

## UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2014

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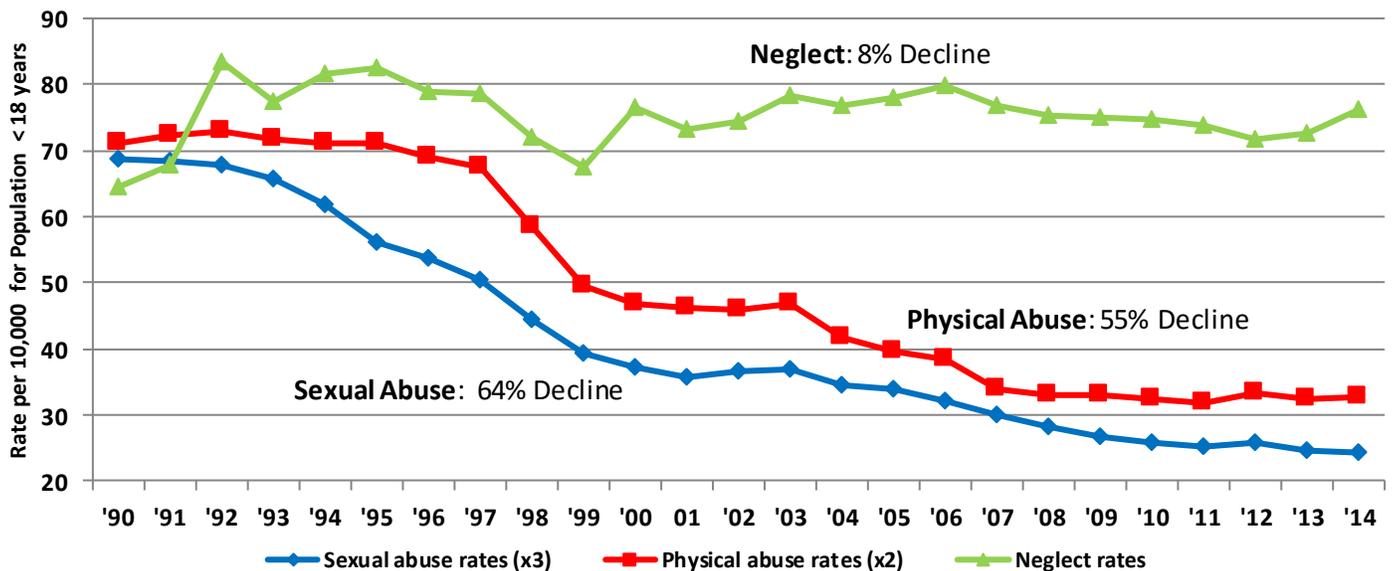
New national data for 2014 show a mixed set of trends over the short term. Sexual abuse continued to decline (down 2% from 2013). Physical abuse was essentially unchanged. By contrast, neglect rose 5% and child maltreatment fatalities rose 3%.

The published NCANDS report shows that overall substantiated child maltreatment increased slightly from 9.2 to 9.4 per 1,000 children, or about 702,000 children. Despite the slight increase, this rate is low by historical standards.

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, 2016, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2014 (USDHHS, 2016). <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2014>.

Breaking out cases by type of abuse, the data show that sexual abuse declined 2% from 2013 to 2014 to a nationally estimated 59,300 cases. Physical abuse was virtually unchanged at an estimated 120,300 cases. Neglect rose 5% to an estimated 561,800 (see Figure 1).

### U.S. Maltreatment Trends: 1990-2014



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2014. 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.

<sup>1</sup> The 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: 2013-2014 and 1992-2014\*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2013-2014			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1992-2014		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	0%	-7%	5%	-63%	-47%	-72%
Alaska	15%	-8%	4%	-90%	-87%	-24%
Arizona	-10%	-7%	7%	-92%	-62%	29%
Arkansas	-10%	3%	-22%	-7%	-33%	2%
California	-6%	-3%	2%	-88%	-87%	-14%
Colorado	-7%	-3%	-1%	-63%	-69%	26%
Connecticut	2%	2%	6%	-61%	-88%	-41%
Delaware	-5%	-15%	-30%	-34%	-42%	-47%
District of Columbia (DC)	48%	-22%	-16%	133%	-29%	-59%
Florida	6%	-9%	-5%	-78%	-76%	-57%
Georgia	-17%	3%	27%	-91%	-79%	-61%
Hawaii	-6%	-7%	3%	-79%	-85%	-70%
Idaho	-21%	1%	-1%	-95%	-85%	-72%
Illinois	-11%	-12%	-2%	-12%	48%	-15%
Indiana	-10%	-2%	11%	-65%	-71%	23%
Iowa	17%	-10%	-36%	-59%	-57%	61%
Kansas	-13%	-10%	15%	-37%	-47%	-34%
Kentucky	3%	1%	5%	-67%	-71%	32%
Louisiana	-13%	7%	23%	-50%	-44%	16%
Maine	14%	20%	-6%	-48%	16%	98%
Maryland	-7%	65%	21%	-32%	-27%	1%
Massachusetts	4%	30%	68%	-65%	-46%	83%
Michigan	-27%	-13%	-10%	-57%	51%	170%
Minnesota	14%	-15%	0%	-41%	-84%	-60%
Mississippi	5%	6%	20%	-43%	-48%	17%
Missouri	168%	148%	170%	-52%	-50%	-69%
Montana	4%	-31%	-16%	-92%	-95%	-66%
Nebraska	-4%	-8%	-3%	-60%	-72%	4%
Nevada	-29%	-23%	-20%	-74%	-49%	-67%
New Hampshire	-25%	-14%	-22%	-79%	-79%	32%
New Jersey	32%	36%	25%	-35%	-75%	5%
New Mexico	33%	30%	20%	-70%	-44%	63%
New York	-2%	-1%	2%	-67%	-66%	89%
North Carolina	2%	14%	6%	-16%	34%	-51%
North Dakota	4%	-12%	3%	-68%	-86%	-33%
Ohio	-8%	-4%	-13%	-55%	-19%	-58%
Oklahoma	9%	-31%	24%	-46%	-16%	56%
Oregon	-4%	-32%	8%	-76%	-64%	47%
Pennsylvania	-5%	11%	-5%	-50%	-68%	-72%
Rhode Island	-3%	1%	-6%	-76%	-71%	8%
South Carolina	14%	23%	14%	-64%	106%	0%
South Dakota	1%	-23%	-13%	-90%	-81%	-57%
Tennessee	6%	7%	18%	-19%	-58%	45%
Texas	-7%	0%	1%	-63%	-58%	14%
Utah	3%	9%	4%	-41%	28%	-10%
Vermont	1%	33%	-46%	-26%	18%	-96%
Virginia	-11%	19%	11%	-72%	-56%	-62%
Washington	-6%	-3%	6%	-84%	-77%	-72%
West Virginia	-2%	9%	6%	-66%	-7%	-9%
Wisconsin	7%	-1%	6%	-84%	-84%	-55%
Wyoming	19%	-24%	25%	-73%	-96%	-53%

\*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, 1993-2014; MD, 2001-2014; WA, 1995-2014; WV, 1998-2014.

Sexual abuse has declined 64% overall from 1992 to 2014 (Figure 1). Similarly the long term trend for physical abuse is also down markedly, decreasing 55% since 1992. Despite the increase in neglect trend seen over the past few years, the overall trend is still down compared to 2006 and down 8% 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 patterns to the decline by region.

In its data on child maltreatment fatalities, the latest NCANDS shows an increase in deaths of 3% from 1490 in 2013 to 1535 in 2014. Almost all the large states like California, Texas, New York and Florida saw increases in fatalities.

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](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](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%202012-11.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: 2013-2014

US States	Child Maltreatment Fatalities		
	Count 2013	Count 2014	% Change 2013-2014
Alabama	32	17	-47%
Alaska	1	3	200%
Arizona	54	43	-20%
Arkansas	29	21	-28%
California	121	131	8%
Colorado	21	20	-5%
Connecticut	5	13	160%
Delaware	6	5	-17%
District of Columbia (DC)	3	3	0%
Florida	121	138	14%
Georgia	90	103	14%
Hawaii	5	2	-60%
Idaho	5	4	-20%
Illinois	96	105	9%
Indiana	28	49	75%
Iowa	5	8	60%
Kansas	7	13	86%
Kentucky	23	15	-35%
Louisiana	43	31	-28%
Maine	missing	missing	missing
Maryland	27	23	-15%
Massachusetts	missing	missing	missing
Michigan	59	76	29%
Minnesota	18	15	-17%
Mississippi	12	22	83%
Missouri	39	36	-8%
Montana	1	4	300%
Nebraska	6	5	-17%
Nevada	11	14	27%
New Hampshire	3	1	-67%
New Jersey	18	8	-56%
New Mexico	7	7	0%
New York	107	114	7%
North Carolina	29	25	-14%
North Dakota	1	2	100%
Ohio	48	45	-6%
Oklahoma	43	34	-21%
Oregon	10	13	30%
Pennsylvania	34	34	0%
Rhode Island	1	6	500%
South Carolina	21	32	52%
South Dakota	5	4	-20%
Tennessee	40	28	-30%
Texas	150	153	2%
Utah	7	15	114%
Vermont	0	1	100%
Virginia	33	37	12%
Washington	27	19	-30%
West Virginia	17	19	12%
Wisconsin	21	18	-14%
Wyoming	0	1	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1490</b>	<b>1535</b>	<b>3%</b>

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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