

UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2015

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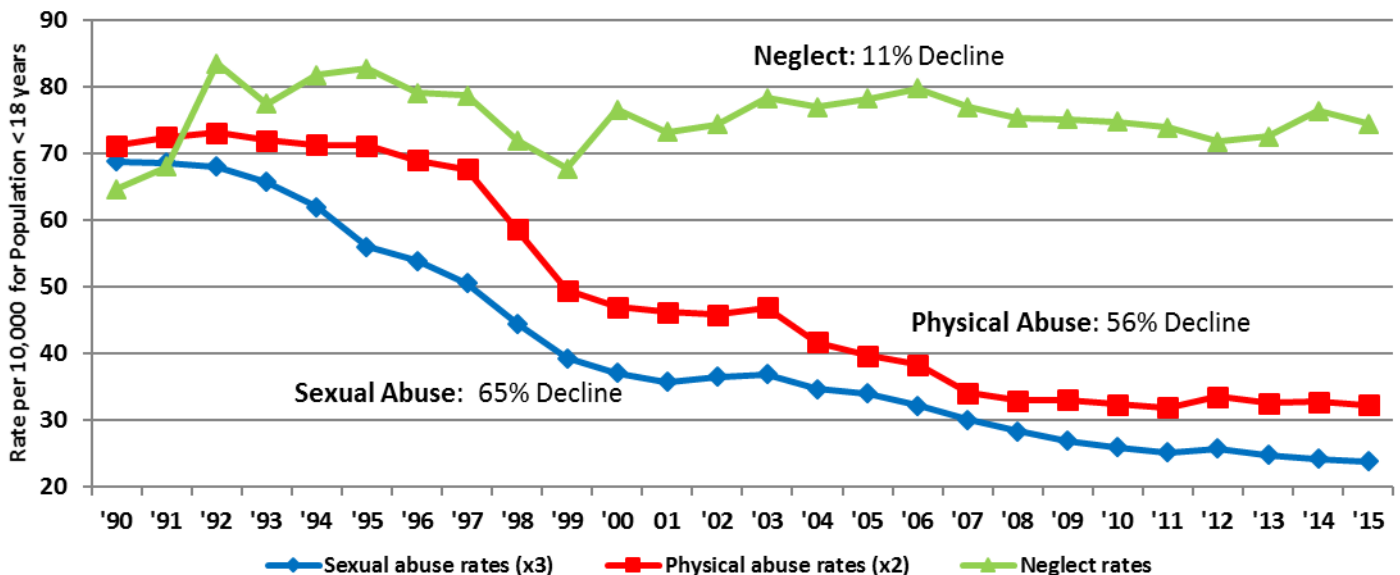
New national data for 2015 show continued declines in child maltreatment across all three major types for the first time since 2011. Sexual abuse rate declined by 2%, physical abuse declined by 1%, and neglect declined 3%. In contrast, child maltreatment fatalities rose by 3% for a second year in a row.

The data used in producing the graphs and tables come from a special calculation obtained from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) to supplement the data published in the original report. NCANDS aggregates and publishes statistics from state child protection agencies. The most recent data from NCANDS were released in January, 2017, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2015 (USDHHS, 2017). <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2015>.

The newly released NCANDS report combines sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect with several other kinds of maltreatment and estimates a total of 683,000 victims for 2015.

Breaking out cases by type of abuse, the data show that sexual abuse rate declined 2% from 2014 to 2015 to a nationally estimated 58,500 cases. Physical abuse declined 1% to an estimated 118,700 cases. Neglect declined 3% to an estimated 548,200. Figure 1 represents the trends as rates per 10,000 minors in the population for all three maltreatment types.

U.S. Maltreatment Trends: 1990-2015



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2015. 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: 2014-2015 and 1992-2015*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2014-2015			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1992-2015		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	-17%	8%	-5%	-69%	-43%	-74%
Alaska	14%	-2%	16%	-88%	-87%	-12%
Arizona	-16%	-13%	-15%	-93%	-67%	10%
Arkansas	-3%	5%	4%	-9%	-29%	6%
California	0%	-5%	-3%	-88%	-88%	-17%
Colorado	2%	-2%	1%	-63%	-69%	26%
Connecticut	-3%	2%	-4%	-62%	-88%	-43%
Delaware	-31%	-3%	-8%	-54%	-44%	-51%
District of Columbia (DC)	-44%	-11%	-8%	30%	-37%	-62%
Florida	0%	-9%	-2%	-78%	-78%	-58%
Georgia	39%	29%	29%	-87%	-73%	-50%
Hawaii	-1%	11%	9%	-79%	-83%	-68%
Idaho	-18%	4%	3%	-96%	-85%	-71%
Illinois	1%	1%	2%	-11%	49%	-13%
Indiana	0%	1%	16%	-65%	-71%	44%
Iowa	-7%	8%	-7%	-62%	-53%	49%
Kansas	6%	10%	-10%	-33%	-42%	-41%
Kentucky	4%	-21%	-8%	-66%	-77%	21%
Louisiana	12%	-3%	4%	-44%	-45%	21%
Maine	-15%	5%	-12%	-56%	21%	74%
Maryland	1%	-63%	-61%	-31%	-73%	-61%
Massachusetts	-17%	-13%	-2%	-71%	-53%	80%
Michigan	11%	9%	10%	-52%	64%	198%
Minnesota	10%	52%	22%	-35%	-76%	-51%
Mississippi	-13%	-7%	10%	-50%	-52%	29%
Missouri	-4%	-1%	11%	-54%	-50%	-65%
Montana	8%	-4%	62%	-91%	-95%	-44%
Nebraska	-21%	-15%	-11%	-69%	-76%	-8%
Nevada	36%	10%	15%	-65%	-44%	-62%
New Hampshire	-16%	-13%	30%	-82%	-82%	71%
New Jersey	-23%	-16%	-19%	-50%	-79%	-15%
New Mexico	-5%	16%	14%	-72%	-35%	85%
New York	-3%	2%	3%	-68%	-65%	95%
North Carolina	-3%	-20%	-75%	-19%	8%	-88%
North Dakota	-7%	23%	11%	-70%	-83%	-26%
Ohio	3%	-6%	-5%	-54%	-23%	-60%
Oklahoma	-12%	-18%	17%	-53%	-31%	83%
Oregon	2%	12%	6%	-76%	-60%	56%
Pennsylvania	-5%	38%	25%	-52%	-56%	-65%
Rhode Island	-4%	-2%	-28%	-76%	-71%	-22%
South Carolina	-1%	30%	17%	-64%	167%	18%
South Dakota	-46%	15%	23%	-95%	-78%	-47%
Tennessee	-1%	6%	-5%	-20%	-56%	38%
Texas	1%	-11%	-3%	-62%	-63%	10%
Utah	2%	-4%	-3%	-40%	23%	-13%
Vermont	4%	16%	110%	-23%	36%	-91%
Virginia	-19%	-3%	-4%	-77%	-57%	-64%
Washington	18%	-14%	-24%	-81%	-81%	-79%
West Virginia	-17%	102%	-16%	-72%	88%	-24%
Wisconsin	-2%	-1%	7%	-84%	-84%	-51%
Wyoming	-35%	-13%	21%	-83%	-96%	-42%

*Note that in states with smaller populations and lower rates of reported maltreatment, small changes 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, 1993-2015; MD, 2001-2015; WA, 1995-2015; WV, 1998-2015.

Sexual abuse rate has declined 65% overall from 1992 to 2015 (Figure 1). Similarly the long term trend for physical abuse is also down markedly, decreasing 56% since 1992. Despite the fluctuations in neglect trend seen over the past few years, the overall trend is still down compared to 2006 and down 11% since a peak in 1992. The longer term trends are more important than year to year fluctuations that may or may not represent something enduring.

It is not possible to directly compare state maltreatment rates with each other because states differ in how statutes define abuse and how abuse is investigated and processed. However, looking at within-state trends, most individual states experienced substantial declines in sexual and physical abuse during the period since the early 1990s (see Table 1). The data do not show any obvious regional patterns to the decline.

In its data on child maltreatment fatalities, the latest NCANDS shows an increase in the number of deaths of 3% from 1535 in 2014 to 1578 in 2015 (see Table 2). Unlike the previous year, this increase does not seem to be attributable to a few large states, and 26 states had increases of 10% or more.

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 or recoveries. However, the most recent 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 use consistent and standardized definitions of child maltreatment and gather 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 also cast doubt on the idea that changes in practices such as worker caseload (an effect of cutbacks, for example) were related to 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. (For a summary of some of these supporting surveys, see Finkelhor & Jones, 2012.

http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV267_Have%20SA%20%20PA%20Decline_FACT%20SHEET_11-7-12.pdf).

Other information on child homicide trends is 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 in particular 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 as much 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: 2014-2015

US States	Child Maltreatment Fatalities		
	Count 2014	Count 2015	% Change 2014-2015
Alabama	17	13	-24%
Alaska	3	5	67%
Arizona	43	51	19%
Arkansas	21	40	90%
California	131	122	-7%
Colorado	20	19	-5%
Connecticut	13	11	-15%
Delaware	5	1	-80%
District of Columbia (DC)	3	3	0%
Florida	138	124	-10%
Georgia	103	113	10%
Hawaii	2	4	100%
Idaho	4	6	50%
Illinois	105	77	-27%
Indiana	49	34	-31%
Iowa	8	12	50%
Kansas	13	8	-38%
Kentucky	15	16	7%
Louisiana	31	39	26%
Maine	missing	missing	missing
Maryland	23	28	22%
Massachusetts	missing	missing	missing
Michigan	76	83	9%
Minnesota	15	17	13%
Mississippi	22	35	59%
Missouri	36	35	-3%
Montana	4	2	-50%
Nebraska	5	3	-40%
Nevada	14	13	-7%
New Hampshire	1	4	300%
New Jersey	8	23	188%
New Mexico	7	14	100%
New York	114	108	-5%
North Carolina	25	missing	missing
North Dakota	2	3	50%
Ohio	45	74	64%
Oklahoma	34	31	-9%
Oregon	13	27	108%
Pennsylvania	34	34	0%
Rhode Island	6	0	-100%
South Carolina	32	23	-28%
South Dakota	4	11	175%
Tennessee	28	32	14%
Texas	153	162	6%
Utah	15	6	-60%
Vermont	1	3	200%
Virginia	37	54	46%
Washington	19	27	42%
West Virginia	19	9	-53%
Wisconsin	18	17	-6%
Wyoming	1	2	100%
Total	1535	1578	3%

Note: Unlike Table 1, Table 2 is not a change in rate, but raw number of child fatalities in each state. Negative percentages: % decline; Positive percentages: % increase.

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 starting in 2008 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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