CHILD MALTREATMENT DATA SNAPSHOT

ABOUT THE DATA SOURCE

This Data Snapshot uses data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The NCANDS includes information provided by states from their child welfare administrative data systems on investigated reports of maltreatment. Data are included for a federal fiscal year for reports that have had a disposition or an assessment of maltreatment during that particular year—that is, a determination was made regarding whether the reported maltreatment occurred.

ADDITIONAL STATE LEVEL DATA ON MALTREATMENT

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center offers a wide array of information on child well-being, including reports, charts and a searchable database of hundreds of measures of child well-being at the national, state and local level. For more information about the indicators presented in this Data Snapshot, please visit the KIDS COUNT Data Center at: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/

DEFINITION OF MALTREATMENT

Most stated make a determination that a maltreatment report has been substantiated or unsubstantiated. Some states include a third category that maltreatment was indicated; this determination is made when evidence is not sufficient to meet the state's legal definition of maltreatment, but the maltreatment may have occurred or the child is at risk of maltreatment. Additionally, some states have diversified systems that identify potential maltreatment victims through alternative responses. In this Data Snapshot, and in NCANDS generally, maltreatment victims are defined as those children who have had substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports, or those identified as victims through alternative response systems.

In 2009, 9.4 children per 1,000 children ages 0 to 17 in the United States were victims of maltreatment, a decrease of 14 percent from 2000. Trends are mixed, however, when it come to changes in rates for particular types of maltreatment, as well as for changes across states. Maltreatment victims—as examined in this Data Snapshot, using data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) for 2000 to 2009—are children who are the subject of an allegation of abuse or neglect that has been verified. It is important to note that the numbers presented here cannot include victimized children who have never been made known to the system through a maltreatment report. Because of this, and because of state differences in policies and practices—including variations in the legal definitions of maltreatment—readers should exercise caution in interpreting trends and in making state-by-state comparisons. Nevertheless, it appears that, overall, welcome progress has been made in recent years in reducing child abuse and neglect, particularly physical and sexual abuse.

Overall rates of substantiated child maltreatment have decreased from 11.0 victims per 1,000 children ages 0 to 17 in the United States in 2000 to 9.4 victims per 1,000 children in 2009. (See Figure 1.) The decline has not been continuous throughout the period; however, rates have fallen consistently for the past three years.
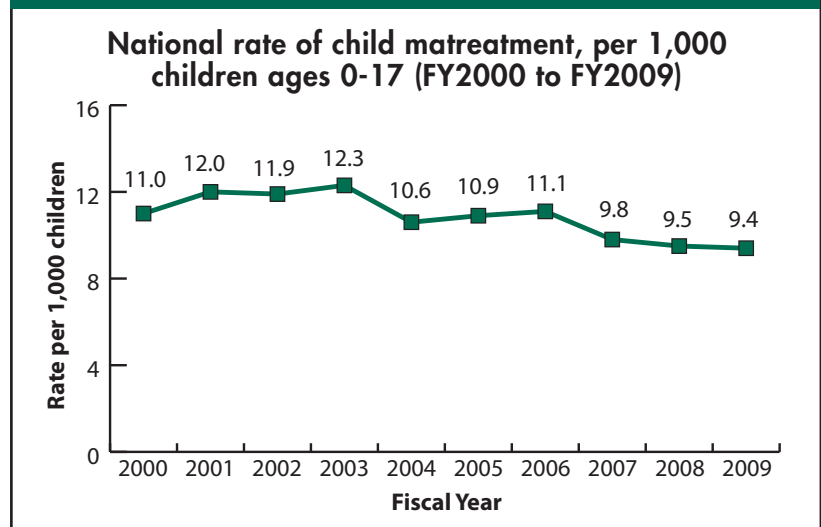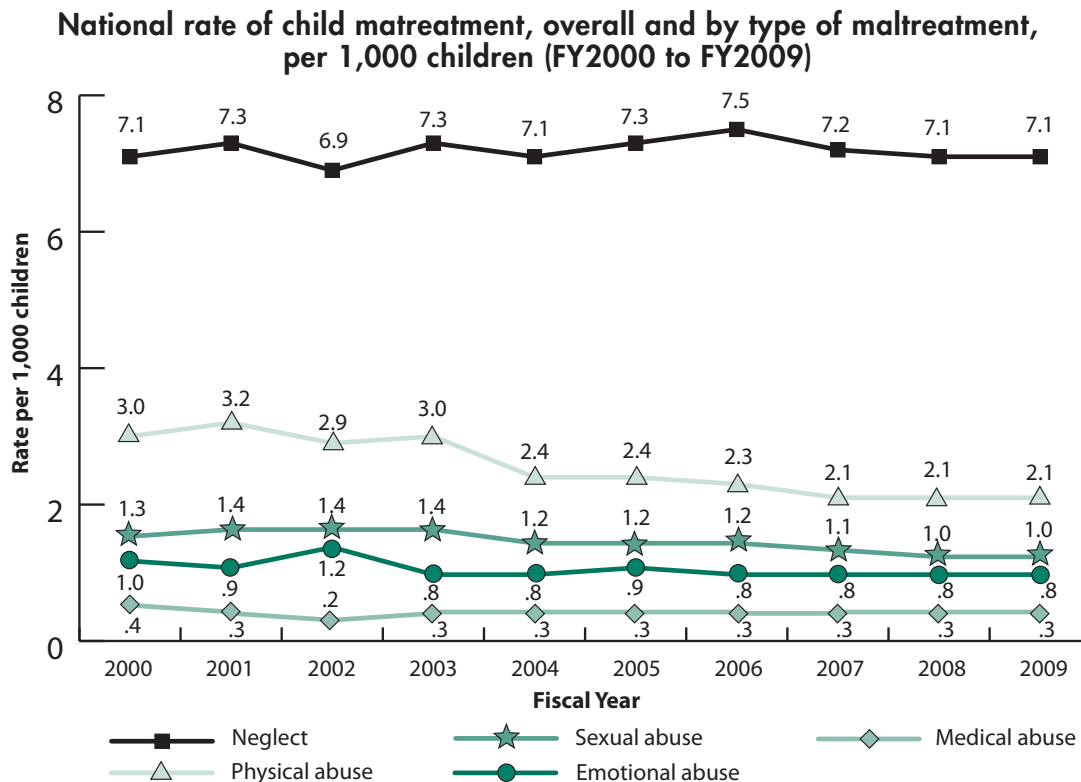
FIGURE 1

National rate of child matreatment, per 1,000 children ages 0-17 (FY2000 to FY2009)

FIGURE 2

National rate of child matreatment, overall and by type of maltreatment, per 1,000 children (FY2000 to FY2009)

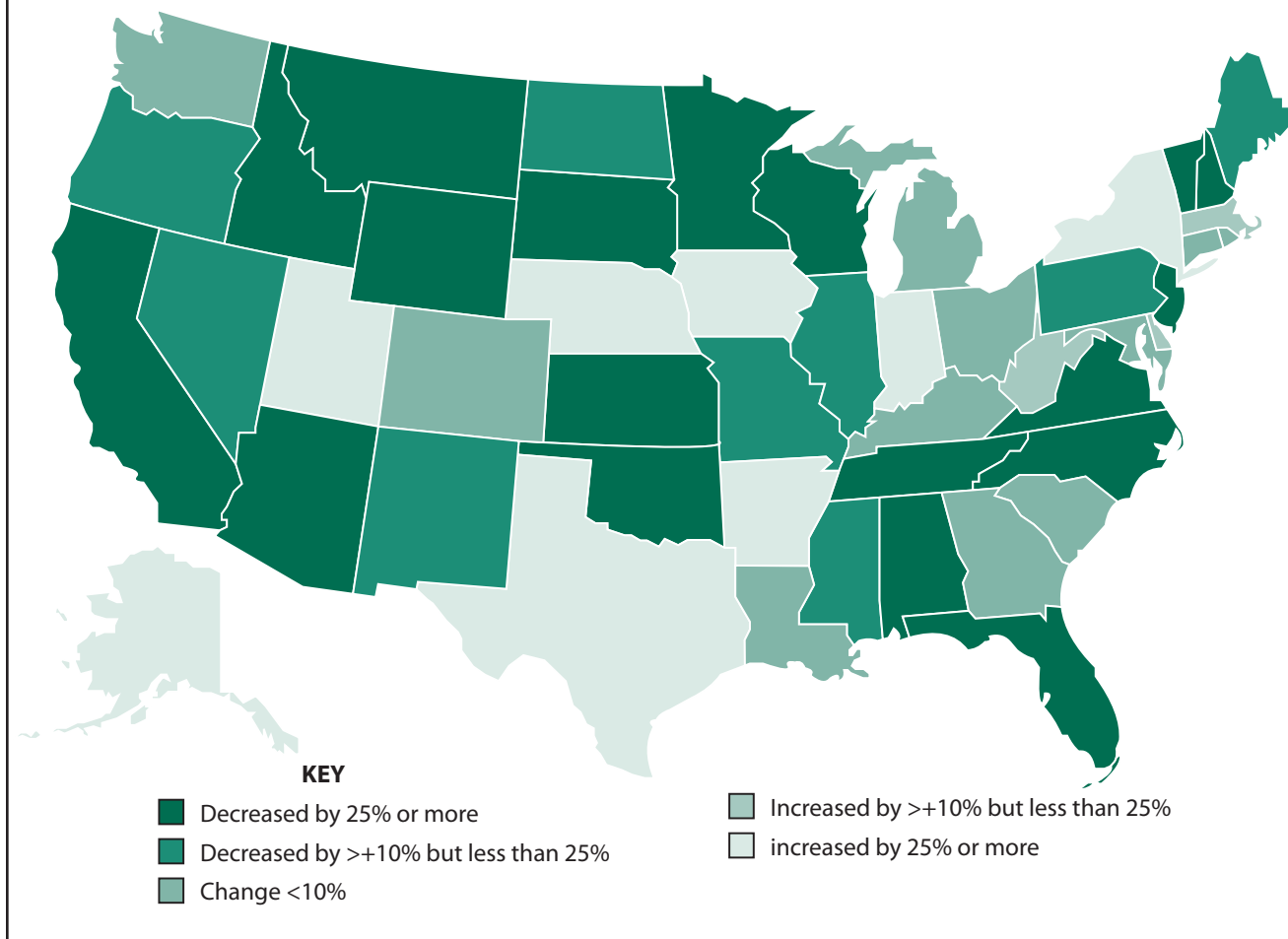Note: Children may be victims of multiple types of maltreatment.

Figure 2 shows data separately for five maltreatment types: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and medical neglect. Children may be victims of multiple types of maltreatment, so the same child may be counted more than once in these data. Rates of neglect (the most common type of child maltreatment) remained stable, hovering around 7.1 victims per 1,000 children, between 2000 and 2009. The largest decrease has been in the rate of physical abuse, from 3.0 victims per 1,000 children in 2000, to 2.1 victims per 1,000 children in 2009. Smaller decreases have occurred in rates of sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and medical neglect. (See Figure 2.)

Research has not identified the causes for the apparent declines in maltreatment;[1] indeed, it is impossible to determine empirically and with certainty the drivers of changes in national trends. However, growth in the public awareness of the issue, as well as the adoption of a number of evidence-based prevention programs, may have contributed to the decline.

Note that the data presented here come from administrative records maintained by state child protection agencies. Because the data are based on reports received and reviewed by agency staff, trends can reflect factors other than the "real" incidence of child maltreatment. For example, a highly publicized child abuse case can temporarily cause an increase in public reporting, as can a new outreach/prevention campaign. Interpreting state-level trends, as well as national trends, can be challenging, in the absence of additional contextual information. State policy changes can widen or narrow the criteria for identifying and/or substantiating abuse. Experts also advise against making state-to-state comparisons of rates, because criteria for defining what constitutes maltreatment, and for determining

[1] Finkelhor, D., Jones, L., and Shattuck, A. (2010). *Updated Trends in Child Maltreatment,* 2008. Durham, NH. Crimes against Children Research Center. Available online at http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/Trends/papers.html. Finkelhor and colleagues note that the fact that other studies have found similar declines in maltreatment suggests that the apparent declines in maltreatment are not merely an artifact of the NCANDS data. They also note that, to date, evidence has not been found to support the hypothesis that the national declines may be partly attributable to any reduction in the likelihood that actual maltreatment may be reported and/or substantiated due to recession-related reductions in agency resources.

FIGURE 4

Percent Change in Rate of Child Maltreatment from 2000 to 2009[4]

KEY

- ■ Decreased by 25% or more
- ■ Decreased by >+10% but less than 25%
- ■ Change <10%
- ■ Increased by >+10% but less than 25%
- ■ increased by 25% or more

whether a report is substantiated, vary across states.[2] In addition, data are simply unavailable for some states, as not all states have submitted data every year.[3]

Despite the limitations of the data, they are the best available for monitoring year-to-year trends; the issues mentioned have been present consistently over the years, and at state and national levels may be relatively negligible. So, at least when considering the national data, or data within a single state, the data presented here are likely reasonable approximations of trends in the "real" incidence of maltreatment.

As indicated in Figure 3, many states saw declines in child maltreatment from 2000 to 2009 (highlighted in the darkest two shades). Table 1 shows the rates of child maltreatment in 2009 by state and maltreatment type. As noted earlier, in 2009, 9.4 of every 1,000 U.S. children were victims of child maltreatment. State-specific rates vary widely, with Pennsylvania having the lowest rate of overall maltreatment (1.36 victims per 100 children) and Washington, D.C., having the highest rate of overall maltreatment (28.65 victims per 100 children). As in the nation as a whole, most states have higher rates of neglect, compared to other types of maltreatment.

---

[2] For more information, see: Ross, Timothy, and Sharon Vandivere. 2009. Indicators for child maltreatment prevention programs. Paper developed to inform the Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood, commissioned by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, DC. Available online at http://www.qic-ec.org/images/uploads/Child_Trends_Commissioned_Paper.pdf.

[3] See footnote 4 for a listing of states that did not submit data in 2000 and 2009.

[4] For states that did not provide maltreatment data, the rate of maltreatment was assumed to be the same as the rate across children in all states that did provide data. The following states did not provide data in 2009: ND, OR. The following states did not provide data on 2000: AL, AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, HA, ID, IL, IN, IA, MD, MI, MS, MT, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, ND, OH, OR, SC, TN, VA, WV, WI.

TABLE 1

Rate of child maltreatment per 1,000 children, total and by maltreatment type, by state, 2009

	Rate of Maltreatment	Rate of Physical Abuse	Rate of Neglect	Rate of Medical Neglect	Rate of Sexual Abuse	Rate of Emotional Abuse	Rate of Other/Missing Abuse
Alabama	7.18	3.65	2.85	0.00	1.71	0.04	0.00
Alaska	19.01	3.10	15.83	0.39	0.78	4.88	0.00
Arizona	2.18	0.67	1.62	0.00	0.23	0.03	0.00
Arkansas	13.94	3.40	9.17	1.24	3.39	0.33	0.01
California	7.83	1.52	6.39	0.00	0.70	1.92	0.02
Colorado	9.19	1.63	7.09	0.17	1.00	0.48	0.16
Connecticut	11.14	1.34	10.33	0.49	0.53	0.78	0.00
Delaware	9.71	1.75	4.09	0.11	0.74	3.14	0.87
District of Columbia	28.65	6.49	20.64	1.53	1.44	0.46	11.43
Florida	11.25	1.72	6.90	0.37	0.68	0.36	6.89
Georgia	8.96	1.42	6.38	0.50	0.54	2.09	0.04
Hawaii	6.89	1.09	1.36	0.13	0.39	0.06	6.63
Idaho	3.74	0.79	2.93	0.05	0.24	0.00	0.34
Illinois	8.61	2.29	6.13	0.26	1.46	0.01	0.00
Indiana	14.02	2.12	12.07	0.42	2.54	0.32	0.00
Iowa	16.29	2.48	13.56	0.21	0.90	0.13	1.34
Kansas	1.87	0.49	0.38	0.07	0.69	0.27	0.52
Kentucky	15.62	1.95	14.00	0.00	0.76	0.08	0.00
Louisiana	8.03	2.48	6.60	0.00	0.77	0.10	0.04
Maine	13.98	3.51	11.94	0.00	1.36	7.73	0.00
Maryland	11.26	2.93	7.66	0.00	1.37	0.05	0.00
Massachusetts	24.16	4.87	22.57	0.00	0.91	0.06	0.01
Michigan	12.70	2.94	10.58	0.36	0.53	3.41	3.89
Minnesota	3.66	0.83	2.63	0.05	0.65	0.03	0.00
Mississippi	9.55	2.08	6.16	0.46	1.50	1.19	0.06
Missouri	3.63	1.15	1.87	0.09	1.01	0.19	0.00
Montana	6.85	1.20	5.77	0.13	0.51	2.01	0.02
Nebraska	10.75	1.34	9.55	0.00	0.99	0.06	0.00
Nevada	6.48	2.04	4.82	0.15	0.59	0.24	0.00
New Hampshire	3.17	1.00	2.55	0.13	0.61	0.09	0.00
New Jersey	4.25	0.95	3.24	0.11	0.46	0.01	0.00
New Mexico	9.62	1.69	7.89	0.29	0.56	2.13	0.00
New York	17.50	2.91	16.79	1.33	0.88	0.27	5.88
North Carolina	9.68	1.02	7.75	0.18	0.78	0.03	0.11
North Dakota*	9.40	2.14	7.14	0.29	1.01	0.85	1.02
Ohio	11.47	4.32	5.24	0.18	2.19	0.77	0.00
Oklahoma	7.75	1.74	6.89	0.25	0.74	1.72	0.00
Oregon*	9.40	2.14	7.14	0.29	1.01	0.85	1.02
Pennsylvania	1.36	0.46	0.05	0.04	0.84	0.01	0.00
Rhode Island	12.30	2.20	10.79	0.22	0.55	0.02	0.21
South Carolina	11.22	3.80	8.00	0.44	0.77	0.12	0.14
South Dakota	7.18	1.26	6.60	0.00	0.48	0.59	0.00
Tennessee	5.87	1.12	3.58	0.22	1.94	0.31	0.00
Texas	9.55	3.62	7.99	0.57	1.41	0.23	0.00
Utah	14.59	2.59	3.47	0.06	2.68	7.44	3.61
Vermont	5.47	2.67	0.21	0.10	2.70	0.08	0.00
Virginia	3.20	1.00	2.07	0.11	0.54	0.09	0.00
Washington	3.86	1.05	3.14	0.00	0.31	0.00	0.00
West Virginia	12.82	4.64	7.58	0.24	0.87	4.24	1.85
Wisconsin	3.53	0.91	1.91	0.06	1.07	0.06	0.00
Wyoming	5.32	0.44	3.78	0.08	0.66	0.82	0.20
Puerto Rico	9.40	2.51	6.88	0.74	0.28	4.29	1.82
United States States w/ Valid Data	9.40	2.14	7.14	0.29	1.01	0.85	1.02

*Maltreatment rates for states without valid maltreatment data for 2009 were estimated using national rates.
[1] United States rates were calculated using only those states with valid maltreatment data for 2009.

CONCLUSION

Once a maltreatment allegation regarding a child has been made, assuming that the report merits investigation, child welfare professionals evaluate whether and what types of services may be needed to ameliorate the situation. Maltreated children and their families—and sometimes even those who had a report that was not substantiated or indicated—often receive services in an effort to strengthen the family and prevent the occurrence or reoccurrence of maltreatment. For instance, families may receive family preservation services, multisystemic child and family therapy; parents or caregivers may receive services to meet their needs, such as parent education, substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, or other support programs; and children may receive counseling, mentoring, or other therapeutic services. If a child's safety cannot be maintained in the home, the child is typically placed in out-of-home care, such as a foster family or a congregate care placement for foster children. (A companion Data Snapshot examines state and national trends in foster care.)

If a child welfare case has been opened, case workers monitor the family's progress and periodically assess the level of risk to the child. In the vast majority of cases, the goal for children placed in foster care is to be reunified with their families, but if it is determined that this cannot safely occur, the child welfare agency typically works to achieve legal permanency for the child through another venue, including adoption or legal guardianship.[5] State and local approaches to addressing abuse and neglect vary greatly with respect to policies and practices. For information about individual state laws, including legal definitions of abuse and neglect, please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway at: http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_pol icies/state. In addition, later this year, results from a national survey of state prevention policies will be available at the Child Welfare Policy Database.

Child maltreatment rates are a critical indicator of child well-being and of our society's commitment to children and families. With appropriate acknowledgement of the limitations of the data, together with efforts to understand the particular contextual factors that play a role in each state, the data can be helpful tools to compel attention, monitor progress, and increase shared accountability.

---

[5] For more information, see for example: Goldman, J., Salus, M.K., Wolcott, D., and Kennedy, K.Y. (2003.) *A Coordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect: The Foundation for Practice*. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available online at http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/foundation/index.cfm.