



## Abuse report: 10,440 children died 2001-07

By Wendy Koch, USA TODAY

More than 10,000 children died from abuse or neglect in the United States from 2001 through 2007, a report released today says.

The U.S. death rate is more than double the rate in France, Canada, Japan, Germany, Great Britain and Italy, countries that have less teen pregnancy, violent crime and poverty, according to the report by the Every Child Matters Education Fund, a non-partisan advocacy group.

"It's heart-wrenching that each day in America, five children will die from abuse and neglect, but what's worse is that the real number is even larger," as much as 50% higher, says Michael Petit, the fund's president. He says the deaths get too little public attention.

To highlight the problem, his group is hosting a conference this week in Washington at which federal officials, scholars and social workers will discuss possible remedies.

The report, based on data from the Department of Health and Human Services, finds that three-quarters of the children who died from abuse or neglect were younger than 4. The number of child deaths rose from 1,300 in 2001 to 1,720 in 2007, the most recent year for which figures are available. In that period, 10,440 abuse and neglect deaths were reported.

"It's an alarming statistic," says David Finkelhor, director of the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center. He says the real number could be twice as large, but "we don't know" because many deaths from abuse or neglect are attributed to other causes.

Finkelhor says it's difficult to know whether the problem is worse or whether states are doing a better job reporting deaths.

"It's hard to know for sure, but there's plenty of reason to worry that it's getting worse," given high child-poverty figures, says Olivia Golden, a scholar at the Urban Institute, a liberal social policy think tank, and author of *Reforming Child Welfare*.

The report finds that state spending to address abuse and neglect varies and that states that spend more generally have fewer child deaths.

The report "is an exercise in hype and hysteria," says Richard Wexler, executive director of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, which says too many children are in foster care. He says state reporting varies so widely that the figures are not accurate, and he fears that more concerns about abuse mean more children will be taken from their parents.

Petit says, "There's been an erosion in the safety net over the last decade or more," and the recession is making it worse. "I've never seen so many states cutting child welfare services."

The report recommends more spending as part of a broad effort to combat child poverty and abuse.