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Lori Wright
UNH Media Relations

David Finkelhor
UNH Crimes against Children Research Center

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New Study Finds High Rates Of Childhood Exposure To Violence And Abuse In U.S.

Media Contact: [Lori Wright](#)

603-862-0574

UNH Media Relations

[David Finkelhor](#)

603-862-2761 (office) / 603-767-1010 (cell)

UNH Crimes against Children Research Center

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David Finkelhor, the study director, is director of the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center.

DURHAM, N.H. –A new study from the University of New Hampshire finds that U.S. children are routinely exposed to even more violence and abuse than has been previously recognized, with nearly half experiencing a physical assault in the study year.

“Children experience far more violence, abuse and crime than do adults,” said David Finkelhor, director of the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center and the study director. “If life were this dangerous for ordinary grown-ups, we’d never tolerate it.”

The research was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The research results are presented in the journal *Pediatrics* and an Office of Justice Programs/OJJDP bulletin titled “Children’s Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey.”

UNH researchers asked a national sample of U.S. children and their caregivers about a far broader range of exposures than has been done in the past.

According to the research, three out of five children were exposed to violence, abuse or a criminal victimization in the last year, including 46 percent who had been physically assaulted, 10 percent who had been maltreated by a caregiver, 6 percent who had been sexually victimized, and 10 percent who had witnessed an assault within their family.

The authors contend that earlier studies of violence exposure only inquired about individual crimes – looking only at bullying or child maltreatment or sexual abuse. In contrast, this study asked about all such exposures as well as additional ones that are rarely, if ever, covered such as dating violence and witnessing domestic violence.

The study found that more than a third of the children had had two or more different kinds of exposures in the past year and 11 percent had five or more.

"Studies have missed the fact that there are a surprisingly large group of very repeatedly and variously victimized kids whom we should be doing a better job to help and protect," Finkelhor said.

The researchers urge teachers, police, doctors, counselors, and parents to ask children about a broader range of possible victimization experiences, especially children who had been identified as victims already. They also call for new efforts to create safer schools, homes and other youth environments.

The study was conducted in 2008 and involved interviews with caregivers and youth about the experiences of a nationally representative sample of 4,549 children ages 0-17. In addition to Finkelhor, the authors include Heather Turner, professor of sociology at UNH, Richard Ormrod, research professor of geography at UNH, and Sherry Hamby, research associate professor of psychology at Sewanee, the University of the South.

The UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Visit the center online at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

Copies of *Pediatrics* Article

Copies of the *Pediatrics* journal article are available from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Please contact Debbie Linchesky at the American Academy of Pediatrics at dlinchesky@aap.org or 847-434-7084.

Copies of DOJ Bulletin

The Department of Justice bulletin about the research is available at www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov.

Photo

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/finkelhor.jpg>

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