

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADULT PROTECTIVE
SERVICES ADMINISTRATORS**

**REPORT ON STATES' ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES
DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

November, 2001

INTRODUCTION

The problem of elder/adult abuse is not a recent development. It was first recognized in the United States in the mid 1960's when a few grants were given by the Administration on Aging for the support of local adult protective services programs. By the early 1980's, most states had mandatory reporting laws in place, but had not addressed the issues of data collection and reporting. Now, almost twenty years later, there are still many states unable to provide much more than a basic count of the number of elder/adult abuse reports they receive in a given year.

Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to collect data on elder abuse. These attempts have been frustrated by inconsistent information collected by state programs serving abused elderly and younger persons with disabilities. In the Introduction to a 1999 study conducted by Jonathan Heller, a Kiplinger Fellow at Ohio State University, the author states, "The wide disparity in the findings...leave many elder abuse experts feeling in the dark as to the true prevalence of elder abuse in the U.S."

Information on reports of abuse, exploitation and neglect of elderly and disabled adults is collected by state protective service agencies. Since there is no federal agency charged with collecting these data on a regular basis, current information at the national level about the number of reports as well as the source of these reports, types of abuse, characteristics of victims and perpetrators and treatment outcomes is unavailable.

As part of a Baseline Survey of Adult Protective Services, the National Association of Adult Protective Services (NAAPSA), a partner in the National Center on Elder Abuse, agreed to compile information on states' Adult Protective Services Data Management Systems. The purpose of this survey is to gain information on how states collect data, as well as what kinds of data are available from the states.

METHODOLOGY

In order to make this report NAAPSA has relied on two sources of information. The first is a Survey of States' Adult Protective Services Information Systems, which was conducted in the fall of 1997 in cooperation with Toshio Tatara of the

National Center on Elder Abuse. In July 1997, a three-page questionnaire was developed and sent to all the state Adult Protective Services administrators. Responses to this survey were received from 34 states and the territory of Guam. Information from the survey was data entered and statistically analyzed by National Center on Elder Abuse staff. Due to Dr. Tatara's retirement, results of the Survey were never published, and are being presented here for the first time.

The second source of information on states' data management capabilities is the National Survey of States which was designed in 1999 by NAAPSA and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse to collect information regarding state statutes, administrative procedures and funding related to the delivery of adult protection/elder abuse reporting and investigation. The survey also collected essential information on both victims and perpetrators. It was sent to all fifty state Adult Protective Services offices, as well as the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories. Fifty of the states as well as Guam and the District of Columbia responded.

Questions about the states' data management systems were not included in the Survey. However, an analysis of the number of states which responded to Survey questions requiring specific data, as well an examination of the kinds of questions they were most likely to answer provides a picture of states' data management capabilities.

FINDINGS

1997 Survey of States' Adult Protective Services Information Systems

Of the 35 responders, 25 states indicated that there were a total of 11,184 users of their data management systems. Funding for their systems was provided through a variety of sources including state funds, local funds and combined state/local funds. Only 5 states provided information on the costs of their systems which ranged from a low of \$2,500 in Guam to a high of \$26,000,000 in Florida. (It is assumed that the Florida system also includes Child Protection, although the survey did not ask for that information.) At the time of the survey, states were in various stages of data system development. One state reported that there was no plan for an APS data system. Thirteen states said that they already had a statewide system in place. Eleven states reported being in the planning and design phase for a new system, one was awaiting approval, one was in contract negotiations, and one was installing equipment.

Of the functions supported by state data management systems, 66% supported intake, 47% supported assessment, 63.9% supported case assignment, 44% monitored service delivery, 55.6% provided systems, 41.7% tracked sources of referrals, 41.7% included a risk assessment component, 52.8% included outcome measures. Of the 36 states, 22.2% reported that their APS data management system was part of the SACWIS Child Welfare data systems which

were funded in part through federal child welfare grants. Five states indicated that they would be willing to share their APS software with other states. And 69.4% of the respondents said that they would be interested in a teleconference to share information on data management system development.

2000 Survey of States

Of the fifty-two respondents, only one state, Texas was able to provide information on all 28 of the questions which required numerical responses. Twelve states were able to 75% or more of the questions. Thirty-one states were able to provide specific data on at least 50% of the questions, and nine states were able to only answer 25% or fewer of the data questions on the Survey.

Only four questions were answered by at least 75% of the respondents. They were: Categories and number of cases investigated, total number of complaints investigated, total number of complaints confirmed/substantiated/validate, and the reasons for case closures.

Questions answered by 25% or less of the states included age of substantiated victims excluding self-neglect, age of substantiated victims of self-neglect only and the age of perpetrators in substantiated reports. Overall, there was little data available on perpetrators. Only 65% of the states could provide information on sources or amounts of funding for their APS programs.

DISCUSSION

Neither of the surveys referred to in this study provide a complete picture of states' APS data management systems. The 1997 study is already four years old. It is assumed that since that time, more states have implemented statewide information systems for APS. However, the relatively poor ability of the states to provide basic data for the 2000 survey indicates that information gathering is still uneven. APS programs rely heavily on state funds which often change from year to year. The states which also use Title XX SSBG funds have experienced a steady erosion of these funds since 1996. The fact that only four states could provide information on the cost of their data management systems indicates that allocations for this purpose are rare.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, conducted by the Administration on Aging in 1999 concluded that their findings represented only "the tip of the iceberg" in terms of the actual national incidence of elder abuse. Without accurate, consistent data management systems in the states, and without annual reports which are collected and disseminated at the national level, we will continue to measure the incidence of elder abuse in thermal units. The lack of

reliable data continues to prevent policy makers and advocates from telling a credible story to legislators.