

How do case outcomes differ based on child maltreatment referral source?

NADON, M., PARK, K., LEE, J. Y., & WRIGHT, M. (2023). WHO MAKES THE CALL? EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILD MALTREATMENT REFERRAL SOURCES AND CASE OUTCOMES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2008-2018. *CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT*, 145, 106404.

What can we learn from this study?

Few studies have examined the relationship between child maltreatment referral sources and the likelihood of reports resulting in substantiation or out-of-home placement. As the rate of child maltreatment reports has increased (from 38.9 in 2008 to 47.8 per 1,000 children in 2018), gaining a better understanding of referral sources and case outcomes can inform improvements to child welfare policy and practice.

Study details:

- **Population:** 39,628,078 child maltreatment reports in the U.S., with additional analyses on 24,349,293 reports from the top five referral sources
- **Data source:** National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, American Community Survey, child welfare policy analysis
- **Methodology:** Trend analysis descriptive analysis and pooled, fixed effects binary logistic regression
- **Dates:** 2008 to 2018

What are the critical findings?

The likelihood of substantiation and placement into out-of-home care significantly differ by referral source.

- **The most common referral sources were from education (18.4%), legal/law enforcement (18.3%), social service (11.1%), medical (8.3%) and mental health (5.3%).** Except for social services, rates of referrals from all these sources increased between 2008 and 2018.
- **Referrals from legal/law enforcement, social services, and medical personnel were more likely than referrals from mental health personnel to be substantiated and to result in out-of-home placement.** Legal/law enforcement personnel had the highest rates of substantiation. Referrals from social services personnel were most likely to lead to out-of-home placement.
- **The percentage of referrals from education increased more than those from any other referral source (from 17.6% in 2008 to 20.7% in 2018), but they were the least likely to result in out-of-home placement.**
- **States' poverty rates were associated with the likelihood of substantiation and out-of-home placement.** For each percentage point increase in a state's poverty rate, the odds of substantiation increased by 9% and the odds of out-of-home placement increased by 11%.

Why is this important for our work?

Although the number of maltreatment referrals is growing, variations in case outcomes by source indicate inconsistent policies and practices. Referrals from education personnel comprise the largest proportion of referrals and are least likely to result in out-of-home placement; this suggests a need for [better, more appropriate pathways](#) for families to access support (including [economic supports](#)) and culturally responsive training and education for mandated reporters about the trauma associated with child welfare involvement.

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research report. To learn more, see: [Are Universal Mandatory Reporting policies effective in identifying child physical abuse?](#) and [How do mandatory reporting laws affect help-seeking among survivors of intimate partner violence?](#)

For additional information, see the article [abstract](#) or contact KMResources@casey.org.