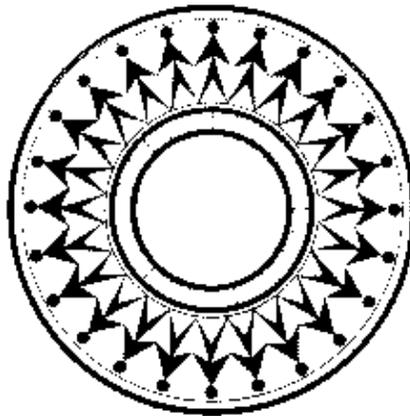


***ADMINISTRATIVE DATA
IN CHILD WELFARE:
RESEARCH STRATEGIES
AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE
JUNE 26-27, 1998***

CONFERENCE SUMMARY REPORT



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Conference Organized by:

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Family Life Development Center

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources**

Project Overview

The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) first began as a pilot project in 1988 with funds from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. The mission of NDACAN is to facilitate the secondary analysis of research data relevant to the study of child abuse and neglect. By making data available to a larger number of researchers, NDACAN seeks to provide a relatively inexpensive and scientifically productive means for researchers to explore important issues in the child maltreatment field.

In 1997 NDACAN received a grant supplement for the purpose of conducting a small conference focused on the use of administrative data for research purposes in the field of child maltreatment and child welfare. The resulting conference, *Administrative Data in Child Welfare: Research Strategies and Prospects for the Future*, was convened by NDACAN at Cornell University on June 26 and 27, 1998.

During this two-day meeting, 10 sessions were presented by 14 conference participants, two of whom were NDACAN staff. Conference participants included researchers representing seven universities, as well as the federal government, state government, a private consulting group, non-profit organizations, and a research center in a children's hospital. The list of participants is included on the following page.

Topics for the conference were varied but interrelated. Some presenters shared their own research using administrative data, while others discussed broader issues such as getting and maintaining access to administrative data (e.g., models for university-state collaborations), and enhancing the utility of the data that is available (e.g., linking administrative databases and combining administrative data with other sources of information.) The federal role in encouraging the use of administrative data was discussed, as were the types of personnel needed to work on secondary analysis projects. Disseminating research findings using administrative data to policy makers and the public was addressed, as was the role of archives in facilitating the dissemination and utilization of administrative data to the research community.

**Administrative Data in Child Welfare:
Research Strategies and Prospects for the Future,
Cornell University, June 26-27, 1998
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Administrative Data in Child Welfare: Research Strategies and Prospects for the Future

Agenda

Thursday, June 25, 1998

6:30 pm--Dinner

Friday, June 26, 1998

8:00--Breakfast

8:45 - 9:00

Welcome --John Eckenrode, Cornell University

9:00 - 10:15

Session 1-- The federal role in promoting research with administrative data

Presenter: Matt Stagner, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

10:15 - 10:30--Break

10:30 - 11:15

Session 2-- Staffing and managing an archive

Presenter:

Barbara Needell, University of California at Berkeley

11:15 - 12:30

Session 3-- Combining administrative data with other sources of information

Panel:

John Landsverk, San Diego's Children's Hospital

Mark Testa, University of Chicago

12:30 -2:00--Lunch

2:00 - 3:20

Session 4- Linking administrative databases in child welfare

Presenter:

Allen Harden, Chapin Hall Center for Children

3:20-3:30--Break

3:30- 5:00

Session 5: Discussion Topic: Models of university-state collaborations on research with administrative data

Panel:

Catherine Born, University of Maryland at Baltimore
Brett Drake, Washington University in St. Louis

6:30 pm--Dinner

Saturday, June 27, 1998

8:00-- Breakfast

8:45 -10:00

Session 6-- Using administrative data to measure child welfare outcomes

Panel:

Ying-Ying Yuan, Walter R. McDonald Associates
John Fluke, American Humane Association

10:00-10:15--Break

10:15-11:30

Session 7 -- Using administrative data to evaluate child welfare reforms

Presenter:

Lynn Usher, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

11:30 -12:15

Session 8-- Foster care histories of children freed for adoption in New York State

Presenter:

Rosemary Avery, Cornell University

12:15 - 1:30--Lunch

1:30 - 2:15

Session 9-- Disseminating administrative data to policy makers and the public

Presenter:

Dick Wertheimer, Child Trends

2:15- 3:15

Session 10-- Discussion topic--Secondary analysis of administrative data: the role of archives

Panel:

John Eckenrode, Cornell University
Patrick Collins, Cornell University

3:15 - 4:00--Closing/Wrap up--John Eckenrode

Introduction

Dr. John Eckenrode welcomed the conference participants and began the conference with a brief discussion of the increased interest in the use of administrative data for research in child welfare. He reviewed the mission of the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) of making administrative data more publicly available to the research community, and stated the goals for the conference:

- ?? To provide a forum for researchers to share their work with regard to methodological approaches to the use of administrative data for child welfare research
- ?? To network with colleagues
- ?? To be proactive and forward thinking in discussions regarding the use of administrative data
- ?? To receive feedback on the role of an archive in how it can best support researchers and the research community in getting access to and analyzing administrative data

Session I

Dr. Matthew Stagner, Senior Policy Analyst in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, presented in the first session. This session discussed issues surrounding the role of the federal government in encouraging the use of administrative data for research purposes. Dr. Stagner questioned where limited federal money could provide the most leverage. He discussed the need to think about several strategies in support of using administrative data to answer policy questions. These issues include:

- ?? Developing state systems for collecting administrative data and management of these systems
- ?? Grants to states to encourage better use of administrative data; e.g. encourage linkages, cross-state compatibility in data collection, university-state collaborations, and better use of existing data within state government to answer policy questions
- ?? Archiving; encouraging better use of existing archives, resulting in greater accessibility of data
- ?? Research grants to encourage methods advancement and to support new researchers in the field to answer specific policy research questions

Dr. Stagner stated that he did not foresee any substantial new investments on the horizon for child welfare. He added that while there is not a lot of money available to develop new state systems, there is some money to keep states in the game. There is a growing recognition of the need for state-research partnerships. States themselves generally are not capable of following through from

data extraction to the answering of a policy research question, while outside researchers are limited in what they can do without state cooperation or at least state encouragement. The federal government is aware that partnerships make sense here. The question is how to encourage this. Dr. Stagner also discussed the concern that as administrative data resources develop there may not be the human capital available to analyze the data. There is a danger that not enough people are currently trained or even interested in working with and analyzing administrative data that will be becoming available. One answer to this concern is archiving, but Dr. Stagner expressed the need to look for other answers. The Joint Center for Poverty Research at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago has recently published a report on the topic, entitled *Administrative Data for Policy Relevant Research: Assessment of Current Utility and Recommendations for Development*.

Dr. Stagner went on to discuss the role of administrative data in answering the question of whether or not welfare reform will lead to increased involvement in other programs for those individuals and families who lose funds and services. He stated that the government does feel that administrative data can help answer this type of question, and that use of administrative data is seen as cost efficient by government officials. The importance of gaining a better understanding of the real costs of administrative data was mentioned. There are concerns about using administrative data alone for research concerning outcomes of welfare reform; for example, if the hypothesis is correct that former welfare recipients will drop out of programs, the administrative records will not capture them. It may be necessary to follow up this type of research with surveys, and the use of other records such as school records. Use of administrative data was also seen as a good way to look at cross-program interactions.

Dr. Stagner reported that South Carolina, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts received ASPE grants in the past to develop research-oriented administrative databases. This year, ASPE received \$5,000,000 to follow Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) leavers. A panel at the National Academy of Sciences was set up to discuss the best science for following those who leave the TANF roles. A plurality of that money went to states in the form of grants for surveys or to reorganize administrative data files. Also, there have been state data linkage projects over the last few years, and indicators development. There is some interaction between administrative data and indicators of well-being, and there is some hope that the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) will make that process easier. There is more work to be done in the area of converting administrative data to well-being indicators. Dr. Stagner also discussed the role of administrative data in the performance measurement issue.

In the discussion period several issues were raised, including the availability of federal funds to help train researchers in the skills needed to analyze administrative data. Dr. Stagner responded that small grants were available through the Joint Center for Poverty Research, but they only gave out a hand full of such awards.

Another question was raised regarding the interaction between the office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), as there was interest expressed in linking HCFA data with social welfare data. Dr. Stagner stated that there had been discussion between the two groups and suggested the possibility of creating a data

center for medicaid data. He also expressed a legitimate need for tight data release policies to protect confidentiality.

The issue of making administrative data accessible to the public was also discussed. Concerns were expressed regarding confidentiality, the politicizing of data that is made public, liability issues, and the need to build and maintain a system that will provide uniformity, such as SACWIS. Concerns were expressed about the importance of building the analytical capacity of states, as well as building the capacity of the SACWIS team. Current administrative data systems have been patched together from contracts and grants that were awarded to answer specific questions. Dr. Stagner responded that the issue of public access and public use data is a tough one that definitely causes tension. He feels that these data currently are used only by a small cadre of analysts, and it should be opened up to others. Conference participants felt that at this point there were too many concerns to take this step, including liability issues for misinterpretation of data. Others stated that data sharing needs to happen from the bottom up and not the top down. Another related point was made regarding the issue of quality control. It was suggested that setting up some sort of advisory panel or other built-in mechanism for peer review was necessary to insure the quality of reporting based on administrative data.

With regard to access to state data, the relationship between public universities and state agencies was discussed. It was stated that it was in the interest of university researchers to educate their colleagues in state agencies regarding statistics and analysis so that they can build an in-house capacity and be informed consumers of university-based research.

The importance of advances in software was also discussed. Software is available now, that was not available even 18 months ago, that can deal with data storage, converting data to an analytical file or to a file that drives the business of an organization. The software can also put those data together in a more accessible format and disseminate it to people on the front lines, as well as to people at the state capital, via the Internet. The new software provides an integrated system that is widely accessible to the user. It was suggested that this is how the SACWIS system should function. These advances also have implications for archives. The issue of what an archive will look like in five years needs to be addressed, specifically with regard to dissemination and increased utility and access of data.

Concerns were raised about overlap with different research groups looking at these same issues regarding administrative data. Perhaps ASPE could help coordinate these efforts.

Session 2

Dr. Barbara Needell, Project Director of the California Children Services Archive at the University of California, Berkeley, presented in the second session. This session discussed the type of data stored in their archive, the type of work they do, and the staff necessary to do the work.

The California Children Services Archive at the University of California combines administrative data from agencies providing services to children. They have the following state data: birth

records, foster care, child abuse, medical eligibility, adoption records, youth authority, death records, and special education. Data at the child level can be linked using probability matching.

Their staff consists of: a lead programmer, a matcher-linker programmer, a programming assistant, a statistician/analyst, a research assistant, a project director, and a principal investigator. The archive serves the following functions: acquiring agency data, confidentiality procedures, analyzing and documenting, designing databases, manipulating and reconfiguring source data, linking client records across agencies, and using the integrated database.

Dr. Needell provided practical guidance regarding the different archive personnel. The lead programmer is a very important position and the best should be hired. The person does not need to be a social worker or a statistician. The lead programmer can have training in public health or another social service field.

The matcher-linker programmer should have previous training in the use of programs for probability matching or linking, such as AutoMatch or AutoStan, from Matchware Technologies. This person should also be capable of completing other programming tasks. The programming assistant should be able to do the time-consuming tasks such as documentation, checking, cleaning of data. They should also be able to handle ad hoc requests.

The statistician/analyst need not be a social worker; rather, may have a background in biostatistics or economics. This person can be a doctoral student interested in employment and an archive-related dissertation.

The research assistant can be a new doctoral student with a child welfare focus. This person needs to have an understanding of advanced multivariate statistics.

The project director should be a child welfare expert. This person serves as the liaison with the state and county agencies, and should be able to do basic statistics and have a conceptual understanding of more complex issues. This person also serves to protect, inform, and nurture the rest of the team.

Dr. Needell provided the following advice on keeping staff content and productive:

?? Include them as co-authors on papers

?? Have periodic meetings to keep everyone informed

?? Encourage and pay for attendance at conferences

?? Encourage and pay for trainings

?? Give new analyst ready to use dataset created from holdings to do some preliminary modeling

?? Gradually introduce child welfare issues to team

?? Work with programmers and analysts to lower their expectations (i.e. at what point is data "good enough")

?? Consider telecommuting to meet needs of staff

?? Work for sympathetic higher powers (dean)

?? Support the staff

During the discussion following Dr. Needell's presentation it was suggested that another way to make workers happy is to offer tuition reimbursement for doctoral or master's level students who may be working for you, or to run independent research courses for credit.

Session 3

Dr. John Landsverk, Director, Center for Research on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, San Diego Children's Hospital, was one of two presenters in the third session on combining administrative data with other data sources.

Dr. Landsverk described a study using county-level administrative data from San Diego county. He stated that his study was somewhat different from the work done by the other researchers at the meeting in that his study brings in administrative data from other sources outside of child welfare, such as use of health services from HCFA medicaid data files. His studies are mostly cohort studies that involve measurement in the mental health status of kids. The researchers on his study also used abstracting of process records and case files from multiple child-serving agencies to supplement data gathered through direct interview methods.

The study looked at the need for mental health services for children in foster care. His study followed a cohort of 950 children entering foster care, and tried to address the following questions: What is the need for and use of mental health services for these kids? His researchers tried to enrich their study by using county-level administrative data. They found that administrative data in social services is limited with regard to markers for child well-being. They used medicaid data from HCFA and matched it to their foster care cohort. Medicaid information on children in foster care has been well-used for looking at the delivery of mental health services to children. He discussed the three basic ways to get information about services delivered: ask people, abstract records, look at administrative data records. Dr. Landsverk's Center conducted a survey of foster parents to ask what mental health services the kids had received. He then questioned how one goes about evaluating the information you get from parents versus what you get from administrative data. One problem with the self-report data regarded the impact of type of maltreatment on use of mental health services. There was clear evidence from surveys of parents that kids who have an allegation of sexual abuse were significantly more likely to receive mental health services than those without that allegation, after controlling for behavior problems. Kids who enter foster care for reasons of neglect were reported to be two times less likely to receive services. When they

tested the same hypothesis on the same kids using medicaid data the relationship reduces to about a third and is no longer statistically significant. As researchers, what do we do with this dilemma? Dr. Landsverk's Center is interested in addressing the question about the amount of concordance when different sources are used to answer a question. But more specifically, they want to address the question of why a different relationship between a predictor variable and a dependent variable is found when using a different data source for the same time period for the same child.

Dr. Landsverk described another study also funded by NIMH which has assisted his staff in utilizing data from multiple service systems in San Diego County. His center is very interested in the issue of kids moving in and out of multiple child serving systems. Questions he wants to address about kids in child welfare include: How do they end up in juvenile justice? Do they use mental health services, and Are they in special education in school? Dr. Landsverk received money from NIMH to look at the degree of overlap between child and adolescent service systems. He and his staff sampled kids after they determined which ones were multiple service system kids and which ones were single service system kids, and then they looked at the pathways into and through those service systems. They developed an integrated database of all children and adolescents who had an open case in one of five different service systems: alcohol and drug treatment services, child welfare, mental health, juvenile probation, and special education, SED classification. They used administrative data to construct a sampling frame after they had partitioned it into cells based on age, race/ethnicity, and level of restrictiveness to oversample group home kids. They went into computerized case files to determine matches, and ended up with database of about 22,000 unduplicated kids who had open cases. This allowed them to report back to the service systems about profiles. What stands out from the data is that child welfare is a service system that is very different than others. The child welfare population is younger than others and comes closest to having equal numbers of males and females, while the other systems are heavily male-dominated. They also looked at the 22,000 kids to address whether or not they were involved with a single service system or multiple service systems during that one year. Here again child welfare is different--three out of four kids receiving child welfare services were not open to any other system. The other service systems were sharing kids at a much higher rate. Dr. Landsverk reported that his research showed that there is more multiple agency involvement by kids who are in congregate care (group home or higher) rather than family care.

Dr. Mark Testa, Professor, School of Social Services Administration, University of Chicago also presented in the third session. Dr. Testa holds a joint appointment as Research Director with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Dr. Testa began his presentation by discussing the use of administrative data in survey research and how as a department they make use of it in Illinois:

?? Selecting probability samples

?? Extending the life of cross-sectional surveys

?? Correcting for missing data

?? Improving the validity of retrospective data

?? Handling left truncation when combining administrative data with survey data

Dr. Testa gave examples from two studies in Illinois that used administrative data to extend the life of cross-sectional surveys. With the Relative Caregiver Social Assessment Survey (1993-94) they took a cross-sectional design and turned it into a longitudinal study by looking at how long kids survived in that placement, and they used the administrative data to extend the observation window to 1996. In the Substances and Families (SAF) survey they looked at 277 birth mothers who had an open family case and compared samples of cases opened because of substance exposed infants versus non-substance exposed infants. They conducted interviews with the mothers in the spring and summer of 1996 and linked the survey data to administrative data on child maltreatment, child placement, and arrest data. Administrative data extended the life of the study to March 1998.

Dr. Testa and his staff also followed women in the Substances and Families data to see how many had a subsequent allegation of child abuse and neglect. They were trying to compare substance exposed infants in intact families with placement cases and look at the birth effect. They used administrative data on births to families, and tested against the sample of mothers. Based on administrative birth data, 60% of births are indicated as having a subsequent report of abuse and neglect, typically drug exposure. Survey responses showed only about 23% of all births having an allegation. What happened here was that the people who record the administrative data over-reported substance exposed infants and underreported "clean births." However, there was still a fairly big birth effect. This example is similar to the example Dr. Landsverk gave of how one may use survey data to correct missing or inaccurate administrative data. With administrative data those who record it tend to over-report what they find interesting. Care must be taken in reporting and interpreting administrative data, providing appropriate caveats and qualifications.

Dr. Testa stated that in Illinois they are interested in federal funds eligibility. In order to be eligible for federal funds, a child has to be removed from his or her home pursuant to a voluntary placement agreement or by judicial determination and be placed in out of home care. This issue is of interest in Illinois because a large number of kids are informally placed with relatives. Under this definition of relative care, if the child is then formally placed with that relative it is called a nonremoval placement and the child is ineligible for federal subsidies. Most of the growth in the substitute care population in Illinois has been accounted for by the placement of children with relatives; much more modest growth is seen in nonrelative and group care arrangements.

Dr. Testa stated that for him the most fruitful use of administrative data was in improving the validity of retrospective survey data. When these two methods are merged together, one methodological point is the issue of left truncation. This is a problem when caregivers are interviewed at different lengths of time after the child is placed in their home.

Dr. Testa and his staff have access to the administrative data and they use it to check the survey data. It is a way to improve people's recall. Administrative payment data, for example, can be used to check accuracy, as this type of administrative data tends to be very accurate. Dr. Testa added that

they use an informed consent form in advance to get permission to link the survey information to other data.

Session 4

Mr. Allen Harden, Senior Research Associate, Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, presented in the fourth session on linking administrative data. Chapin Hall is known for linking data. Mr. Harden directs the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive and worked extensively on the Illinois Integrated Data Project.

With regard to limitations of administrative data, Mr. Harden stated that the main one is that administrative data tend to focus on a particular type of service and service context. They don't go beyond what the initial administrative data set was set up to track. With linkage, you can extend this. Linking serves to connect information from one administrative data set to another, or to another type of data. Linkage is typically done at the level of the individual because the individual is usually the most stable entity-- families change, cases change, grants change, but individuals usually are stable.

Mr. Harden added that there are some difficulties in getting individual level data to link--problems with legal access, confidentiality rights, and the culture of some agencies that just won't give access to their data.

There are different reasons for linking data sets. From a case load point of view, you can look at the extent to which the same child has contacts with different agencies. You can answer questions regarding whether or not children have multiservice contacts, or tend to move from one service to another. You can also look at entrance and exit data--where kids in one type of service came from and where they go to; or you could look at the type of populations that flow between services.

With regard to the act of linkage, for the most part you are talking about matching. No single variable is reliable in and of itself for purposes of matching. Even social security numbers can not be used alone to give matches. Other variables such as date of birth, other significant dates, gender, race/ethnicity, and county or zip codes should be used as well. Probabilistic record matching is a process that is used to look for mutual associations. The software AutoMatch (Matchware Technologies) is used for this purpose. AutoMatch works in a fairly simple way by putting in as much information as possible in the two systems and the program looks at the frequencies of each of the variables in each of the data systems and computes probabilities based on mutual association of correct hits versus incorrect hits on all the variables. AutoStan (Matchware Technologies) is a new piece of software that has a feature that helps smooth out information in the linking process by, for example, recognizing all the different abbreviations for "Chicago." Mr. Harden warned that in the linking process false links are more dangerous than missed links. He also emphasized that there are confidentiality issues throughout the linking process.

As part of the discussion following Mr. Harden's presentation, it was suggested that doing validation studies with case files is a good idea. Cleaning the data frequently was also recommended, as was keeping the original data and using good documentation. It was also

mentioned that one problem with the software Automatch is that it will stop with the first acceptable match and not check the whole database after that match has been found; therefore sometimes a much closer match could be missed.

Other discussion focused on the importance of setting rigorous standards with regard to matching, and erring on the side of caution.

The issue of trying to make statements about families, not just individuals, from linked data was raised. A problem in doing this is that children can have multiple family ID's because they have been through the adoption process. There needs to be a system to deal with these types of data that are likely to change.

Session 5

Dr. Catherine Born, Research Associate Professor at the University of Maryland at Baltimore presented in the fifth session on university and state collaborations.

Dr. Born directs the Welfare and Child Support Research Training Group and has over 30 employees. She has worked with the Maryland Department of Human Resources on welfare research projects for almost 20 years and on child support research projects for 14 years; virtually all of these projects have involved heavy use of administrative data. Dozens of reports have been produced on many topics, but almost all of them focus in some way on the themes of client characteristics and patterns of welfare use over time, including a longitudinal (10 year) study of a cohort of first-time cash assistance recipients. At present, major work focuses on the study "Life After Welfare" which is making extensive use of various administrative data systems in tracking the post-exit experiences and outcomes of a random sample of several thousand families who exit cash assistance under welfare reform. The study began on the first day of reform in Maryland (10/1/96) and thus far has produced two interim reports chronicling outcomes for over 2000 families. Individual adults and children (n=3100+) as well as "cases" are being tracked for at least a two-year period following the welfare exits.

Dr. Born discussed some of the "rules" she and her researchers followed to allow for an effective collaboration between her university and the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

?? Be a collaborator not an expert

?? Respect Agency staff; wisdom is more than "book learning"

?? Be humble and remember that we need them more than they need us

?? Build a relationship with the Agency personnel first before you ask for their data

?? Use clear language and answer questions that are useful to the agency

?? Be flexible in terms of ways to get the data; take data in the format that they can provide

?? Never promise more than you can deliver and always deliver more than you promise

Dr. Born emphasized the importance of building trust in the relationship between Agency staff and University staff. It is reasonable for the Agency to have concerns about how their data will be used and what will be said about them.

Dr. Brett Drake, Associate Professor at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University at St. Louis, also presented in Session 5.

Dr. Drake reiterated many of the points made by Dr. Born in the earlier session. He emphasized that he needs the connection to the state of Missouri in order to conduct his research--they don't need him to do their work. He made the following points with regard to building a trusting and lasting relationship with state agency staff:

?? Work within the flow of the agency's work--not against it.

?? Show your appreciation for the extra work Agency staff are doing for you

?? Share the money and resources with Agency staff

?? Do work on projects of interest to the Agency whether or not you are interested in them

?? Sharing office space and even exchanging personnel during a project builds trust

The discussion following Dr. Drake's presentation focused on the need for trust for effective university-state collaborations. The importance of the personality of workers and how they relate to others was also discussed, as was the issue of where to draw the line with regard to special requests, for example, if an Agency asked a researcher to wait for a certain period of time before going to the press with the results of a project, how would that be handled?

Later discussion centered around presenting data based on a university-state collaboration to the press. Issues such as who should present collaborative data to the public, and in what format it should be presented, was discussed. It was suggested that a series of briefings may be more effective than reports in presenting certain data.

Session 6

Dr. John Fluke, Director of Program Analysis and Research with the Children's Division of the American Humane Association and Dr. Ying-Ying Yuan, Vice-President and Director of Research with Walter R. McDonald & Associates presented jointly in Session 6 on using administrative data to measure child welfare outcomes.

Dr. Fluke and Dr. Yuan discussed projects that they had worked on together as well as individual projects that used administrative data.

Dr. Yuan stated that the technical environment has improved a lot over the last few years, however some of the states that they were working with had very limited technical capacity. With regard to the cultural environment, there has been increased interest in and audience for research using this type of data. The challenge today is to communicate this information to very different audiences who don't always "speak the language" of researchers who use administrative data.

Dr. Yuan went on to address some lessons learned in dealing with this type of data (and a summation of some of the previous presentations):

?? Do the best you can with what you've got

?? Don't give up

Dr. Fluke and Dr. Yuan presented data related to two themes: 1) the analyses of administrative data in helping to understand the patterns of a phenomena, and 2) the concept of simple to complex and complex to simple.

Dr. Fluke described one of their studies, funded by the Casey Foundation, where they developed a database of indicators. He stated that one of the big challenges of administrative data is to take an indicator that has been defined in relationship to the realities of a particular state and then operationalize it in some way. Part of the process is to determine a range of indicators to focus attention on, and figure out what the administrative data can tell us about them.

Dr. Yuan stated that in child welfare it is often not clear that the child is the unit of analysis. With child protective services, it is also possible that you can analyze at the report level. Reports can have more than one child and a child can be in more than one report. There are only eight states where "report" equals one child.

The issue of spells for services and targeting services to specific types of kids was raised.

Dr. Fluke and Dr. Yuan looked at the measure of substantiated child abuse victims, and asked the following questions: What is the baseline? What level of fluctuation can be expected? and What does the change mean? A common way to present these data is to compare the distributions of report dispositions of children between two years, in their case the years were 1990 and 1996. The distributions had not changed very much. Another way to look at the data is to see if the number of victims was related to the number of reports that were received in states. There were distinct patterns in some states. The percent change in number of victims between 1990-1996 was about 20%, up or down. One possible explanation of this change is related to the classification systems used in states. If states add a classification or delete one it can dramatically change the number of victims.

They also looked at comparing patterns of recurrence of substantiated abuse over time. One of the issues of choosing "national" indicators is the question of how comparable the phenomenon is across jurisdictions. Patterns of recurrence of substantiated abuse cases is comparable across states such that it is beginning to surface as a national measure. Another phenomenon that they looked at that was consistent across states was that if there was an indication of post-investigative services, then the probability of recurrence was always higher. Explanations for this could be that services are only offered for more serious cases or that there is more surveillance for the cases where there are services offered.

The Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) Evaluation was implemented in 1995 in Illinois. After it was implemented, recurrence rates went down in the state. A cross-state comparison was made to determine whether this was a unique phenomenon. In most of the other states that were examined, recurrence rates remained the same over the same time period. It was noted that in almost all the states, recurrence rates for neglect cases were higher than for any other types of maltreatment.

Another example of the use of administrative data was presented using adoption data. An evaluation of adoption reform is being conducted for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. In this study it was found that much adoption data remain unautomated. General observations include the finding that adoption rates for older children remained stable. In other words, age poses a difficult barrier to the adoption of children in the child welfare system.

In the discussion following the presentation the issue of terminology was discussed. The word "spell" was compared to the word "episode." In the health services, the word episode is used to explain the sequencing of different types of services a child may receive, for example out-patient or in-patient; or when a child enters a particular system or receives a particular treatment. The word "spell" is used in child welfare to describe similar events.

Session 7

Dr. Lynn Usher, Kuralt Professor of Public Welfare in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill presented Session 7 on using administrative data to evaluate child welfare reforms.

Dr. Usher began his presentation with an overview of the differences between evaluating social experiments and evaluating reform initiatives. He explained that most social experiments are federally sponsored while most reform initiatives are foundation sponsored. Most social experiments are targeted tests of very specific interventions whereas reform initiatives by their nature have saturation effects. To a great extent, social experimentation involves tweaking technology as opposed to the multifaceted bundles of interventions that are associated with reform initiatives. The model in social experimentation is replication across similar communities. In contrast the model in reform initiatives is fundamentally community-based. There is an attempt to invoke communities as part of the intervention. With social experiments the focus is on changing individual behavior, whereas reform initiatives seek to improve outcomes for families and

communities. This is a very different context in which to work. It flies in the face of a lot of conventions regarding program evaluation

The difficulties with using administrative data in evaluating reform initiatives is, as was discussed in earlier presentations, the lack of good data on families. We have more data on communities, but not very good information on families..

The following five areas are a beginning point for the type of information that is necessary to monitor and perhaps evaluate performance in child welfare:

?? Preventing repeated substantiated incidents of abuse and neglect

?? Protecting children from abuse and neglect but avoiding placement authority

?? The quality of children's experiences in out of home care

- Restrictiveness of care

- Placement stability

- Length of stay

- Avoiding entry to the backlog

- Permanent placement

- Re-entry to care

?? Progress toward adoption, for appropriate cases

?? Caseload dynamics

- Children entering care for the first time

- Children re-entering care

- Children leaving care

- Children remaining in care

Dr. Usher reviewed a sample report from North Carolina that showed the experiences of children entering child welfare custody in North Carolina between the years of 1993-1997. The report categories included: patterns of initial placements, the length of time in custody/placement authority, the length of time in licensed care, disruptions in care, and rates of re-entry. The data presented in the report provided three aggregations of results, one for the sample county and, by way of comparison, a second for similar counties in the state and a third for the state as a whole.

This report represents the type of information state officials are trying to feed back to each of the 100 counties in North Carolina addressing the quality of the care that is being provided to children in out of home care.. Initially Dr. Usher's department produced the information for them, but the state now has the capacity to produce this information on its own .

Dr. Usher also described a study in Cleveland regarding placement patterns and pathways. He discussed the case of children who are placed with relatives, from a 1993 cohort. They checked

records in December 1996 and looked to see who was still in care. For almost 80% of the cohort that came into care and were initially placed with relatives, that was their only living arrangement in the record. About 5% went from that relative to another relative, and an even smaller percent went from that relative to an agency foster home or to a private foster home. It is important to note that most children placed with relatives are not having to deal with multiple placements. This type of data allows child welfare officials to focus on children who bounce around in care to see what their issues are.

When states are ready to make changes to their system, these problem areas are the place to start. In North Carolina, and in other states, they are using county-level self-evaluation teams to monitor performance in each area.

Session 8

Dr. Rosemary Avery, Associate Professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University, presented in session 8 on foster care histories of children freed for adoption in New York State.

Dr. Avery described her research using New York State administrative data to look at the foster care histories of children freed for adoption. She received seed money from the Children's Bureau to begin her research 10 years ago, in 1989. Dr. Avery described the difficulties she faced in getting access to the data. The state data were not computerized and had to be transcribed. The benefit was that she had to get down to the individual level of the child.

One of the first things she and her staff looked at was subsidized adoptions. One of the significant findings regarding subsidized adoptions was that 47% of all children in New York State were adopted by single parents. In the next stage of the project they wanted to find out more information about these single parent adoption. From March 1992 to March 1993 they contacted all private and public adoption agencies in New York state and asked them to have adoptive parents fill out a questionnaire on a voluntary basis. The questions were translated into Spanish and in some cases interpreters were used. The process was difficult, but they got tremendous cooperation from agencies. They got about 258 families to fill out the questionnaires. The likelihood that children were adopted into families that already had either biological or foster children was very high. Family size for adoptive families was much larger than the average family in their county. Also, there was a high rate of siblings being adopted into the same family at different phases.

The goals of this work was to construct a data set with a which an event history analysis could be conducted. She obtained a data tape containing information on every child in New York State who had ever been freed for adoption before July 1993. The data arrived without a codebook and it took two years to generate a codebook for the data, and another year to clean the data. Missing information was a big problem, but she had to work with what she had gotten. After getting this data set, she also collected as much data on the county level as possible.

Between 1980 and 1993 in New York State, 30,712 children were freed for adoption. Over half (53%) were male and 47% were female. Thirty-seven percent were white, 47% were black, 2.8% were of mixed race, and 12.5 % were other. Adoption and foster care in NYS is a New York City phenomenon, with about 67% taking place in New York City. Another area of interest, was special needs adoption and subsidy eligibility. Of all the children in the sample over the period, 24% were never eligible, which means that by the time they exited the system or had a case closing, they had never been approved for a subsidy. About 22% of their sample were handicapped and about 34% were hard to place.

Dr. Avery also wanted to look at how long kids stay in the system, experiences they have in the system, and when they exit. The foster care caseload is getting younger over time; by race, mixed race kids enter at younger ages, black and white children follow a similar pattern. In terms of duration, mean age of coming in, and mean age of case closing, from 1986 onward, shows kids spending increasing time in care. Babies get adopted very quickly. Children aged 2-5 years take a lot longer, and are a particularly vulnerable population.

Dr. Avery also described a collaborative project she hopes to work on with two other Cornell professors, Dr. Eckenrode and Dr. Liz Peters, to look the impact of welfare reform (PRWORA) on child welfare statistics. The three areas of interest are: the number of children served, the composition of Child Protective Services, Foster Care and Adoption caseloads, and the quality of services. They plan to use four sources of data, including: Administrative data in child welfare, the Adoption and Foster Care Automated Reporting System (AFCARS), the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) project on state-level child outcomes.

Session 9

Dr. Dick Wertheimer, Senior Research Associate with Child Trends, a non-profit research organization in Washington, D.C., presented in the ninth session on disseminating administrative data to policy makers and the public.

Dr. Wertheimer presented guidelines for presenting appropriate administrative data to policy makers and the general public. He addressed three key issues:

?? Why should administrative data be presented to policy makers and the public?

?? Deciding if a particular set of administrative data is suitable for presentation

?? Elements of an effective presentation

With regard to why administrative data should be presented to policy makers and the general public, Dr. Wertheimer stated three reasons:

?? To increase awareness about public issues

- ?? To document efforts made by government to address an issue (accountability)
- ?? To report progress made as a result of governmental activities (outcomes)

As an example, Dr. Wertheimer stated that administrative data can inform the public about how many children are reported as victims of maltreatment, and can answer more specific questions about such things as the types of maltreatment and the age of victims. Administrative data can also address issues such as how states compare on these statistics and what state governments are doing to address the issue, e.g., number of investigations and services provided to victims. Administrative data can also provide information on the progress resulting from government efforts, such as time trends for either reported, substantiated, or indicated cases of maltreatment; distributions of children by length of stay in substitute care; and the ratio of adoption to children eligible for adoption. Dr. Wertheimer added that very often you can do a much better job of saying how well the system is working than you can say about how well the child is doing.

With regard to deciding if a data set is suitable for presentation, Dr. Wertheimer stated that there are three things to consider:

- ?? The properties of the data
- ?? The level of sophistication of the audience
- ?? The medium of presentation

The properties of the data that are important are comprehensiveness, accuracy, and consistency. Reporting errors, the sophistication of the database system, and database system changes over time all come into play here as well. Quality control issues are also relevant.

The sophistication of the audience is also an important consideration. You can not expect a general audience to grasp the subtleties of measurement issues. A question to ask is whether or not the issues can be addressed simply and briefly. Audiences often want to construct rankings--sometimes rankings are not appropriate and could result in misinterpretation of data. With regard to medium of presentation, Dr. Wertheimer stated that broadcast media are good for making conclusions but not explaining detailed content. Publications and websites are more flexible.

With regard to making an effective presentation, Dr. Wertheimer stated that the presenter should use text to explain the importance of the topic and place it in its context. He also stated that using multiple communication techniques are helpful--some people really respond to graphics but you want to keep graphics simple. The level of detail should be geared to the sophistication level of the audience.

Dr. Wertheimer reviewed the following points at the end of his presentation:

- ?? Effective presentations of administrative data can increase awareness of the public, document governmental action, and provide information on outcomes regarding what the government has done.

?? Not all administrative data are appropriate for presentation, and presentations must be appropriate to the audience

In the discussion following the presentation concern was raised about simplifying presentations to certain audiences too much so that not enough of the story gets told. Sometimes simplifying too much can be misleading. In response Dr. Wertheimer stated that if the presentation can't be made at a higher level so that the audience can understand more of the story than maybe that presentation should not be made. Another point was made that the use of mapping can be effective to convey sophisticated concepts in a fairly simple way to a wide audience.

Session 10

Dr. John Eckenrode, Director of the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), and Professor of Human Development at Cornell University presented in Session 10 with Patrick Collins, Project Director of the NDACAN, on the topic of secondary analysis of administrative data and the role of archives.

Dr. Eckenrode stated that he would like the session to function more as a discussion and would specifically like feedback on the role of an archive. He explained that NDACAN is a small organization with the core mission of obtaining and archiving data. More researchers are being required to archive their data and NDACAN will have to build its capacity to keep up with those demands in the future.

The archive sees itself as more than a passive repository of data. Archive staff would like to provide assistance to users as they can, and also try to market and promote the data through publications and meetings such as this one. The archive also has a networking function. There are other things that could be done if there were more resources. Administrative data is becoming a more important piece as more of this type of data comes to the archive.

Dr. Eckenrode stated that the archive would like to be more involved in the analysis and reporting of administrative data. One of the archive's goals is to get better research out there with administrative data. The question is how to do this with the complexities and nuances about administrative data, many that were raised and discussed during the conference. Dr. Eckenrode questioned what we should be doing as an archive over the next few years so that we are better prepared to deal with these issues and assist those doing secondary analyses with administrative data from our archive.

Mr. Collins discussed the following issues regarding data archiving:

?? A website is not a data archive

?? Metadata standards are the key to the future (metadata is data about data--the names, labels, and codings of variables to construct a data set)

?? Confidentiality is one of the biggest problems we have

A universal metadata system is necessary. Now, many different agencies and centers that deal with this type of data have different systems that use different metadata. The ideal would be one metadata file that would have everything from the title of the study, to the PI, to the abstract, all the metadata necessary to read the file, to do crosstabs, to look at each element of the codebook, etc.

The issue of confidentiality is a problem because although there are not currently cases we can point to where trouble started over a breach of confidentiality, people are very afraid of it happening and are constantly protecting against the unknown.

There are different ways that confidentiality can be protected. Our archive controls access to data and uses a terms of use agreement.

Mr. Collins also discussed the role of archiving in promoting research with administrative data. With regard to dissemination he emphasized the following:

?? Controlling access to the data and using terms of use agreements

?? Educating users about administrative data and supporting their use of the data through expanded documentation and trainings

?? Protecting confidentiality

With regard to policy considerations, Mr. Collins stated the need to:

?? Provide feedback to improve information systems

?? Encourage release of data to research community

With regard to technical considerations, he stressed the following:

?? Promote standards for data, metadata, and documentation

?? Build combined datasets from multiple releases

?? Crosswalk data from multiple sources

In the discussion following the session, the issue of storing the state-level data that is being expunged each year was raised. This information provides a history and it would be good to preserve it, as long as confidentiality can be assured. Others felt it would be unrealistic to store this quantity of data because of the cost involved. Perhaps a consortium of states and universities could be used.

The question was raised about who owns archived data. It was stated that this debate is not about confidentiality concerns so much as over who has control of the data. Another point was that the

important issue with regard to archived data is ease of access and level of sophistication. Even with documentation and manuals, we still can't guarantee how people will use the data.

The issue of sampling selection bias was raised. It is the responsibility of the archive to understand these biases. The manuals for the data in the archive provide technical information about these types of issues, but this can't ensure that people are using the data responsibly. The archive requests that users submit a report to the PI by way of a check, but people can't be forced to do this. We can't force people to do this but we encourage it. With a peer review process, would there be special considerations regarding administrative data? How can we ease the concerns of states? The suggestion was made to set up some sort of IRB for archiving.

It was also suggested that it may be a good idea to add something to the documentation to the effect that administrative data is dynamic and changes over time. What sort of model could be used to update the data and send it to those using the data?

Models to open access to the data were discussed. Developing a consortium of centers was mentioned, as was establishing a "virtual" archive. Moving toward a standardization of how administrative databases are tackled would be an advance to the field.

With regard to feedback on the meeting itself, the participants liked the small group format and felt that the meeting was beneficial for them.

It was suggested that a summary of issues raised at the meeting, including the archiving issues would be interesting to see. It was also suggested that a description of what administrative data is good for and what it is not good for at a more advanced level would be useful.

It was suggested that the participants of the meeting keep in touch and share the work they are doing.

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