

Child Maltreatment 2018: Summary of Key Findings

This factsheet presents data from *Child Maltreatment 2018*, a report based on data submissions by State child protective services (CPS) agencies for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2018. The full [Child Maltreatment 2018](#) report is available on the Children's Bureau website. The report includes comparison statistics for the last 5 years. These statistics indicate an increase in the overall rates of child victimization as well as an increase in the overall rates of children who received a response from a CPS agency.

States voluntarily provide data on child abuse and neglect to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) that are used for the annual Child Maltreatment report. States have their own definitions of child abuse and neglect based on standards set by Federal law.¹ Additionally, States' screening policies and responses to maltreatment may differ, as does what each State reports to NCANDS.

¹ For more information about State definitions, refer to Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect](#).

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HOW MANY ALLEGATIONS OF MALTREATMENT WERE REPORTED AND INVESTIGATED?

During FFY 2018, CPS agencies received an estimated 4.3 million referrals involving the alleged maltreatment of approximately 7.8 million children.² The national referral rate is 58.5 referrals per 1,000 children in the population. Of these referrals, approximately 2.4 million reports—concerning approximately 3.5 million children—were screened in as "appropriate" for CPS response and received either an investigation or alternative response.³ The national rate for children receiving either an investigation or alternative response was 47.8 children per 1,000 in the population.

More than half (56.0 percent) of referrals were screened in for investigation or assessment by CPS agencies in the 46 States that reported statistics for both screened-in and screened-out reports. Approximately one-fifth (16.8 percent) of the children investigated were found to be victims of abuse or neglect—a rate of 9.2 per 1,000 children in the population. The remainder of the children investigated (83.0 percent) were found to be nonvictims of maltreatment or received an alternative response. The following are additional details about the dispositions of the investigations (duplicate count):

- 16.1 percent substantiated
- 0.7 percent indicated
- 56.3 percent unsubstantiated
- 10.4 percent no alleged maltreatment
- 14.0 percent alternative response⁴
- 1.2 percent closed with no finding
- 1.0 percent "other"
- 0.1 percent unknown
- 0.0 intentionally false

WHO REPORTED CHILD MALTREATMENT?

For FFY 2018, nearly two-thirds (67.3 percent) of all reports of alleged child abuse or neglect were made by professionals. The term "professional" means that the person who was the source of the report had contact with the alleged child maltreatment victim as part of his or her job. The most common professional report sources were education personnel (20.5 percent), legal and law enforcement personnel (18.7 percent), social services staff (10.7 percent), and medical personnel (10.5 percent). The remaining reports were made by nonprofessionals (16.6 percent), such as friends, neighbors, and relatives, or by unclassified reporters (16.1 percent), a category that includes anonymous and unknown reporters.

² Over time, the Child Maltreatment report series has transitioned from using duplicate counts to unique counts for most analyses. For example, a "duplicate" count of child victims counts a child each time he or she was found to be a victim, while a "unique" count of child victims counts a child only once, regardless of the number of times he or she was found to be a victim during the reporting year. All numbers provided here are unique counts, unless noted otherwise.

³ Alternative response is the provision of a response other than an investigation that determines whether a child or family needs services. In alternative responses, a determination of maltreatment is not made, and a perpetrator is not determined.

⁴ Beginning with *Child Maltreatment 2015*, children reported to NCANDS as alternative response victims or alternative response nonvictims are presented in one category, regardless of victim status.

WHO WERE THE CHILD VICTIMS?

In FFY 2018, an estimated 678,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect nationwide, which is a rate of 9.2 victims per 1,000 children in the population. The following is additional information about children confirmed as victims by CPS agencies in FFY 2018:

- Children in the age group of birth to 1 year had the highest rate of victimization at 26.7 per 1,000 children of the same age in the national population. The youngest children are the most vulnerable to maltreatment.
- Slightly more than one-half (51.2 percent) of all child victims were girls, and 48.5 percent were boys. The gender was unknown for 0.3 percent of victims.
- Most victims were from three races or ethnicities: White (44.5 percent), Hispanic (22.6 percent), and African-American (20.6 percent). American Indian or Alaska Native children had the highest rates of victimization at 15.2 per 1,000 children in the population of the same race or ethnicity, and African-American children had the second-highest rate at 14.0 per 1,000 children of the same race or ethnicity.

WHAT WERE THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF MALTREATMENT?

As in previous years, neglect was overwhelmingly the most common form of child maltreatment. CPS investigations determined the following:⁵

- 60.8 percent of victims suffered neglect.
- 10.7 percent of victims suffered physical abuse.
- 7.0 percent of victims suffered sexual abuse.
- 2.3 percent of victims suffered psychological maltreatment.
- 0.8 percent of victims suffered medical neglect.
- 2.7 percent of victims experienced "other" maltreatment, which may include threatened abuse or parental substance use. States define "other" differently, but it generally refers to any maltreatment that does not fit in one of the NCANDS categories.

Research indicates there are risk factors for maltreatment, including caregiver alcohol abuse and caregiver drug abuse. Although not all States reported on all factors, FFY 2018 NCANDS data show the following:

- 12.3 percent of victims were reported with the caregiver alcohol abuse risk factor.
- 30.7 percent of victims were reported with the caregiver drug abuse risk factor.

⁵ Each victim could be counted for multiple forms of maltreatment.

Over the past 3 years, there has been an overall increase in both of these risk factors, which may be partly due to better reporting. Another contributing factor could be the opioid crisis. Use and misuse of both prescription and nonprescription opioids, as well as the rates of emergency room visits for babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome, have been increasing.⁶ For more information about how heroin and other opioids impact children and families involved with child welfare, visit the webpage [Impact of Opioids on Families](#).

The *Child Maltreatment 2018* report is the first time data will be given for the new maltreatment type of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. States are now instructed to include data on sex trafficking cases by caregivers and noncaregivers for victims younger than age 24 in their NCANDS submissions, as per the provisions of the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, which includes an amendment to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) under title VIII—Better Response for Victims of Child Sex Trafficking.

FFY 2018 NCANDS data on sex trafficking show the following:

- Twenty-seven States reported 741 unique cases of sex trafficking.
- The majority (89.1 percent) of victims were female, 10.4 percent of victims were male, and 0.5 percent of victims were unknown.
- Unlike other maltreatment types, children under age 3 comprised 1.0 percent of victims, and percentages increased for older victims. Children age 14 to 17 had the highest percentage of victims at 71.9 percent.
- The majority of sex trafficking victims are one of three races: White (41.6 percent), African-American (23.5 percent), and Hispanic (19.3 percent).
- More than half (54.3 percent) of victims had an unknown relationship to their perpetrators.
- One-third (34.5 percent) of victims were maltreated by someone other than a parent.

Also new to the Child Maltreatment report are data pertaining to infants with prenatal substance exposure. States are required to submit these data as per the provisions of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016, which included an amendment to CAPTA Section 106(d) Annual State Data Reports 18 (A) requesting a count of infants with prenatal substance exposure.

FFY 2018 NCANDS data on infants affected by prenatal substance exposure show the following:

- A total of 27,709 infants in 45 States were referred to CPS agencies as infants with prenatal substance exposure.
- Of these infants, 87.8 percent were screened in for an investigation or alternative response.
- Of screened-in infants, 68.3 percent were considered victims with substantiated (55.0 percent) or indicated (13.3 percent) dispositions. One-fifth (19.4 percent) received an unsubstantiated disposition, and 9.2 percent received an alternative response.

⁶ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Pain management and the opioid epidemic: Balancing societal and individual benefits and risks of prescription opioid use*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK458661/>

- Fewer than 1 percent (0.8 percent) had the alcohol abuse risk factor.
- Three-quarters (75.4 percent) had the drug abuse risk factor.
- About 12 percent (11.7 percent) had both the alcohol and drug abuse risk factors.
- Thirteen States reported 64.1 percent of screened-in infants had a plan of safe care.
- Fourteen States reported 42.6 percent of screened-in infants had a referral to appropriate services.

HOW MANY CHILDREN DIED FROM ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

NCANDS defines "child fatality" as the death of a child caused by an injury resulting from abuse or neglect or where abuse or neglect was a contributing factor. The following are data regarding child fatalities due to child maltreatment during FFY 2018:

- An estimated 1,770 children died due to abuse or neglect.
- The overall rate of child fatalities was 2.4 deaths per 100,000 children in the national population.
- Nearly three-quarters (70.6 percent) of the children who died due to child abuse or neglect were younger than 3 years old.
- Nearly three-quarters (72.8 percent) of child fatalities were attributed to neglect only, and 46.1 percent of the children died exclusively from physical abuse or from physical abuse in combination with another maltreatment type.
- Boys had a slightly higher child fatality rate than girls (2.9 boys per 100,000 boys in the population compared with 2.2 girls per 100,000 girls in the population).

For more information about child maltreatment fatalities, including information about what States and communities are doing to prevent fatalities, read Information Gateway's [Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities 2018: Statistics and Interventions](#).

WHO ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN?

NCANDS tracks child maltreatment by caregivers, including parents and other household members who are responsible for children's well-being. These cases are generally handled by child welfare agencies. Cases of child maltreatment committed by out-of-home perpetrators are considered criminal cases and are generally handled by law enforcement.

In FFY 2018, 52 States reported a total of 546,365 perpetrators of child maltreatment (each perpetrator counted once, regardless of the number of children or reports involved). The following data describe those perpetrators:

- More than four-fifths (83.3 percent) of all perpetrators were between the ages of 18 and 44 years.
- More than one-half (53.8 percent) of perpetrators were women, 45.3 percent of perpetrators were men, and 0.9 percent were of unknown sex.
- The three largest categories for perpetrator race or ethnicity were White (49.6 percent), African-American (20.6 percent), and Hispanic (19.3 percent).

- The majority of perpetrators (77.5 percent) were parents of their victims.
- The largest nonparent categories for perpetrator relationship were relatives other than a parent (6.4 percent), those who had multiple relationships to their victims (e.g., unmarried partner to a parent) (4.2 percent), and other (e.g., foster sibling, nonrelative, babysitter) (3.7 percent).

WHO RECEIVED SERVICES, AND WHAT DID THEY INCLUDE?

As a result of an investigation or alternative response, CPS agencies provide services to children and their families, both in the home and in foster care. The following describes services provided to children (duplicate count) in FFY 2018:

- Forty-seven States reported that approximately 2 million children received prevention services.
- Approximately 1.3 million children received postresponse services from a CPS agency.⁷
- Fifty States reported that more than three-fifths (60.7 percent) of duplicate victims received postresponse services, and 50 States reported that nearly one-third (29.0 percent) of duplicate nonvictims received postresponse services.
- Among the States reporting a breakdown of service type, 22.9 percent of victims who received services and 1.9 percent of nonvictims who received services (including those who received an alternative response) were removed from their homes and received foster care services. The remaining victims and nonvictims who received services received in-home services only.

The statistics in the Child Maltreatment reports are based on data submitted to NCANDS by the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. NCANDS is a voluntary reporting system that was developed by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to collect and analyze annual statistics on child maltreatment from State CPS agencies. The NCANDS Child File includes case-level data on all completed reports with a disposition (or finding) as an outcome of the CPS response during the reporting year. The Child File may include assessments that began in a previous year but were completed in the current year, but it does not include screened-in reports that have not yet reached disposition.

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⁷ Postresponse services, as mentioned in the second and third bullets, are activities provided or arranged by the CPS agency, social services agency, or the child welfare agency for the child or family after needs are discovered during an investigation.



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