

# Variability in Findings from Adult Protective Services Investigations in Selected Southern California Counties

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June 2022

Presented By: Academy Evaluation Team



The Academy for Professional Excellence is a project of the San Diego State University School of Social Work

## APS in Southern California

During FY 20/21 and FY 21/22, the Adult Protective Services Workforce Innovations (APSWI) program at the Academy for Professional Excellence provided training to Adult Protective Services staff in selected Southern counties on the topic of Consistency of Case Findings. This study aims to assess the variability in case findings before and after this training intervention.

In California, each county's APS office reports detailed data on APS investigations to the state department of social services monthly using a form called SOC 242. Each allegation of abuse or neglect is investigated by an APS worker to determine whether it is 'confirmed' (abuse occurred or most likely occurred), 'inconclusive' (insufficient evidence to determine that abuse occurred) or 'unfounded' (abuse did not occur). In order to assess variability in reporting of confirmed, unconfirmed and unfounded findings of elder abuse in the southern counties, data were obtained from the California Department of Social Services for two time periods: May 2020 through January 2021 (hereafter referred to as Pre-Training) and July 2021 through February 2022. (hereafter referred to as Post-Training). The trainings were delivered from February 2021 through June 2021. This data on investigation findings were used to calculate three percentages: 1) confirmed, 2) inconclusive, and 3) unfounded cases. These percentages were calculated by dividing the number of confirmed, inconclusive and unfounded cases by the number of investigations by each county. The proportions of confirmed, inconclusive and unfounded cases for the pre-training time period were compared to the post-training time period using the chi square test.

Participants of the Consistency in Case Findings trainings were asked to complete a pre- and post-test, which presented a case scenario where participants were asked to determine whether various types of abuse allegations were confirmed, inconclusive, or unfounded. The percentage of correct answers from pre- to post-test were compared using an independent samples t-test.

### Consistency in APS Findings Trainings

The Consistency in Case Findings trainings that occurred from February 2021 to June 2021 were delivered to Imperial, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties. The goal(s) of the California APS Consistency in Determining Findings: Multi-Module Virtual Skill-Building Training was to ensure participants were able to 1) determine potential abuse by identifying the abuse indicators, using the CA APS Standards for Consistency in Determining Findings Matrix, 2) critique if evidence meets the abuse type's legal components (Essential Defining Elements, interpreted from the Welfare & Institutions Code) during scenario based skill practice, and 3) construct a findings rational narrative that includes the components required for it to be descriptive and complete. The training was intended for those who conduct investigations and determine case findings. However, to better ensure consistency

when determining findings, all levels of APS staff including, but not limited to line workers, supervisors, managers, and program support specialists were strongly encouraged to attend. The number and percentage of staff trained in each county is displayed below.

### APSWI Consistency in APS Findings Training Attendance and % of workers trained

County	Number of training attendees	% of APS workers trained (based on average # of workers*)
Imperial	3	50%
Los Angeles	121	86%
Riverside	122	82%
San Bernardino	43	46%
San Diego	79	101%
Total	368	

\*these percentages may contain rounding errors and/or may not accurately reflect the true percentages due to being based on a monthly average during this time period

### SOC 242 Data Pre- and Post-Training by County

State/ County	Total Investigations N		Confirmed Investigations N (%)		Inconclusive Investigations N (%)		Unfounded Investigations N (%)	
	Pre-Training	Post-Training	Pre-Training	Post-Training	Pre-Training	Post-Training	Pre-Training	Post-Training
Imperial	796	198	353 (44)	87 (44)	85 (11)	17 (9)	358 (45)	94 (48)
Los Angeles	45204	34414	12533 (28)	10096 (29)	32208 (71)	23491 (68)	463 (1)	827 (2)
Riverside	16920	16084	5399 (32)	5699 (35)	3450 (20)	3003 (19)	8071 (48)	7382 (46)
San Bernardino	11096	10238	2674 (24)	2803 (27)	6211 (56)	4982 (49)	2211 (20)	2453 (24)
San Diego	13544	12875	5860 (43)	6211 (48)	4904 (36)	3808 (30)	2780 (21)	2856 (22)
Statewide	168642	150575	58830 (35)	57206 (38)	81580 (48)	63144 (42)	28232 (17)	30225 (20)
Southern Counties	87560	73809	26819 (31)	24896 (34)	46858 (54)	35301 (48)	13883 (16)	13612 (18)

## Results

### Comparison of SOC 242 Data between May 2020-January 2021 (Pre-Training) and July 2021-February 2022 (Post -Training)

SOC 242 elder abuse data from the Pre-Training period (May 2020-January 2021) was compared to the elder abuse data from the Post-Training period (July 2021-February 2022) for the state of California as well as five Southern California counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego). Results will be reported for the entire state, all five Southern California counties, then each county individually.

During the Pre-Training period, 168,642 investigations were completed in the state. Of these, 35% were confirmed, 48% were inconclusive, and 17% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 150,575 investigations were completed in the state with 38% confirmed, 42% inconclusive, and 20% unfounded. There is a statistically significant difference in findings between Pre-Training and Post-Training ( $p < .0001$ ). In comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had fewer total cases completed (150,575 compared to 168,642). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment revealed that in comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had fewer confirmed cases (42% compared to 53%), fewer inconclusive cases (44% compared to 56%), and more unfounded cases (52% compared to 48%), which each represent statistically significant differences ( $p < .001$  for each comparison).

For the five Southern California counties, during the Pre-Training period, there were 87,560 completed investigations. Of these, 31% were confirmed, 54% were inconclusive, and 16% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 73,809 investigations were completed in the five Southern California counties with 34% confirmed, 48% inconclusive, and 18% unfounded. There was a statistically significant difference in findings between Pre-Training and Post-Training ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had fewer total cases completed (73,809 compared to 87,560). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment revealed that in comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had more confirmed cases (34% compared to 31%), fewer inconclusive cases (48% compared to 54%), and more unfounded cases (18% compared to 16%), which each represent statistically significant differences ( $p < .0001$  for each comparison).

For Imperial County, during the Pre-Training period, there were 796 completed investigations. Of these, 44% were confirmed, 11% were inconclusive, and 45% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 198 investigations were completed with 44% confirmed, 9% inconclusive, and 48% unfounded. There was no statistically significant difference in findings between Pre- and Post-Training.

For Los Angeles County, during the Pre-Training period, there were 45,204 completed investigations. Of these, 28% were confirmed, 71% were inconclusive, and 1% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 34,414 investigations were completed with 29% confirmed, 68% inconclusive, and 2% unfounded. There was a statistically significant difference in findings between Pre-Training and Post-Training ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In comparison to Pre-Training data, Post-Training data had fewer total cases completed (34,414 compared to 45,204). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment revealed that in comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had more confirmed cases (29% compared to 28%), fewer inconclusive cases (68% compared to 71%), and more unfounded cases (2% compared to 1%), which each represent statistically significant differences ( $p < .0001$  for each comparison).

For Riverside County, during the Pre-Training period, there were 16,920 completed investigations. Of these, 32% were confirmed, 20% were inconclusive, and 48% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 16,084 investigations were completed with 35% confirmed, 19% inconclusive, and 46% unfounded. There was a statistically significant difference in findings between Pre-Training and Post-Training ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In comparison to Pre-Training data, Post-Training data had fewer total cases completed (16,084 compared to 16,920). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment revealed that in comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had more confirmed cases (35% compared to 32%), fewer inconclusive cases (19% compared to 20%), and fewer unfounded cases (46% compared to 48%), which represent statistically significant differences ( $p < .0001$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $p = .001$  respectively).

For San Bernardino County, during the Pre-Training period, there were 11,096 completed investigations. Of these, 24% were confirmed, 56% were inconclusive, and 20% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 10,238 investigations were completed with 27% confirmed, 49% inconclusive, and 24% unfounded. There was a statistically significant difference in findings between Pre-Training and Post-Training ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In comparison to Pre-Training data, Post-Training data had fewer total cases completed (10,238 compared to 11,096). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment revealed that in comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had more confirmed cases (27% compared to 24%), fewer inconclusive cases (49% compared to 56%), and more unfounded cases (24% compared to 20%), which each represent statistically significant differences ( $p < .0001$  for each comparison).

For San Diego County, during the Pre-Training period, there were 13,544 completed investigations. Of these, 43% were confirmed, 36% were inconclusive, and 21% were unfounded. During the Post-Training period, 12,875 investigations were completed with 34% confirmed, 48% inconclusive, and 18% unfounded. There was a statistically significant difference in findings between Pre-Training and Post-Training ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In comparison to Pre-Training data, Post-Training data had fewer total cases completed (12,875 compared to 13,544). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment revealed that in comparison to the Pre-Training data, the Post-Training data had more confirmed cases (48% compared to 43%), fewer inconclusive cases (30% compared to 36%), and more unfounded cases (22% compared to 21%), which each represent statistically significant differences ( $p < .0001$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $p = .001$  respectively).

### **Comparison of Pre- and Post-test scores among training participants**

Participants of the Consistency in Case Findings trainings were asked to complete a pre- and post-test, which presented a case scenario where participants were asked to determine whether various types of abuse allegations were Confirmed, Inconclusive, or Unfounded. A total of 314 pre-tests and 341 post-tests were collected and an independent samples t-test was used to compare the percent of correct answers from the pre- to the post-test. In the pre-test, participants got an average of 50% of answers correct out of 4 and in the post-test, participants got an average of 58% correct, which represents a statistically significant increase ( $p < .001$ ).

### **Conclusions**

In comparing the statewide data from the pre-training time period to the post-training time period, in all counties except Imperial County, case findings were significantly different from Pre- to Post-training. If the Consistency in Case Findings trainings are successful, we would expect to see a decrease in the percentage of inconclusive cases and an increase in the definitive findings of confirmed and/or unfounded. A finding of inconclusive has been known to be used by workers as a "catchall." It can sometimes be deferred to in cases where the workers are unsure, worried about making a definitive finding of confirmed or unfounded, if not enough information has been gathered, or if it's unclear to the worker what each finding means. The Consistency in Case Findings training provided clear guidelines for each finding and opportunity to practice using Consistency in Case Finding specific tools to walk through cases and determine findings.

In Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties, and for Southern counties combined, there were more confirmed and unfounded cases and fewer inconclusive cases Post-Training compared to Pre-Training. For the state overall, there were fewer confirmed and



inconclusive cases and more unfounded cases at Post-Training compared to Pre-Training. In comparing the pre- and post-test scenario scores for training participants in this study, the percentage of correct answers increased from pre to post. Overall, workers attending these trainings increased their skill in determining case findings and statewide data showed a decrease in inconclusive findings from Pre- to Post-training. These are both outcomes we would expect to see if the training succeeded in attaining its goal(s).

The following limitations should be considered. There are many other factors that can affect how investigations are reported and it is outside the scope of this study to assess what these factors may include. In addition, not all workers in these counties received the intervention.

In Los Angeles County, scheduling challenges led to 40 additional staff being trained later than planned, during August of 2021, which was during the Post-Training period. This means that for Los Angeles, the Pre- and Post-Training time periods are not clearly delineated, and there is a chance that some of the August 2021 trainees' case investigation findings were reported at some point during the Post-Training period.

Analysis using the state as a whole must consider that other counties have also received similar Consistency in Case Finding trainings. Consistency in Determining Findings trainings were delivered in the Central Region from March 2021 to June 2022. APS professionals from the following counties were trained in that time: San Francisco, Stanislaus, Kern, Ventura, Santa Barbara, Madera, Sonoma, Solano, Kings, Fresno, Tulare, Merced, Contra Costa, Mariposa, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, San Mateo, Mendocino, Marin, Santa Cruz, Alameda, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Benito. Additionally, San Francisco County received the initial Consistency in Findings training in May and June 2019.

The scope of this study was to analyze the 9 months prior to the trainings and the 9 months after the trainings. However, due to lack of availability of data, only 8 months of data post-training was obtained, so the two time periods do not consist of the same number of months which can possibly skew the number of cases included in the analysis. Further, it is not clear whether reports of elder and dependent adult abuse fluctuate based on the time of year, thus analyzing 8 or 9 months of data may not fully encompass what analyzing a full year of data might. In regard to the reporting and public availability of the SOC 242 data, it is not clear how often, the extent of, and for how long, data are revised after the initial reporting via this form. While no counties in our study were noted in the SOC 242 data as not having reported any of the months in question, there are indications that data are revised for months or years after initial reporting. The data provided for this study was provided via static files as an online data repository was not available. As such, any data revisions or counties not yet reported are only available as of the date the data was provided to us.

## Appendix

### Pre- and Post-test Case Scenario

The following is the pre- and post-test Case Scenario participants were given before and after the trainings. The correct answers to the scenario are in bold font.

#### Kim Benfer Case Scenario

APS receives a call from Judy Yager regarding her friend and neighbor Kim Benfer. Judy claims Kim is being financially “drained” by her new husband and has not been seen at their condominium complex in two weeks. Judy also provides the following information:

Kim is a retired actress living in Palm Springs in a well-appointed senior condominium complex. They have been friends for 15 years and both turned 80 years old last month.

Three months ago Kim met a younger man named Hugo at the local theater. Hugo seemed smitten by Kim and started spending a lot of time at her condominium. After a month Hugo moved in and Kim bought him a sports car so he could “drive her around in style.”

Six weeks ago, Hugo fired Kim’s long-time accountant and had her sign durable power of attorney naming him as the Durable Power of Attorney (DPoA). When Judy told Kim she was worried that Hugo was over taking her finances. Mrs. K. brushed this comment off saying that Hugo was an accountant in his last job and has a “head for numbers.” Judy also said she fears that Kim is no longer seeing the primary doctor she has had for years and that Hugo has driven off her friends. Her friends have told Judy that they have a similar experience to Judy; that is, when she calls her friend on the phone or attempts to visit and Hugo is around, he is the one who answers the door or phone and says Kim is resting and can’t be disturbed.

Two weeks ago Kim was alone in her home so Judy was able to visit her. Kim expressed surprise at seeing Judy. Hugo had told her that Judy was jealous of Hugo and didn’t want to be her friend anymore. She was glad that Judy was still her friend. She said she missed seeing and hearing from all of her former friends and did not understand why they never called anymore. Kim said that Hugo had proposed and they were going to be married and honeymoon in Las Vegas. She told Judy that she really didn’t want to marry in Las Vegas, that she really wanted to have a ceremony in her back yard in Palm Springs with some close friends, but Hugo insisted that if she wanted to marry him, she would do it in Las Vegas



instead. Judy has not seen Kim since that day but noticed Hugo pulling from the driveway this morning.

This case is assigned to you. First, you contact Mrs. Benfer's primary physician and find that she is no longer their patient. About 2 months ago, Hugo called the office and said Kim was changing to another doctor. The doctor does not know the name of the new primary. You contact the former accountant and verify that their services were discontinued. They cannot provide any current information about her finances.

You arrive at Mrs. Benfer's home the next day to interview Kim and Hugo. Hugo opens the door and states that Kim is currently not at home. He states that he and Kim were married last week at a private ceremony in Las Vegas, NV. Shortly after the wedding, while honeymooning in Las Vegas, Kim experienced heart problems. He took her to a local hospital in Las Vegas where she was admitted. The doctors advised that her condition needed to be stabilized before she could return home and she was discharged to a SNF for 2 weeks of rehabilitation. He is waiting for her to recover so she can return home. You contact Nevada APS and they confirm that Mrs. Benfer was hospitalized for a heart arrhythmia, was medically unfit to travel home, and consequently discharged to a SNF where she currently resides. Staff at the facility report she is still experiencing heart palpitations and is receiving rehabilitation. Hugo calls daily to check on his wife and be updated on the plan for her discharge. Mrs. Benfer stated to the Nevada APS professional that 1) she wanted Hugo to have the car, 2) she wanted to marry him but was very upset that she was stuck in Las Vegas because she never wanted to get married here in the first place and 3) she wants Hugo to come and take her home. The Nevada APS professional provides no additional information to you.

You call the SNF and get in touch with Mrs. Benfer who confirms what she told the Nevada APS professional. When you ask if she has had any contact with her friends in Palm Springs she states, "No, Hugo told me they are jealous and no longer want to be friends".

Please determine the finding(s) for the following abuse allegations based upon the information given in the scenario. An answer is required for each question, so please choose a finding even if you are not sure.

Financial Abuse (choose one: Confirmed, Inconclusive, **Unfounded**)

Isolation (choose one: **Confirmed**, Inconclusive, Unfounded)

Abandonment (choose one: Confirmed, Inconclusive, **Unfounded**)

Abduction (choose one: Confirmed, Inconclusive, **Unfounded**)



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6505 Alvarado Road, Suite 107; San Diego, CA 92120 | (619) 594-3546