

UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2016

David Finkelhor, Kei Saito, and Lisa Jones

March 2018

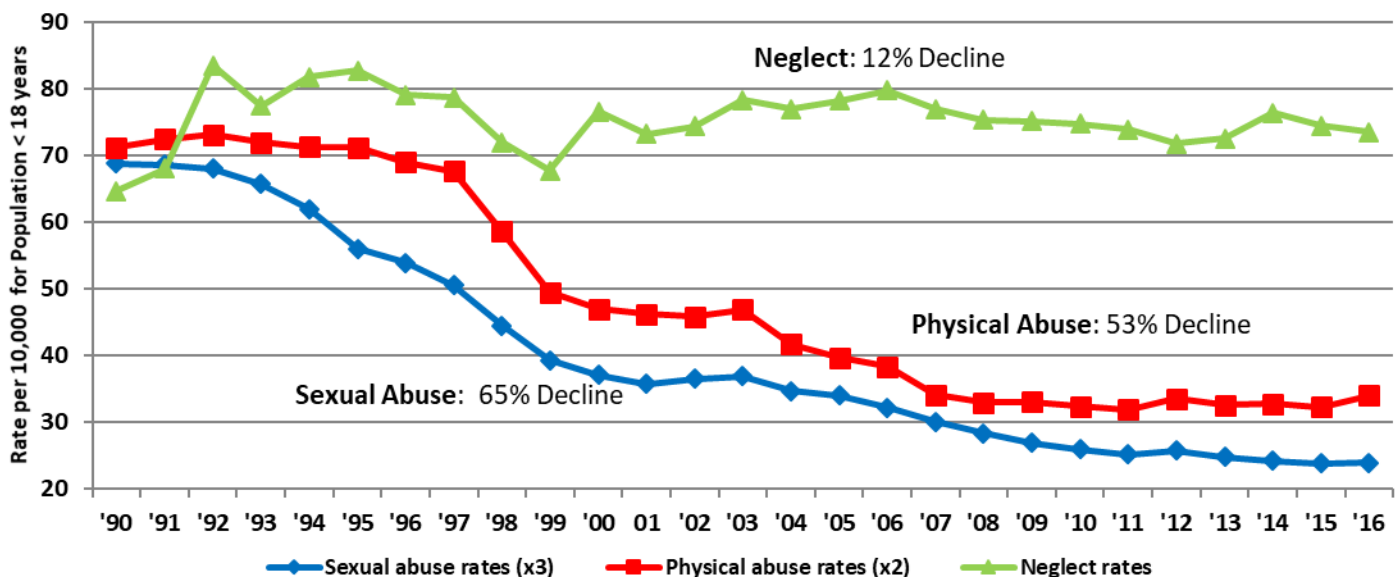
New national data for 2016 show a mixed set of trends over the short term. **Neglect continued to decline (down 1% from 2015).** **Sexual abuse was essentially unchanged. By contrast, physical abuse rose 5% and child maltreatment fatalities rose 8%.**

The newly released NCANDS report combines sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect with several other kinds of maltreatment and estimates a total of 676,000 for 2016. This is an overall decrease from an estimated 683,000 victims for 2015.

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, 2018, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2016 (USDHHS, 2018). <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2016>.

Breaking out cases by type of abuse, the data show that sexual abuse rate was essentially unchanged from 2015 to 2016 to a nationally estimated 58,700 cases. Physical abuse increased 5% to an estimated 125,000 cases. Neglect declined 1% to an estimated 541,000 cases. Figure 1 represents the trends as rates per 10,000 minors in the population for all three maltreatment types.

U.S. Maltreatment Trends: 1990-2016



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2016. 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: 2015-2016 and 1992-2016*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2015-2016			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1992-2016		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	8%	23%	26%	-67%	-29%	-67%
Alaska	15%	12%	5%	-87%	-85%	-8%
Arizona	9%	-19%	-10%	-92%	-74%	-1%
Arkansas	4%	1%	8%	-6%	-29%	15%
California	0%	-8%	-5%	-88%	-89%	-21%
Colorado	6%	12%	13%	-61%	-66%	42%
Connecticut	-4%	14%	14%	-64%	-86%	-35%
Delaware	29%	9%	0%	-41%	-39%	-51%
District of Columbia (DC)	64%	-7%	0%	113%	-41%	-62%
Florida	5%	-15%	-2%	-77%	-81%	-59%
Georgia	-6%	-24%	-19%	-88%	-79%	-59%
Hawaii	13%	-3%	-6%	-76%	-84%	-70%
Idaho	8%	0%	18%	-95%	-85%	-66%
Illinois	-3%	0%	-1%	-13%	49%	-15%
Indiana	-3%	-7%	10%	-66%	-73%	58%
Iowa	6%	-10%	24%	-59%	-58%	84%
Kansas	8%	15%	4%	-28%	-33%	-39%
Kentucky	-13%	0%	7%	-70%	-77%	30%
Louisiana	-11%	-13%	-10%	-50%	-52%	9%
Maine	19%	10%	-4%	-47%	33%	67%
Maryland	4%	3%	4%	-28%	-73%	-59%
Massachusetts	10%	-4%	4%	-68%	-55%	88%
Michigan	5%	7%	8%	-49%	77%	220%
Minnesota	38%	122%	44%	-10%	-46%	-30%
Mississippi	17%	12%	20%	-42%	-46%	54%
Missouri	1%	0%	-4%	-54%	-50%	-67%
Montana	33%	22%	73%	-88%	-94%	-4%
Nebraska	-28%	-22%	-22%	-78%	-81%	-28%
Nevada	-4%	-24%	7%	-67%	-58%	-59%
New Hampshire	-4%	60%	23%	-83%	-71%	111%
New Jersey	-2%	-24%	-15%	-51%	-84%	-27%
New Mexico	-15%	-20%	-13%	-76%	-48%	61%
New York	6%	-3%	-1%	-67%	-66%	92%
North Carolina	-14%	1%	-13%	-30%	9%	-89%
North Dakota	-21%	-20%	5%	-76%	-86%	-22%
Ohio	-4%	6%	3%	-56%	-19%	-59%
Oklahoma	4%	-13%	2%	-51%	-40%	87%
Oregon	27%	22%	15%	-69%	-51%	80%
Pennsylvania	10%	27%	89%	-47%	-45%	-34%
Rhode Island	3%	2%	-10%	-76%	-71%	-30%
South Carolina	0%	32%	11%	-64%	252%	30%
South Dakota	91%	9%	17%	-90%	-76%	-37%
Tennessee	-2%	309%	-68%	-21%	81%	-56%
Texas	-1%	-22%	-10%	-63%	-71%	-1%
Utah	-18%	9%	11%	-51%	34%	-3%
Vermont	-18%	0%	-48%	-37%	36%	-95%
Virginia	7%	-2%	-6%	-75%	-58%	-66%
Washington	-13%	-15%	-21%	-84%	-84%	-83%
West Virginia	32%	36%	15%	-62%	156%	-13%
Wisconsin	-8%	-1%	4%	-85%	-84%	-49%
Wyoming	14%	50%	-5%	-80%	-95%	-45%

Sexual abuse rate has declined 65% overall from 1992 to 2016 (Figure 1). Despite the increase in physical abuse in the past year, the long term trend for physical abuse is also down markedly, decreasing 53% since 1992. The overall trend for neglect is still down 12% 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 8% from 1578 in 2015 to 1700 in 2016 (see Table 2). Half of this national rise is attributable to Texas and another quarter to Indiana.

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.

*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.

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: 2015-2016

US States	Child Maltreatment Fatalities		
	Count 2015	Count 2016	% Change 2015-2016
Alabama	13	26	100%
Alaska	5	1	-80%
Arizona	51	48	-6%
Arkansas	40	42	5%
California	122	137	12%
Colorado	19	37	95%
Connecticut	11	6	-45%
Delaware	1	0	-100%
District of Columbia (DC)	3	3	0%
Florida	124	110	-11%
Georgia	113	97	-14%
Hawaii	4	4	0%
Idaho	6	3	-50%
Illinois	77	64	-17%
Indiana	34	70	106%
Iowa	12	12	0%
Kansas	8	10	25%
Kentucky	16	15	-6%
Louisiana	39	41	5%
Maine	missing	missing	missing
Maryland	28	32	14%
Massachusetts	missing	missing	missing
Michigan	83	85	2%
Minnesota	17	28	65%
Mississippi	35	41	17%
Missouri	35	29	-17%
Montana	2	0	-100%
Nebraska	3	7	133%
Nevada	13	13	0%
New Hampshire	4	4	0%
New Jersey	23	21	-9%
New Mexico	14	11	-21%
New York	108	95	-12%
North Carolina	missing	32	missing
North Dakota	3	4	33%
Ohio	74	66	-11%
Oklahoma	31	31	0%
Oregon	27	19	-30%
Pennsylvania	34	47	38%
Rhode Island	0	4	missing
South Carolina	23	22	-4%
South Dakota	11	4	-64%
Tennessee	32	41	28%
Texas	162	217	34%
Utah	6	12	100%
Vermont	3	0	-100%
Virginia	54	45	-17%
Washington	27	15	-44%
West Virginia	9	20	122%
Wisconsin	17	25	47%
Wyoming	2	4	100%
Total	1578	1700	8%

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>.

REFERENCES

- Almeida, J., Cohen, A. P., Subramanian S. V., Molnar, B. E. (2008). Are increased worker caseloads in state child protective service agencies a potential explanation for the decline in child sexual abuse?: Multilevel analysis. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32(3), 367-375.
- Finkelhor, D. (2008). *Childhood victimization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Finkelhor, D., & Jones, L.M. (2012). Have sexual abuse and physical abuse declined since the 1990s? Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
- Finkelhor, D., & Jones, L. M. (2006). Why have child maltreatment and child victimization declined? *Journal of Social Issues*, 62, 685-716.
- Jones, L. M., Finkelhor, D., & Kopiec, K. (2001). Why is sexual abuse declining?: A survey of state child protection administrators. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 25, 1139-1158.
- Jones, L. M., Finkelhor, D., & Halter, S. (2006). Child maltreatment trends in the 1990s: Why does neglect differ from sexual and physical abuse? *Child Maltreatment*, 11(2), 107-120.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2018). *Child Maltreatment 2016*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2016>



Crimes against Children
Research Center
125 McConnell Hall
Durham, NH 03824

(603) 862 4869
(603) 862 1122

www.unh.edu/ccrc
www.facebook.com/pages/Crimes-against-Children-Research-Center
twitter.com/CCRCunh

