WELCOME TO THE 2024 NDACAN SUMMER TRAINING SERIES!

- The session will begin at 12pm EST.

- Please submit questions to the Q&A box.

- This session is being recorded.

NDACAN SUMMER TRAINING SERIES: BEST PRACTICES IN THE USE OF NDACAN DATA

National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

Cornell University & Duke University

AFCARS: STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS

JULY 24, 2024

NDACAN

Children's Bureau
An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

NDACAN SUMMER TRAINING SERIES SCHEDULE

July 10 — NCANDS: Strengths & Limitations

July 17 — Assessing Reporting Issues in NCANDS & AFCARS

July 24 — AFCARS: Strengths & Limitations

July 31 — Survey Design & Using Weights

August 7 — NSCAW III for Experienced & New Users

August 14 — NYTD: Strengths & Limitations

SESSION AGENDA

- AFCARS background

- Strengths

- Limitations

AFCARS BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND

- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is a federally mandated data collection system on case-level information on all children

  - in foster care (i.e. removed from their home/placed in out-of-home care), and

  - those who have been adopted with a state agency's involvement.

- Data are used for providing summary data to the public, for monitoring states' progress on improving child welfare programs, for allotting funds for various programs, and for data quality improvement.

DATA COLLECTION

- All states are required to submit data on:

  - Foster care: all children in foster care and for whom the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement, case, or supervision.

  - Adoptions: all adopted children who were placed by the state child welfare agency, by private agencies under contract with the public child welfare agency, or by private adoptions voluntarily reported during the given reporting period.

- States submit 37 adoption data elements and 66 foster care data elements, as has been regulated since 1993

  - Note, the data structure and elements has changed for future data collections due to the AFCARS 2020 Final Rule. More data elements will be collected with additional granularity of placements, in addition to retaining most of the 1993 data elements.

REPORTING POPULATION

- 50 states, plus D.C and Puerto Rico are required to submit data on children who meet one of the following criteria:

  - Children in the title IV-E agency's responsibility for care and placement (C&P).

  - Children who at the time the agency obtains/receives C&P is on runaway status or whose location is otherwise not known.

  - Children under the responsibility of another public agency for placement and care but for whom a title IV-E foster care payment is being made under an inter-agency agreement between the State and the other public agency. States may have an interagency agreement with juvenile justice or a tribe, or both.

  - Children whose removal episode is more than 24 hours.

REPORTING POPULATION

- The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allows states the option of providing Title IV-E reimbursable foster care, adoption, or guardianship assistance payments to children up to the age of 19, 20 or 21 if the youth is:

  - Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential;

  - Enrolled in an institution which provides post-secondary or vocational education;

  - Participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment;

  - Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or

  - Incapable of doing any of the above due to a medical condition.

AFCARS FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION FILES

- Foster Care File (2000-2021)

  - One record per foster care child is included in the annual database - the most recent record received for each child served in the year

  - Statewide and national information on the status of the foster care population (i.e., type of placement, availability for adoption, case-plan goals, services received)

  - There are 6-month file versions (2010-2021) but these are not as thoroughly cleaned therefore it is recommended to use the annual file for research

- Adoption File (2000-2021)

  - States submit data for each child with a finalized adoption (where a public child welfare agency was involved)

  - Individual level data by fiscal year

  - Information on the number and characteristics of adoptive and foster care children and their parents

ADOPTION FILE

- Adoptions that states are legally required to report to AFCARS:

  - Children placed for adoption by the public child welfare agency.

  - Children who have been in the public foster care system and were placed for adoption by a private agency under contract with the public child welfare agency.

  - Children in whose adoption the public child welfare agency was involved but who had not been in the public foster care system (e.g., children who received Title IV-E funds for non-recurring costs of adoption).

- Adoptions that states are NOT legally required to report to AFCARS:

  - Those involving children who were not in the public foster care system, placed for adoption by tribal agencies, or placed for adoption by private agencies

  - These may be voluntarily reported to AFCARS, but these adoptions do not involve a state agency and are not included in the publicly available version of the data.

FOSTER CARE FILE

- Data on child demographics including sex, birth date, race, and ethnicity; number of previous stays in foster care, service goals, services received, availability for adoption; dates of removal and discharge; and data/demographics on parents and out-of-home caretakers

- Data are submitted to the Children's Bureau for review, cleaning, compiling, and abstraction into the *annual file*.

- Only one record per foster care child is included in the annual database.

  - The retained record will be the most recent record received for each child served.

FOSTER CARE FILE REPORTING

- States must submit an AFCARS record for every report period during which the child is in care.

  - The first reporting period ("A" period) extends from October 1 through March 31 and the second ("B" period) from April 1 to September 30 (aka 6-month files).

- If a child has a record in both 6-month periods, the record from the second period will be retained; the record from the first period will not be included in the annual file.

- A child who is in or comes into care at the start of the year, exits care, and then later returns to care in the second half of the year, will have one record in the annual database, the one submitted in the second report period when the child re-entered care.

- Some FC entries and discharges for the most recent fiscal year will not be submitted until after the close of the fiscal year, so early versions of an annual file will be incomplete to that extent. As updated data is received, the undercounts for that year will correct themselves.

STRENGTHS

STRENGTHS (PT. 1)

- Best available data on the subject:

  - Statewide and national information on the number and characteristics of adoptive and foster care children and their parents (including step-parents, adoptive parents, and foster care parents).

  - Statewide and national information on the status of the foster care population (i.e., type of placement, availability for adoption, and case-plan goals)

  - Information on the extent and nature of assistance or services provided by federal, state, and local adoption and foster care programs.

- Lots of data support and resources through NDACAN and others

  - Findings from the AFCARS data are published by the Children's Bureau each year in its AFCARS Report
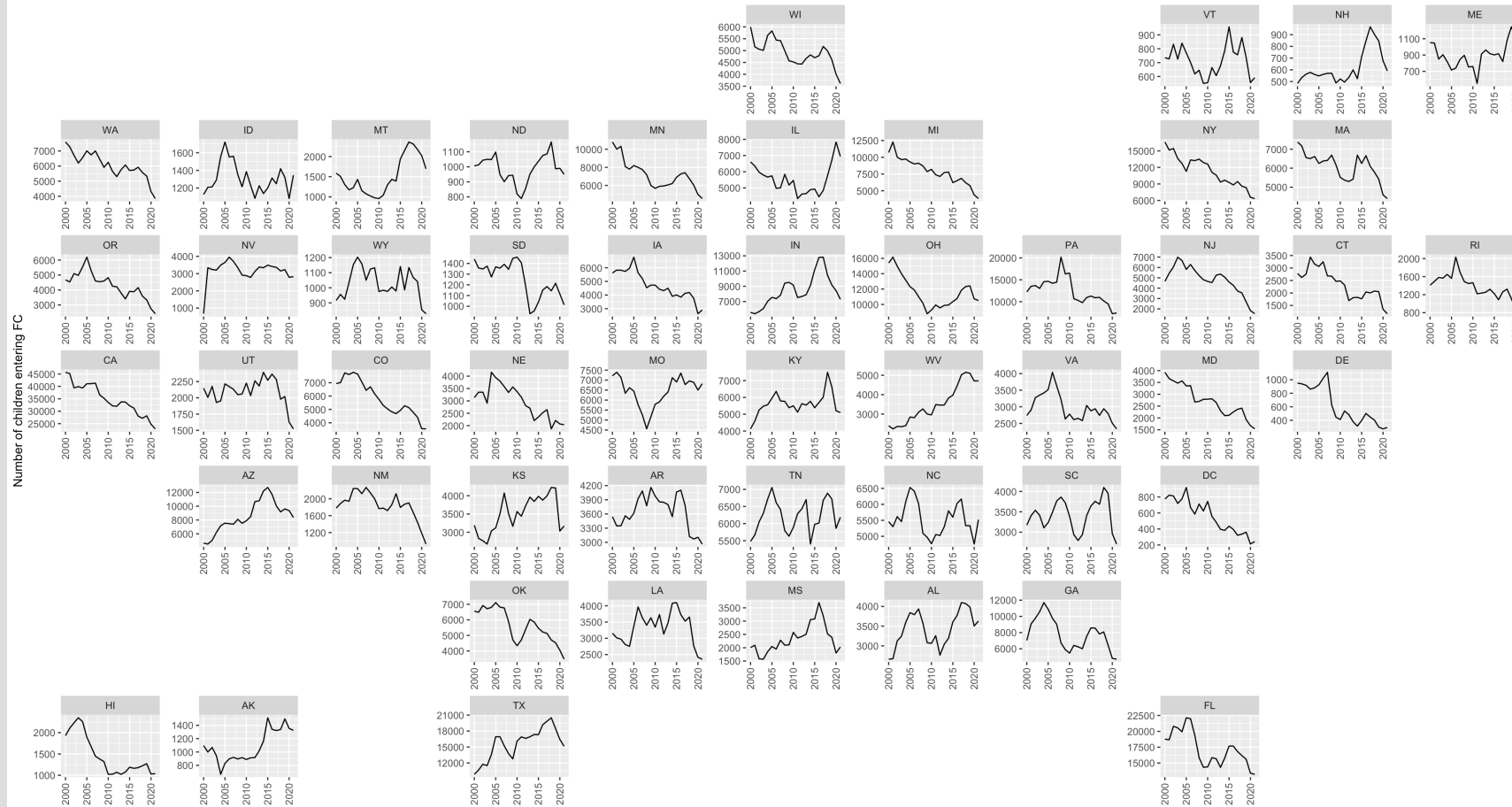
STRENGTHS (PT. 2)

- Linkable with NCANDS (with some limitations) and NYTD

- Many years of data for long term tracking changes over time or longitudinal analysis (all states have reported data since 2001)

  - Detect the effects or impact of policy or statutes

  - Observe impact of historic events, e.g. Covid-19, opioid epidemic

- Can compare information between states (with caveats described below)

  - Can even observe county level (for populous counties)
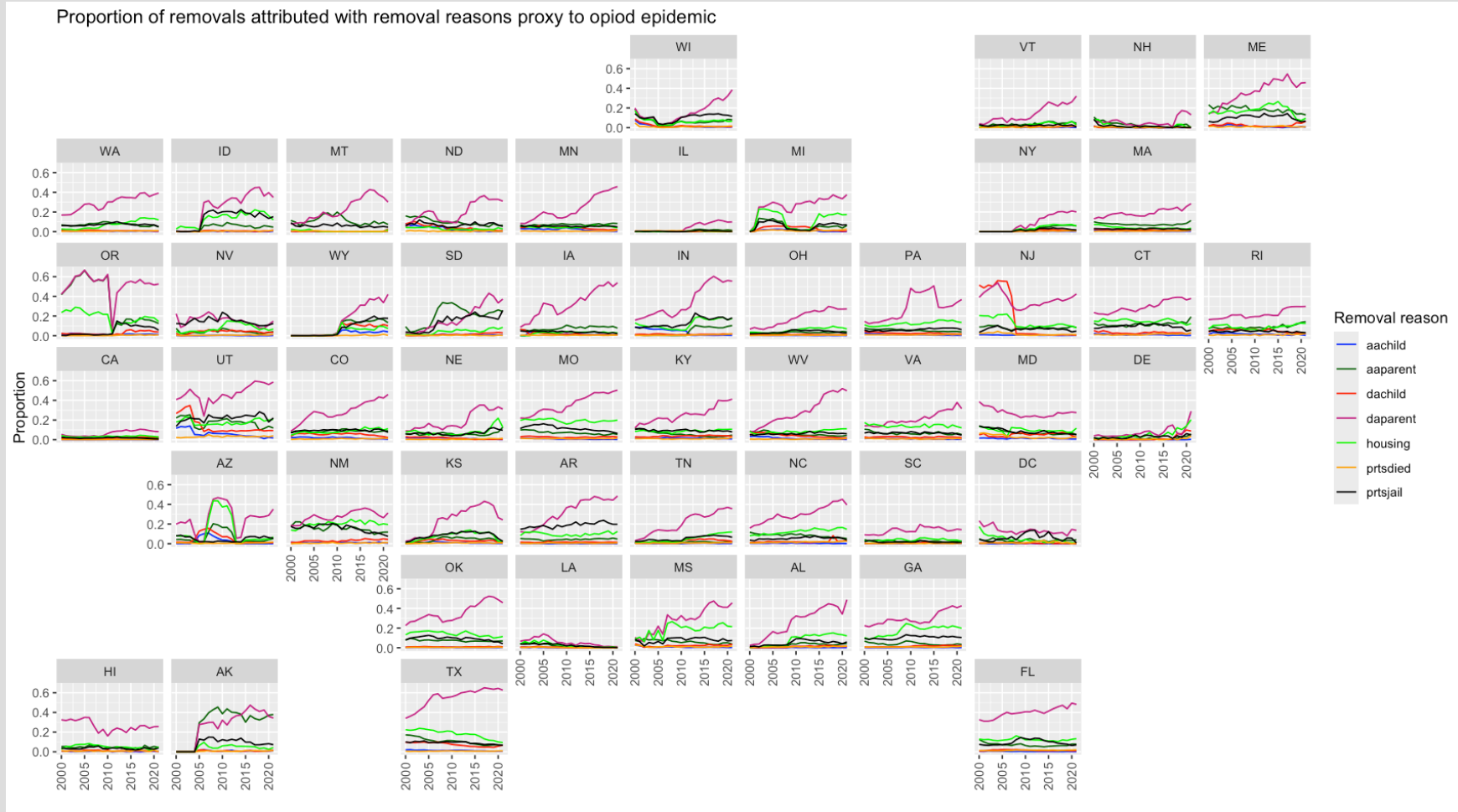
STRENGTHS (PT. 3)

- Not just information about child, but also caregivers and adoptive parents

- Information about services or assistance received

- Information about risk factors for child and caretakers (e.g. substance abuse, disability)

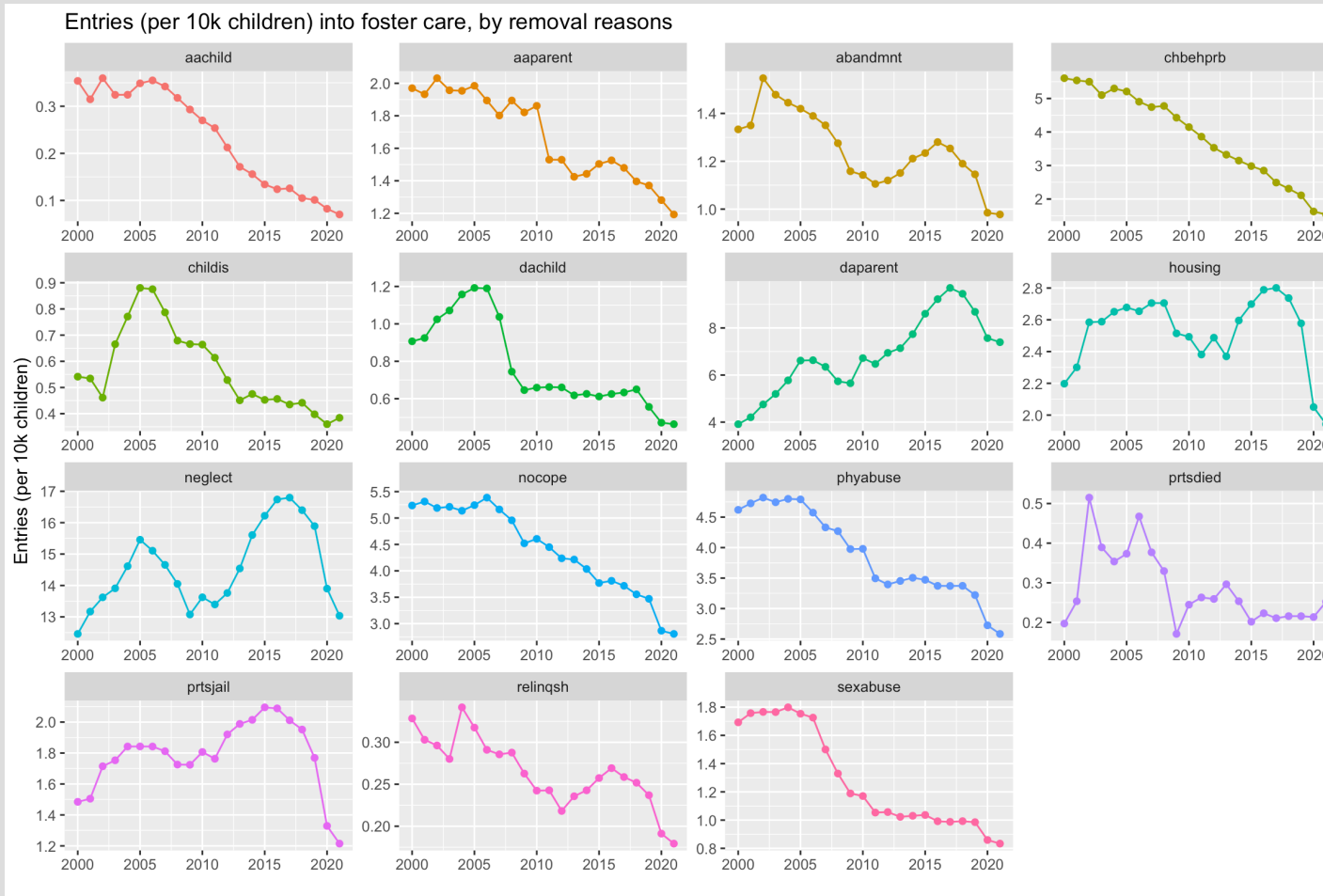Entries into foster care, by state and year

ENTRIES INTO FOSTER CARE BY REMOVAL REASONS

Proportion of removals attributed with removal reasons proxy to opiod epidemic

Entries (per 10k children) into foster care, by removal reasons

LIMITATIONS

VARIATION OVER STATES AND TIME

- Breakage in linking years

  - States sometimes change ID encryption algorithm thereby creating new IDs for children that are not directly linkable to previous years – interrupts longitudinal analysis

- State-to-state variation in child maltreatment laws, statutes/definitions, and information systems may affect the interpretation of the data.

  - State footnotes associated with each state should always be taken into account when utilizing a state's data

STATES WHO LACK ID TO LINK AFCARS AND NCANDS

- NCANDS data can be linked to AFCARS data if a state includes the AFCARS ID in the NCANDS data. This ID is always present in the AFCARS data

- This table shows the number of states who submitted NCANDS files that include an AFCARS ID, and is therefore linkable to AFCARS data

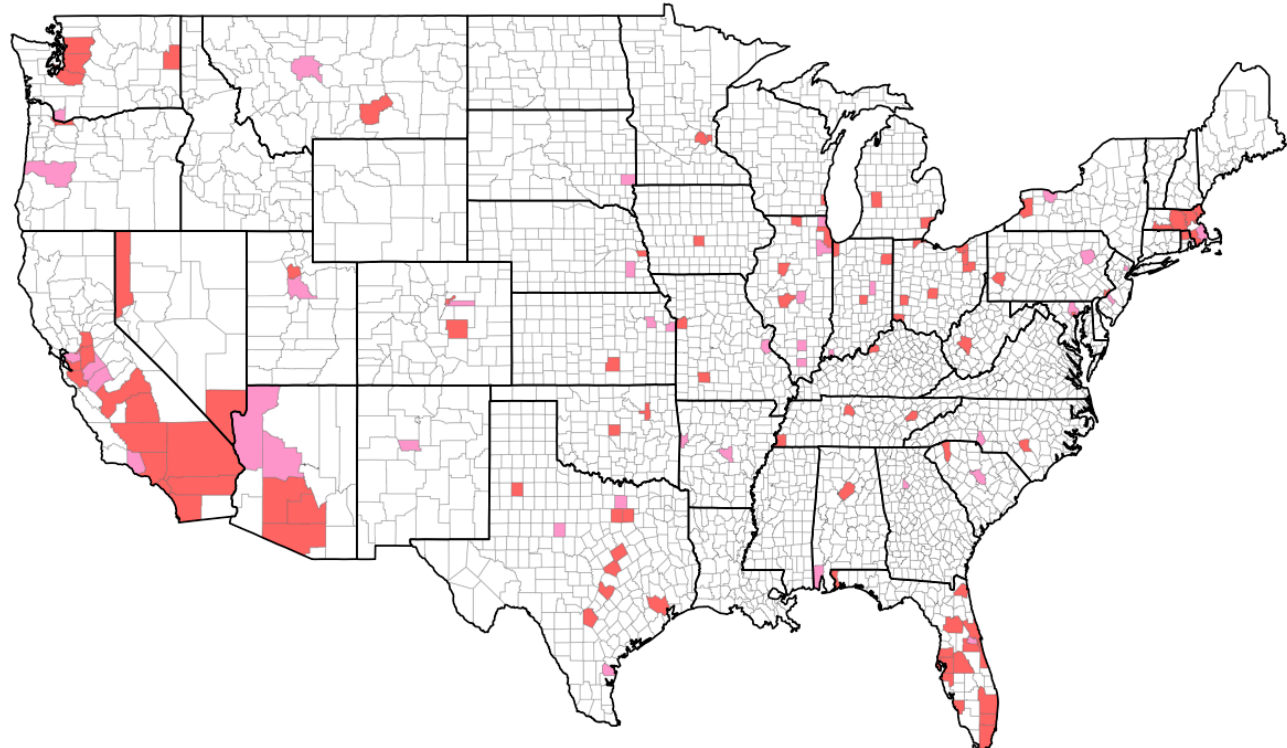| FY	# States with data	# States with over 50% missing AFCARS ID	Submitting States without AFCARSID
2022	52	3	IL, PA, VT
2021	51	3	IL, PA, VT
2017-2020	52	3	IL, PA, VT
2016	51	3	IL, PA, VT
2015	52	3	IL, PA, VT
2014	52	4	IL, PA, PR, VT
2013	52	6	GA, IL, NY, PA, PR, VT
2012	52	6	GA, IL, NY, PA, PR, VT
2011	51	6	GA, IL, NY, PA, PR, VT
2010	51	7	GA, IL, MD, NY, PA, PR, VT
2009	50	6	GA, IL, NY, PA, PR, VT
2008	50	8	AL, GA, IL, NY, PA, PR, TN, VT
2007	49	8	AL, GA, NC, NY, PA, PR, TN, VT
2006	49	7	AL, GA, IN, NC, NY, PA, VT
2005	49	12	AL, DC, GA, IN, MO, NC, NY, PA, SC, TN, TX, VT
2004	45	10	DC, IN, MO, NC, NY, PA, SC, TN, TX, VT
2003	45	11	DC, FL, IN, MO, NC, NY, PA, SC, TN, TX, VT
2002	42	41	All *except* CT
2001	24	23	All *except* CT
2000	20	20	All

SUPPRESSED OR MISSING DATA

- Sometimes incomplete records, e.g. missing discharge date or entry date

- Missing data and missing codes

- Some masked variables

  - County masking – unable to compare or analyze small counties, rural populations (e.g. in 2021 there are 101 identifiable counties)

  - Date masking – DOB is masked to the 15th of the month and all other dates are shifted similarly to maintain timespans

AVAILABLE COUNTIES IN 2021 AFCARS FOSTER CARE FILE

- Counties in red are available under the current suppression rule (>1000 records in county)

- Counties in pink will also be available under the new upcoming suppression threshold (>700 records in county)

- Hawaii and Alaska omitted

County suppression in the 2021 AFCARS Foster Care File

■ >1000 records   ■ >700 records   □ Not identifiable

OTHER

- Problems linking foster care file and adoption file

    - Some states give a child a new identifier when they are adopted, which breaks the link and prevents tracking a child from Foster Care to Adoption.

- The annual file uses the most recent information (e.g. placement setting) and if a child has multiple FC episodes in the same FY some information may be lost

- Administrative data developed as an ongoing data collection system and does not conform to rigorous criteria for scientific research design.

- ID's use UTF-8 characters (which is more extensive than standard ASCII) therefore some "weird" characters may cause problems in certain programming languages, which can interfere with linking

COMPARING FOSTER CARE FILE TO ADOPTION FILE

- This table shows, by state, the proportion of children in the 2021 adoption file who can be linked using their child ID to the children in the 2021 foster care file who exited by adoption

- Low proportion or 0 means children in adoption file can't be linked to the AFCARS file

State	Proportion	State	Proportion
Alabama	0.00	Montana	0.99
Alaska	0.99	Nebraska	0.00
Arizona	1.00	Nevada	0.00
Arkansas	0.00	New Hampshire	0.00
California	0.93	New Jersey	0.00
Colorado	0.03	New Mexico	0.00
Connecticut	0.00	New York	1.00
Delaware	1.00	North Carolina	0.00
District of Columbia	0.00	North Dakota	0.95
Florida	0.98	Ohio	0.98
Georgia	0.90	Oklahoma	0.00
Hawaii	0.98	Oregon	0.95
Idaho	0.92	Pennsylvania	0.00
Illinois	0.00	Rhode Island	0.00
Indiana	0.84	South Carolina	0.98
Iowa	0.00	South Dakota	0.99
Kansas	1.00	Tennessee	0.92
Kentucky	1.00	Texas	1.00
Louisiana	1.00	Utah	0.95
Maine	1.00	Vermont	0.00
Maryland	0.00	Virginia	0.05
Massachusetts	1.00	Washington	0.00
Michigan	0.00	West Virginia	1.00
Minnesota	1.00	Wisconsin	0.00
Mississippi	0.99	Wyoming	0.99
Missouri	0.93	Puerto Rico	0.64

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

SUGGESTIONS

- Always do state by year exploration of any variables used for research – understand missingness, reporting, etc. – frequencies, crosstabs, visualizations

- Consider multi-level modeling if using all states and years to account for differences at state level

- Refer to published reports or state footnotes for additional information on each state's reporting

- Seek assistance! – NDACAN, CB reports, published literature

NEW AFCARS

- The existing familiar AFCARS was created under the "1993 final rule"

- There will be a new AFCARS under the new "2020 final rule"

- New data will include much more information and granularity such as better tracking of each placement, Native American tribal affiliation, expanded children demographics (e.g. education, teen pregnancy, placements with siblings or family)

- The organization of the data files will change and it will take careful consideration to be able to link to and conform to previous years

- The first few years of this new data may have lots of missingness or quality problems as the states and Children's Bureau must overhaul and adapt data systems and intake processes

- New AFCARS data is expected to be released sometime in 2025

- Resources:

  - https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/overview-afcars-2020-final-rule

  - https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/05/12/2020-09817/adoption-and-foster-care-analysis-and-reporting-system

QUESTIONS?

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NEXT WEEK…

July 31, 2024
at 12pm (Eastern)

Presenter:
Sarah Sernaker, M.S.

Topic:
Survey Design and Using Weights