

UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2022

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New national data for 2022 show a decline in neglect of 6% compared to 2021. This continued a four-year decline totaling 13% in neglect starting in 2018. Since neglect is the most frequent type of reported maltreatment, the neglect decline drove the overall rate of child maltreatment down 6% from 2022 to 2023. The rate of physical abuse was nearly unchanged from 2022. The rate of sexual abuse dropped 1.5%. By contrast, child maltreatment fatalities increased less than 6% from 2022 to 2023. This also was part of a trend up 13% since 2018.

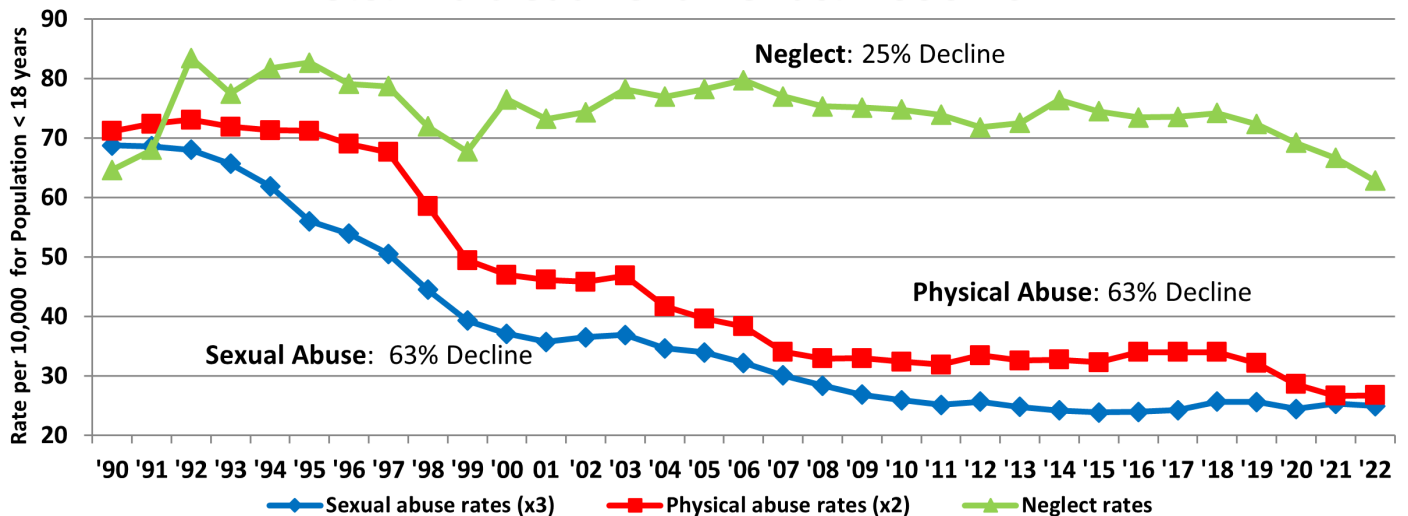
The data used in producing the graphs and tables come from a special calculation obtained from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) to supplement the data published in the original report which aggregates statistics from NCANDS and publishes statistics from state child protection agencies.

The most recent data from NCANDS were published in February, 2023, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2022. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/child-maltreatment-2022>

The newly released NCANDS report combined sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect with several other kinds of maltreatment and estimated a total of 559,899 substantiated reports for 2022, a 7% drop from an estimated 602,000 for 2021.

Breaking out cases by type of abuse, the data show that physical abuse stayed nearly the same, a nationally estimated 96,870. Sexual abuse declined 1.5% to 60,138. Figure 1 represents the trends as rates per 10,000 minors in the population for all three maltreatment types.

U.S. Maltreatment Trends: 1990-2022



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2022. 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.

¹ 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: 2020-2022 and 1992-2022*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2021-2022			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1992-2022		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	-6%	2%	-2%	-57%	-20%	-61%
Alaska	12%	9%	-4%	-80%	-75%	-28%
Arizona	missing	missing	missing	-88%	-60%	15%
Arkansas	5%	-8%	-10%	-11%	-44%	27%
California	-7%	0%	-5%	-88%	-93%	-36%
Colorado	-7%	-11%	-10%	-59%	-74%	35%
Connecticut	9%	21%	-8%	-57%	-91%	-56%
Delaware	-11%	11%	23%	-19%	-54%	-64%
District of Columbia (DC)	-1%	7%	-7%	9%	-52%	-55%
Florida	-6%	-1%	-6%	-80%	-89%	-75%
Georgia	-9%	35%	19%	-91%	-86%	-82%
Hawaii	18%	33%	-4%	-72%	-89%	-64%
Idaho	-18%	-15%	-9%	-88%	-86%	-66%
Illinois	-9%	-4%	-5%	-18%	31%	23%
Indiana	-10%	-4%	-12%	-70%	-83%	1%
Iowa	-4%	0%	-1%	-52%	-57%	172%
Kansas	-15%	-20%	-3%	-54%	-46%	52%
Kentucky	-9%	8%	-17%	-72%	-83%	-22%
Louisiana	26%	25%	20%	-65%	-77%	-22%
Maine	-20%	-9%	-4%	-52%	19%	102%
Maryland	-3%	16%	7%	-13%	-77%	-64%
Massachusetts	2%	13%	-2%	-66%	-71%	29%
Michigan	-4%	6%	0%	-41%	-20%	126%
Minnesota	-1%	17%	-7%	-3%	-85%	-50%
Mississippi	8%	18%	15%	-20%	-46%	41%
Missouri	-6%	-4%	-2%	-56%	-63%	-79%
Montana	20%	8%	-12%	-87%	-93%	-18%
Nebraska	-23%	-27%	-16%	-78%	-86%	-49%
Nevada	17%	-1%	10%	-44%	-70%	-47%
New Hampshire	-14%	1%	16%	-85%	-59%	162%
New Jersey	8%	23%	-4%	-62%	-94%	-77%
New Mexico	-4%	8%	4%	-73%	-55%	39%
New York	2%	14%	-5%	-64%	-74%	66%
North Carolina	74%	128%	-19%	0%	49%	-54%
North Dakota	-59%	-7%	-4%	-89%	-93%	-46%
Ohio	-4%	-5%	-5%	-59%	-18%	-58%
Oklahoma	-7%	2%	3%	-46%	-49%	70%
Oregon	30%	4%	-3%	-64%	-51%	24%
Pennsylvania	3%	13%	49%	-45%	-29%	94%
Rhode Island	-12%	13%	-6%	-79%	-76%	-36%
South Carolina	-3%	3%	-7%	-64%	164%	9%
South Dakota	-2%	11%	1%	-86%	-74%	-27%
Tennessee	3%	-19%	1%	-29%	7%	-70%
Texas	-5%	-9%	-18%	-54%	-78%	-9%
Utah	30%	-7%	-6%	-52%	6%	-23%
Vermont	145%	42%	1658%	-55%	30%	-78%
Virginia	-5%	-7%	-7%	-75%	-74%	-72%
Washington	-5%	13%	-1%	-84%	-87%	-88%
West Virginia	15%	-9%	7%	-57%	151%	3%
Wisconsin	5%	15%	-5%	-84%	-88%	-57%
Wyoming	38%	-15%	-3%	-83%	-97%	-47%

Year-to-year changes are less meaningful than the longer-term trends. Of major importance, physical abuse rates have declined 63% for the period 1992 to 2023 (Figure 1). Sexual abuse rates have similarly declined 63%. The longer-term trend for neglect is now down 25% since a peak in 1992. These are encouraging. Skeptics have wondered whether changes in child welfare systems, like differential response practices, could account for the declines rather than true reductions. However, differential response practices almost never apply to sexual abuse allegations, which have shown a large decline.

It is not possible to directly compare state maltreatment rates with each other because states differ in how their 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 findings on child maltreatment fatalities, the 2022 data show a 6% annual increase from 1845 to 1951, capping a 13% rise since 2018. (See Table 2). The main drivers of the most recent increase were the states of Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Other states like Maryland, Nevada, New York, and Texas had substantial declines. The pattern of multi-year increases for children is also apparent in data from law enforcement about homicides and medical examiners about violent deaths (Wilson et al., 2023).

There was considerable concern that the pandemic would affect child maltreatment, isolating families together under conditions of increased stress and uncertainty and reducing exterior supervision including less robust child welfare investigations. It may be premature to judge the pandemic's lasting influence on child maltreatment, but the rising levels of maltreatment deaths may be pandemic related. There were increases in homicide more generally during the pandemic era. Those overall rates have now returned to pre-pandemic levels (Hutchinson, 2023). It remains to be seen if this return will also occur for child maltreatment fatalities, which do not always track with other homicide trends.

*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.

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 (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; Finkelhor, 2008). The period when sexual and physical abuse started their dramatic downward trends was marked by some economic improvement, expansions in medical coverage, 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.

There are some possible reasons why neglect trends lagged in improvement compared to 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.

Another possibility is the identification of new forms of neglect like drug-affected babies or exposure to domestic violence that have masked a decline in other conventional types of neglect.

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>.

Table 2: Child Maltreatment Fatality Trends: 2020-2022

US States	Count	Count	% Change
	2021	2022	2021-2022
Alabama	36	38	6%
Alaska	6	8	33%
Arizona	-	14	missing
Arkansas	36	39	8%
California	159	164	3%
Colorado	31	40	29%
Connecticut	14	15	7%
Delaware	7	6	-14%
District of Columbia (DC)	2	3	50%
Florida	84	86	2%
Georgia	92	114	24%
Hawaii	2	5	150%
Idaho	3	8	167%
Illinois	89	110	24%
Indiana	57	62	9%
Iowa	12	18	50%
Kansas	10	8	-20%
Kentucky	11	12	9%
Louisiana	23	29	26%
Maine	8	3	-63%
Maryland	84	68	-19%
Massachusetts	-	-	missing
Michigan	35	61	74%
Minnesota	22	25	14%
Mississippi	49	72	47%
Missouri	75	57	-24%
Montana	2	1	-50%
Nebraska	1	3	200%
Nevada	27	15	-44%
New Hampshire	3	2	-33%
New Jersey	10	19	90%
New Mexico	10	19	90%
New York	126	105	-17%
North Carolina	121	93	-23%
North Dakota	4	6	50%
Ohio	98	115	17%
Oklahoma	15	29	93%
Oregon	18	19	6%
Pennsylvania	65	80	23%
Rhode Island	2	2	0%
South Carolina	41	38	-7%
South Dakota	9	13	44%
Tennessee	32	34	6%
Texas	206	176	-15%
Utah	4	15	275%
Vermont	1	0	-100%
Virginia	51	39	-24%
Washington	19	31	63%
West Virginia	9	8	-11%
Wisconsin	22	21	-5%
Wyoming	2	3	50%
Total	1845	1951	6%

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

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