



Human Services
Research Institute

Perils, Pitfalls and Successes: Randomized Control Trial of Differential Response

AEA Annual Conference
November 2010

What is Differential Response (DR)?

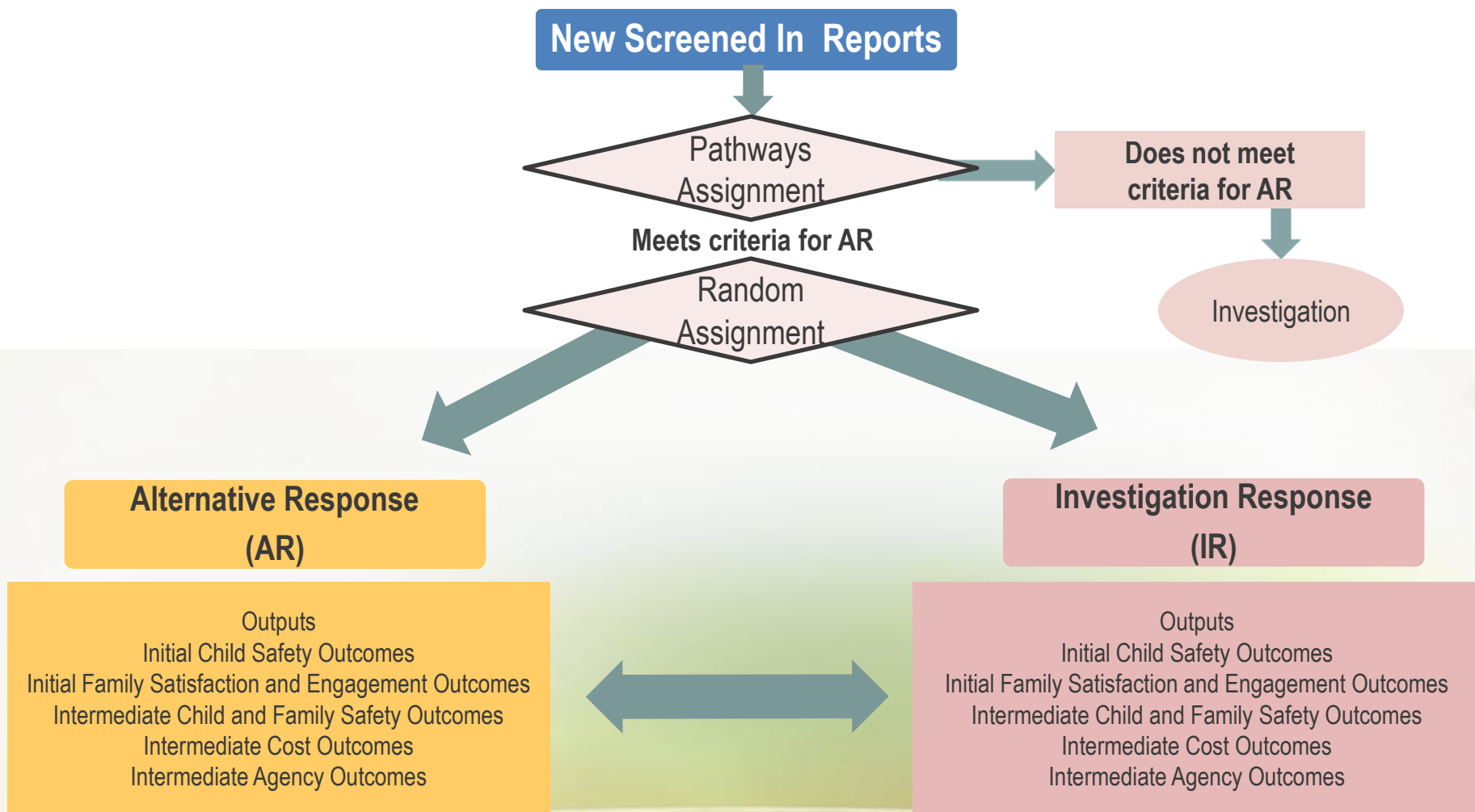
Emerging Consensus on Core Characteristics

- A system including both Investigation Response (IR) and one or more Alternative Responses (AR) for screened-in cases
- Clear criteria for AR eligibility (generally safety-related)
- Maltreatment not substantiated for AR cases
- AR families may refuse services following safety assessment if no over-riding safety concerns are found
- Reassignment of AR cases to IR when safety dictates

Purpose of the federal DR Project (3 states, 2010-2013)

- Examine the efficacy of DR in improving child welfare outcomes, across state systems, using rigorous Randomized Control Trial design
- Build and disseminate knowledge on implementation and effectiveness of DR, at agency and case levels
- Enhance capacity at local level to improve outcomes for children and families identified for suspected abuse or neglect

Experimental Design for Evaluation



Pros/**Cons** of Using RCT

- Stronger test of effect on outcomes
- **Not appropriate for systemic change efforts**
- Points to importance of specific intervention characteristics
- **Difficult to contain spill-over into traditional practice**
- **Practitioners' perception that denying service to those who could benefit**

Ohio SOAR project

- 6-county consortium (Champaign, Clark, Madison, Montgomery, Richland, Summit)
 - County-administered child welfare system
 - Mixed experience and knowledge of DR
 - Differing admin structure and agency size
- Pilot began 9/2010; going live 12/2010**
- Ohio commitment to DR statewide
 - 2007-2009 pilot in 10 counties
 - 2010 began in 10 new counties
 - Leadership Council

Challenges and Successes in Implementation

Big Picture

- Ohio
 - 6 counties
- Colorado
 - 6 counties
- Illinois
 - The whole state.

Comparability? How?



Randomization and Ratios

	County 1	County 2	County 3	County 4	County 5	County 6
Estimate # cases eligible for randomizer	191	216	632	1,066	1,463	2,952
Varying sampling % by county (adj for cty size)	30%	30%	40%	12%	17.0%	8%
County anticipated new AR cases per month (Randomizer Numerator)	5	6	15	12	36	36
Randomizer denominator (monthly)	16	18	53	89	122	246
Randomizer ratio	31%	33%	28%	14%	30%	15%
# AR Cases selected to be surveyed per month	3	14	4	7	14	13
Randomizer ratio for IR cases to be surveyed**	25%	14%	25%	14%	14%	14%
# IR Cases selected to be surveyed per month	3	4	3	11	14	32

Perils

- Random really does mean random
 - AR caseworker start-up
 - Stocks and flows
 - Lack of cases
 - » IR/AR friction
 - » AR envy
 - County Solutions
 - Request a change in ratio
 - Workers given non-AR cases
 - Bypass the randomizer!!!
 - Overwhelmed by cases

Perils

- Data Collection
 - Family Survey, Caseworker Survey
 - Data has to be collect for experimental side *and* control
 - Training

“I thought this was voluntary!!!”

- Communication
 - Directors, supervisor, caseworkers
- Terminology
 - AR; DR; IR; TR

Perils

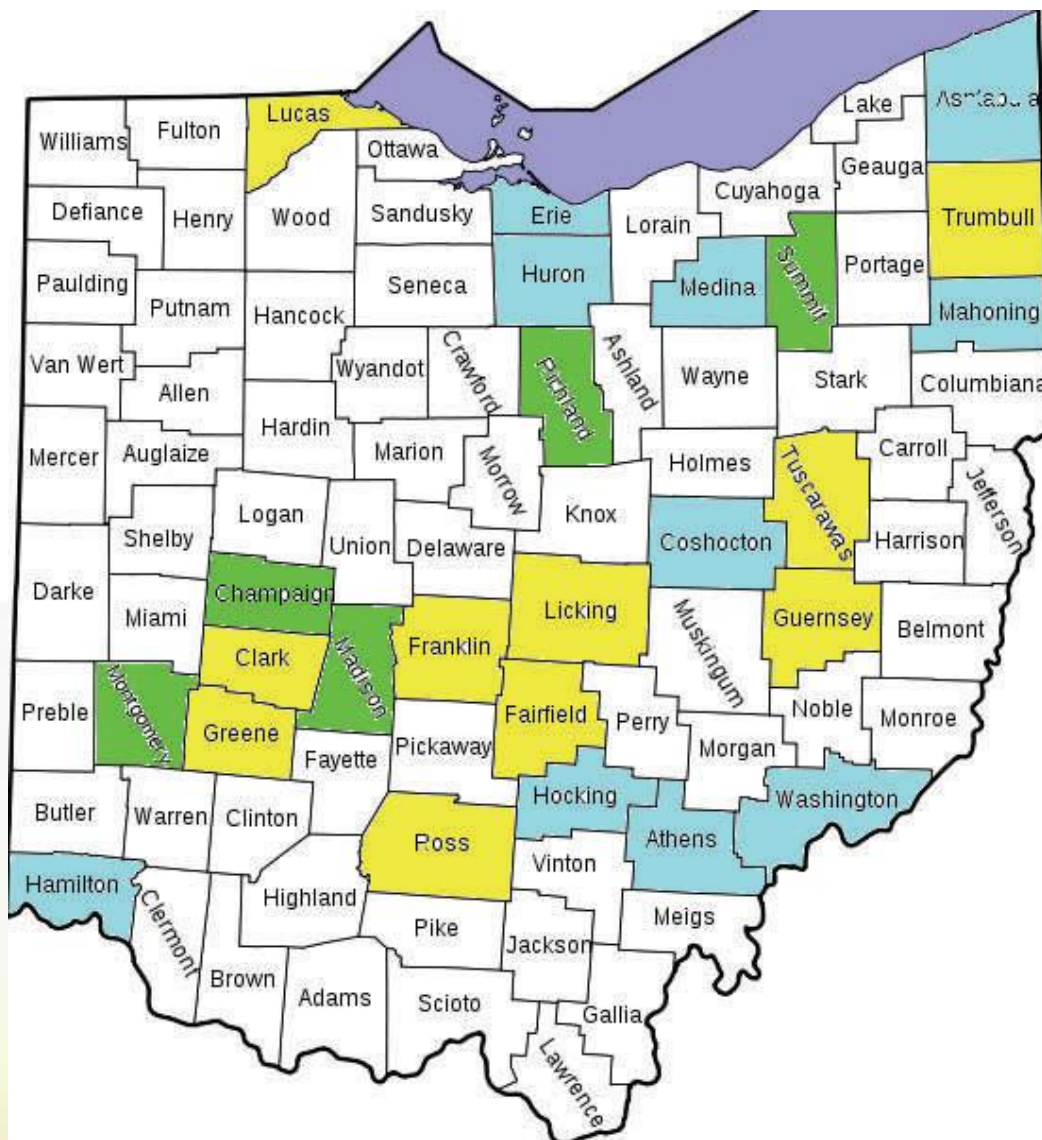
- Technology
 - Electronic Randomizer
 - SACWIS
 - SOARDS

Ohio Project Sites

Round 1

Ohio Project Sites Round 2 (QIC)

Ohio Project Sites Round 3



Successes

- Buy in
 - Child Protective Services
 - Trainings
 - Open communication
 - conference calls 2x monthly, individual phone calls, visits,
 - Quarterly face-to-face visits, E-mail,
 - Community
 - Community Informational Sessions

Successes

- Pilot Period for Current Study
 - Training
 - Counties not using randomizer
 - Track switch
 - Response rate
 - General hiccups
 - Monitoring data