



## American Humane Fact Sheet

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### Child Abuse and Neglect in America: What the Data Say

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 (CPS) agencies. As a result, the number of reports likely underrepresents the number of children who actually suffer from child abuse or neglect.

One of the most reliable and extensive information sources is *Child Maltreatment* by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services's 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 2001 – an estimated 2.7 million referrals of child abuse or neglect (representing approximately five million children) were received by public social service or CPS agencies in 2001. Of these referrals, a little less than one million children were confirmed to be victims of actual abuse or neglect. That means about 12.4 out of every 1,000 children up to age 17 in the United States were found to be victims of maltreatment in 2001 alone.

#### Sources of reports

Reports of suspected child maltreatment come from multiple sources. In 2001, almost 20% of all reports were made by family members, friends, and neighbors. Over one-half of reports (56.5%) were from professionals who are considered “mandated reporters.” Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected abuse and neglect. The three most common mandated reporter referral sources are educators; legal, law enforcement, and

criminal justice personnel; and social services and mental health professionals.

#### Types of maltreatment suffered by children

Maltreatment can take many forms, and some children can suffer from more than one type. Consistent with previous years, the majority of children confirmed to be victims of child maltreatment in 2001 experienced neglect. Following are the percentages of children who experienced maltreatment in 2001:

- Neglect 59.2%
- Physical abuse 18.6%
- Sexual abuse 9.6%
- Emotional/psychological 6.8%
- Other 19.5%

“Other” 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% because some children were victims of more than one type of maltreatment.

#### Gender, age, and race of child victims

Boys and girls are equally likely to suffer maltreatment. In 2001, 48% of child victims were male, and 51.5% were female (the gender of 0.5% of victims was unknown or not reported). Almost 75% of all victims of abuse and neglect were under the age of 12.

In 2001, roughly half (50.2%) of children who were maltreated were white, 25% were African American, and 14.5% were Hispanic. American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for 2% of victims, and Asian-Pacific Islanders accounted for 1.3% of victims. These rates have remained consistent for the past several years.

#### Who are the perpetrators?

Perpetrators of child abuse or neglect are often parents. In 2001, 80.9% of perpetrators were parents, and 15.9% were non-parents (e.g., other caregivers, babysitters, extended family members).

Perpetrators in remaining cases (3.2%) were missing or unknown. Females were more often perpetrators than males (59.3% females, 40.7% males).



## American Humane Fact Sheet

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### Child Abuse and Neglect (continued)

#### Many child victims are unknown to CPS agencies

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

#### Children who are victims of maltreatment are likely to be maltreated again

For many children who are victims of abuse or neglect, efforts of the federal child protection system have not been successful in preventing subsequent victimization.

This means that history likely repeats itself. It is twice as likely for children who have been reported as victims of abuse or neglect to be reported again in the future than for children who have never been reported as victims of abuse or neglect to be reported in the first place. Children younger than three were most likely to be victims of recurrence of maltreatment. Children for whom the perpetrator of abuse or neglect was exclusively the mother were more likely to experience recurrence than if the perpetrator was the father or a non-parent.

#### Children die every day as a result of abuse or neglect

In 2001, an estimated 1,300 children died as a result of abuse or neglect. The majority – almost 78% – of these children were three years of age or younger. Fifty-six percent of all fatalities were boys, and 44% were girls. Most child fatalities (82.8%) happened at the hands of parents. Not all fatalities were the result of the physical trauma of abuse. Neglect accounted for more than one-third (35.6%) of all fatality cases.

#### Statistics over time

The number of children who are abused and neglected has fluctuated over time. In the last two

years, there has been a renewed increase in the number of physical and sexual abuse reports following a five-year generally downward trend:

1995	1,006,000
1996	1,012,000
1997	957,000
1998	904,000
1999	829,000
2000	881,000
2001	903,000

#### Conclusion

Thousands of children throughout America suffer abuse and neglect every day, every year. 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.

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. If you suspect child abuse is occurring, report it to your local CPS agency or to the police if the child is in immediate danger. See American Humane's Fact Sheet on *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect*.

#### 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. For a copy of this report, contact the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information at (800) 394-3366 or <http://www.calib.com/nccanch>. The publication is also available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>.

#### Resources

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, National Child Abuse



## American Humane Fact Sheet

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### Child Abuse and Neglect *(continued)*

and Neglect Data System. (2003). *Child maltreatment 2001*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. (This publication is available by calling (800) 394-3366 or by visiting <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/index.htm>, under “Factsheets/Publications.”)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1996, September). *Third national incidence study of child abuse and neglect (NIS-3)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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American Humane is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the mission of protecting children and animals from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. For more information or to lend your support, please visit [www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org) or call (866) 242-1877.