

Study shows dramatic fall in child abuse

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A large federal study documents an unprecedented and dramatic decrease in incidents of serious child abuse, especially sexual abuse. Experts hailed the findings as proof that crackdowns and public awareness campaigns had made headway.

An estimated 553,000 children suffered physical, sexual or emotional abuse in 2005-06, down 26 percent from the estimated 743,200 abuse victims in 1993, the study found.

"It's the first time since we started collecting data about these things that we've seen substantial declines over a long period, and that's tremendously encouraging," said professor David Finkelhor of the University of New Hampshire, a leading researcher in the field of child abuse.

The findings were contained in the fourth installment of the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, a congressionally mandated study.

The new study is based on information from more than 10,700 "sentinels" — such as child welfare workers, police officers, teachers, health care professionals and day care workers — in 122 counties across the country. The detailed data collected from them was then used to make national estimates.

Some dramatic differences in child abuse rates found in the study:

- Poor children were three times more likely than other kids to experience abuse.
- Rates of abuse in African-American families were significantly higher than for whites and Hispanics.
- Children whose single parent had a live-in partner faced an abuse rate 10 times that of a child living with two parents.