

George H. Ryan
Governor



Jess McDonald
Director

Illinois Department of Children & Family Services

April 28, 2002

Dear Honorable Members of the General Assembly:

I am proud to present the seventh annual report of the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP), in compliance with PA 88-614. This report is based on research and analysis conducted by the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The evaluation continues to demonstrate that the CERAP is a reliable and valid protocol for assessing the safety of children who have been reported to be abused or neglected.

In each of the years since CERAP was implemented in 1995, there has been a substantial decrease in the likelihood that abuse or neglect will recur. Since CERAP implementation, the incidence of child abuse or neglect occurring within 60 days of a report to DCFS has declined nearly 60%. This is clear evidence that Illinois children are increasingly well protected. As a result, the CERAP has become a national model for child safety assessment. Many other states have adopted it for use in child protective services.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Richard Calica of the Juvenile Protective Association, who chairs the multidisciplinary task force that developed the protocol and continues to chair the committee that oversees its continued development and implementation. I would also like to recognize the staff of the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois who gathered and analyzed the data cited in this report. The professional child welfare caseworkers at DCFS and Illinois' private child welfare agencies have enthusiastically embraced the CERAP as they make use of the protocol every day. It is through their hard work that Illinois has become the national leader in keeping children safe from child abuse and neglect.

I thank Governor Ryan and the members of the General Assembly for their continued support in this important effort; protecting our children.

Sincerely,

Jess McDonald

406 E. Monroe Street · Springfield, Illinois 62701
217-785-2509 · 217-524-3715 / TTY



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Illinois Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol

A Report to the General Assembly

Prepared by

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

April 26, 2002

DCFS:

**Jess McDonald, Director
John Goad, Deputy Director**

**CERAP Advisory Committee:
Richard Calica, Chair**

**University of Illinois Child and Family Research Center:
Tamara Fuller
Philip Garnier
Martin Nieto**

Executive Summary

This document is the seventh annual report to the Illinois General Assembly regarding the implementation, reliability and validity of the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP). Public Act 88-614 required the development of this protocol and mandated an annual report to the General Assembly. CERAP training and certification is required for all direct service child welfare caseworkers, investigators, and supervisors, from both the public and private sectors. This year's report is based upon information provided through research conducted by the Child and Family Research Center (CFRC) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. These studies document that, during the past six years, Illinois children who are victims of abuse or neglect have been increasingly safe following an initial incident of child abuse or neglect and resultant DCFS intervention.

Major findings include:

Since the implementation of CERAP there has been a steady and significant reduction in the recurrence of child abuse/neglect during the 60 days following a child's initial report.

- In 1995, 3,828 children were abused or neglected within 60 days following a report to DCFS. By 2001 the number has declined to 950. This represents an overall decline in the recurrence of maltreatment within 60 days of initial investigation of 59.04% over six years.

- The decline was most noticeable in the first year of implementation of CERAP (1996) when the 60-day recurrence rate dropped from 2.71% to 2.09%, a reduction of 22.88%. However, in each of the succeeding years the recurrence rate has continued to decline. The rate of recurrence within 60 days was 1.80% in 1997, 1.75% in 1998, 1.60% in 1999, 1.41% in 2000, and 1.11 in 2001.

Since the implementation of CERAP there has been a steady and significant reduction in the recurrence in *households* in which a child was reported to be abused or neglected during the preceding 60 days.

- In 1995, there was a recurrence of abuse or neglect in 1,767 households in which DCFS had investigated abuse or neglect during the preceding 60 days. By 2001 the number has declined to 481. This represents an overall decline in the recurrence of maltreatment within 60 days of initial investigation of 59.14% over six years.
- The decline was most noticeable in the first year of implementation of CERAP (1996) when the 60-day household recurrence rate dropped from 2.79% to 1.99%, a reduction of 28.67%. However, in each of the succeeding years the household recurrence rate has continued to decline. The rate of household recurrence within 60 days was 1.80% in 1997, 1.73% in 1998, 1.54% in 1999, 1.40% in 2000, and 1.14 in 2001.

Since the implementation of CERAP -- for children not taken into protective custody -- there has been a steady and significant reduction in the recurrence of child abuse/neglect during the 120 days following the child's first report.

- In 1995, 3,315 children were abused or neglected within 120 days following a report to DCFS. By 2001 the number has decreased to 1,123. This represents a decline in the recurrence of maltreatment within 120 days of initial investigation of 53.8% over six years.
- Again, the decline was most noticeable in the first year of implementation of CERAP (1996) when the recurrence rate went from 3.18% down to 2.72%, a reduction of 14.47%. Since 1996, the recurrence rate has continued to decline each year. The rate of recurrence within 120 days was 2.40% in 1997, 2.37% in 1998, 2.31% in 1999, 1.99% in 2000, and 1.47% in 2001.

This extremely positive outcome has now held up for six years, making it clear that the CERAP is a valid and reliable protocol for identifying and controlling factors that make children unsafe from abuse/neglect. The effectiveness of the CERAP is clear. The enormous impact on child safety has resulted in a huge decrease in subsequent report rates, and the number and rate of children placed in substitute care has also declined.

Overview

This report is the seventh annual evaluation report to the Illinois General Assembly regarding the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP), as required by PA88-614.

This year's evaluation is based upon research conducted by the Child and Family Research Center (CFRC) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The study focuses on the validity and reliability of the CERAP by analyzing whether its use affects the safety of Illinois children. Relevant parts of the study are included in Section 2 of this report.

The study repeats an analysis that had been done by both the American Humane Association and the CFRC during the past six years. This project consists of a review of all the children (708,556) and households (336,362) who were subjects of a first report during any of the past seven years; this includes the year before CERAP implementation and each year since. It was determined for which of these children and in which households abuse or neglect recurred during the 60 days following the initial report. The results, detailed in section two, document a significant and steady reduction during each of the past six years, with a cumulative reduction of 59.04% for children and 59.14% for households.

The study was duplicated examining only children who had not been taken into protective custody as the result of the initial report. The decrease in the recurrence rate again was shown to steadily decrease, with a six-year cumulative decrease of 54.93%.

Finally, this group of children is examined to determine the portion for which abuse or neglect recurred within 120 day of the initial report. Once again the percentage declined each year. Since implementation of the CERAP, the cumulative decrease is 53.77%.

Genesis and Mandate of the Law

Increased attention to incidents and severe maltreatment of children in Illinois during 1993 and 1994 led to the passage of Senate Bill 1357, which became effective as PA 88-614 on September 7, 1994. This bill required that the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services develop a child endangerment risk assessment protocol, and to implement its use by training staff and certifying their proficiency at applying the protocol. Additionally, the Department was directed to form a multi-disciplinary task force and contract with an outside expert to assist in this project. The task force was created in 1994, and included experts in many disciplines, including: law enforcement, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, developmental disabilities, medical, and others. The American Humane Association from Denver was contracted as the outside expert.

The intent of this legislation in mandating the development and ongoing testing of a child endangerment risk assessment protocol was threefold:

- The establishment of a standardized protocol combined with mandated training for all personnel responsible for safety decisions was seen as a

way to improve child safety. This standardized protocol was meant to provide diligent workers with protection under the law (they would be held harmless if they did what was reasonably expected to protect a child, yet still experienced an undesirable outcome).

- The establishment of a standardized child endangerment risk assessment protocol held the promise of being able to apply existing empirical research to our decision making process. The mandate also directed the Department to evaluate these efforts annually and to attempt to improve our results through further research and training.
- By requiring ongoing reports to the state legislature about the validity and reliability of the protocol, the intent was to clarify for the public the difficulties encountered when attempting to predict the future. It is neither good public policy nor good child welfare practice to remove all children with indicated cases of child abuse/neglect from their families. A safety protocol that is based on research findings allows the Department to make more thoughtful decisions concerning the safety of children.

Summary of Ongoing Implementation

Over the past six years, more than 9000 DCFS and private agency staff have been certified in applying CERAP. All new hires who are direct service workers, investigators, or supervisors are required to demonstrate their ability to assess the safety of children by passing the CERAP certification test **before** they can make safety decisions concerning a child. New public and private sector child welfare staff who fail in two attempts to pass the test are denied employment.

Illinois Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol Evaluation: Impact on Short-term Recurrence Rates – Year Six

This report analyzes the impact of Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) implementation on the safety of children investigated by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for abuse and/or neglect between its implementation on December 1, 1995 and November 30, 2001. Special focus is placed on the period between December 1 2000 and November 30, 2001.

The CERAP consists of a focused system for assessing safety using empirically based factors found to correlate with risk of abuse and/or neglect. When children are assessed as being unsafe, the CERAP documents a safety plan for each child in the household. Investigators and case workers and their supervisors from DCFS, as well as from private child welfare agencies, receive intensive training in the CERAP and must pass a certification examination demonstrating their mastery of the protocol.

For the purpose of this study, child safety is assessed using data from DCFS' Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System (CANTS) and is defined as the occurrence of an indicated report of maltreatment within 60 days of an initial report. The current analyses build upon the results of previous years' reports that found declining recurrence rates over the six years post CERAP implementation.

Several alternative explanations for the reduction in recurrence were assessed in previous reports. Policy changes in substance-affected infants and risk of harm and/or inadequate supervision while in the care of a relative were not related to reduced recurrence. These analyses were therefore dropped in last year's and this year's reports.

This report presents an analysis of changes in short-term maltreatment recurrence rates from the year before the first implementation of CERAP (1995) through the six years following implementation.

Recurrence Analysis

Short-term recurrence¹ rates have decreased in each of the six years since implementation of the CERAP. In 1995, 3,828 children were abused or neglected within 60 days following a report to DCFS. By 2001 the number has declined to 950. Table 1 presents the recurrence rates for the 708,556 children and their first investigation that occurred during the seven-year time period observed. As the table shows, there has been a consistent decrease in the recurrence rates over the seven-year period. Overall, the percentage reduction in recurrence from 1995² through 2001 was 59.04%.

¹This is a measure of investigated children who were subsequently abused or neglected.

² Because implementation of the CERAP first occurred on December 1, 1995, each of the seven comparison years was defined as beginning on December 1 and ending November 30.

Table 1. 60-Day Recurrence for First Reports in Time Period

	Total	Number Recurrent^a	Crude Rate (%)	% Reduction From Prior Year^b
1995	141,240	3,828	2.71	
1996	112,949	2,363	2.09	22.88
1997	99,925	1,800	1.80	13.88
1998	93,201	1,630	1.75	02.78
1999	87,538	1,399	1.60	08.57
2000	88,173	1,243	1.41	11.88
2001 ^c	85,530	950	1.11	21.28

^aThe number recurrent is of children with an indicated report occurring within 60 days of their first report in the time period observed.

^bPercentage changes represent the percentage change in percentages, not the raw difference from one percentage to another.

^cRecurrence rates for 2000 may be incomplete as data for January 1, 2001 through January 29, 2001 were not available at the time of analysis.

The data representing first reports were further refined by selecting only the Sequence A (first time) reports and only the cases not associated with protective custody being taken. Since the CERAP is targeted at the prevention of future maltreatment and children with multiple investigations have higher rates of indication than those in their first investigation, controlling for investigation number by selecting only Sequence A reports provides a clearer picture of the impact of CERAP implementation. Eliminating children with protective custody taken theoretically excludes from analysis those children who spent a portion of time out of the investigated (and CERAP evaluated) household³.

³³ Because of questions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of protective custody cases from these recurrence analyses, separate analyses were conducted including cases associated with protective custody cases, excluding cases associated with protective custody, and including only those cases associated with protective custody having been taken. Analyses that included protective custody cases with total reports did not differ from those excluding protective custody cases. The crude recurrence rates and percentage reductions were the same whether protective custody cases were included or not.

These 590,900 children without protective custody and with Sequence A reports are the subject of the remainder of analyses presented. The 60-day recurrence rates during the seven-year observation period for these children are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. 60-Day Recurrence for Sequence A Reports in Time Period, Excluding Cases Associated with Protective Custody Taken

	Total	Number Recurrent ^a	Crude Rate	% Reduction From Prior Year ^b
1995	104,146	2,221	2.13	
1996	90,959	1,605	1.76	17.37
1997	84,461	1,354	1.60	09.09
1998	79,895	1,241	1.55	03.13
1999	76,820	1,111	1.45	06.45
2000	78,412	991	1.26	13.10
2001 ^c	76,207	734	0.96	23.81

^aThe number recurrent is of children with an indicated report occurring within 60 days of their first Sequence A report in the time period observed.

^bPercentage changes represent the percentage change in percentages, not the raw difference from one percentage to another.

^cRecurrence rates for 2001 may be incomplete as data for January 1, 2002 through January 29, 2002 were not available at the time of analysis.

As Table 2 shows, for each year observed, there has been a reduction in the recurrence rates relative to the previous year. In 1995, 2,221 children were abused or neglected within 60 days following a first time report to DCFS that did not result in the child being taken into protective custody. By 2001 the number has declined to 734. The overall reduction from pre-implementation to 2001, the sixth year post implementation, is 54.93%.⁴

⁴ However, this figure may be slightly inflated due to possible recurrences occurring after January 1, 2002.

Because children living in households in which their siblings have been maltreated are likely to be at risk of being abused or neglected, recurrence at the household level was examined. Short-term recurrence rates at the household level have also decreased over the six years following implementation of the CERAP. Table 3 presents the recurrence rates for the 336,362 households and their first investigation that occurred during the seven-year time period observed. As the table shows, there has been a consistent decrease in the recurrence rates over the seven-year period. Overall, the percentage reduction in recurrence from 1995 to 2001 was 59.14%⁵.

⁵This figure may be slightly inflated due to possible recurrences occurring after December 31, 2001.

Table 3. 60-Day Indicated Re-Reports for Household’s First Report in Time Period: Indicated Re-Reports Relative to Total Number of First Reports

Year	Total	Number Recurrent^a	Crude Rate (%)	% Reduction From Prior Year^b
1995	63439	1767	2.79	
1996	51514	1024	1.99	28.67
1997	48097	865	1.80	9.55
1998	44902	775	1.73	3.89
1999	43063	664	1.54	10.98
2000 ^c	43069	603	1.40	9.09
2001 ^d	42278	481	1.14	18.57

^aThe number recurrent is of children with an indicated report occurring within 60 days of their first report in the time period observed.

^bPercentage changes represent the percentage change in percentages, not the raw difference from one percentage to another.

^cNote that both the number recurrent and the crude rate in 2000 differ from those of the previous report. This is because the denominator, first reports, represents all first reports through November 30, 2000. Complete data for the numerator, number recurrent, representing recurrences on December 1, 2000 through January 29, 2001 was not available at the time of the previous report.

^dRecurrence rates for 2001 may be incomplete as data for January 1, 2002 through January 29, 2002 were not available.

The overall pattern of short-term recurrence at the household level is similar to the pattern found when the analysis is done at the child level.

Although the CERAP was originally designed to assess risk for the 60 days post assessment, we “looked ahead” to see if the CERAP might be predictive of lower recurrence rates post 60 days. Table 4 presents the results of a 120-day recurrence analysis for the same children represented in Table 8, that is, children with Sequence A reports without protective custody.

**Table 4. 120-Day Recurrence for Sequence A Reports in Time Period,
Excluding Cases Associated with Protective Custody Taken**

	Total	Number Recurrent^a	Crude Rate	% Reduction From Prior Year^b
1995	104,146	3,315	3.18	
1996	90,959	2,471	2.72	14.47
1997	84,461	2,031	2.40	11.76
1998	79,895	1,891	2.37	01.25
1999	76,820	1,777	2.31	02.53
2000	78,412	1,560	1.99	13.85
2001 ^c	76,207	1,123	1.47	26.13

^aThe number recurrent is of children with an indicated report occurring within 120 days of their first Sequence A report in the time period observed.

^bPercentage changes represent the percentage change in percentages, not the raw difference from one percentage to another.

^cRecurrence rates for 2001 may be incomplete as data for January 1, 2002 through January 29, 2002 were not available at the time of analysis.

As Table 3 shows, for each year observed, there has been a reduction in the recurrence rates relative to the previous year. In 1995, 3,315 children were abused or neglected within 120 days following a first time report to DCFS that did not result in the child being taken into protective custody. By 2001 the number has declined to 1,123. The overall reduction from pre-implementation to 2001, the sixth year post implementation, is 53.77%.⁵

Summary

Results of the six-year follow-up of the impact of the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol indicate that 60 and 120-day recurrence of maltreatment for at-risk children has decreased consistently from the year prior to first implementation of the

CERAP (1995) - through 2001⁶. Overall, the 60 and 120-day rates of recurrence of maltreatment decreased more than 50% over the seven-year period. The reduction in recurrence rates from year to year was more pronounced in the initial years after implementation than in the last few years. This is not surprising and the rates of recurrence can be expected to level off in the near future.

Future Directions

Next year's evaluation will repeat the analysis of the rate at which children are abused or neglected within 60 and 120 days of a DCFS investigation at both the child and household levels. In addition, changes in the rates at which children are taken into state custody will be compared with changes in the rates of abuse/neglect since CERAP implementation to test the hypothesis that the improved process for safety assessment is effective in identifying children who are **safe** just as it is clearly effective in identifying those who are not. Finally, an analysis of cases of children who were subsequently maltreated within 60 and 120 days of a DCFS investigation will be conducted in an effort to discover any shared characteristics and potential improvements in the effort to protect children.

⁶ Recurrence figures for year 2001 are however, incomplete; data on potential recurrences 33 to 60 days after initial reports made November 2- November 30, 2001 were not available at the time of writing.