a report can be associated with more than one child. As a result, if a grantee specifies that there is more than one index child per family, more than one index child may be associated with a report. If a grantee specifies that there is only one index child per family, regardless of how many children are in each report, the grantee will be interested only in the data on the index child.

Records in NCANDS are organized using report-child pairs. Each record has the report date, the disposition date, the maltreatments associated with the report, and the determinations of substantiation associated with the report. Report-child pair records are useful because a history of events is easily presented. Children with multiple reporting events will have multiple records. These children appear more than once in the data file and can be said to be duplicated.

MIECHV programs are encouraged to count children in these constructs using a **unique count**, where each child is counted only once regardless of how many incidents or events of a specific construct are associated with that child. Although it is anticipated that there will be very few children with multiple records, the grantee will need to convert report-child pair

data to unique child counts. Technical assistance is available from Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation (DOHVE) TA team to help with these computations. Contact information for DOHVE is provided in the section titled Resources.
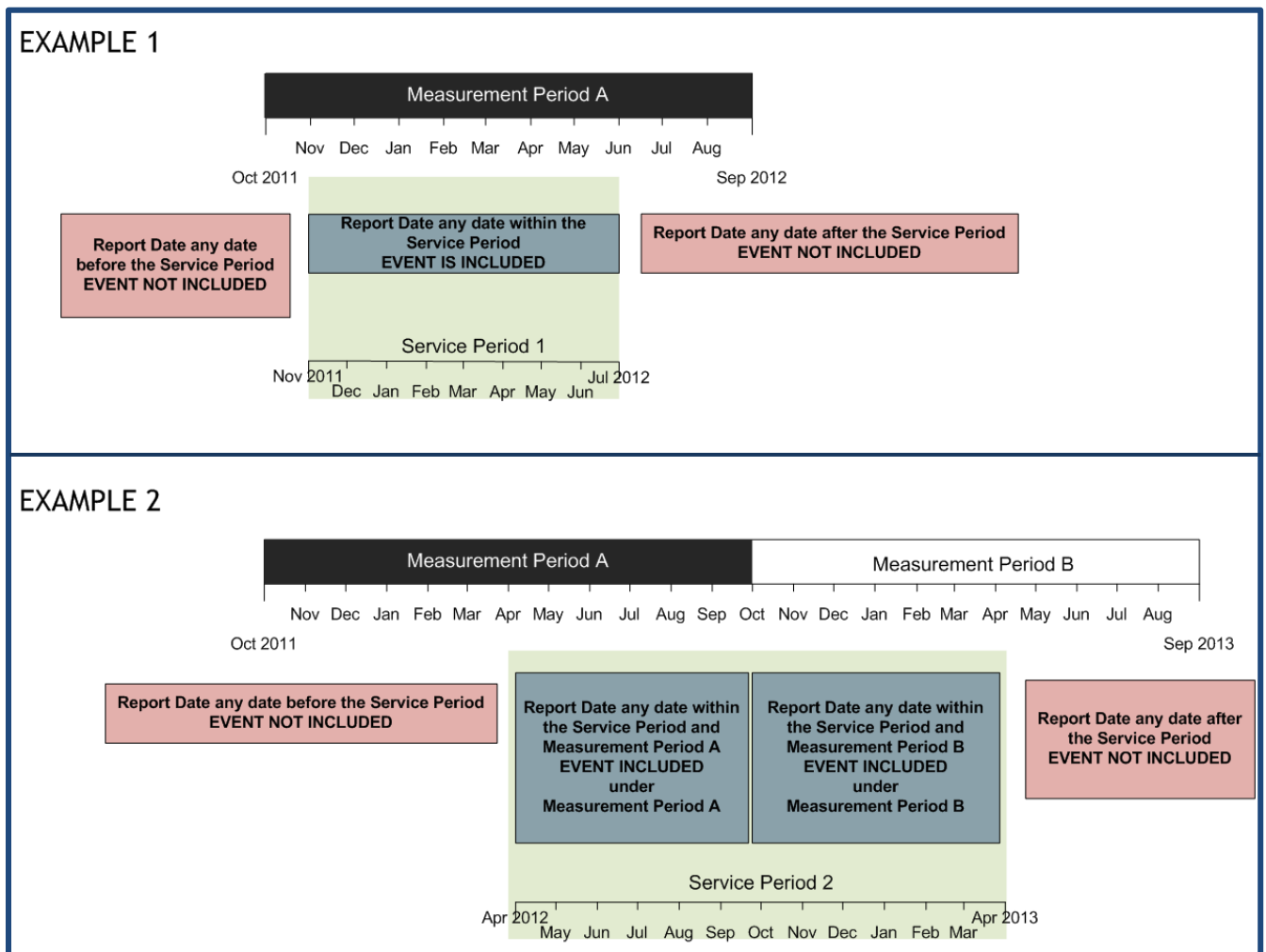
Time Periods of Interest

Dates associated with events are particularly important so that grantees can determine if:

1. The event occurred during the *service period* in which the family was enrolled in the program. Because grantees only need to count events that occurred during the service period, a start and end date for services must be determined for each index child. (If there are multiple index children within a family, these dates could be the same for all index children within that family.)

2. The event occurred during the *measurement period(s)* for the MIECHV program. The measurement periods align with the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY)—October 1 through September 30—and the baseline and comparison periods defined by each grantee for the purposes of examining improvement.

Service periods and measurement periods will overlap in different ways for each child. For example, the service period of a child might be contained within a FFY or it may cross over more than one FFY. In addition, a baseline or comparison period might be contained within a FFY or it might cross over FFYs.

Only events with report dates that occur within the service period and the measurement periods are counted. Grantees need to be careful to obtain the report date associated with each event to identify those events that occurred while an index child was receiving services within one or more of the MIECHV measurement periods.

Figure 1. Time Periods for Events

The above figures display two examples of how service periods are related to measurement periods. Events are counted only if they occurred within the service period and the applicable measurement period.

Working with the CW Agency

The CW agency contact person will want to know the details of the data being requested. It may be helpful to share a copy of the MIECHV program's guidance for benchmark reporting and this brief with them. The grantee will need to explain that it is seeking to obtain information on the child protective services events related to the three constructs for each index child.

➢ The name of each index child will need to be provided. In some communities, additional information such as birth date, address, and name of the mother might be

useful. The CW agency will be able to inform the grantee as to which data will be most useful to ensure the most accurate matching of names.

➢ The definitions of all key terms (see Glossary) will need to be discussed in case the CW agency uses other terms. Programmatic assistance from the CW agency may be needed in order to crosswalk the agency's terms to terms used in this brief.

➢ The service period of interest and measurement period for each child will need to be provided. An alternative approach would be to provide parameter dates that encompass all service periods. For example, the duration of the measurement period might be provided to the CW agency rather than the child-specific service period. This would reduce the burden on the CW agency in determining which events would be counted, but would require that the grantee screen all data to determine which events fall within each child's specific service period.

In addition to these topics, the grantee and the CW agency contact will need to agree upon the following issues.

➢ The format for submitting the child-specific data request. For example, the CW agency may be able to accept an Excel file listing all children of interest. The format of the Excel file should have all information that the CW agency needs to conduct the matching process with a description of each field.

➢ The format for receiving the data from the CW agency. For example, report-child pair records might be provided in a comma-delineated TXT file. Some agencies also may be able to provide SPSS files. The format of these files must be clearly documented.

The grantee and the CW agency will need to work through issues of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy associated with obtaining such records. Moreover, the grantee will need to ensure data security of these records once they are received.

Resources

➤ Additional DOHVE TA resources for data, research, and evaluation are available at: [7]
http://www.mdrc.org/dohve/dohve_resources.html

➤ The Child Maltreatment reports are available on the Children's Bureau website at
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment

➤ The MIECHV program guidance for benchmark reporting is available on the HRSA, MCHB MIECHV Program website at:
http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting/ta/resources/index.html

For more information about this document or to request technical assistance on MIECHV benchmark reporting, please contact:[8]

Jill Filene, MPH
DOHVE TA Project Director
James Bell Associates
3033 Wilson Blvd., Suite 650
Arlington, VA 22201
703-528-3230
filene@jbassoc.com

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[7] The purpose of the Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation (DOHVE) is to provide research and evaluation support for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program. The project is funded by the Administration for Children and Families in collaboration with the Health Resources and Services Administration, under contract number HHS23320095644WC.

[8] This brief was prepared in collaboration with staff members of the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and with members of the NCANDS Technical Team at Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc.

Glossary

The following terms are explained using the NCANDS definitions.

Alternative response nonvictim: A response other than an investigation that did not determine that a child was a victim of maltreatment.

Alternative response victim: A response other than an investigation that determined that a child was a victim of maltreatment.

Case-level data: Information submitted by the States in the Child File containing individual child or report maltreatment statistics.

Child File: A type of data file submitted by the States to NCANDS on an annual basis that contains a child-specific record for each report of alleged child abuse and neglect that received a disposition as a result of an investigation or an alternative response during the reporting period.

Disposition: A determination made by a CW agency that evidence is or is not sufficient under State law to conclude that maltreatment occurred. A disposition is applied to each individual child within a report and to the overall report.

Disposition date: The date (month, day, and year) that a decision was made by the CW agency or by a court regarding the disposition of the CW agency response. If maltreatment dispositions are associated with different disposition dates, the report disposition date should be assigned to the latest of these dates.

National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS): A national data collection system of child abuse and neglect data submitted annually from State child welfare agencies. Contains case-level and aggregate data.

Screened-in allegations (called reports): Those allegations that met a State's standards for acceptance and receive an agency response such as an investigation or an assessment. Screened-out allegations are those that did not meet a State's standards for acceptance and should not be included in calculations.

Report-child pair: Refers to the connection between the report identifier number and the child identifier number. Together, the numbers form a new identifier that represents a single record in the case-level Child File. This means that each child has a single record for each report event. Each record would contain the following: a report date and a disposition date; a suspected maltreatment event; the dispositions that resulted from the investigation; and, an indication of any prior substantiated maltreatment.

Report date: The date (month, day, and year) that the report of maltreatment was made to the CW agency. If a State combines several allegations into one report, the date of the report should be the date of the initial allegation.

Unique count: Counting a child once, regardless of the number of reports concerning that child that received a CPS response in the Federal Fiscal Year.

NCANDS State Contact Person Information

For more information on data specifications and working with the CW agency, please contact the NCANDS person in your State.

Region I				
CT	Beth	Petroni	beth.petroni@ct.gov	860-560-5015
MA	Rosalind	Walter	ros.walter@state.ma.us	617-748-2219
ME	Robert	Blanchard	robert.blanchard@maine.gov	207-624-7963
NH	Jane	Whitney	JMWhitney@dhhs.state.nh.us	603-271-6764
RI	David	Allenson	david.allenson@dcyf.ri.gov	401-528-3864
VT	Aaron	Pelton	aaron.pelton@ahs.state.vt.us	802-241-2108
Region II				
NJ	Linda	Longo	linda.longo@dcf.state.nj.us	609-888-7296
NY	Paul	Nance	Paul.Nance@ocfs.state.ny.us	518-402-3016
PR	Olga Ribas	Alfonso	oribas@adfan.gobierno.pr	939-642-4475
Region III				
DC	Lori	Peterson	lori.peterson@dc.gov	202-434-0055
DE	Tylesha	Rumley	tylesha.rumley@state.de.us	302-633-2674
MD	Linda	Carter	lcarter3@dhr.state.md.us	410-767-7650
PA	William	Sunday	wsunday@pa.gov	717-214-3809
VA	Tania	White	Tania.White@dss.virginia.gov	804-726-7572
WV	Brenda	Howell	Brenda.L.Howell@wv.gov	304-558-7980
Region IV				
AL	Janet	Winningham	janet.winningham@dhr.alabama.gov	334-353-4898
FL	Jason	Gaitanis	Jason_Gaitanis@dcf.state.fl.us	850-413-8667
GA	Darlene	Kishbaugh	dbkishba@dhr.state.ga.us	404-657-5127
KY	Dilip	Penmecha	dilip.penmecha@ky.gov	502-564-0105
MS	Shirley	Johnson	shirleyj@mdhs.state.ms.us	601-359-4679
NC	Heather	Bohanan	heather.bohanan@dhhs.nc.gov	919-334-1237
SC	Lynn	Horne	lynn.horne@dss.sc.gov	803-360-1786
TN	Lance	Griffin	lance.griffin@state.tn.us	615-532-5394
Region V				
IL	David	Foust	David.Foust@illinois.gov	217-558-5040
IN	Lisa	Rich	lisa.rich@dcs.in.gov	317-232-4497
MI	Cynthia	Eberhard	Eberhardc@michigan.gov	517-202-1315
MN	Jean	Swanson-Broberg	jean.swanson-broberg@state.mn.us	651-431-4746
OH	Leslie	McGee	mcgeel@odjfs.state.oh.us	614-752-1089
WI	Wendy	Henderson	Wendy.Henderson@wisconsin.gov	608-266-5572
Region VI				
AR	Donald	Sikes	Don.Sikes@arkansas.gov	501-320-6504
LA	Walter	Fahr	Walter.Fahr@la.gov	225-342-6832
NM	Linnette	Carlson	linnetted.carlson@state.nm.us	505-259-6661
OK	Elizabeth	Roberts	e.roberts@okdhs.org	405-522-3715
TX	Mark	Prindle	MarkPrindle@dfps.state.tx.us	512-929-6753

NCANDS State Contact Person Information *continued*

Region VII				
IA	Jeff	Regula	jregula@dhs.state.ia.us	515-242-5103
KS	Deanne	Dinkel	deanne.dinkel@srs.ks.gov	785-291-3665
MO	Meliny	Staysa	meliny.j.staysa@dss.mo.gov	573-751-4832
NE	Greg	Brockmeier	greg.brockmeier@nebraska.gov	402-471-6615
Region VIII				
CO	Kimber	Johnson	kimber.johnson@state.co.us	303-866-5932
MT	Louis	Walters	Lwalters@mt.gov	406-841-2415
ND	Marlys	Baker	mbaker@nd.gov	701-328-1853
SD	Jaime	Reiff	jaime.reiff@state.sd.us	605-773-3227
UT	Navina	Forsythe	nforsythe@utah.gov	801-538-4045
WY	Debra	Hibbard	dhibba@state.wy.us	307-777-5479
Region IX				
AZ	Nicholas	Espadas	nespadas@azdes.gov	602-542-3969
CA	Debbie	Williams	deborah.williams@dss.ca.gov	916-928-2262
HI	Ricky	Higashide	rhigashide@dhs.hawaii.gov	808-586-5109
NV	Shauna	Tilley	stilley@dcfs.nv.gov	775-684-7942
Region X				
AK	Kristen	Tromble	Kristen.Tromble@alaska.gov	907-465-3291
ID	Robbin	Thomas	ThomasR2@dhw.idaho.gov	208-334-5798
OR	Carole	Cole	carole.cole@state.or.us	503-945-6510
WA	Lisa	Barber	lbar300@dshs.wa.gov	360-902-8052