



## Risk Factors for the Recurrence of Substantiated Abuse or Neglect

This Rhode Island Data Analytic Center Research Brief summarizes findings from a recent study of the recurrence of child abuse and neglect using data obtained from the Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST). This brief extends earlier findings reported regarding rates of re-allegation among families investigated by DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS). In this study, the recurrence of maltreatment is examined among cases that have had a substantiated incident of abuse or neglect. All children with a substantiated incident of maltreatment that occurred between January 1, 2001 and September 30, 2003 were included in the study and followed for up to two years. Children whose first substantiated incident of maltreatment resulted in the child receiving foster care, adoption, or transitional living services were excluded from analyses.

A total of 5,861 substantiated maltreatment cases were followed through September 30, 2003 to determine whether there was a recurrence of child maltreatment. Of this group, 51% were boys, and 61% were White, 17% Hispanic, 13% Black, and 9% were of another racial/ethnic background. A total of 9% of these children were 1 year old or younger, 29% 2-5 years old, 31% 6-10 years old, 25% 11-15 years old, and 6% were 16 years of age or older. One-quarter of these children were prior victims of maltreatment and 32% received post-investigation services following the initial investigation.

About 22% of the cases in which there is a substantiated incident of abuse or neglect are likely to have a recurrence of maltreatment within three years (See Figure 1). The risk of recurrence of maltreatment is greatest during the 6 months immediately following the index report, with about 7% of all cases reporting another substantiated incident of abuse or neglect during this time.

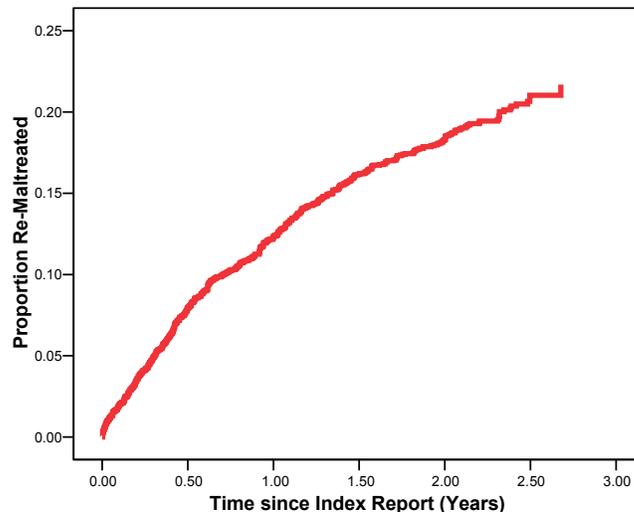


Figure 1: Rate of Maltreatment Recurrence Following an Initial Incident of Substantiated Child Maltreatment

### Child & Family Characteristics

#### Demographic Characteristics

Research has indicated that older children may be at lower risk for recurrence of child abuse or neglect (1,2). Findings from this analysis are consistent with this research. When compared to children from birth to 2 years of age, children 16 or older at the time of the initial maltreatment were 50% less likely to experience another substantiated case of abuse or neglect compared to infants. A total of 10% of infants were victims of abuse or neglect within 12 months as compared to 5% of older adolescents. Rates of re-maltreatment did not differ by a child's gender, race, or ethnicity.

Children in low SES households marked by receipt of public assistance or a history of financial or housing problems were over 322% more likely to experience another substantiated case of maltreatment than children from non-poor households (See Figure 2). This was, by far, the strongest predictor of re-maltreatment in the study.

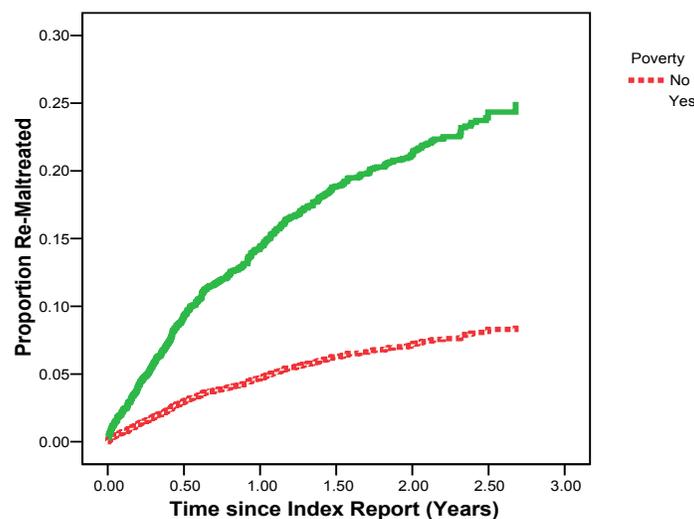


Figure 2: Difference in Rates of Re-maltreatment by SES

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## Family Risks

A family history of substance abuse has previously been shown to increase the chances that a child will have repeated incidents of maltreatment (3). In Rhode Island, a family history of alcohol or drug problems increased the likelihood of re-maltreatment by about 75% (17% vs. 10% re-maltreatment within 1 year) (see Figure 3).

## Case Characteristics

### Type of Maltreatment in the Initial Investigation

A few studies have found that cases in which the original maltreatment involved sexual abuse were less likely to recur than cases involving other types of abuse or neglect (1,4). In Rhode Island, a similar finding was observed; when the initial incident involved sexual abuse, there was a 50% lesser chance of a recurrence of maltreatment as compared to cases involving neglect. It is important to note that these analyses do not include children who received foster care, adoption, or transitional independent living post-investigation services – suggesting that case workers had made a determination that the child would be safe remaining in the home.

### Post-Investigation Services

After excluding cases that were receiving foster care, adoption, or transitional living services, the rates of recurrence of maltreatment was assessed in relation to various types of services provided after the initial investigation. In general, cases receiving services were 20% more likely to involve re-maltreatment than those not receiving services. A similar finding was obtained in one multi-state study (1). Although initially this finding may appear to be surprising, it is likely that children receiving services are those that caseworkers determine are at greatest risk. It is also possible that children receiving post-investigation services are more closely monitored by service providers who may observe and report additional abuse or neglect. Inspection of the providers reporting re-maltreatment suggests that this is the case.

### Prior CPS History

Prior CPS history has also been found to be an important predictor of recurrence of maltreatment in previous research (3). Rhode Island data was consistent with this finding; children with a prior CPS history were nearly 25% more likely to be re-maltreated than children without a prior history.

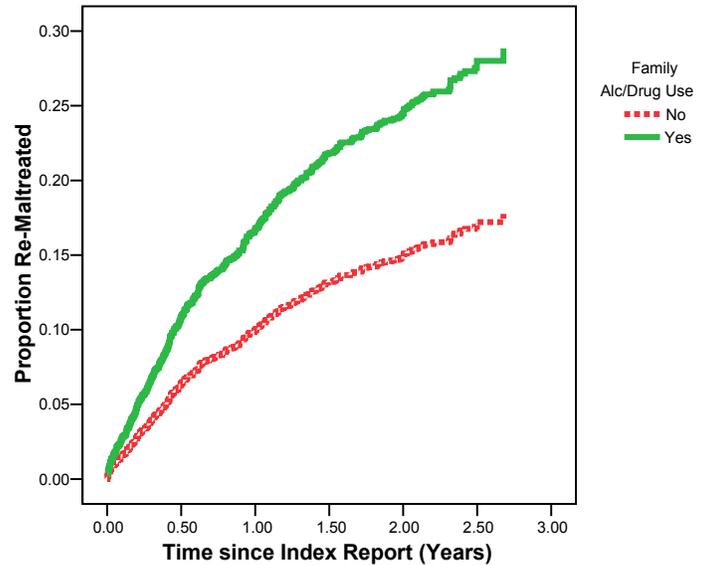


Figure 3: Difference in Rates of Re-maltreatment for Cases by Presence of Family Alcohol and Drug Problems

### Summary of Major Findings

- Approximately 22% of children for whom there was substantiated maltreatment had another substantiated incident of abuse or neglect within 3 years. The period of greatest risk was during the first 6 months following the initial report.
- Children most at risk for re-maltreatment include: those living in poverty or who are experiencing financial hardship, those in which a parent has an alcohol or drug problem, and those with a prior history of substantiated abuse or neglect. Children who received post-investigation services also had higher rates of re-abuse or neglect.
- Children less at risk for re-maltreatment include older adolescent children (16 or older) and children who were sexually abused (and remained in the home).

**References:** (1) Fluke, J. D., Yuan, Y.-Y., & Edwards, M. (1999). Recurrence of maltreatment: An application of the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23, 633-650. (2) Herrenkohl, R.C., & Herrenkohl, B. E. (1979). The repetition of abuse: How frequently does it occur? *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 3, 67-72. (3) English, D.J., Marshall, D.B., Brummel, S., Orme, M. (1999). Characteristics of repeated referrals to child protective services in Washington State. *Child Maltreatment*, 4, 297-307. (4) Jonson-Reid, M., Drake, B., Chung, S., & Way, I. (2003). Cross-type recidivism among child maltreatment victims and perpetrators. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 899-917.