VOLUNTARY COOPERATIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM (VCIS) MULTI-YEAR FILE (1982-1995)

NDACAN Dataset Number 247
USER'S GUIDE

National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

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PREFACE

The data for *Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS) Multi-Year File (1982-1995)* have been given to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) for public distribution by American Public Human Service Association (formerly American Public Welfare Association). Funding for the project was provided by Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Award Number(s): Not applicable).

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Authors should acknowledge the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) and the original collector(s) of the data when publishing manuscripts that use data provided by the Archive. Users of these data are urged to follow some adaptation of the statement below.

> The data used in this publication were made available by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, and have been used with permission. Data from *Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS) Multi-Year File (1982-1995)* were originally collected by: American Public Human Service Association (formerly American Public Welfare Association (APWA)). Funding for the project was provided by Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Award Number(s): Not applicable). The collector(s) of the original data, the funder(s), NDACAN, Cornell University and their agents or employees bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

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PUBLICATION SUBMISSION REQUIREMENT

In accordance with the terms of the *Data License* for this dataset, users of these data are required to notify the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect of any published work or report based wholly or in part on these data. A copy of any completed manuscript, thesis abstract, or reprint should be emailed to NDACANsupport@cornell.edu . Such copies will be used to provide our funding agency with essential information about the use of NDACAN resources and to facilitate the exchange of information about research activities among data users and contributors.

ABSTRACT

The Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS) compiled aggregate information about children who experienced substitute care in the United States between 1982 and 1995. Substitute care data were collected voluntarily by the American Public Welfare Association (APWA) from state agencies administering public child welfare programs. VCIS data are annual state-level counts of children entering, in, and exiting substitute care, tabulated by various child attributes such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, or duration of care. The VCIS therefore provides a basis for both cross-sectional and longitudinal state-level analysis, including through linkage to aggregated data from its successor, the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting and Analysis System (AFCARS).

However, VCIS data have significant limitations in terms of availability and reliability, and users are strongly encouraged to read the User Guide carefully before using the data.

STUDY OVERVIEW

Study Identification

Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS) Multi-Year File (1982-1995)

Original Investigator(s):

American Public Human Service Association (formerly American Public Welfare Association)

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Funded By:
Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Award Number(s):
Not applicable

Purpose of the Study

Research objectives for the study:

- Understand the prevalence among children of entering, being in, and exiting substitute care.
- Understand the demographic attributes of children experiencing substitute care, such as their age, sex, and race/ethnicity.
- Understand aspects of the experience of children in substitute care, such as place of residence and duration of care.

Study Design

Voluntary administrative survey.

Date(s) of Data Collection

1982–1995

Geographic Area

United States, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands.

Unit of Observation

State–year. The District of Columbia and U.S. territories are referred to as states.

Sample

Children in substitute care. The VCIS defines substitute care as being under the supervision of a public welfare agency and living in a relative or non-relative foster home, pre-adoptive home, group home, child care and emergency facility, or supervised independent living arrangement, or having run away from foster care without also exiting care by reaching age of majority.

Data Collection Procedures

The American Public Welfare Association (APWA) administered an annual voluntary survey to state agencies administering public child welfare programs. The original VCIS data-gathering instrument contained three parts. Part I contained questions about children in substitute care. Part II contained questions about adoptions. Part III contained questions about expenditures. Only Part I is included in this study.

The APWA did not maintain VCIS data. Data were recovered from computerized files previously made available by APWA to academic researchers. NDACAN gratefully acknowledges Christopher Swann, Joseph Doyle, and John Vogel for providing VCIS data and documentation. NDACAN accepts responsibility for any remaining errors.

Response Rates

Of the 742 state–years covered by the VCIS's historical range and geographic area, 713 state–years (96.1%) contain reported information about children in substitute care. Of the 90,524 state–year–variable cells covered by the VCIS (excluding state and year identifiers), 36,457 cells in the Raw File are observed (i.e. reported), and 32,281 cells in the Clean File are observed (i.e. reported and not suppressed).

Sources of Information

State agencies administering public child welfare programs.

Type of Data Collected

Administrative survey.

Measures

Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS)

Tatara, T. (1983). "VCIS Data Gathering Instrument for Public Child Welfare Services." Appendix A in *Characteristics of Children in Substitute and Adoptive Care: A Statistical Summary of the VCIS National Child Welfare Data Base*. Washington, DC: American Public Welfare Association. Available from: https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/gateway/Record?r=1&rpp=25&upp=0 &w=NATIVE%28%27SIMPLE_SRCH+ph+is+%27%27VCIS%27%27%27%29&m=46& order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29&

Related Publications and Final Reports

Users are strongly encouraged to review published works, based upon these data, before doing analyses. To view a complete list of publications for this dataset, please visit our online citations collection called "canDL" at: or go to the child abuse and neglect Digital Library (canDL) NDACAN webpage.

Analytic Considerations

VCIS data provide a basis for both cross-sectional and longitudinal state-level analysis of children in substitute care. **However, the data have significant limitations that users are strongly urged to consider before conducting analyses:**

- Reliability: There are several issues that limit the reliability of VCIS data. Users should consider carefully which issues are pertinent to their analytic goals, whether making comparisons across states, within states across years, or by linking VCIS data to other sources. Users are strongly encouraged to review detailed analyses of VCIS reliability listed in the Related Publications and Reports section.
    - Reporting period definition: Some states did not comply with the data-gathering instrument's definition of the reporting period, and some states changed compliance over the period of the study.
    - Population definition: Some states did not comply with the data-gathering instrument's definition of substitute care, and some states changed compliance over the period of the study. Many states did not report their compliance with the instrument.
    - Variable definitions: Based on NDACAN analysis of VCIS data, states appear to have used varying definitions of certain categories, such as ethnoracial categories or categories of reasons for entering substitute care. In these cases, NDACAN has recoded or suppressed specific values or entire Variables as appropriate to maintain reliability. See the Extent of Processing section in this User Guide and

Details section in Codebook entries corresponding to affected Variables and Variable Groups.

- o Unobserved variation: Even in the case of compliance with the data-gathering instrument, VCIS data may obscure underlying qualitative variation across states, years, or groups. **Users should take particular care in making inferences from data on sensitive and/or historically marginalized populations, including but not limited to American Indian/Alaska Native children, Black children, and children with disabilities.**

- Small cell sizes: Most VCIS Variables are counts of children having certain attributes. Cells corresponding to certain combinations of attributes (e.g. Children Entering Care, American Indian/Alaska Native, Rhode Island, 1983) contain no or very few children. Users should exercise caution in making inferences based on the analysis of small numbers of children.
- Missing data: The VCIS was a voluntary data collection system, and not all state child welfare agencies provided data in each year. As a result, the calculation of any national-level statistics from VCIS data requires appropriate procedures for handling missing data. Moreover, longitudinal analyses of VCIS data should use appropriate methods for unbalanced panels.
- Unknown values: In addition to unreported and suppressed data, VCIS Variable Groups frequently contain Variables counting children with unknown values of a given attribute (e.g. Children In Care, Age Unknown). Analyses of Variable Groups in state–years where unknown Variables have non-zero counts of children should use appropriate missing data methods; inferences cannot be responsibly drawn directly from known values.

Additionally, the Data Files acquired by NDACAN contain a number of anomalous values. Examples include implausible values or values that do not sum to other reported values. NDACAN has released two versions of the VCIS: the Raw File and the Clean File. The Raw File is minimally processed by NDACAN, and includes all anomalies. The Clean File modifies and suppresses anomalous values to report data that NDACAN believes are suitable for analysis. The Clean File should therefore be used for almost all analyses. **The Raw File should only be used to investigate data quality on a case-by-case basis.** In the Clean File, suppressed data have informative suppression codes corresponding to negative numeric values. **Users need to recode negative (suppressed) values in the Clean File before conducting any tabulation or statistical analysis.**

Confidentiality Protection

The dataset underwent a confidentiality review by NDACAN and it was determined that no recodes were necessary. There are no primary or secondary identifiers in the dataset.

Extent of Collection

This collection consists of the User Guide, Codebook, and two data files (Raw and Clean Files) formatted to be used in SPSS, SAS, Stata, spreadsheet programs, or R.

Extent of Processing

NDACAN acquired multiple files containing VCIS data and combined them to produce the Raw File. NDACAN then cleaned the Raw File to produce the Clean File. This involved four basic types of alteration:

1. Values that were determined to be located in the wrong cell were relocated, and their erroneous location was recoded as not reported.
2. Erroneous values whose true value could be ascertained were recoded as true values.
3. Erroneous or uncertain values whose true value could not be ascertained were recoded as suppressed (-1, Value Suppressed).
4. Values of categories (e.g. reasons for entering care) whose meanings were determined to be highly unreliable across states and/or years were recoded as suppressed (-2, Category Suppressed). Values from suppressed categories were reassigned to Other categories within Variable Groups. One Variable Group, "Children in Care, by Parental Rights Status," is entirely suppressed (-3, Variable group suppressed).

NDACAN produced the User Guide and Code Book (this file).

DATA FILE INFORMATION

File Specifications

This dataset contains two data files, the Raw File and the Clean File. Both files contain 742 observations (rows) of 127 variables (columns).

The Raw (vcis_raw) and Clean Files (vcis_clean) are available in the following file formats: SAS (.sas7bdat), SPSS (.sav), Stata (.dta), comma-separated values (.csv), and also import statements for reading the text data file (.dat) into SPSS (.sps), SAS (.sas), and Stata (.do). Comma-separated values files (vcis_raw.csv and vcis_clean.csv) contain variable (column) names in the first row. Files formatted for SPSS, SAS, and Stata contain variable labels.

Data File Notes

The Clean File is recommended for all analytic uses involving multiple states or multiple years. The Raw File is included for reference, and is likely to be most useful to users (i) seeking to understand the nature and extent of NDACAN processing of data, or (ii) seeking to identify particular suppressed quantities for particular state–years. See Extent of Processing for details about differences between the Raw and Clean Files.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

The following abbreviations and acronyms are used in this document:

AFCARS- Adoption and Foster Care Reporting and Analysis System

APWA - American Public Welfare Association who is now known as the American Public Human Service Association

canDL-child abuse and neglect Digital Library

NDACAN- National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

U.S.- United States

VCIS- Voluntary Cooperative Information System

Technical support for this dataset is provided by NDACAN.
Please send your inquiries to NDACANsupport@cornell.edu