
INFANTS REMAINING AT HOME AFTER AN ALLEGATION OF MALTREATMENT:

A FIVE-YEAR ANALYSIS OF CALIFORNIA DATA
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Children's
Data Network

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Children's Data Network is a university, agency, and community collaborative focused on the integration and application of data to inform programs and policies for children and their families. The Children's Data Network is funded by First 5 LA and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, housed at USC's School of Social Work, and includes a partnership with the California Child Welfare Indicators Project. Support for the Child Welfare Indicators Project is provided by the California Department of Social Services and the Stuart Foundation.



SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Maltreatment that begins during infancy is likely to be chronic in duration and developmentally consequential if the appropriate intervention is not delivered. Repeated reports of maltreatment may signal unmet service needs.

PURPOSE

Using administrative records, this study longitudinally followed infants who remained at home following an initial report of maltreatment. The objective was to generate knowledge of infants at high risk of continued adversities (as indicated by repeated reports of maltreatment) to guide more strategic practice and policy responses.

DATA

Birth records for all children born in California during 2006 were linked to statewide child protection records through 2012. Infants reported for maltreatment before age 1 were identified and followed for 5 years to analyze re-reporting patterns based on the initial report disposition.

ANALYSES

χ^2 tests were used to assess characteristics at birth across initial report dispositions. Multivariable models were developed to adjust for birth characteristics associated with an initial maltreatment report.

FINDINGS

Of the 563,871 children born in California in 2006, 5.2% ($n = 29,135$) were reported for abuse or neglect before age 1. Following an initial report, 81.9% of infants remained in the home, the majority (60.7%) of whom were re-reported within 5 years. The highest rate of re-reporting was observed among infants whose initial allegation was substantiated and who had a case opened for family maintenance services (69.1%). Infants whose initial allegation was not investigated had re-reporting rates that were equal to or higher than other infants remaining in the home without services.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings highlight that most families with infants reported for maltreatment are not formally served by the child protection system. High rates of re-reporting underscore the challenge of delivering services that remedy conditions that may necessitate child protection follow-up.



BACKGROUND

THE HIGHEST RATE OF REPORTED MALTREATMENT OCCURS DURING INFANCY¹ AND DATA INDICATE THAT INFANTS ACCOUNT FOR AN INCREASING PROPORTION OF VICTIMS SUBSTANTIATED FOR ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN THE UNITED STATES.² A GROWING BODY OF RESEARCH LINKS EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVERSITY TO POORER OUTCOMES THROUGHOUT THE LIFE COURSE, INCLUDING:



LOWER EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND LOWER EARNINGS³



INCREASED DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE, DEPRESSION,
AND INCREASED SUICIDE RISK⁴



POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS SYMPTOMS AND
ELEVATED INTIMATE PARTNER VICTIMIZATION⁵



A WIDE RANGE OF HEALTH PROBLEMS⁶

The first year of a child's life provides perhaps the greatest opportunity for child protective services (CPS) and other family support systems to positively intervene to prevent abuse and neglect, both because maltreatment that begins during infancy has the potential to be quite chronic in duration, and because its timing is developmentally consequential.^{7,8} Due to the physical vulnerability of infants, a larger proportion of children in this age group enter foster care compared to their older counterparts.^{9,10} Less is known, however, about the subsequent safety and CPS involvement of infants who remain at home following an initial report of maltreatment.



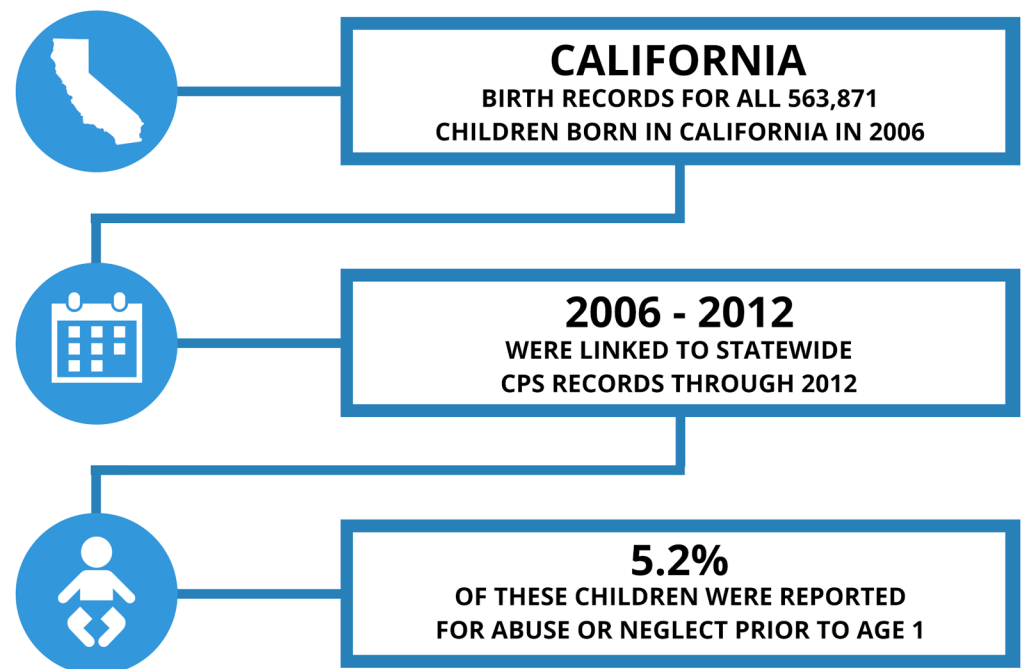
The present study builds on previous analyses by examining re-reporting patterns for infants with an initial allegation of maltreatment to CPS, including allegations that were evaluated out prior to investigation or identified as unfounded following investigation. Three questions are addressed in this analysis:

- 1) WHAT IS THE RATE OF RE-REPORTING AMONG INFANTS REMAINING AT HOME FOLLOWING AN INITIAL CPS REPORT?
- 2) DO RE-REPORTING RATES VARY BASED ON THE INITIAL MALTREATMENT DISPOSITION?
- 3) ARE VARIATIONS IN RE-REPORTING EXPLAINED BY THE PRESENCE OF OTHER RISK FACTORS?

The objective was to generate knowledge of infants at high risk of continued adversities (as indicated by repeated reports of maltreatment) to guide more strategic practice and policy responses.

DATA & ANALYSES

Birth records for all children born in California in 2006 were linked to statewide child protection records through 2012; 5.2% (n = 29,135) of children were reported for abuse or neglect prior to age 1.

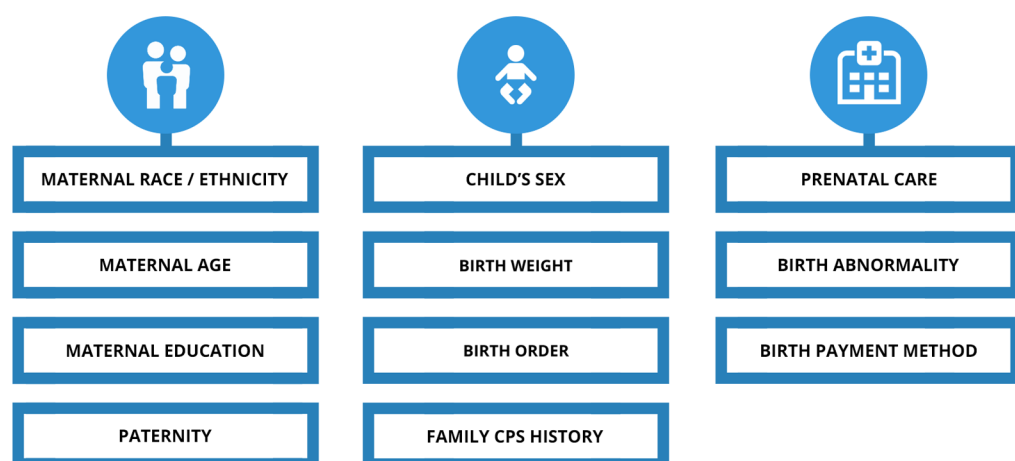


The initial report disposition was examined as a predictor of a subsequent report within 5 years. Infants were classified into five mutually exclusive groups based on whether the initial report of maltreatment was:



In addition to the disposition of the first report, variations in re-reporting were examined based on the most serious form of alleged maltreatment in the initial report (abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, at risk due to sibling abuse) and whether it was made by a mandated reporter (mandated, non-mandated).

In a series of multivariable models that were developed, 11 covariates were included:

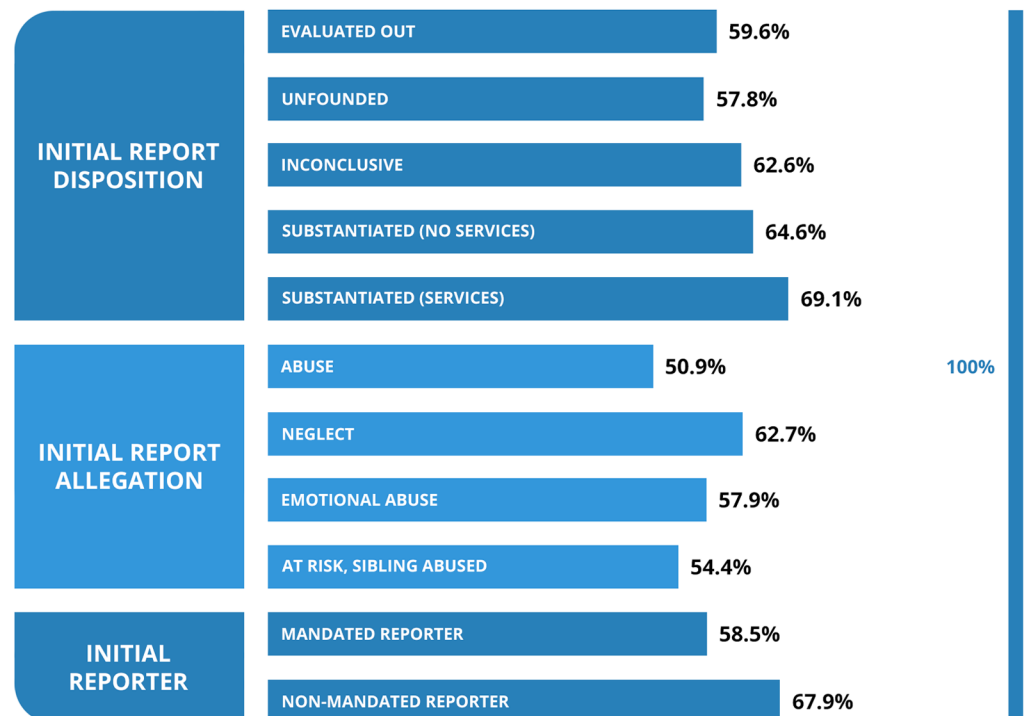


(1) child's sex (female, male); (2) birth weight (normal $\geq 2,500$ g, low $< 2,500$ g); (3) start of prenatal care (first trimester, second trimester, third trimester, no care or missing care); (4) the presence of one or more birth abnormalities (none, abnormality); (5) maternal race/ethnicity (White, Black, U.S.-born Hispanic, Foreign-born Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American); (6) maternal age at birth (≤ 19 years, 20–24 years, 25–29 years, ≥ 30 years); (7) maternal educational attainment (high school degree or less, some college or more); (8) paternity (established, missing); (9) birth order (first born, second born, third born or higher); and (10) birth payment method (private insurance, public insurance). Additionally, a history of family CPS involvement was coded as a three-level variable for each infant (no sibling CPS involvement due to a 1 child family; no sibling CPS involvement for a family with 2 or more children; prior sibling CPS involvement for a family with 2 or more children).

FINDINGS

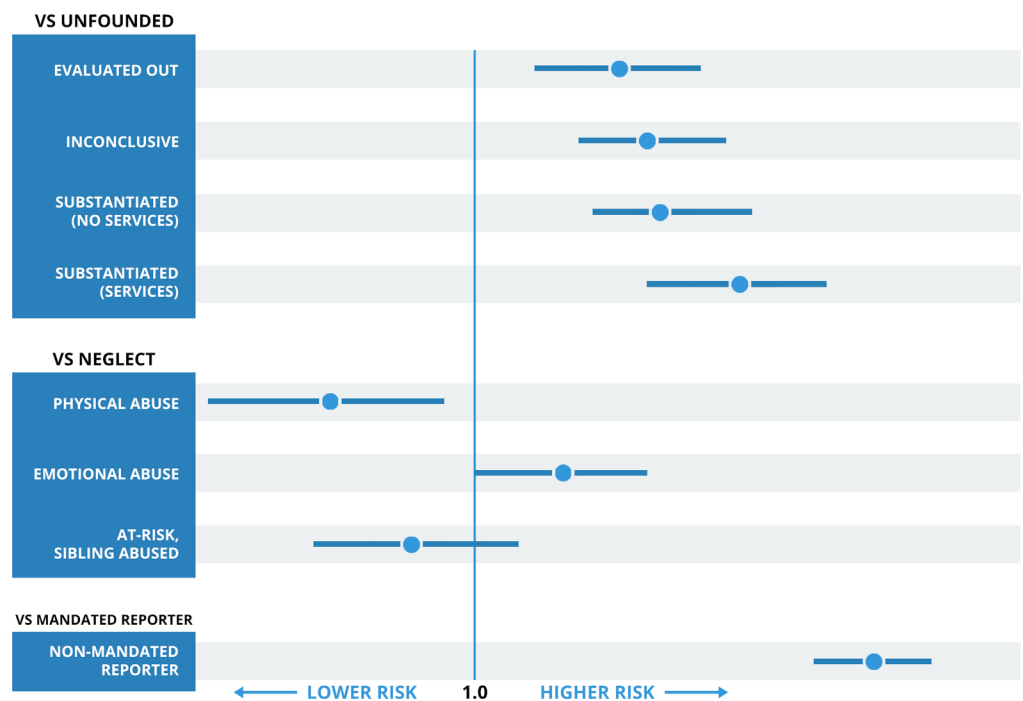
60.7% of infants remaining in the home following a first report of abuse or neglect were re-reported within 5 years; the median time from the first to second report was 312 days.

As reflected in the figure below, the rates of a follow-up report were fairly similar regardless of the initial disposition type.



The highest re-reporting rate was observed for infants with an initial substantiation and a CPS case opened for family-maintenance services. Slightly more infants evaluated out prior to an investigation were re-reported than infants with a report that was investigated and deemed unfounded. Infants remaining at home following an initial allegation of neglect were more likely to be re-reported within 5 years compared to infants reported for other reasons. A greater share of infants whose initial allegation originated with a non-mandated reporter were re-reported than infants whose reporter was mandated.

The figure below summarizes findings from a multivariable model in which the likelihood of re-reporting was estimated based on characteristics of the initial report with adjustments for sociodemographic factors. Consistent with descriptive data presented below, infants initially evaluated out (i.e., those whose reports were not investigated) were re-reported at a higher rate than infants whose initial report was investigated and deemed unfounded ($p < .001$).



Infants with an abuse allegation were significantly less likely to be re-reported relative to infants with a neglect allegation. Independent of which covariates were included, infants initially reported by non-mandated reporters had a higher rate of re-reporting during the subsequent 5 years compared to those whose initial reports originated with a mandated reporter.

DISCUSSION

Prior literature has pointed to repeated reports of maltreatment as a predictor of adversities throughout childhood and adolescence.^{11,12} The present study examined the rate at which infants who remained at home following an initial report of abuse or neglect were re-reported within 5 years. Several key findings emerged that both extend our understanding of maltreatment risk and confirm research that has documented the vulnerability of infants known to CPS.

FIRST

Data indicate that 6 in 10 infants remaining at home following an initial allegation of abuse or neglect were re-reported within 5 years. Although previous research has documented high rates of re-reporting among children with an initial maltreatment allegation,^{13,14,15,16} findings from the current analysis represent the highest published estimate to date.

SECOND

High rates of re-reported maltreatment were observed among infants with unsubstantiated reports following an investigation and among infants whose initial reports were evaluated out prior to any investigation. Data from the present study not only support research indicating the vulnerability of infants with unsubstantiated reports, but also broaden the discussion to include infants who are evaluated out through the CPS hotline.

THIRD

Findings suggest that despite variations in the sociodemographic characteristics of infants by initial report disposition, these factors do not substantively alter the relationship between an initial disposition and re-reporting risk. As expected, across all three models, re-reporting rates by initial disposition were fairly constant, both before and after adjusting for the initial allegation type, mandated reporter status, and factors at birth.

FOURTH

These data document how few infants remaining at home following a first report of maltreatment receive formal CPS interventions. High rates of re-reporting following initial allegations of maltreatment invariably raise questions as to whether there are certain high-risk groups of children and families for which attempts to modify risk are not achievable.¹⁷ As much as this is true, that some children cannot safely remain with their birth families, one policy response may be to intervene sooner rather than later so that children can move quickly to alternative forms of permanency, such as adoption.¹⁸



Yet, any argument for an aggressive removal response presumes that delivered services are unsuccessful at remedying familial risks and protecting children - that the services needed to prevent conditions leading to later reports simply do not exist or do not work. Data from the current study, however, do not provide evidence of failed or ineffective services. Rather, findings align with earlier analyses that underscore just how few infants and families may receive services after an initial report of abuse or neglect.¹⁹

FIFTH

Finally, we found that both before and after adjusting for other factors, infants with initial reports from non-mandated reporters were more likely to be re-reported. Mandated reporters may be better equipped to accurately obtain, document, and communicate relevant evidence of maltreatment to CPS, potentially leading to better initial determinations and interventions and thereby reducing the rate of follow-up reports.²⁰

Among all reported infants, 3 out of every 4 did not receive any formal CPS interventions following the report (i.e., no foster care placement and no case opened for family maintenance services). Of the 82% of infants who remained at home following the first report, only 1 in 10 received CPS services through an open case. It is unknown how many of these infants and their families may have received voluntary services through community agencies. Still, data from our study suggest that if community interventions were delivered, they were inadequate in terms of engagement, available slots, duration, or quality, to prevent conditions leading to later reports of abuse and neglect for a majority of infants.

It should also be noted that, not surprisingly, infants who did receive formal CPS services had the highest rates of re-reporting. Infants and families with a case opened for in-home CPS services likely constituted the group at highest risk, those on the very margin of foster care placement. Additionally, the surveillance of these families was almost certainly higher.

IMPLICATIONS

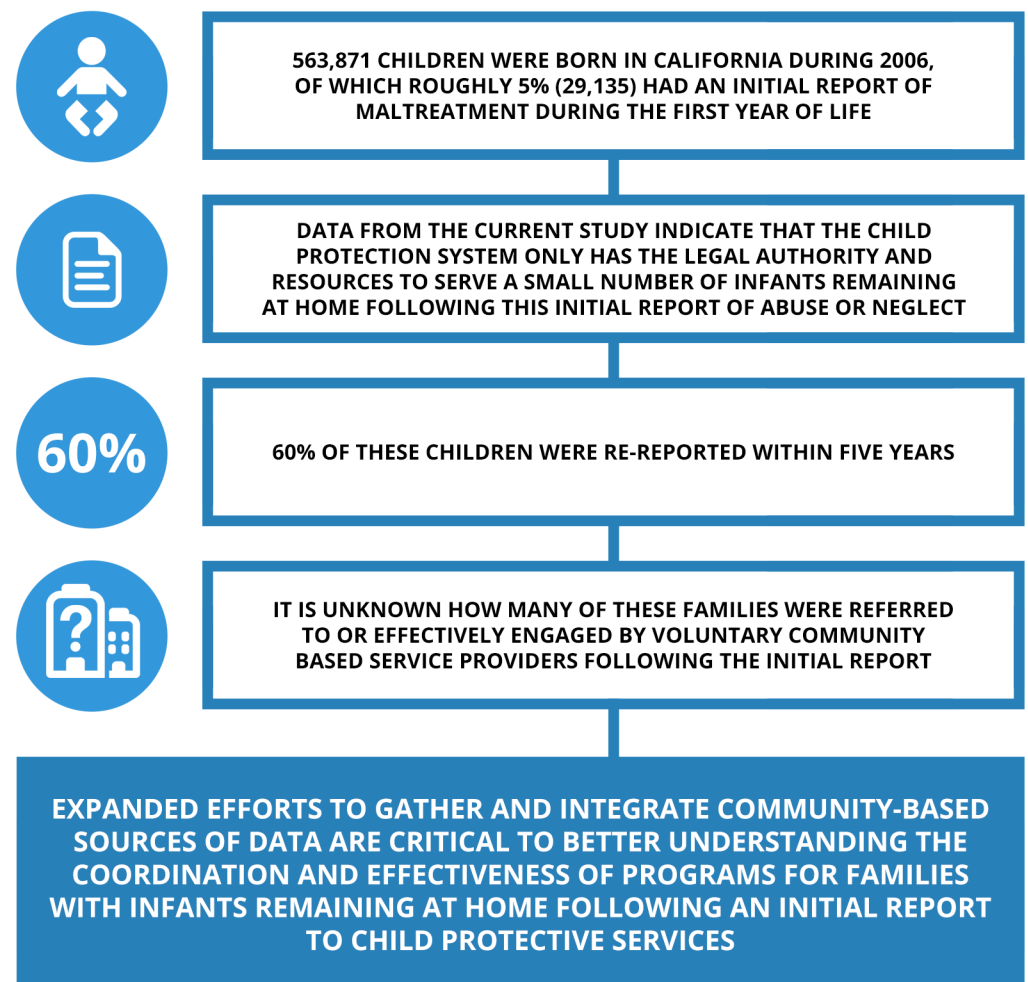
More than half a million children were born in California during 2006, roughly 5% of whom were identified as possible victims of maltreatment during the first year of life. Although some initial allegations to CPS were undoubtedly false indications of risk, recent research points to a report of abuse or neglect as an important signal of a child whose vulnerability runs deeper than what poverty alone would predict.^{21,22} As much as these early maltreatment reports to CPS are



meaningful signals of future harm and later adversities, they may also provide a useful means of identifying infants and families with the most pronounced need for support and intervention, and potentially the greatest opportunity for impact.

Data from the current study indicate that the child protection system only has the legal authority and the resources to formally serve a small number of infants remaining at home following an initial report of abuse or neglect.

The fact that more than 60% of infants were re-reported points to the challenges of delivering services that are adequate in engagement, quality, retention, dosage, and substantive value to prevent conditions necessitating CPS follow-up.



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TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CALIFORNIA'S 2006 BIRTH COHORT AND CHILDREN REPORTED FOR MALTREATMENT DURING INFANCY

Notes. CPS=child protective services; HS=high school. The column "All births" captures the full population of children born in California in 2006 and "all infants" refers to the subset of those children who were first reported to CPS as infants (i.e., during the first year of life). "Infants reported to CPS and remaining at home" presents the birth characteristics of infants who remained at home following the first report of maltreatment (i.e., who were not removed and placed in foster care). χ^2 tests were used to examine the differences among these infants remaining at home by initial maltreatment disposition type (evaluated out, unfounded, inconclusive, and substantiated with and without services). The manner in which data were linked did not allow us to provide information regarding CPS family history for the full birth cohort. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CALIFORNIA'S 2006 BIRTH COHORT AND CHILDREN REPORTED FOR MALTREATMENT DURING INFANCY BY INITIAL REPORT ALLEGATION AND MANDATED REPORTER STATUS

Notes. CPS=child protective services; HS=high school. The column "Infants reported to CPS and remaining at home" presents the birth characteristics of infants who remained at home following the first report of maltreatment (i.e., who were not removed and placed in foster care). χ^2 tests were used to examine differences across maltreatment allegation types and mandated reporter status. Risk due to sibling abuse category was excluded from the examination of birth order. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3. BIVARIATE AND MULTIVARIABLE COX REGRESSION MODELS EXAMINING THE LIKELIHOOD OF A RE-REPORT WITHIN 5 YEARS OF A FIRST REPORT DURING INFANCY

Notes. CI=confidence interval; HR=hazard ratio. Model 1 presents bivariate estimates of the likelihood of re-report for initial disposition, allegation, and reporter. Model 2 simultaneously estimates the likelihood of re-report by initial disposition, allegation, and reporter. Model 3 additionally adjusts the likelihood of re-report based on a history of family CPS involvement, child sex, birth weight, prenatal care, birth abnormality, maternal race/ethnicity, maternal age, maternal education, paternity establishment, birth order, and birth payment method.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$



TABLE 1

	2006 Cohort		Infants Reported to CPS and Remaining at Home				
	All births	All infants reported	Evaluated out	Unfounded	Inconclusive	Substantiated (no services)	Substantiated (services)
	(N=563,871)	(N=29,135)	(n=3,450)	(n=9,773)	(n=4,874)	(n= 3,402)	(n=2,372)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
CPS Family History***							
No History: 1 Child	–	28.5	38.9	27.7	32.1	30.1	23.6
No History: 2+ Child	–	34.3	33.6	39.2	34.5	36.2	29.7
Yes History: 2+ Child	–	37.2	27.6	33.1	33.4	33.7	46.7
Sex							
Female	48.7	48.4	48.4	48.3	48.3	48.3	50.8
Male	51.3	51.6	51.6	51.7	51.7	51.7	49.2
Birth Weight***							
Normal (≥2500 g)	93.2	88.1	89.3	90.1	90.3	88.4	85.0
Low (<2500 g)	6.8	11.9	10.7	10.0	9.7	11.6	15.0
Prenatal Care***							
1st trimester	85.2	66.5	68.0	74.9	69.6	63.8	62.9
2nd trimester	11.2	20.2	21.8	17.8	20.5	21.1	21.5
3rd trimester	2.2	5.5	5.1	4.1	5.0	6.1	7.4
None/missing care	1.4	7.9	5.1	3.4	4.9	9.1	8.3
Birth Abnormality***							
None	92.2	86.9	86.9	89.7	89.3	86.1	84.1
Abnormality	7.8	13.1	13.1	10.3	10.7	13.9	15.9
Maternal Race/Ethnicity***							
White	28.7	30.3	36.5	26.7	31.0	32.5	29.8
Black	5.8	14.5	14.1	14.3	15.1	12.1	13.2
Hispanic, US-born	20.5	30.3	27.5	28.9	30.0	32.3	30.0
Hispanic, foreign-born	32.7	19.1	15.9	24.6	17.7	17.7	19.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	11.9	4.4	4.5	4.1	4.8	3.9	5.4
Native American	0.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.9
Maternal Age at Birth***							
≤19 yrs	9.5	17.5	23.3	18.1	19.8	17.7	14.6
20-24 yrs	23.0	30.6	30.9	28.6	33.2	34.2	30.3
25-29 yrs	26.4	25.4	23.5	24.9	25.0	25.2	26.2
≥30 yrs	41.2	26.5	22.4	28.4	22.1	22.9	28.9
Maternal Education***							
HS degree or less	55.8	79.0	75.5	77.2	77.4	79.0	81.6
Some college+	44.2	21.0	24.5	22.8	22.6	21.0	18.4
Paternity***							
Established	90.7	69.1	71.3	75.1	74.3	72.8	68.4
Missing	9.3	30.9	28.8	24.9	25.7	27.2	31.6
Birth Order***							
First born	39.0	28.5	38.9	27.7	32.1	30.1	23.6
Second born	31.5	24.4	24.2	25.0	26.5	26.4	22.6
Third or higher	29.5	47.2	37.0	47.3	41.3	43.5	53.8
Birth Payment Method***							
Private	53.2	26.8	28.4	28.2	28.2	26.4	22.5
Public	46.8	73.2	71.6	71.8	71.8	73.6	77.5



TABLE 2

Infants Reported to CPS and Remaining at Home

	Allegation Type					Reporter Status		
	Abuse	Neglect	Emotional	Sibling abused	χ ²	Mandated	Non-mandated	χ ²
	(n=1,572)	(n=17,703)	(n=2,476)	(n= 2,120)		(n=18,387)	(n= 5,484)	
	%	%	%	%	P-value	%	%	P-value
CPS Family History								
No History: 1 Child	39.2	31.4	38.3	3.5	P<.001	30.2	29.9	P<.001
No History: 2+ Child	38.7	33.2	37.4	56.7		36.6	34.2	
Yes History: 2+ Child	22.1	35.5	24.4	39.8		33.2	35.9	
Sex								
Female	46.9	48.3	49.0	51.1	P= .053	48.5	48.6	P=.961
Male	53.1	51.7	51.1	48.9		51.5	51.4	
Birth Weight								
Normal (≥2500 g)	92.8	88.2	92.0	92.6	P<.001	88.5	91.9	P<.001
Low (<2500 g)	7.2	11.9	8.0	7.4		11.5	8.1	
Prenatal Care								
1st trimester	78.4	66.9	77.5	81.3	P<.001	69.0	73.4	P<.001
2nd trimester	15.4	21.2	17.2	13.9		19.8	19.6	
3rd trimester	3.9	5.6	3.3	2.8		5.4	3.7	
None/missing care	2.4	6.3	2.0	2.0		5.8	3.3	
Birth Abnormality								
None	91.7	86.8	91.4	93.1	P<.001	87.2	91.4	P<.001
Abnormality	8.3	13.2	8.6	6.9		12.8	8.6	
Maternal Race/Ethnicity								
White	24.8	33.0	24.1	17.4	P<.001	28.6	35.2	P<.001
Black	14.8	14.3	12.9	12.2		13.7	15.0	
Hispanic, US-born	28.5	29.9	31.4	25.1		29.1	30.9	
Hispanic, foreign-born	25.2	17.1	24.9	40.5		22.3	14.5	
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.4	4.1	5.9	4.2		4.8	3.1	
Native American	1.3	1.5	0.8	0.7		1.5	1.4	
Maternal Age at Birth								
<=19 yrs	21.2	19.8	21.6	5.0	P<.001	18.3	20.3	P<.001
20-24 yrs	32.9	31.1	34.8	22.6		29.5	35.1	
25-29 yrs	22.9	24.8	22.4	30.1		25.2	23.7	
≥30 yrs	23.0	24.3	21.2	42.4		26.9	20.9	
Maternal Education								
HS degree or less	72.5	79.1	72.4	75.6	P<.001	77.9	76.8	P=.087
Some college+	27.5	20.9	27.6	24.4		22.1	23.2	
Paternity								
Established	81.0	69.7	86.1	83.3	P<.001	73.5	72.9	P=.365
Missing	19.0	30.3	13.9	16.7		26.5	27.1	
Birth Order								
First born	39.2	31.4	38.3	--	P<.001	30.2	29.9	P<.001
Second born	26.2	24.4	28.4	--		24.6	27.2	
Third or higher	34.6	44.2	33.3	--		45.3	42.8	
Birth Payment Method								
Private	33.2	25.8	33.3	30.0	P<.001	27.4	27.6	P=.735
Public	66.8	74.3	66.7	70.0		72.7	72.4	



TABLE 3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Bivariate		Multivariable		Multivariable + Birth covariates	
	HR	95% CI	HR	95% CI	HR	95% CI
Initial Disposition						
Evaluated out	1.11***	(1.06, 1.17)	1.12***	(1.07, 1.18)	1.10**	(1.04, 1.16)
Unfounded	Ref.	--	Ref.	--	Ref.	--
Inconclusive	1.17***	(1.12, 1.22)	1.18***	(1.13, 1.24)	1.12***	(1.07, 1.18)
Substantiated, no services	1.17***	(1.11, 1.23)	1.20***	(1.14, 1.26)	1.13***	(1.08, 1.20)
Substantiated, services	1.34***	(1.26, 1.41)	1.37***	(1.29, 1.45)	1.19***	(1.12, 1.26)
Initial Allegation						
Abuse	0.74***	(0.51, 0.78)	0.77***	(0.72, 0.83)	0.91**	(0.84, 0.98)
Neglect	Ref.	--	Ref.	--	Ref.	--
Emotional abuse	0.89***	(0.84, 0.94)	0.90***	(0.85, 0.95)	1.06	(1.00, 1.12)
At risk, sibling abused	0.79***	(0.74, 0.83)	0.85***	(0.80, 0.95)	0.96	(0.90, 1.03)
Initial Reporter						
Mandated reporter	Ref.	--	Ref.	--	Ref.	--
Non-mandated reporter	1.31***	(1.26, 1.36)	1.36***	(1.31, 1.42)	1.30***	(1.25, 1.35)

