NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT DATA SYSTEM (NCANDS) CHILD FILE FFY 2020

NDACAN Dataset Number 253

USER'S GUIDE

NATIONAL DATA ARCHIVE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT DATA SYSTEM (NCANDS) CHILD FILE, FFY 2020

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National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

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National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect
in collaboration with NCANDS Technical Team --
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PREFACE

The data for National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, FFY 2020, have been given to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect for public distribution by the Children's Bureau. Funding for the project was provided by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SOURCE

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

> *The analyses presented in this publication were based on data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, FFY 2020. These data were provided by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, and have been used with permission. The data were originally collected under the auspices of the Children's Bureau. Funding was provided by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The collector of the original data, the funding agency, NDACAN, Duke University, Cornell University, and the agents or employees of these institutions bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. The information and opinions expressed reflect solely the opinions of the authors.*

The bibliographic citation for this data collection is:

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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 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File dataset consists of child-specific data of all investigated reports of maltreatment to State child protective service agencies. The NCANDS is a federally-sponsored annual national data collection effort created for the purpose of tracking the volume and nature of child maltreatment reporting. The Child File is the case-level component of the NCANDS. There is also an NCANDS State-level component, known as the Agency File, but those data are not part of this collection. States participate on a voluntary basis and submit their data after going through a process in which the state's administrative system is mapped to the NCANDS data structure. Submitted data consist of all investigations or assessments of alleged child maltreatment that received a disposition in the reporting year. Records are provided at the level of each child on a report, also known as the report-child pair. Data elements include the demographics of children and their perpetrators, types of maltreatment, investigation or assessment dispositions, risk factors, and services provided as a result of the investigation or assessment.

STUDY OVERVIEW

STUDY IDENTIFICATION

National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, FFY 2020

Principal Investigator: Children's Bureau; Administration on Children, Youth and Families

Funding Agency: Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The NCANDS is a child abuse and neglect reporting program based on state participation. The NCANDS was designed in response to the Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption and Family Services Act of 1988 which created Section 6 of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and required the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) to establish a national data collection and analysis program on child maltreatment. The Act stated in part that:

> *The Secretary shall, through the Center--(1) as a part of research activities, establish a national data collection and analysis program which, to the extent practical, coordinates existing State child abuse and neglect reports and which shall include---(A) standardized data on false, unfounded, or unsubstantiated reports; and (B) information on the number of deaths due to child abuse and neglect.*

CAPTA as amended in May 1992 retained these provisions and added requirements in Section 105, part 1(b) that NCCAN establish a program:

> *… which shall collect, compile, analyze and make available State child abuse and neglect reporting information which, to the extent practical, is universal and case specific, and integrated with other case-based foster care and adoption data collected by the Secretary.*

As a result, NCANDS has become the primary source of national information on abused and neglected children reported to State child protective service agencies. Findings from the NCANDS data are published by the Children's Bureau each year in its Child Maltreatment report series.

STUDY DESIGN

States submit two datasets to the NCANDS system: The ***Child File***, which is released in this data collection, is the most comprehensive. It includes case-level data on all children who have received a disposition of an investigation or

assessment of allegations of maltreatment during the reporting year. The ***Agency File*** collects aggregated, state-level, data on items that have been requested by the CAPTA legislation that are not able to be collected at the case level. States that submit the Child File also submit the Agency File.

DATE(S) OF DATA COLLECTION

Federal fiscal year: Oct 1, 2019 through Sep 30, 2020

GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Fifty states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico submitted data to the FY2020 NCANDS Child File.

UNIT OF OBSERVATION

The unit of observation in the Child File is the report-child combination (R/C pair). A child identifier (ChID) may appear on more than one record because the child could be included on more than one report. A report identifier (RptID) may repeat, because there will be a separate record for each child on the report. However, no two records will have the same ReportID/ChildID pair within the same year.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

State participation in Child File data collection consists of mapping each requested State data element into the Child File record layout, extracting the State data into the Child File record layout, and submitting the case level data to NCANDS.

In the first process, the State Mapping Process, the state receives the "Guidelines and Procedures for Submitting Data to NCANDS" document. States may collect data using different concept and category definitions, variables collected, variable names, and valid values. Thus, it is necessary for each state to map (convert) data, including codes, from the state's computer system into the standard record layout of NCANDS. Using the Guidelines, the state performs this State Mapping Process for the Child File. This activity, done during the Data Mapping Meetings, help to unify the coding structures of states and to enhance data consistency across states that are submitting NCANDS data. The Technical Assistance and Map Review process is provided by the NCANDS Technical Team to assist the state in its mapping activities. The goal of technical assistance is a state annual data submission that passes all NCANDS validation checks.

Upon completion of the State Mapping Process, the state moves into the next three integrated processes: State Data Submission, NCANDS Validation of Data Submission, and the Technical Assistance Review of Data. In the State Mapping Process, the state uses the completed mapping forms as specifications and writes its data extraction computer program to transfer the data from the state's database into the Child File. The file is created by the state for the given year and is submitted to NCANDS. During the State Data Submission process, the NCANDS

Technical Team continues to provide assistance to states regarding decisions about the use of unique identifiers, record construction, and quality of data, as needed.

When the data set is received by the Chilren's Bureau, the NCANDS Validation of Data Submission and the Technical Assistance Review of Data processes begin. The NCANDS Technical Team validates and reviews the data, and provides the state with feedback about the data quality. This cycle of data submission, review, and assistance may go through several iterations before the final data set is ready.

Once the data submission and review activities are complete, the State Submission of Year's Final Data Set process occurs. The NCANDS Technical Team reviews and validates the final submission and then proceeds with the analysis activities for all of the States.

Once all these proceses are completed the state files are sent as a package to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect for further processing and public distribution.

Sources of Information

States extract case-level data from their child welfare information systems for submission to NCANDS. All reports reaching a disposition date, (i.e. the report is completed) in a given year are mapped to the NCANDS data elements and included in the submission. Note that the determining date for entry of the case into a data year is when the report is closed, not the data of the incident or the date the incident was reported.

Type of Data Collected

NCANDS Child File data consist of extractions from state administrative records.

Related Publications & Reports

Users are strongly encouraged to obtain these references before doing analyses:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2020). *Child Maltreatment 2020*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Please note that states may have updated their data since the publication of Child Maltreatment. As a result, summaries of the Child File data in this collection may not agree with the tabular data presented in the published report.

Analytic Considerations

When conducting analyses with NCANDS data, it is important to keep in mind that state-to-state variation in child maltreatment laws and information systems may affect the interpretation of the data. Users are encouraged to refer to the state mapping documents included on the data CD for information about how the state's

system codes its data.

Report and Child Identification Codes

Records in the Child File are often referred to as report-child pairs, because each individual record in a state's Child File can be identified through reference to two identification variables, the Report ID (RptID) and the Child ID (ChID). When there are multiple children in a report, each child in the report is assigned the same Report ID. Similarly, if a child appears in multiple reports, each report for that child contains the same unique Child ID. When working beyond the state level, include the state identifier when grouping or counting individual records.

There are, however, a few caveats to consider when using the Child ID to match different reports within the Child file. A state's laws and data processing capabilities may sometimes limit the ability to match children to previous reports. This limitation is most commonly observed in unsubstantiated reports where a state's laws may prohibit the archiving of data that identifies these children or families. As a result, the use of the Child ID to identify children in multiple reports should be limited to reports where the maltreatment was substantiated or indicated. The inability to identify the same child in multiple reports might also occur in states with county-based data collection systems if records cannot be referenced across counties.

Aggregating the Data by Report or Child

Although the data may include multiple entries for a given report or child, these data can be aggregated into a file that contains only one entry per report or one entry per child. For example, a file of unique reports that describe characteristics of the report can be created. Such characteristics might include the date or the disposition of the report. Summary charactistics for children can also be reduced to the report level, such as the total number of children or the age of the youngest and oldest children. Conversely, a file of unique children can be created that contains a count of the number of reports in which a child was included or the type(s) of maltreatment associated with the respective reports.

State Classification of the Disposition of Investigations

The disposition of each investigation depends on the classification system used by the participating state. Most states use a two-tier system that categorizes an allegation as substantiated or unsubstantiated. Some states use a three-tier system that includes a third category, indicated. In these states, maltreatment is indicated if there is sufficient reason to suspect that the child may have been maltreated or is at risk of maltreatment, but the case does not meet the level of evidence required by state law to substantiate the allegation.

A small number of states have diversified systems that do not fit into the two and three tier disposition categories. To accommodate these states, NCANDS uses two additional disposition codes, known as Alternative Response-Victim and Alternative Response-Nonvictim. Only states with a diversified system use these codes.

For analytic purposes, NCANDS considers children who have been assigned the Substantiated or Indicated codes (MalLev 1 or 2) to be victims of maltreatment.

Maltreatment Disposition Versus Report Disposition

On a Child File record, dispositions of substantiated, indicated, unsubstantiated, etc. can be assigned for up to four different allegations of maltreatment. For example, if physical abuse and neglect are alleged, either one, both, or neither one may substantiated.

An overall disposition for the report is also assigned and applies to all children on the report, regardless of the disposition of an individual child's allegations. The disposition of a report will correspond to the highest level of any of the allegations for any of the children on the report. For example, if a report has three children, and only one allegation for one child was substantiated, the report disposition is substantiated for all three children, even though no allegation is substantiated for two of them. More succinctly, for a given record, the fact that the Report is substantiated does not mean the child is a victim. Only if all the allegations for all the children on the report are unsubstantiated is the report disposition coded as unsubstantiated.

Maltreatment Coding

As mentioned above, up to four sets of maltreatment allegations and disposition levels can be assigned for each child on a report. There is no prescribed order in which the maltreatment elements appear on the data record and any maltreatment type can fall in any of the four sets. However, no maltreatment type can be repeated within a given record. In other words, a child cannot have more than one allegation of, say, physical abuse in the same report.

Using multiple years of the child file

When analyzing more than one year at a time, be aware that although a ReportID/ChildID combination will not repeat within a data year, it can repeat across years. These are cases where there is a second or subsequent disposition, due to an appeal or some other reason. Since inclusion in a partcular year's NCANDS file is based on the disposiiton date, the later date can sometimes cause the case to be included in a subsequent Child File year. When removing such duplicates, choose the case with the most recent disposition date (RpDispDt).

Attempting to track the Child File history of a particular child is possible if the state uses the encrypted Child ID consistently. This is usually the case, but there are exceptions. Conact NDACAN (NDACANSupport@Cornell.edu) if you want further information about which states use Chid ID consistently for which years.

Double-Encryption of Identifiers

As of December, 2016, the Children's Bureau will re-encrypt all identifiers in the Chld File (Child ID, Report ID, Perpetrator IDs). The pupose of this step is to ensure that all IDs are encrypted to protect anonymity of individuals. Prior to initiating this

step, data for states that did not certify that their identifiers had been encrypted were not distributed in the publically-available Child File. This second encryption allows data from all states to be released, provided that they submit data.

Given that the second encryption will result in a break in the ability to link IDs across years, the Chilren's Bureau re-encrypted the IDs in all Child Files going back to 2002, which was the last year that the CF was submitted on a calendar year basis before changing to a Federal Fiscal Year reporing cycle in 2003. Files in the NDACAN archive reflect this

Note: The Children's Bureau did not re-encrypt the AFCARS IDs, because doing so would prevent researchers from linking NCANDS Child Files with AFCARS and NYTD on this common identifier.

OTHER DATA QUALITY ISSUES

CHILD IDS WITH AN UNLIKELY NUMBER OF REPORTS

You will encounter Child IDs that seem to have an inordinate number of appearances in the data. Puerto Rico is particularly problemmatic in this regard, not having developed a method for assuring that an ID has not already been used. For other instances, the problem usually confined to those states that use dummy Child IDs for cases where the identity of the child cannot be determined (Iowa, Montana, Utah). Occasionally, there is a legitimately high number of reports for the same child.

MULTIPLE REPORTS ON THE SAME DAY

There are cases with multiple reports on the same day for the same child, often with the same report source, report disposition, maltreatment type, etc. The vast majority – but not all – are substantially duplicate records. Such duplicates have not been deleted from the file.

CONFIDENTIALITY PROTECTIONS

All ID variables submitted to the NCANDS have been encrypted by the states to prevent tracing a Child File record back to the record in the state's child welfare information system.

To further protect the confidentiality of the individuals in the Child File, the following targeted modifications were made to the data:

1. Five variables -- the child's date of birth, the child's county of residence, Worker ID, Supervisor ID, and Incident Date -- are dropped from the distributable Child File and are not available to the research community.

NOTE: Prior to the FY2010 Child File, AFCARS ID was not included in the publicly-available dataset. Beginning with the FY2010 Child File, and for updated versions of older datasets, the AFCARS ID is included in the publically-available data file.

2. For records involving a fatality (i.e. MALDEATH = 1), the records are kept in the distributable file, but the values for state (STATERR), county of report (RPTCNTY), and the ID variables for the report (RPTID), the child (CHID, AFCARSID), and the perpetrators (PER1ID, PER2ID, PER3ID) are recoded to mask the information.

3. If there are fewer than 1,000 records for a given county of report, the value for that variable (RPTCNTY) is recoded to mask the information.

4. The report date (RPTDT) variable has been recoded so that days 1-15 round to the 8th of the month and days 16-31 round to the 23rd. As a result, the dates in RPTDT all fall on either Day 8 or Day 23 of the month.

5. All other dates (INVDATE, RPDISPDT, SERVDATE, RMVDATE, FCDschDt, and PETDATE) in the distributable Child File have been adjusted so that the interval between that date and the report date is preserved even after the report date has been rounded to either the 8th or the 23rd of the month, as described in item #4 above.

6. The child's age (CHAGE) is top-coded so that any value greater than or equal to age 23 is assigned to an "23 or older" code.

7. Perpetrator age (PER1AGE, PER2AGE, PER3AGE) is top-coded to "75 or older" and bottom-coded to "6 or under."

8. If there are a very small number of records at the county level (RPTCNTY) with a particular race or Hispanic ethnicity, the race and ethnicity information for the individual is masked. For example, if there is only one Hawaiian or Pacific Islander child in Renkford County, SC, all the race and ethnicity variables for that child will be recoded to Unknown.

Description of Collection

The Collection consistes of the NCANDS Child File data in several formats: SAS, SPSS, and Stata native files, and a tab-delimited text file for use by other programs. See the ReadMe text file in the downloaded zip folder for more details about the contents of the collection.

Extent of NDACAN Processing

NDACAN produced the User's Guide and Codebook and completed the modifications to the data necessary for protecting child and perpetrator confidentiality. One variable, *RptVictim*, was created by NDACAN.

DATA FILE INFORMATION

DATA FILE NOTES

The perpetrator fields are populated for those records associated with a substantiated, indicated, or alternative response-victim report. For reports where no victimization was determined, the values for the perpetrator fields are missing.

The Pennsylvania reporting system is child-based, meaning that each report has only one child. In other states, children who are subjects of the same investigation share the same report ID, but in Pennsylvania, this is not the case.