



Child Maltreatment 2015: Summary of Key Findings

This factsheet presents excerpts from *Child Maltreatment 2015*, a report based on data submissions by State child protective services (CPS) agencies for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2015. The full *Child Maltreatment 2015* report is available on the Children's Bureau website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2015>. The report includes comparison statistics for the last 5 years. These statistics indicate a decrease 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 statistics on child abuse and neglect to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). Data from NCANDS 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 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* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/define.pdf>.

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How Many Allegations of Maltreatment Were Reported and Investigated?

During FFY 2015, CPS agencies received an estimated 4.0 million referrals involving the alleged maltreatment of approximately 7.2 million children. This estimate is based on a national referral rate of 53.2 referrals per 1,000 children in the population.

Of these referrals, approximately 2.2 million reports concerning approximately 4.1 million children (duplicate count) were screened in as “appropriate” for CPS response.²

- Almost three-fifths (58.2 percent) of referrals were screened in for investigation or assessment by CPS agencies in the 44 States that reported statistics for both screened-in and screened-out reports.
- Approximately 3.4 million children received either an investigation or alternative response, with a national rate of 45.1 children per 1,000 in the population.
- Approximately one-fifth (18.0 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 (82.0 percent) were found to be nonvictims of maltreatment. The following are the dispositions of the investigations (duplicate count): 17.3 percent substantiated, 0.7 percent indicated, 55.9 percent unsubstantiated, 10.5 percent no alleged maltreatment, 13.2 percent alternative-response nonvictim,³ 1.6 percent closed with no finding, 0.6 percent “other,” and 0.1 percent unknown.

² Over time, the *Child Maltreatment* report series has transitioned from using duplicate counts to unique counts for most analyses. 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 Beginning with *Child Maltreatment 2015*, children reported to NCANDS as alternative-response victims or alternative-response nonvictims will be presented in one category, regardless of victim status.

Who Reported Child Maltreatment?

For FFY 2015, more than three-fifths (63.4 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 their job. The most common professional report sources were education personnel (18.4 percent), legal and law enforcement personnel (18.2 percent), social services staff (10.9 percent), and medical personnel (9.1 percent). Professionals have submitted more than one-half of all reports for the past 5 years.

The remaining reports were made by nonprofessionals (18.2 percent), such as friends, neighbors, and relatives, or by unclassified reporters (18.3 percent), a category that includes anonymous and unknown reporters.

Who Were the Child Victims?

In FFY 2015, an estimated 683,000 children were victims of abuse and 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 2015:

- Children in the age group of birth to 1 year had the highest rate of victimization at 24.2 per 1,000 children of the same age group in the national population. The youngest children are the most vulnerable to maltreatment.
- Slightly more than one-half (50.9 percent) of the child victims were girls, and 48.6 percent were boys. The gender was unknown for 0.5 percent of victims.
- Most victims (88.2 percent) were from three races or ethnicities: African-American (21.4 percent), Hispanic (23.6 percent), and White (43.2 percent). African-American children had the highest rates of victimization at 14.5 per 1,000 children in the population of the same race or ethnicity, and American Indian or Alaska Native children had the second-highest rate at 13.8 per 1,000 children.

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:⁴

- 75.3 percent of victims suffered neglect.
- 17.2 percent of victims suffered physical abuse.
- 8.4 percent of victims suffered sexual abuse.
- 6.2 percent of victims suffered psychological maltreatment.
- 2.2 percent of victims suffered medical neglect.
- 6.9 percent of victims experienced “other” maltreatment, which may include threatened abuse or parents’ substance abuse. States define “other” differently, but it generally refers to any maltreatment that does not fit in one of NCANDS’s categories.

Research indicates that there are risk factors for maltreatment, including caregiver alcohol abuse and caregiver drug abuse. Although not all States reported on all factors, FFY 2015 NCANDS data show the following:

- 10.3 percent of victims and 5.5 percent of nonvictims were reported with the caregiver alcohol abuse risk factor.
- 25.4 percent of victims and 8.1 percent of nonvictims were reported with the caregiver drug abuse risk factor.

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 2015:

- An estimated 1,670 children died due to abuse or neglect.
- The overall rate of child fatalities was 2.25 deaths per 100,000 children in the national population.

⁴ Each victim could be counted for multiple forms of maltreatment.

- Close to three-quarters (74.8 percent) of the children who died due to child abuse or neglect were younger than 3 years old.
- Nearly three-quarters (72.9 percent) of child fatalities were attributed to neglect only or a combination of neglect and another maltreatment type, and 43.9 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 at 2.42 boys per 100,000 boys in the population compared with 2.09 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 2015: Statistics and Interventions* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/fatality>.

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 by out-of-home perpetrators are considered criminal cases and are generally handled by law enforcement.

In FFY 2015, 51 States reported a total of 522,476 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 (83.4 percent) of all perpetrators were between the ages of 18 and 44 years.
- More than one-half (54.1 percent) of perpetrators were women, 45.0 percent of perpetrators were men, and 0.9 percent were of unknown sex.

- The three largest categories for perpetrator race or ethnicity were White (48.7 percent), African-American (20.0 percent), and Hispanic (19.5 percent).
- The great majority of perpetrators were parents—one or both parents maltreated 91.6 percent of victims.
- Approximately 13.3 percent of victims were maltreated by a perpetrator who was not the child’s parent and who sometimes acted alone and sometimes with other perpetrators. The largest categories in the nonparent group were male relatives, male partner of parent, and “other,” but the category also included other options, such as daycare providers, foster parents, and unknown.
- More than three-fifths (61.5 percent) of perpetrators maltreated one victim, more than one-fifth (21.5 percent) maltreated two victims, and the remaining 10.3 percent maltreated three or more victims.
- Seven percent of perpetrators were involved in more than one report.
- More than three-fifths (61.9 percent) of victims and nearly one-third (29.7 percent) of nonvictims received postresponse services.
- Among the States reporting a breakdown of service type, more than one-fifth (22.9 percent) of victims who received services and 2.1 percent of nonvictims who received services 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 all children with an allegation of maltreatment who are involved in investigations or assessed and reach disposition during the 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.

Who Received Services, and What Did They Include?

As a result of an investigation or alternative response⁵, 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 2015:

- Forty-seven States reported that approximately 2.3 million children received prevention services.
- Approximately 1.3 million children received postresponse services from a CPS agency.

⁵ Alternative response is the provision of a response other than an investigation that determines whether a child or family needs services. A determination of maltreatment is not made, and a perpetrator is not determined. 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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