

The Use of Administrative Data to Improve Identification and Outcomes for Youth who Experience Commercial Sexual Exploitation

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Background

In 2014, President Obama signed Public Law 113-183, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, which required that agencies develop policies and procedures for identifying and serving children and youth who experience sex trafficking or are at-risk of such experiences.

These requirements were codified by California law and implemented in 2016.

Background

WIC § 300 (b)(2) defines a **commercially sexually exploited child (CSEC)** as:

“A child who is sexually trafficked, as described in Section 236.1 of the Penal Code, or who receives food or shelter in exchange for, or who is paid to perform, sexual acts described in Section 236.1 or 11165.1 of the Penal Code, and whose parent or guardian failed to, or was unable to, protect the child”

WIC § 16501.35, & WIC § 16501.45 require child welfare agencies to identify children receiving child welfare services that have experienced **commercial sexual exploitation (CSE)** or are at-risk of CSE victimization

CSEC Data Grid

The screenshot displays a software interface with a navigation bar at the top containing icons for a document with a dollar sign, a person at a desk, and a person with a bag. Below the navigation bar are tabs for 'Case Log', 'AFDC-FC', 'Attorneys', 'Service Providers', 'I.C.W.A.', 'Adoption Info', and 'AAP Eligibility'. The main content area is titled 'CSEC Data' and contains a table with the following structure:

	CSEC Type	Start Date	End Date
+			
1			

Below the table, there are three dropdown menus: 'CSEC Type', 'Start Date', and 'End Date'. The 'CSEC Type' dropdown is open, showing a list of options: '<None>', '<None>', 'At Risk', 'Victim Before Foster Care', 'Victim During Foster Care', 'Victim in Open Case not in Foster Care', 'Victim while Absent from Placement', and 'Victim with Closed Case, Rcv ILP Svcs'. A red arrow points from the table area down to the 'CSEC Type' dropdown menu.

Exploitation Allegations

Client Services - Referral [L, Mother] - [Allegation [L, Susie (15)]]

File Edit Search Action Associated Attach/Detach Window Help Tools

ID Conclusion

Current Conclusion

People Involved

Alleged Victim: L, Susie

Abuse Category: Exploitation

Alleged Perpetrator:

Conclusion Date: 04/12/2016

Allegation Conclusion: Substantiated

Conclusion Description

Abuse Information

+ Abuse Subcategory

Select Abuse Information

Abuse SubCategory

- Child Porno, Knowledge/Involvmnt of Parnt
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- Exploiting Child's Labor
- Involving Child in Criminal Behavior
- Other Exploitation
- Selling/Offering to Sell Child

Conclusion History

Allegation Conclusion History

Date	Conclusion	Grievance
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Allegation Conclusion modified as a result of due grievance?

No Yes

Background: Relevant Research

A recent study found that youth confirmed to have experienced CSEC were more likely to experience kidnapping, physical abuse and sexual assault by a non-relative than youth identified only as at-risk of CSEC using a sex trafficking screening tool (Kenny et al., 2019).

These findings suggest that distinguishing between youth at-risk for and actually experiencing CSE may have important implications for service provision.

Background: Relevant Research

Some research suggests that CSE disproportionately impacts certain subsets of the child population, including African American, LGB and gender nonconforming youth (Alessi et al., 2020; Baker, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2010). However, other evidence suggests the presence of bias in the identification of CSE across the child population (Halter, 2010).

Taken together, these findings reveal a need for rigorous research on the experiences of CSE among the child population.

Questions of Interest

- What is the scope of exploitation across California?
- To what extent is exploitation specific to CSEC?
- Who is identified as being a *victim* of CSEC?
- Who is identified only as being *at-risk* of CSEC?
- To what extent can we assess recurrence of CSEC?

Findings: CSEC Data Grid

- Since 2014, a total of 8,855 youth before the age of 18 years received one or more entry on the CSEC Data Grid
- Among all youth with entries:
 - 26.8% ever had a “victim” data grid entry
 - Across counties that entered information on the CSEC data grid for at least 250 youth, the percentage of youth with one or more “victim” entry ranged from 5.5 to 67.0%

Findings: Exploitation Allegations

- Since 2014, a total of 9,297 youth were the subject of one or more allegations of exploitation
- Among all youth with allegations of exploitation:
 - 18.2% ever had a substantiated exploitation allegation

Taken together...

- Since 2014, a total of 14,892 youth have been identified by the CWS for suspected exploitation and/or trafficking by age 18
- Among these youth:
 - 11.5% ever received an exploitation substantiation
 - 15.9% has a “victim” data grid entry
 - 6.3% has a substantiation and a victim data grid entry
 - 9.6% had a “victim” grid entry but had no substantiated allegation of exploitation
 - 3.7% had substantiated allegations of exploitation but no data grid entry

Additional Findings

Since 2014, nearly 15,000 minors have been identified as being vulnerable to exploitation or human trafficking in California.

However:

- Very few of these children have been documented as "victims" of CSEC, either through substantiated allegations or CSEC data grid entries on the client page
- A majority were only ever flagged as being "at-risk" of CSEC and were never reported or investigated for alleged exploitation
- The use of CSEC risk and victimization indicators vary widely across counties, and are widely used among non-dependent children

Implications

These findings suggest the presence of conflicting understandings of and screening procedures for using the “at-risk” category on the CSEC data grid.

Existing data fields and collection practices prevent us from rigorously examining recurrence of CSE and make it challenging to document the effectiveness of prevention efforts.

These findings may inform efforts to clarify expectations, establish uniformity across counties and design improved service management platforms (CWS-CARES)

Next Steps

- Clear and consistent guidelines are needed for identifying, documenting, and reporting child-level information about CSEC-affected youth in CWS/CMS
 - Guidance should include a clearer definition of what “at risk” means, and provide additional instruction around the use of the term
 - Guidance should include survivor and stakeholder participation
- Use of a validated screening tool could ensure better consistency across child welfare staff and jurisdictions
- Consideration of the unique experiences of youth impacted by CSE when determining and measuring outcomes
- Planning around CSE-data in development of the CWS-CARES system

Questions?

Thank You

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