



Child Abuse and Neglect

How Are We Really Doing?

The question of how many children are abused and neglected each year in the United States is seemingly simple, but it does not have an easy answer. Because several national and state agencies collect and analyze different data using different methods, the statistics vary. In addition, not every suspicion or situation of abuse or neglect is reported to child protection services (CPS) agencies. As a result, the number of reports likely underrepresents the number of children who actually suffer from abuse or neglect.

One of the most reliable and extensive information sources is the yearly *Child Maltreatment Report* by the Children's Bureau, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth and Families. This yearly report is based on data collected by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) from state CPS agencies. American Humane has provided significant technical assistance and expertise to NCANDS as a project subcontractor to Walter R. McDonald and Associates since the project began in 1990.

According to NCANDS – whose latest statistics are for 2005 – an estimated 3.3 million referrals of child abuse or neglect were received by public social service or CPS agencies. Of these referrals, 899,000 children were confirmed to be victims of abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). That means about 12 out of every 1,000 children up to age 18 in the United States were found to be victims of maltreatment in 2005 (USDHHS, 2007).

Where Do We Get Our Information?

Reports of suspected child maltreatment come from multiple sources. In 2005, over one-half of reports (61.7 percent) were from professionals who are considered “mandated reporters” (USDHHS, 2007). Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected abuse and neglect. The most common mandated reporter referral sources in 2005 were social services personnel, legal professionals, law enforcement, criminal justice personnel and medical and mental health professionals (USDHHS, 2007).

Types of Maltreatment Children Suffer

Maltreatment can take many forms, and some children can suffer from more than one type. Since 1999, the majority of children confirmed to be victims of child maltreatment experienced neglect.

The following are the percentages of children who experienced maltreatment in 2005 (USDHHS, 2007):

- Neglect62.8%
- Physical abuse16.6%
- Sexual abuse9.3%
- Emotional/psychological abuse7.1%
- Medical neglect.....2.0%
- Other.....14.3%

The ‘Other’ category listed above includes abandonment, threats to harm the child, congenital drug addiction and other situations that are not counted as specific categories in NCANDS. The percentages here add up to more than 100 percent because some children were victims of more than one type of maltreatment.

Demographics of Child Victims

Boys and girls are equally likely to suffer maltreatment. In 2005, 47.3 percent of child victims were male, and 50.7 percent were female. Victimization rates were highest among the youngest population of children, birth to 3 years, at a rate of 16.5 per 1,000 children (USDHHS, 2007).

In 2005, 49.7 percent of children who were maltreated were white, 23.1 percent were African American, and 17.4 percent were Hispanic. American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for 1.2 percent of victims, and Asian-Pacific Islanders accounted for less than 1 percent of victims (USDHHS, 2007).

Approximately 10 percent of the children in this country have a disability or chronic illness. The incidence of abuse and neglect among these children is twice as high as it is among average children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006).

Child victims who were reported with disabilities accounted for almost 8 percent of all victims of child abuse and neglect in the 39 states that reported this type of data (USDHHS, 2007). For NCANDS' purposes, children with the following disabilities were considered disabled: mental retardation, emotional disturbances, visual impairment, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, behavioral problems or other medical problems. It is believed that while children with disabilities are maltreated more frequently, these cases are less likely to be reported for several reasons. Most CPS agencies' data collection on maltreatment



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cases does not involve questions regarding a child's disability. Children with disabilities are less likely to be believed or viewed as credible when they attempt to report.

Parental Substance Abuse Can Lead to Child Abuse and Neglect

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University estimates in a 2005 report that substance abuse is a factor in at least 70 percent of all reported cases of child maltreatment. Adults with substance use disorders are 2.7 times more likely to report abusive behavior and 4.2 times more likely to report neglectful behavior toward their children. Maltreated children of substance abusing parents are more likely to have poorer physical, intellectual, social and emotional outcomes and are at greater risk of developing substance abuse problems themselves (USDHHS, 2003).

Too Often Children Need to Be Removed From Their Homes

One of the major reasons children enter foster care is abuse and neglect associated with parental alcohol or drug abuse (USDHHS, 1999). As of September 30, 2004, 517,000 children lived in foster homes because they could not safely remain in their own homes. In 2005, one-fifth (21.7 percent) of victims or 317,000 children were removed from their homes as a result of child maltreatment investigations. Some children spend weeks or months in care, and others live in care for an entire year or longer (USDHHS, 2007).

Statistics Over Time

The number of children who are abused and neglected has fluctuated over time. There has been a general increase in the number of abuse and neglect substantiations.

1999.....	829,000
2000.....	881,000
2001.....	903,000
2002.....	896,000
2003.....	906,000
2004.....	872,000
2005.....	899,000

It is difficult to determine if the shifts in the numbers of children being reported is due to the actual change in abuse and neglect each year or if the fluctuations

are a result of improved data collecting in these areas. NCANDS reports that the increase in 2005's data could be a result of the additional reporting of both Puerto Rico and Alaska, which were not included in *Child Maltreatment* in previous years.

Who Are the Perpetrators?

Perpetrators of child abuse or neglect are most often the child's own parents. According to NCANDS, in 2005, 79.4 percent of perpetrators were parents and 6.8 percent were other relatives. The largest remaining categories of perpetrators were the unmarried partner of a child's parent (3.8 percent) and other perpetrators (4.1 percent). In 3.6 percent of child maltreatment cases the perpetrators were missing or unknown. In under 1 percent of child maltreatment cases the perpetrator was a foster parent, residential facility staff, the child's daycare provider, a legal guardian, friends or neighbors, or other professionals (USDHHS, 2007).

Approximately 40 percent of child victims were maltreated by their mothers acting alone; another 18.3 percent were maltreated by their fathers acting alone; 17.3 percent were abused by both parents (USDHHS, 2007).

Children Die Every Day From Abuse or Neglect

In 2005, an estimated 1,460 children died as a result of abuse or neglect (USDHHS, 2007). The majority – almost 76.6 percent – of these children were 3 years of age or younger. Most child fatalities (76.6 percent) happened at the hands of parents (USDHHS, 2007). Not all fatalities were the result of the physical trauma of abuse. Neglect accounted for almost half (32.2 percent) of all fatality cases.

Many Child Victims Are Unknown to CPS Agencies

According to the federally funded Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (1996), almost three times as many children are maltreated as are reported to CPS agencies. This study involved 5,700 community professionals who came in contact with children. The study offered insight into when and why these professionals reported suspected abuse or neglect in greater detail than can be derived through NCANDS data.



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What Can You Do?

Thousands of children throughout America suffer abuse and neglect each day. This has harmful consequences on the physical and emotional development and well-being of children. State CPS agencies identify and help many of these children and their families, yet many cases of abuse or neglect are never reported, and not all states provide detailed case-level data to NCANDS. American Humane encourages all community members to become actively involved in the lives of the children within their communities.

American Humane's Front Porch Project® is a national initiative built on the belief that people who are concerned about children's well-being should be empowered to act. The program teaches community members how to intervene appropriately when necessary and encourages them to share their knowledge with other community members. It strengthens communities through relationship building between community members, building on the strengths and assets within at-risk families, and by creating a partnership between participants and government agencies.

You have the power to create positive change in your community by stopping the abuse and neglect that occurs in your own neighborhood. If you suspect child abuse or neglect is occurring, please report it to your local CPS agency or to the police if the child is in immediate danger. The longer the abuse continues the more damage it will ultimately cause the child(ren). (See American Humane's Fact Sheet, *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect*).

As nationwide data from sources like NCANDS become more detailed and available, they can help professionals and others understand the problem of child maltreatment more completely. Yet, data alone cannot solve the problem of child abuse and neglect in America.

What Is NCANDS?

NCANDS, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, is the primary source of national information on abused and neglected children known to public

child protective services agencies. American Humane has provided technical assistance to this project since its beginning in 1990. NCANDS reports that *Child Maltreatment 2005* appears to have a large increase in overall data due to the fact that this edition is the first to include Alaska and Puerto Rico. For a copy of this report, contact the Child Welfare Information Gateway at (800) 394-3366 or <http://www.childwelfare.gov>. The publication is also available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>.

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American Humane is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting children and animals from abuse, neglect and exploitation. For more information or to lend your support, please visit www.americanhumane.org or call (800) 227-4645.