

An Issue Facing All Communities: The National Scope of the Problem

How many children are abused and neglected in the United States?

Each week, child protective services (CPS) agencies throughout the United States receive more than 50,000 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. In Federal fiscal year 2003, an estimated 2.9 million reports concerning the welfare of approximately 5.5 million children were made.

In approximately two-thirds (68 percent) of these cases, the information provided in the report was sufficient to prompt an assessment or investigation. As a result of these investigations, approximately 906,000 children were found to have been victims of abuse or neglect.

More than 60 percent of victims were neglected, meaning a caretaker failed to provide for the child's basic needs. Fewer victims experienced physical abuse (nearly 20 percent) or sexual abuse (10 percent), though these cases are typically more likely to be publicized. The smallest number (5 percent) were found to be victims of emotional abuse, which includes criticizing, rejecting, or refusing to nurture a child.

An average of four children die every day as a result of child abuse or neglect (an estimated 1,500 children in 2003).

Who is more likely to be abused or neglected?

No group of children is immune. In 2003, girls were slightly more likely to be victims (52 percent) than boys (48 percent).

Children of all races and ethnicities experience child abuse. However, Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and African-American children had the highest rates of victimization when compared to their national population. While the rate of White victims of child abuse or neglect was 11 per 1,000 children of the same race, the rate for Pacific Islanders was 21 per 1,000 children, the rate for American Indian or Alaska Natives was 21 per 1,000 children, and the rate for African-Americans was 20 per 1,000 children.

Children of all ages experience abuse and neglect, but the youngest children are most vulnerable and are most likely to die from maltreatment. Children younger than 1 year old accounted for 44 percent of all abuse-related deaths reported in 2003; more than three-quarters (79 percent) of those killed were younger than 4.

Who reports child abuse and neglect?

In 2003, more than one-half (57 percent) of all reports made to CPS agencies came from professionals who came in contact with the child. Teachers (16 percent of all reports); legal, law enforcement, and criminal justice personnel (16 percent); social services workers (12 percent); and medical personnel (8 percent) were the most frequent sources of reports in 2003. Many people in these professions are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect.

However, a significant proportion of reports (approximately 43 percent) came from nonprofessional sources, such as parents, other relatives, friends, and neighbors. Anonymous sources accounted for 9 percent of all reports in 2003. It is important for everyone to know the signs that may indicate maltreatment and how to report it. We all share a responsibility to help keep children safe as we take steps to prevent abuse from occurring in the first place. For more information about recognizing child abuse and neglect, see *Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms* on the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information website at <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm>.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2005). *Child Maltreatment 2003*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available online at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm03/index.htm or by calling the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information at (800) 394-3366. Statistics in *Child Maltreatment 2003* primarily refer to cases of harm to a child caused by parents or other caretakers; they generally do not include harm caused by other people, such as acquaintances or strangers.

