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UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2010

David Finkelhor, Lisa Jones, and Anne Shattuck

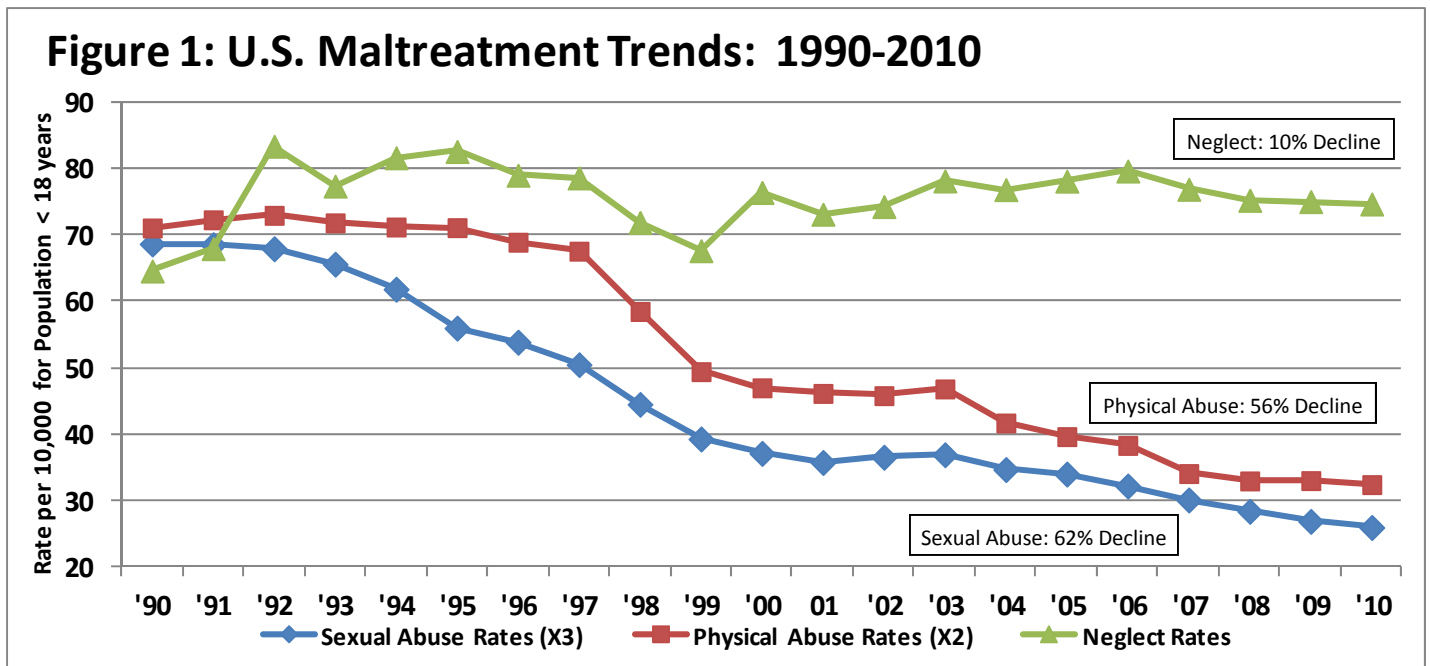
Even in the midst of continuing difficult economic times, 2010 national statistics showed no increase in child maltreatment. Overall substantiated child maltreatment actually declined 1% from 2009 to 2010, including a 3% decline in sexual abuse and a 2% decline in physical abuse. Child maltreatment fatalities also declined 8%, but some known administrative changes affected the rates.

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm10/index.htm>

The published NCANDS report shows overall substantiated child maltreatment dropping from 10.1 to 10.0 per 1000 children, a 1% decline in the rate of substantiated child maltreatment from 2009 to 2010. The new rate, equivalent to about 754,000 children, is the lowest level of child maltreatment since the NCANDS system was put into place in 1990.

The data in the tables and graphs included below are derived from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), which aggregates and publishes statistics from state child protection agencies. The most recent data from NCANDS were released in December, 2011, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2010 (USDHHS, 2011).

Breaking out data by type of abuse, the report shows that sexual abuse declined 3% from 2009 to 2010 to a nationally estimated 63,300 substantiated cases or a rate of 8.6 per 10,000. Physical abuse declined 2% to an estimated 118,700 cases or 16.2 per 10,000. Neglect was down fractionally to an estimated 548,000 substantiated cases or 74.7 per 10,000 (see Figure 1).



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2010. Annual rates for physical abuse and sexual abuse have been multiplied by 2 and 3 respectively in Figure 1 so that trend comparisons can be highlighted.

¹The statistics in Table 1 and Figure 1 concern substantiated cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. A substantiated case means a case that has been reported to a child protection agency, investigated and deemed to have occurred according to a “preponderance of evidence.” The child maltreatment cases referred and investigated by state child protection agencies primarily involve abuse by caregivers. The cases do not include many involving stranger abusers, unless some element of caregiver neglect was involved.

Table 1: State Trends in Child Maltreatment: 2009-2010 and 1992-2010*

US States	Recent Trends: 2009-2010			Long-term Trends: 1992-2010		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	12%	18%	16%	-57%	-41%	-73%
Alaska	6%	-21%	-23%	-92%	-86%	-19%
Arizona	1%	5%	104%	-93%	-72%	-51%
Arkansas	4%	25%	22%	12%	-19%	75%
California	-6%	1%	7%	-84%	-85%	-20%
Colorado	-3%	-15%	4%	-59%	-61%	43%
Connecticut	10%	-4%	11%	-60%	-85%	-14%
Delaware	2%	-9%	3%	-34%	-35%	-4%
District of Columbia (DC)	-29%	5%	-8%	137%	28%	-31%
Florida	10%	11%	15%	-79%	-72%	-51%
Georgia	-10%	-7%	-16%	-86%	-74%	-67%
Hawaii	15%	1%	-35%	-70%	-78%	-67%
Idaho	-9%	-19%	6%	-94%	-89%	-70%
Illinois	-1%	-7%	-2%	-22%	18%	-27%
Indiana	-13%	-13%	-4%	-57%	-70%	11%
Iowa	-9%	-4%	2%	-62%	-48%	164%
Kansas	7%	11%	30%	-44%	-59%	-44%
Kentucky	6%	-12%	6%	-72%	-80%	2%
Louisiana	-8%	-10%	-9%	-47%	-37%	-28%
Maine	-19%	-22%	-13%	-61%	-40%	74%
Maryland	-9%	-16%	-16%	-29%	-46%	-15%
Massachusetts	-12%	-27%	-32%	-67%	-49%	29%
Michigan	-5%	6%	11%	-51%	40%	189%
Minnesota	3%	-7%	-10%	-43%	-81%	-56%
Mississippi	-8%	13%	8%	-48%	-49%	-5%
Missouri	0%	-5%	9%	-51%	-54%	-71%
Montana	-10%	-21%	-5%	-89%	-93%	-61%
Nebraska	-22%	-9%	-9%	-59%	-70%	32%
Nevada	-3%	19%	8%	-56%	-50%	-63%
New Hampshire	-21%	11%	-8%	-77%	-57%	70%
New Jersey	8%	-11%	5%	-45%	-80%	-24%
New Mexico	-19%	2%	12%	-78%	-61%	5%
New York	-1%	2%	1%	-61%	-57%	125%
North Carolina	2%	-9%	-3%	-7%	30%	-46%
North Dakota	missing	missing	missing	-76%	-84%	-49%
Ohio	-5%	4%	0%	-47%	-15%	-46%
Oklahoma	-2%	-19%	-2%	-57%	-68%	6%
Oregon	missing	missing	missing	-69%	-62%	11%
Pennsylvania	-8%	-12%	-26%	-45%	-67%	-51%
Rhode Island	16%	14%	22%	-76%	-71%	22%
South Carolina	-19%	3%	-10%	-70%	66%	5%
South Dakota	-26%	-31%	-5%	-90%	-77%	-26%
Tennessee	-4%	12%	-6%	-23%	-54%	-11%
Texas	-4%	-4%	-2%	-58%	-50%	19%
Utah	-10%	2%	3%	-40%	-47%	0%
Vermont	17%	-34%	-21%	-39%	-36%	-90%
Virginia	0%	12%	10%	-66%	-57%	-62%
Washington	4%	2%	8%	-84%	-76%	-77%
West Virginia	-10%	-21%	-24%	-69%	-37%	-28%
Wisconsin	-3%	-10%	-1%	-81%	-83%	-61%
Wyoming	-27%	-18%	-1%	-83%	-91%	-61%

*Note that in states with smaller populations and low rates of maltreatment fatalities, small changes in fatality counts can result in large percentage changes

Note: Negative percentages: % decline; Positive percentages: % increase. Due to missing data, long-term trends in SA, PA, and neglect calculated for: CA, 1993-2010; MD, 2001-2010; OR, 1992-2008; WA, 1995-2010; WV, 1998-2010.

The decline in sexual abuse adds to an already substantial positive long term trend. Sexual abuse has declined 62% from 1992 to 2009. The long term trend for physical abuse is also down, decreasing 56% since 1992. The long-term trend for neglect is a relatively small 10% decline since 1992.

It is not possible to directly compare state maltreatment rates because states differ in how statutes define abuse and how abuse is investigated and processed. However, looking at within-state trends, almost all individual states experienced substantial declines in sexual and physical abuse during the period since the early 1990s (see Table 1). Out of the 48 states submitting data to NCANDS, 35 states have seen declines of 50% or more in sexual abuse since 1992. Thirty three states have seen declines of this size in physical abuse. The data do not show any obvious patterns to the decline by region.

In its data on child maltreatment fatalities, the latest NCANDS shows a decrease from 1663 deaths in 2009 to 1529 in 2009. However, California changed its method of calculating fatalities and dropped its numbers by over a third or 60 cases, which clearly exaggerated the overall drop.

Because NCANDS reports only those cases known to and confirmed by state authorities, questions are always relevant about the extent to which trends reflect changes in investigatory effort, reporting practices, definitional standards, and administrative or statistical procedures, not real changes in underlying abuse. These factors can clearly play a role. They may be particularly concerning during times of state budget cut backs. However, the recently released Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) confirmed that the declines documented in the NCANDS data in the period of 1993 to 2008 were probably not statistical or reporting artifacts.

The NIS studies used consistent and standardized definitions of child maltreatment and gathered reports directly from community professionals in schools, hospitals, day care and settings, avoiding problems created when state agencies change their standards, practices or their data systems. The comparison of rates from 1993 to 2008 in NIS-3 and NIS-4 largely tracked the patterns shown in the NCCANDS data over the same period.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incid/index.html

Another study was unable to show that worker caseload (an effect of cutbacks, for example) was related declines (Almeida, Cohen, Subramanian & Molnar, 2008). In addition, victim self-report surveys show declines in sexual offenses and physical assaults against children over the same period, also confirming a decline in true underlying incidence. Still year to year fluctuations may be due to changes in state policies and should not be given undue emphasis. It is also instructive to note, however, that police reported crime and homicide declined from 2009 to 2010 in the face of the recession to the surprise of many criminologists.

<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/preliminary-crime-in-the-us-2009>
<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2009>

Other information on child homicide trends are available at this link: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Child%20Homicide%20and%20Maltreatment%20Fatality%20Rates%2012-11.pdf>

There is currently no consensus in the child maltreatment field about why sexual abuse and physical abuse substantiations have declined so considerably over the longer term, although a recent article and book suggest some possible factors (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; Finkelhor, 2008). The period when sexual and physical abuse started the dramatic downward trend was marked by sustained economic improvement, increases in the numbers of law enforcement and child protection personnel, more aggressive prosecution and incarceration policies, growing public awareness about the problems, and the dissemination of new treatment options for family and mental health problems, including new psychiatric medication. While some have suggested community notification laws as a possible explanatory factor, the passage and implementation of these laws actually occurred well after the sexual abuse decline was underway.

There is no obvious reason why neglect trends have differed so sharply from those of sexual and physical abuse (Jones, Finkelhor & Halter, 2006). One possibility is that neglect has not declined because it has not been the subject of the same level of policy attention and public awareness as sexual and physical abuse.

Table 2: Child Maltreatment Fatality Trends: 2009-2010

US States	Child Maltreatment Fatalities		
	Count 2009	Count 2010	% Change 2009-2010
Alabama	14	13	-7%
Alaska	1	0	-100%
Arizona	30	20	-33%
Arkansas	13	19	46%
California	185	120	-35%
Colorado	36	27	-25%
Connecticut	4	4	0%
Delaware	3	2	-33%
District of Columbia (DC)	5	2	-60%
Florida	156	180	15%
Georgia	60	77	28%
Hawaii	3	2	-33%
Idaho	4	2	-50%
Illinois	77	73	-5%
Indiana	50	17	-66%
Iowa	10	8	-20%
Kansas	8	6	-25%
Kentucky	34	30	-12%
Louisiana	40	30	-25%
Maine	2	1	-50%
Maryland	17	24	41%
Massachusetts	missing	missing	
Michigan	58	71	22%
Minnesota	21	14	-33%
Mississippi	14	17	21%
Missouri	39	31	-21%
Montana	0	0	
Nebraska	10	7	-30%
Nevada	29	15	-48%
New Hampshire	1	1	0%
New Jersey	24	18	-25%
New Mexico	10	19	90%
New York	99	114	15%
North Carolina	missing	17	
North Dakota	2	1	-50%
Ohio	79	83	5%
Oklahoma	23	27	17%
Oregon	13	22	69%
Pennsylvania	40	29	-28%
Rhode Island	2	2	0%
South Carolina	28	25	-11%
South Dakota	4	2	-50%
Tennessee	46	38	-17%
Texas	279	222	-20%
Utah	8	13	63%
Vermont	3	4	33%
Virginia	28	38	36%
Washington	21	12	-43%
West Virginia	6	8	33%
Wisconsin	24	21	-13%
Wyoming	0	1	
Total	1663	1529	-8%
Total excluding NC	1663	1512	-9%

The 8% decrease includes NC reporting in 2010 but not in 2009. With NC excluded in both years there is a 9% decrease.


Another possibility is that increased education and recent state and professional initiatives about neglect, including the identification of new forms of neglect like drug affected newborns, has masked a decline in other conventional types of neglect.

The fact that overall maltreatment rates did not worsen in the face of economic deterioration is a surprise to many observers. It is unfortunate that information about the trends in child maltreatment are not better publicized and more widely known. The long-term decline in sexual and physical abuse may have important implications for public policy. These trends deserve more discussion, analysis and research.

Additional information about trends in child abuse and neglect is available at: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/Trends/index.html>

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