PURPOSE OF REVIEW

The purpose of the review was to quantitatively determine the safety of children in licensed foster care settings. The goal of the review is to identify information that describes the children and the incidents in order to address and prevent future incidents of abuse and neglect while children are in licensed foster care.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Used information from two automated systems. Staff from the Family Safety Quality Assurance Unit performed a review of data generated from two automated statewide information systems – the Florida Abuse Hotline Information System (FAHIS) and the Client Information System (CIS). FAHIS information begins at the Hotline with the taking of the report alleging abuse or neglect and continues with the documentation of information gathered and decisions made throughout the investigation. The FAHIS "Investigative Decision Summary" includes a summary of the allegations, evidence gathered, risk to the child, perpetrator information, findings and disposition of the investigative cases. The Client Information System documented client and provider information for those cases that were opened as service cases following the investigation. For purposes of this review, it is the system used to document that the children were in licensed foster care at the time the report was received.

Identified the cases for review. FAHIS and CIS are also the systems used to generate the quarterly and annual report titled Abuse/Neglect/Threatened Harm During Service Provision. This report was developed to inform management of the incidence of reabuse of children while in our care. Lists of children who are reabused while in care are sent to districts on a quarterly basis for further analysis along with the aggregate reports. Similarly, this review was designed to look at all children statewide who were reabused while in foster care. The annual aggregate report for April 2000 - March 2001 indicated that there were investigations with findings of some indications or verified abuse or neglect for 1413 children while they were in foster care during that period. As some of the children were involved in more than one investigation, a total of 1583 investigations involving the 1413 children were reviewed. All of the investigations involved child victims who were documented in CIS as foster children at the time the reports were received.

Reviewed the cases. The "Investigative Decision Summary" from FAHIS was reviewed for each of the 1583 abuse/neglect investigations on the victim children. Prior reports involving the alleged perpetrators were also reviewed. Significant
data about the investigations, the alleged perpetrators and the children were documented on a spreadsheet.

**Organized the data for analysis.** After reviewing each FAHIS "Investigative Decision Summary" each abuse or neglect incident was categorized based on where the child was residing at the time of the incident and the relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child.

**CATEGORY 1** — Incidents where the accused perpetrator was responsible for the child in foster care — the child was in foster care when abused or neglected and the suspected, known or unknown perpetrator was a foster parent, paramour or relative of a foster parent, an employee of the Department of Children and Families (i.e. a staff person supervising a visitation session or transporting a child to an appointment), or an employee of a licensed child caring facility (excluding Department of Juvenile Justice facilities).

**CATEGORY 2** — Incidents where the accused perpetrator was not related to the foster care placement — the child was in foster care when abused or neglected and the suspected, known or unknown perpetrator was a parent during visitation, a relative or paramour of a parent during visitation, a child care employee or a Department of Juvenile Justice employee.

**CATEGORY 3**— Incidents which occurred before or after the child was in foster care — the child was not in foster care when abused or neglected (i.e. the incident occurred before the child was placed in foster care) or the report was a companion report to a child-on-child sexual abuse incident and the perpetrator was an unknown adult. Generally, these reports involved professional, mandated reporters who recently learned of the abuse and neglect, but did not know whether the incidents were previously investigated, and therefore, called the Abuse Hotline. In several instances these incidents had, in fact, been previously investigated.

**Differentiated between "verified" maltreatment and "some indication" of maltreatment.** Florida, unlike many states, has implemented two categories for determining abuse and neglect. The first category is "verified" cases where the preponderance of the credible evidence results in a determination that the specific injury, harm or threatened harm was the result of abuse or neglect. The second category includes investigations where there are some indications of abuse/neglect but not a preponderance of credible evidence. This is not the standard that is used by most states in reporting reabuse statistics. A "verified" finding is not indicative of the severity of the abuse or neglect. For example, a minor accident on a playground in an emergency shelter facility was classified as "verified" neglect because the facility had been given a licensing warning about the playground equipment.
FINDINGS:

There were 566 children in Category 3 -- these incidents occurred before the children were in foster care. Category 3 incidents, since they occurred prior to the child's removal into foster care, should not be counted as abuse/neglect while in foster care. Therefore, further analysis in this review will focus on the 847 children in Categories 1 and 2.

There were verified findings of abuse related to the child being in foster care for 12 children per 1000 children in foster care. There were 656 children with indicated or verified findings of abuse while in foster care where the alleged perpetrator was the foster parent, paramour or relative of the foster parent, or an employee of the Department or a licensed child caring facility, excluding a DJJ facility. Of the 656 incidents of abuse or neglect related to the stay in foster care,
there were verified findings for 185 children. Using a base of 15,270 children served in foster care statewide between April 1, 2000 and March 31, 2001, this represents a verified abuse rate of 1.2 percent or 12 children per 1000 children in care where the abuse was related to the foster care placement. Including the indicated findings, the incidence rate for abuse related to the foster care placement is 42 per 1000 children in foster care or 4.2 percent of the foster care population. Counting the children in Categories 1 and 2 together, the rate of abuse or neglect of children while in foster care, regardless of whether the incident was related to the stay in foster care, was 5.5 percent or 55 children per 1000 children in foster care.

![Incidence of Abuse/Neglect per 1000 Children in Foster Care](image)

Other findings included:

- 432 children had a report with a some or verified finding that involved a foster parent, paramour or relative of the foster parent.
  - 312 of these children had investigations with a finding of “some indications”.
  - 120 of these children had an investigation with a finding of “verified”.
  - At least 105 children were moved as a result of an investigation when the finding was “verified”. In the remaining investigations, the reviewer could not determine from the desk review if the child was moved.

- 214 children had a report with some or verified finding that involved an employee of the department or a facility or an unknown perpetrator
  - 149 of these children had investigations with a finding of “some indications”
  - 65 of these children had investigations with a finding of “verified”
SUMMARY
This review helped to establish the scope of the problem of abuse and neglect of children in foster care. More in-depth analysis is necessary to identify why children are being abused in foster care so that preventive measures can be implemented. The data analysis also uncovered serious shortcomings in our performance reports related to reabuse while in care. The current measure significantly overstated the incidence of reabuse of children while in licensed care.

NEXT STEPS:

1. A root cause analysis of Category 1 cases will be completed to determine why children are being abused or neglected in foster care. Counter measures will be identified and a plan developed for implementation and tracking.

2. An accurate method will be established and implemented to measure abuse or neglect of a child while in foster care.

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