



Answering the big questions about differential response in Colorado: Safety and cost outcomes from a randomized controlled trial^{☆,☆☆}

Marc Winokur^{a,*}, Raquel Ellis^b, Ida Drury^c, John Rogers^b

^a Colorado State University, 110 Education, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA

^b Westat, 1600 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850, USA

^c Colorado Department of Human Services, Administrative Review Division, 4045 S. Lowell Boulevard, Denver, CO 80205, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 March 2014

Received in revised form 3 June 2014

Accepted 4 June 2014

Available online 2 July 2014

Keywords:

Differential response
Child abuse and neglect
Child protective services
Child welfare

ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years, jurisdictions across the United States have implemented differential response (DR), which provides child protective services with the flexibility to tailor their response to reports of child abuse or neglect based on the level of risk. Given the widespread adoption of DR, there has been an increasing demand from policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders to build the evidence base for this innovative child welfare approach. This study was designed to answer the big questions regarding the effect of differential response on child welfare outcomes and costs using a randomized controlled trial in five Colorado counties. Specifically, the study examined the safety outcomes and costs of families who were randomly assigned to either a family assessment response (FAR) or an investigation response (IR). According to the regression results, there were no differences between the tracks on measures of system re-involvement. However, survival analysis findings indicate that FAR families were 18% less likely, over time, to have a high risk assessment after their initial accepted referral than were IR families. The cost study revealed no differences between the tracks on initial costs for caseworker contacts, services, and out-of-home placements. However, the results suggest that follow-up costs for IR cases were significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than for FAR cases. The authors discuss policy and practice implications for jurisdictions considering DR.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Beginning in 1993, child welfare jurisdictions experimented with alternatives to the ‘one size fits all’ approach that commonly characterized early child welfare efforts. To respond to increasing workloads of low- and moderate-risk cases, which are usually related to child neglect, agencies reasoned that a different approach might be more appropriate (Siegel, 2012). The change gradually became known as Differential Response (DR), and by 2011, at least 19 states had either fully

[☆] The Colorado Consortium on Differential Response evaluation was supported by a contract with the Colorado Department of Human Services through a grant from the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services (QIC-DR), which was funded by the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (grant no. 90CA1974).

^{☆☆} Data are from the Colorado Trails Child Welfare application. The rights of the participants have been protected. This publication has been approved by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division.

* Corresponding author.

Table 1
Eight core elements of Colorado DR model.

Core element (QIC-DR)	Colorado implementation
Two or more discrete tracks of intervention.	A new, non-investigatory track was developed: Family Assessment Response (FAR).
Multiple responses for reports of maltreatment that are screened in and accepted for response.	Track assignment decision is made at the time of screening.
No substantiation of alleged maltreatment for families served in a non-investigation track and services offered without a formal determination of child maltreatment. This means that perpetrators and victims are not identified for the alleged reports of maltreatment that receive a non-investigation response.	Though the roles of alleged person responsible for abuse or neglect (PRAN) and alleged victim will continue to be entered in Trails prior to track assignment for the purpose of National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) reporting, there will be no finding made or determined PRAN entered for those cases served in the FAR track.
Differential use of central registry depending on track, meaning the name of the alleged perpetrator is not entered into the central registry for those individuals who are served through a non-investigation track.	Colorado does not utilize a central registry, but rather records background information in Trails. For cases served in the FAR track, that information cannot be used for the purpose of determining employment eligibility, as an investigation will not be conducted.
Response pathways are formally established via legislation, policy or protocols.	Legislation established the FAR track as an option in all five counties in the project.
The CPS agency determines pathway assignment based on an array of factors (e.g., alleged maltreatment type; presence of imminent danger; risk level; number of prior reports; age of child).	Colorado has developed an agency response guide that provides structured analysis of an array of factors.
Initial pathway assignment can change if the agency obtains new information that alters risk level or safety concerns.	A track change from FAR to investigation occurs if any of the following is present within the assessment period: A. The family requests an investigation response. B. New information is received that might warrant a change in response. C. There is insufficient engagement or ability to conduct an assessment of child safety.
Services are voluntary – families may accept or refuse services so long as there are no safety concerns.	If no safety factors are present in the safety assessment, the family may accept or refuse services from the agency without consequence.

or partially implemented DR ([National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services \[QIC-DR\], 2011](#)). Although there are many variations and definitions, differential response is considered to be an innovative system reform that allows child protective services (CPS) to address screened-in allegations of child maltreatment in different ways. Evaluations of early DR programs showed promising results in regard to child safety and family engagement ([Center for Child and Family Policy, 2009](#); [Loman, Filonow, & Siegel, 2010](#); [Loman & Siegel, 2004](#); [Siegel & Loman, 1997](#); [Virginia Department of Social Services, 2008](#)).

Differential response in Colorado

In Colorado, differential response was implemented to include a dual-track system where high-risk cases receive a traditional investigation (i.e., determination of whether or not maltreatment occurred) and low- and moderate-risk cases receive an assessment of the family's needs and strengths without a determination of whether or not maltreatment occurred. Services are voluntary in the absence of imminent safety concerns to families in the non-investigative track. As displayed in [Table 1](#), the Colorado DR model also follows the eight core elements suggested by the QIC-DR ([Merkel-Holguin, Kaplan, & Kwak, 2006](#)).

However, the DR model in Colorado is more than a dual-track system, as there are specified organizational processes and social work practices that are integral to child welfare practice across track assignment and the entire agency. The organizational processes are: enhanced screening, Review, Evaluate, Direct (RED) teams, group supervision, facilitated family meetings, front-loaded services, and support planning. The social work practices are: rigorous and balanced assessment, strategies for including children, evidence-based assessment tools, risk and goal statements, participation of extended networks, and behaviorally-based safety and support plans. The model in Colorado was designed to address some of the inconsistencies of DR implementation nationally, with the hope that practices would be uniform across counties ([Winokur & Gabel, 2013](#)).

Many of the system-wide practice changes implemented in Colorado for differential response impacted both tracks. For example, enhanced screening and RED teams were used prior to track assignment to gather thorough information during the referral phase to allow for balanced decision making. Facilitated family meetings and support planning were offered to families in both tracks to assist in developing safety networks and sustainability plans to avoid recidivism. Group supervision was intended for all assessments of child maltreatment, as well as for teams in permanency and ongoing work. Furthermore, the social work practices were intended for use among all CPS workers from referral to permanency. When implementing the Colorado DR model, caseworkers from across the entire agency participated in training and design. These changes in practice and process served as the backdrop for the study of safety and cost in DR implementation, and are important to note as key contextual factors to better understand and interpret the results of this study.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832695>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832695>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)