

Introduction to California Adult Protective Services Standards for Consistency in Determining Findings 2011

In 2006, because of concerns voiced by the CWDA Protective Services Operations Committee (PSOC) about the inconsistency of data reported on the SOC 242, the Archstone Foundation funded a research project to investigate this issue. Dr. Aileen Wiglesworth of the University of California at Irvine (UCI) was the primary investigator.

The research verified many areas of inconsistencies, the greatest of which was the determination of findings. Findings varied from:

- confirmed investigations ranging from 0% to 68.1%
- inconclusive investigations ranging from 8.1% to 100.0%
- unfounded investigations ranging from 0% to 79.33%.

These ranges far exceeded normal variations, and were a reflection of inconsistent definitions and practices across counties.

In response to this information, PSOC formed a committee to address the issues of inconsistency in APS practice. The group was made up of APS managers from throughout the state, and they made improving the consistency in determining findings their first priority.

Because of the complexity and uniqueness of elder and dependent adult abuse and neglect, and because ascertaining findings is a subjective process, it was not possible to develop a fixed formula for determining findings. Instead, the committee concentrated on developing a consistent approach to understanding and evaluating the information gathered, and focusing the investigation on the relevant information. The protocol created uses a reasoned, thoughtful approach to formulating findings. It clearly delineates the essential defining elements of each type of abuse/neglect—which gives workers direction and focus for gathering information, and provides them with a structure for evaluating the relative strength and integrity of that information. The resulting findings are based on both the facts gathered and the social worker's expertise.

There are two components to the protocol, which complement each other and are designed to be used in concert. They are:

- Guiding Principles which focus workers on the relevant information
- A Matrix which outlines standards to improve the consistency of how cases are approached and understood

Guiding Principles

- Define the basis for findings
- Identify extraneous information which may be important in formulating the plan of action but are not relevant to the determination of findings
- Focus workers on what is important
- Recommend good casework practices
- Outline types of evidence
- Define standards for findings

While careful consideration has been given to the development of these standards for findings, they must be understood as a general rule, not an absolute dictate. Unusual and unique situations sometimes arise, and workers must have flexibility to adjust their findings to reflect those situations. However, the decision to overrule the standards should be made in conjunction with the worker and his/her supervisor.

Matrix

- Creates operational definitions that are in common, everyday language
- Identifies the key elements of those definitions which provide the focus of the investigative process
- Suggests areas to be explored and raises questions which should act as a prompt for information gathering
- Provides examples of evidence which would be indicators of abuse

Together, these tools will provide structure to the decision-making process and provide workers with standards which will improve the consistency of APS practice throughout the state.

Online Training Evaluation and Research

Participants engage in various evaluation activities before, during and after the online training, including a 3- and 6-month follow-up survey. These activities and the data collected will be evaluated to measure if this training has a direct impact on APS practice in CA.

Dr. Aileen Wiglesworth of the University of California at Irvine (UCI) has agreed to evaluate the data in an effort to come “full circle” with the process—that is, from research to subject matter experts to policy to training and back to research. This research is also part of a larger national movement to develop best-practice standards in APS; California is currently a leader in this movement.

Participation in training evaluation activities is voluntary and confidential. Full participation in these activities is encouraged and appreciated.

For information on online course registration or evaluation, please contact Krista Brown:
krbrown@projects.sdsu.edu