



## America's Children: How Are They Doing?

"If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." This statement, by author and activist Pearl S. Buck, reminds us that the safety and well-being of America's children are crucial to the well-being of the entire country. Many of the problems endemic to American society, such as substance abuse, inadequate educational resources, poverty, homelessness and inadequate health care, increase the risk of family violence and child abuse and neglect. The following statistics reveal some of the significant problems that families face in the United States.

### Child Abuse and Neglect Are Everywhere

- In federal fiscal year 2005, an estimated 3.3 million children were allegedly abused or neglected and underwent investigations or assessments by state and local child protective services agencies. Approximately 940,500 children were determined to be victims of child maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).
- In 2005, an estimated 1,460 children died due to child abuse or neglect. More than 75 percent of children who were killed were younger than 4 years old. More than 40 percent of child fatalities were attributed to neglect. Physical abuse was also a major contributor to child fatalities (USDHHS, 2007).
- While the percentage of injuries to children as a result of shaken baby syndrome is not currently known, the syndrome is recognized as the most common cause of child maltreatment fatalities and long-term disability in infants and young children due to physical abuse (National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome, 2005).
- Every day in America, approximately 2,463 children are determined to be victims of abuse or neglect (USDHHS, 2007).
- As of September 30, 2004, there were 517,000 children in foster care in the United States (USDHHS, AFCARS, 2006).
- The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that there are 1.5 million children who have parents incarcerated in state or federal prisons or in jails (Children's Defense Fund, 2005).

### Violent Crime Is a Reality for Many of Our Children

- An estimated 3.3 to 10 million children a year are at risk of witnessing domestic violence, which can produce a range of emotional, psychological or behavioral problems for children. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are at a greater risk of being abused or neglected themselves (CDF, 2005).
- In a study of 100 women who were victims of domestic violence, 54 reported that their partner had either hurt or killed the family pets, and 62 percent of this group reported that their children were exposed to their pets' abuse (Ascione, 2000, as cited in Ascione, 2001).
- In just one year (2003), 2,827 children and teens died from gun violence, which is more than the number of fighting American men and women killed in hostile action in Iraq in the three years from 2003 to April 2006 (CDF, 2006).
- From 1979 to 2003, approximately 100,000 children and teens were killed by firearms. Children are twice as likely as adults to be victims of violence and more likely to be killed by adults than by other children (CDF, 2005).
- Each day in America, 181 children are arrested for violent crimes (CDF, 2006).
- Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population. The arrest rate for females under age 18 increased more than 14 percent between 1993 and 2002, while the arrest rate for males under age 18 decreased (CDF, 2004).
- There are at least 2,225 child offenders in the United States sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in prison (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

### A Lack of Adequate Health Care Affects Children's Well-Being

- In 2002, 314,077 infants born in the United States were of low birth weight (less than 5.5 pounds). Low birth weight babies have a high probability of experiencing developmental problems (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005).



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- Although early prenatal care has increased significantly over the past five years, 17.3 percent of babies born in 2002 were to mothers who did not receive prenatal care (CDF, 2004).
- In 2002, 27,500 babies in the United States died before their first birthday (CDF, 2004).
- Progress is being made to immunize all children against vaccine-preventable diseases, but only about 77.5 percent of two-year-olds were fully immunized in 2002 (CDF, 2004).
- In 2002, approximately 9.3 million children in this country had no health insurance. This figure would be even higher if not for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which insures 5.8 million children who do not have health insurance and do not qualify for Medicaid (CDF, 2004).
- In 2002, the rate of births to girls aged 15 to 19 was 43 per 1,000. This rate has decreased steadily since 1991 (CDF, 2004).

### Children's Educational Services Are Also Falling Short

- In 2004, just one in seven of the 15 million children eligible for federal child care assistance actually received it. More than 3 million children eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start were not served (CDF, 2005).
- The majority of fourth graders cannot read or do math at their grade level (CDF, 2005).
- For persons 25 years of age and older, over 27.5 million have not graduated high school (Hoffman, Snyder and Tan, 2005).

### Poverty and Homelessness are Pervasive Problems Among America's Children

- Poverty is the single best predictor of child abuse and neglect. Children who live in families with an annual income less than \$15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than children living in families with an annual income of \$30,000 or more. Abused and neglected children are 1.5 to 6 times as likely to be delinquent and 1.25 to 3 times as likely to be arrested as an adult (CDF, 2005).
- After falling for seven consecutive years during the 1990s, the number of children living in poverty rose for four years in a row to 13 million

in 2004; in all, 37 million Americans live below the poverty line. Child poverty has increased by over 1.4 million children since 2000, accounting for more than a quarter of the 5.4 million people overall who have fallen into poverty. More than one out of every six American children were poor in 2004 (CDF, 2005).

- For every five children who have fallen into poverty since 2000, more than three fell into "extreme poverty," a term describing families living at less than one-half of the poverty level. This means that these families had to get by on less than \$7,412 a year, or \$20 a day (CDF, 2005).
- In 2004, 13.9 million children under age 18 (19 percent of all children) lived in "food-insecure" households (CHP, 2004).
- Children make up nearly 40 percent of all emergency food clients (CHP, 2004).
- Families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population, now accounting for 40 percent of the nation's homeless (CDF, 2005).

### Runaways or "Throwaways" Are Often Victims of Abuse or Neglect

- According to a 1999 study, as many as 1,680,900 children had a runaway or throwaway episode. Of these, an estimated 37 percent were "caretaker missing" youth, meaning the caregiver was alarmed, did not know the whereabouts of the child and attempted to find the child (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002).
- This study also found that only an estimated 21 percent of all runaways or throwaways were reported missing to police or to a missing children's agency for purposes of locating them (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002).

### What Does This Mean?

From these statistics, it is evident that we are facing significant challenges in improving the well-being of our nation's children. We must determine how to provide support to families so that each child has the basic necessities of life, including food, shelter and education, and ensure that each child has the opportunity to thrive. These statistics show the issues families face every day and challenge us to address these issues if we are to improve the safety and well-being of our nation's children and their families. Through advocacy, volunteering, outreach and



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education, one person can make a difference in the life of a child. Our children are our future!

#### 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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