

## UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2009

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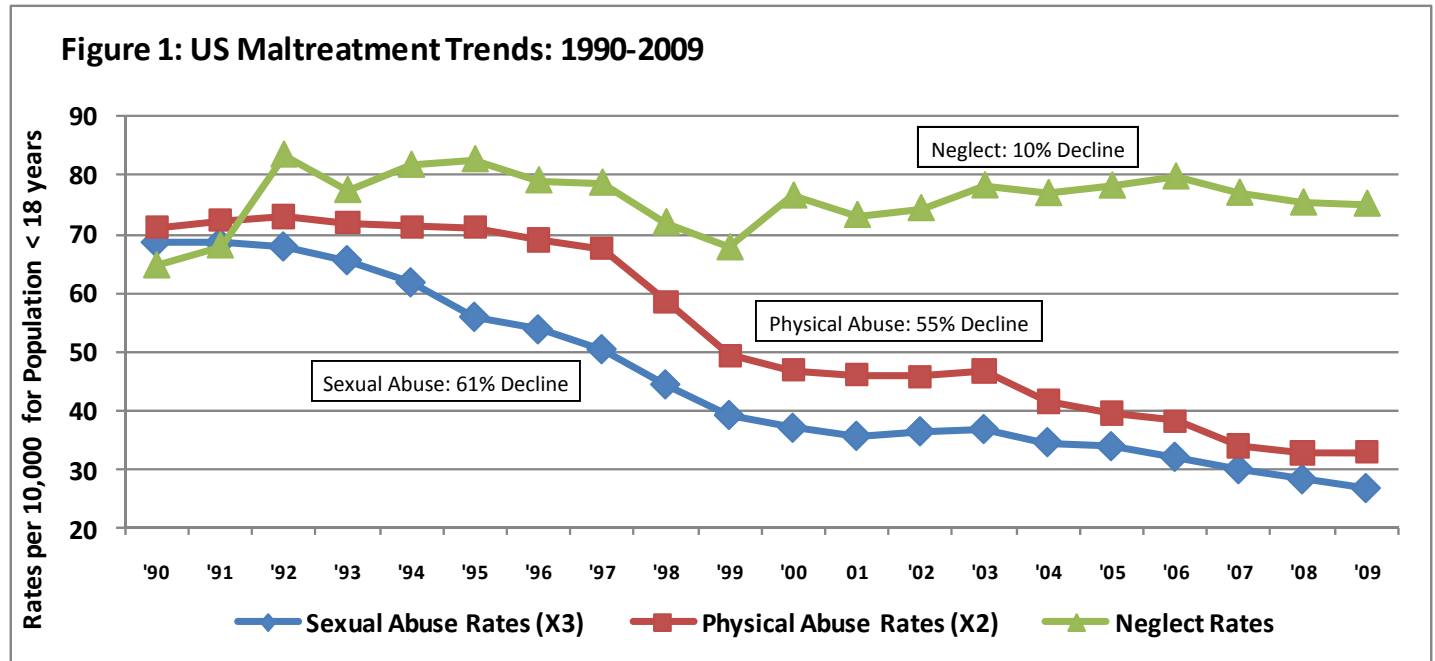
Despite the worsening economic conditions in 2009, newly released national child maltreatment data for 2009 do not show an increase in substantiated maltreatment. Overall substantiated child maltreatment actually declined 2% from the previous year, including a 5% decline in sexual abuse. Child maltreatment fatalities, however, rose 3%.

The data in the tables and graphs included below are derived from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), which aggregates and publishes statistics from state child protection agencies. The most recent data from NCANDS were released in December, 2010 and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2009 (USDHHS, 2010).

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm08/index.htm>

The published NCANDS report shows overall substantiated child maltreatment dropping from 10.3 to 10.1 per 1000 children, a 2% decline in the rate of substantiated child maltreatment from 2008 to 2009. The new rate, equivalent to about 763,000 children, is the lowest level of child maltreatment since the NCANDS system was put into place in 1990.

Breaking out data by type of abuse, the report shows that sexual abuse declined 5% from 2008 to 2009 to a nationally estimated 65,700 substantiated cases or a rate of 8.9 per 10,000. Physical abuse was unchanged at an estimated 121,000 cases or 16.5 per 10,000. Neglect was also unchanged at an estimated 552,000 substantiated cases or 75.1 per 10,000 (see Figure 1).



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2009. 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: 2008-2009 and 1992-2009

US States	Recent Trends: 2008-2009			Long-term Trends: 1992-2009		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	-19%	0%	-18%	-62%	-51%	-77%
Alaska	-40%	-20%	-8%	-92%	-82%	5%
Arizona	16%	0%	14%	-93%	-73%	-76%
Arkansas	0%	21%	18%	7%	-35%	43%
California	-13%	-11%	-3%	-83%	-85%	-25%
Colorado	7%	3%	9%	-58%	-54%	38%
Connecticut	-6%	3%	16%	-64%	-85%	-22%
Delaware	-23%	-12%	-11%	-35%	-29%	-7%
District of Columbia (DC)	-9%	58%	15%	233%	22%	-24%
Florida	-10%	-5%	-5%	-81%	-75%	-57%
Georgia	-2%	-2%	-16%	-85%	-72%	-60%
Hawaii	-35%	-17%	8%	-74%	-78%	-49%
Idaho	9%	-9%	-14%	-94%	-87%	-72%
Illinois	-6%	5%	0%	-21%	27%	-26%
Indiana	3%	1%	13%	-50%	-66%	16%
Iowa	8%	0%	21%	-58%	-46%	159%
Kansas	-13%	-11%	-33%	-47%	-63%	-57%
Kentucky	-4%	-14%	-4%	-74%	-77%	-3%
Louisiana	-6%	-6%	-6%	-43%	-30%	-21%
Maine	-18%	1%	5%	-52%	-23%	101%
Maryland	missing	missing	missing	-22%	-35%	1%
Massachusetts	-1%	-9%	-7%	-62%	-30%	89%
Michigan	5%	24%	12%	-48%	31%	161%
Minnesota	-16%	-7%	-16%	-45%	-80%	-51%
Mississippi	-3%	-3%	1%	-43%	-55%	-12%
Missouri	-3%	7%	1%	-51%	-51%	-73%
Montana	-7%	0%	12%	-88%	-91%	-59%
Nebraska	-2%	8%	18%	-48%	-67%	44%
Nevada	50%	38%	-16%	-55%	-58%	-66%
New Hampshire	7%	-28%	-13%	-71%	-61%	83%
New Jersey	6%	-7%	5%	-49%	-78%	-27%
New Mexico	6%	-11%	-7%	-72%	-62%	-6%
New York	1%	4%	7%	-60%	-57%	123%
North Carolina	-8%	2%	-1%	-8%	43%	-45%
North Dakota	missing	missing	missing	-46%	-82%	-21%
Ohio	-3%	3%	-9%	-44%	-18%	-46%
Oklahoma	-22%	-29%	-33%	-56%	-60%	8%
Oregon	missing	missing	missing	-69%	-62%	11%
Pennsylvania	0%	4%	-7%	-41%	-62%	-34%
Rhode Island	-23%	35%	-2%	-79%	-75%	0%
South Carolina	17%	5%	-1%	-63%	61%	17%
South Dakota	-3%	25%	10%	-87%	-66%	-22%
Tennessee	-25%	-52%	-10%	-19%	-59%	-5%
Texas	-7%	-6%	-4%	-57%	-48%	21%
Utah	-2%	-4%	-1%	-33%	-47%	-3%
Vermont	15%	19%	-7%	-48%	-2%	-88%
Virginia	-4%	0%	5%	-66%	-62%	-65%
Washington	-10%	5%	-6%	-85%	-76%	-79%
West Virginia	-24%	3%	-16%	-66%	-20%	-6%
Wisconsin	-15%	-7%	-10%	-80%	-81%	-61%
Wyoming	12%	21%	-10%	-76%	-89%	-61%

\*Note that in states with smaller populations and low rates of maltreatment fatalities, small changes in fatality counts 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, 1993-2009; MD, 2001-2009; ND, 1992-2008; OR, 1992-2008; WA, 1995-2008; WV, 1998-2008.

The decline in sexual abuse adds to an already substantial positive long term trend. Sexual abuse has declined 61% from 1992 to 2009. The long term trend for physical abuse is also down, decreasing 55% since 1992. The long-term trend for neglect is a relatively small 10% decline since 1992.

It is not possible to directly compare state maltreatment rates because states differ in how statutes define abuse and how abuse is investigated and processed. However, looking at within-state trends, almost all individual states experienced substantial declines in sexual and physical abuse during the period since the early 1990s (see Table 1). Out of the 48 states submitting data to NCANDS, 32 states have seen declines of 50% or more in sexual abuse since 1992. Thirty three states have seen declines of this size in physical abuse. 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 from 1628 deaths in 2008 to 1671 in 2009. Much of the increase could be ascribed to Texas, where numbers increased by over 50 deaths.

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 reporting practices, investigation standards, and administrative or statistical procedures, not real changes in underlying abuse. These factors can clearly play a role. However, the recently released Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) confirmed that the recent trends documented in the NCANDS data

are 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 was unable to show that worker caseload (an effect of cutbacks, for example) was related 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. Still year to year fluctuations may be due to changes in state policies.

There is currently no consensus in the child maltreatment field about why sexual abuse and physical abuse have declined so substantially 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 because it has not been the subject of the same level of policy attention and public awareness as

Table 2: Child Maltreatment Fatality Trends: 2008-2009

US States	Child Maltreatment Fatalities		
	Count 2008	Count 2009	% Change 2008-2009
Alabama	20	14	-30%
Alaska	2	missing	
Arizona	11	30	173%
Arkansas	21	13	-38%
California	185	185	0%
Colorado	32	36	13%
Connecticut	6	4	-33%
Delaware	2	3	50%
District of Columbia (DC)	8	5	-38%
Florida	185	156	-16%
Georgia	68	60	-12%
Hawaii	2	3	50%
Idaho	2	4	100%
Illinois	69	77	12%
Indiana	34	50	47%
Iowa	11	10	-9%
Kansas	10	8	-20%
Kentucky	22	34	55%
Louisiana	30	40	33%
Maine	4	2	-50%
Maryland	missing	17	
Massachusetts	missing	missing	
Michigan	59	58	-2%
Minnesota	16	21	31%
Mississippi	17	14	-18%
Missouri	42	39	-7%
Montana	1	0	-100%
Nebraska	17	10	-41%
Nevada	17	29	71%
New Hampshire	0	1	
New Jersey	29	24	-17%
New Mexico	19	10	-47%
New York	107	109	2%
North Carolina	missing	missing	
North Dakota	3	2	-33%
Ohio	74	79	7%
Oklahoma	31	22	-29%
Oregon	14	13	-7%
Pennsylvania	45	40	-11%
Rhode Island	0	2	
South Carolina	21	28	33%
South Dakota	2	4	100%
Tennessee	55	46	-16%
Texas	223	279	25%
Utah	15	8	-47%
Vermont	1	3	200%
Virginia	37	28	-24%
Washington	23	21	-9%
West Virginia	5	6	20%
Wisconsin	30	24	-20%
Wyoming	1	0	-100%
Total	1628	1671	3%
Total excluding AK & MD	1626	1654	2%

\*The 3% increase includes AK reporting in 2008 but not in 2009 and MD reporting in 2009 but not in 2008. With both excluded (AK and MD) there is a 2% increase.

sexual and physical abuse. 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 is a surprise to many observers. The observed 3% increase in child maltreatment fatalities may be related to the recession, but the magnitude of this single year fluctuation is within the range of fluctuations often seen from year to year when economic conditions are more stable. It is interesting to note that overall crime rates fell in 2009 and the first part of 2010, contrary to the expectations of some.

<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/preliminary-crime-in-the-us-2009>

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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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