



National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information National Adoption Information Clearinghouse



Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

Child Maltreatment 2001: Summary of Key Findings

Investigations of Child Abuse and Neglect

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) was developed by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Human Services in partnership with the States to collect annual statistics on child maltreatment from State child protective services (CPS) agencies. This summary of key findings presents highlights based on data submissions by the States for calendar year 2001.

PLEASE NOTE: The press release announcing these data is available on the Administration for Children and Families' Web site at www.hhs.gov/news/press/2003pres/20030401.html. The *Child Maltreatment 2001* report is available on the Children's Bureau Web site at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/outcover.htm.

In 2001, 3 million referrals concerning the welfare of approximately 5 million children were made to CPS agencies throughout the United States. Of these, approximately two-thirds (67 percent) were screened in; one-third (33 percent) were screened out. Screened-in referrals alleging that a child was being abused or neglected received investigations or assessments to determine whether the allegations of maltreatment could be substantiated. Some of the screened-out reports were referred to the attention of other service agencies.

Professionals, including teachers, law enforcement officers, social services workers, and physicians, made more than half (57 percent) of the screened-in reports. Others, including family members, neighbors, and other members of the community, made the remaining 43 percent of screened-in referrals.

More than one-quarter of investigations or assessments (28 percent) resulted in a finding that the child was maltreated or at risk of maltreatment. The remaining investigations resulted in a finding that the maltreatment did not occur, the child was not at risk of maltreatment, or there was insufficient information to make a determination.

Approximately 903,000 children were found to be victims of child maltreatment. Maltreatment categories typically include neglect, medical neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological maltreatment. More than half of child victims (57 percent) suffered neglect; 2 percent suffered medical neglect; 19 percent were physically abused; 10 percent were sexually abused; and 7 percent were psychologically maltreated.

The 2001 victimization rate of 12.4 per 1,000 children in the population is comparable to the 2000 rate of 12.2, especially given that the child population base numbers were estimated. Both the 2000 and 2001 rates are lower than the 1998 rate. The 1999 rate is considered an outlier that was unduly influenced by the census population estimates.

Victims of Maltreatment



The Clearinghouses are services of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Children in the age group of birth to 3 years accounted for 28 percent of victims. Overall, the rate of victimization is inversely related to the age of the child. These proportions have remained constant during the past 5 years.

Percentages of victims were similar for males and females (48 percent and 52 percent, respectively). The sex was unknown or not reported for less than 1 percent of child victims.

Half of all victims were White (50 percent); one-quarter (25 percent) were African American; 15 percent were Hispanic. American Indian/Alaska Natives accounted for 2 percent of victims, and Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 1 percent of victims.¹

Perpetrators

Most States define perpetrators of child abuse or neglect as a parent or other caretaker, such as a relative, babysitter, or foster parent, who has maltreated a child. Fifty-nine percent of perpetrators were women and 41 percent were men. The median age of female perpetrators was 31 years; the median age of male perpetrators was 34 years. More than 80 percent of victims (84 percent) were abused by a parent or parents. Almost half of child victims (41 percent) were maltreated by just their mother, and one-fifth of victims (19 percent) were maltreated by both their mother and father.

Fatalities

Child fatalities are the most tragic consequence of maltreatment. Approximately 1,300 children died of abuse or neglect during the year 2001, a rate of 1.81 children per 100,000 children in the population. The increase in the rate of fatalities compared to earlier years is hypothesized to be largely attributable to improved reporting.² Youngest children were the most vulnerable. Children younger than 1 year old accounted for 41 percent of child fatalities, and 85 percent of child fatalities were younger than 6 years of age.

Services

Services to prevent the abuse or neglect of children were provided by various State and local agencies to an estimated 2 million children. Because of the difficulties in collecting these data, this may be an undercount.

More than half of the child victims (58 percent or an estimated 528,000)—including about one-fifth of all victims who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care—received postinvestigation services as a result of the investigation or assessment conducted by the CPS agency. In addition, more than one-quarter of children (29 percent or an estimated 629,000 children) who were not found to be victims of maltreatment also received services.

Summary

Child abuse and neglect continues to be a significant problem in the United States. These statistics can help us understand the scope of the problem, who is affected, and what type of services are being provided by State and local agencies.

¹ The percentages do not add to 100 percent due to missing data.

² Child fatality estimates are based on data recorded by CPS agencies or other agencies such as the coroner's office or fatality review board as to factors leading to the death of a child. Reported deaths may have not yet been the subject of court proceedings to determine the cause of death.