

## UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2023

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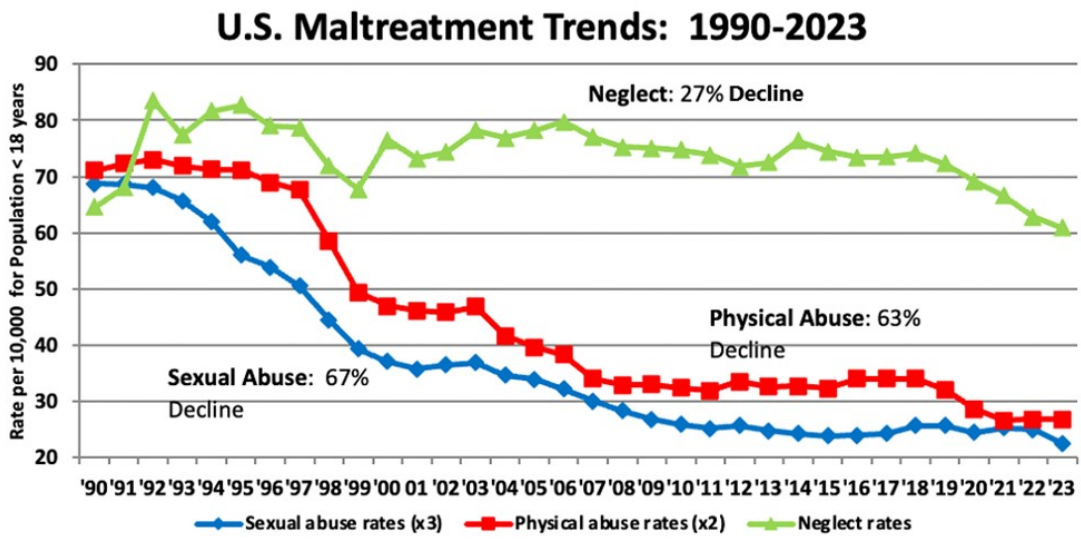
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**New national data have been released for 2023, showing a 3% decline in the rate of all child abuse of compared to 2022. Sexual abuse declined 9% compared to the previous year, neglect dropped 3% while physical abuse did not change. The trends continue a pattern of declines dating since the 1990s (Figure 1). Since 1993, sexual abuse has declined 67%, physical abuse has declined 63% and neglect has declined 27%. By contrast, child maltreatment fatalities rose less than 1% from 2022 to 2023, but have risen 32% since a low in 2013.**

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 January 2025, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2023.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/child-maltreatment-2023>

The declines in all forms of maltreatment over time seem encouraging, but some wonder whether it could be a result of changes in reporting or child protection practices like alternative response options. However, overall reporting of child maltreatment has actually increased over time. Moreover, differential response options are rarely applied to sexual abuse allegations, and sexual abuse has shown the largest declines.



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2023. 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: 2020-2023 and 1992-2023\*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2022-2023			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1993-2023		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	-13%	0%	3%	-63%	-20%	-60%
Alaska	-33%	-13%	-3%	-87%	-78%	-30%
Arizona	15%	44%	-2%	-86%	-43%	13%
Arkansas	-13%	-10%	-14%	-22%	-49%	9%
California	-14%	0%	-5%	-90%	-93%	-39%
Colorado	-16%	4%	3%	-66%	-73%	39%
Connecticut	3%	-6%	5%	-55%	-92%	-54%
Delaware	-21%	-13%	-21%	-36%	-60%	-71%
District of Columbia (DC)	-22%	-17%	-23%	-15%	-61%	-65%
Florida	-10%	-4%	-7%	-82%	-90%	-76%
Georgia	1%	15%	16%	-91%	-84%	-79%
Hawaii	-48%	-19%	-38%	-86%	-91%	-78%
Idaho	4%	3%	-1%	-88%	-86%	-67%
Illinois	-9%	2%	-1%	-26%	33%	22%
Indiana	-8%	-3%	-6%	-73%	-83%	-5%
Iowa	-13%	-6%	-3%	-59%	-60%	164%
Kansas	-10%	7%	-4%	-58%	-42%	46%
Kentucky	69%	285%	-15%	-52%	-36%	-34%
Louisiana	11%	25%	20%	-61%	-72%	-6%
Maine	-4%	4%	-6%	-54%	24%	90%
Maryland	-18%	-1%	-5%	-15%	-77%	-66%
Massachusetts	-8%	0%	-3%	-69%	-71%	25%
Michigan	12%	17%	-8%	-33%	-6%	108%
Minnesota	11%	-16%	-10%	8%	-88%	-55%
Mississippi	-22%	-11%	-3%	-37%	-51%	37%
Missouri	8%	2%	15%	-53%	-62%	-76%
Montana	1%	16%	-6%	-87%	-92%	-22%
Nebraska	36%	26%	3%	-70%	-82%	-47%
Nevada	-15%	-19%	16%	-53%	-75%	-39%
New Hampshire	40%	18%	16%	-79%	-52%	204%
New Jersey	-29%	-3%	1%	-73%	-94%	-76%
New Mexico	-25%	2%	3%	-80%	-55%	43%
New York	-17%	-1%	-6%	-70%	-74%	56%
North Carolina	-25%	-3%	3%	-25%	44%	-53%
North Dakota	29%	-12%	-23%	-86%	-94%	-59%
Ohio	-12%	-11%	-5%	-64%	-27%	-60%
Oklahoma	-12%	0%	-6%	-52%	-49%	59%
Oregon	-2%	17%	-12%	-65%	-42%	9%
Pennsylvania	-15%	-11%	4%	-53%	-36%	102%
Rhode Island	-8%	2%	-7%	-80%	-75%	-41%
South Carolina	-16%	-9%	-5%	-70%	139%	3%
South Dakota	2%	-3%	-1%	-86%	-74%	-28%
Tennessee	-4%	16%	4%	-32%	23%	-69%
Texas	-16%	0%	2%	-61%	-78%	-7%
Utah	-3%	-4%	-4%	-54%	2%	-26%
Vermont	-4%	8%	-56%	-57%	40%	-90%
Virginia	-1%	-4%	-6%	-75%	-75%	-74%
Washington	-14%	-8%	-1%	-86%	-88%	-88%
West Virginia	-9%	-58%	-18%	-61%	5%	-15%
Wisconsin	-26%	-6%	-3%	-88%	-89%	-58%
Wyoming	-38%	-26%	-13%	-89%	-98%	-54%

The newly released NCANDS report combined sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect with several other kinds of maltreatment and estimated a total of 546,159 substantiated reports for 2023, a 3% drop from 559,899 substantiated reports for 2022.

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 (Joseph, J et al. 2025).

In the findings on child maltreatment fatalities, the 2023 data show a small annual increase from the previous year, but it caps an overall 32% rise since 2013. (See Table 2). The pattern of multi-year increases for children is also apparent in homicide data from law enforcement and violent death data from medical examiners (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. Due to missing data, long-term trends in SA, PA, and neglect calculated for: CA, 1993-2023; MD 2001-2023; WA, 1995-2023; WV, 1998-2023.

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: 2020-2023

US States	Count	Count	% Change
	2022	2023	2022-2023
Alabama	38	43	13%
Alaska	8	5	-38%
Arizona	14	43	207%
Arkansas	39	33	-15%
California	164	150	-9%
Colorado	40	32	-20%
Connecticut	15	11	-27%
Delaware	6	7	17%
District of Columbia (DC)	3	5	67%
Florida	86	75	-13%
Georgia	114	103	-10%
Hawaii	5	2	-60%
Idaho	8	8	0%
Illinois	110	83	-25%
Indiana	62	65	5%
Iowa	18	14	-22%
Kansas	8	12	50%
Kentucky	12	5	-58%
Louisiana	29	47	62%
Maine	3	7	133%
Maryland	68	83	22%
Massachusetts	-	-	missing
Michigan	61	43	-30%
Minnesota	25	32	28%
Mississippi	72	76	6%
Missouri	57	61	7%
Montana	1	2	100%
Nebraska	3	0	-100%
Nevada	15	21	40%
New Hampshire	2	2	0%
New Jersey	19	14	-26%
New Mexico	19	16	-16%
New York	105	123	17%
North Carolina	93	107	15%
North Dakota	6	2	-67%
Ohio	115	140	22%
Oklahoma	29	17	-41%
Oregon	19	19	0%
Pennsylvania	80	50	-38%
Rhode Island	2	1	-50%
South Carolina	38	43	13%
South Dakota	13	7	-46%
Tennessee	34	31	-9%
Texas	176	187	6%
Utah	15	17	13%
Vermont	0	3	100%
Virginia	39	55	41%
Washington	31	31	0%
West Virginia	8	8	0%
Wisconsin	21	22	5%
Wyoming	3	0	-100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1963</b>	<b>1%</b>

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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