

Highlights from *Child Maltreatment 2009*

Webinar Q & A

The following questions were received by participants during the webinar: Highlights from Child Maltreatment 2009 on January 25, 2011. The responses were developed by the Children's Bureau Data Team and the NCANDS team.

Question 1: Please comment on the decrease in child entries into foster care/decrease in substantiated allegations and then the increase in the death rate of children due to child abuse and neglect.

The data for child foster care entry, substantiated child maltreatment allegations, and child fatalities, in part, encompass different data sources and child populations, which make comparisons across the sources difficult. The number of children entering foster care includes all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care, or supervision. The number of child victims includes children who were known to child protective services system (CPS) agencies and were found to have a substantiated or indicated maltreatment allegation. The number of child fatalities includes children who were known to CPS agencies as well as outside agencies such as medical examiners' offices, vital statistics offices, and public health departments. This means that the fatalities not under the auspices of the State child welfare agencies could significantly increase the fatality rate independent of the decrease in the number of substantiated allegations.

Another complication is the relative size of the populations. The number of child fatalities due to abuse and neglect are thankfully relatively small—a nationally estimated 1,770—when compared with the number of child maltreatment victims—a nationally estimated 763,000. Because the number of child fatalities is relatively small, minor fluctuations in just a few States can have a seemingly large affect on the national estimate. Rates computed from numbers with small bases, in general, are sensitive to slight changes in the numerator (number of fatalities).

Question 2: We are in the process of formulating a statewide needs assessment and we are using the 2009 report. How can we locate statewide data by county?

National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data at the county level are available for the majority of States from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) (<http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/>). Funded by the Children's Bureau, the Archive makes the case-level data of the NCANDS Child File available to eligible members of the research community for the purpose of statistical analysis and reporting. For more information on the NCANDS data available from the archive, including procedures for ordering data, see: http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/NDACAN/Datasets/Abstracts/DatasetAbstract_NCANDS_Child_File.html. To protect the confidentiality of individuals in the child files, NDACAN makes several modifications to the files it distributes. For example, the distributed files do not include the child's county of residence. In addition, in some cases the county in which the report was

made or handled is masked, such as when there are fewer than 1,000 records for a given county of report or when the case is a fatality.

In addition to the Archive, most States have procedures for sharing data with other State and government agencies. A person interested in county-level data from a particular State may wish to contact the NCANDS contact for that State. Appendix D in the *Child Maltreatment 2009* report includes NCANDS –related contact information for every State that submitted data.

Question 3: Can you provide several data highlights of data findings that were significantly different for 2009 from the earlier 3-5 years? How would you explain or account for those significant differences?

The *Child Maltreatment 2009* report contains 11 trend tables to provide the reader with a comprehensive view of key data indicators. Trend table topics include disposition rates of reports and children, victimization rates, child fatality rates, and response times. At the national level, these data indicators do not change very quickly and the trends are stable.

Some variation may occur at the State level and readers are encouraged to go to the report’s Appendix D: State Commentary for additional information provided by the States about their data. Within the commentary appendix, States provide information about recent changes to State policies, programs, and procedures; potential explanations for recent increases or decreases in data; and information about what is included in the “not otherwise classified” NCANDS category called “other.”

One recent change that may affect data over time is the increasing use of the alternative response victim and alternative response non-victim categories in NCANDS. As more States move toward a dual-track child protective services system (CPS) response program, the disposition and victimization numbers and rates may decrease. This is a slowly changing trend that will be monitored during the next few years.

Question 4: Could you please explain where the “National Standard” number comes from?

The national standards are based on six data indicators as part of the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) to determine whether or not States are operating in substantial conformity. To date, two rounds of CFSR have been completed. For the first round, the following Information Memorandum (IM) was released that discussed data sources and methodology for calculating the national standard *ACYF-CB-IM-00-1*:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/2000/im0011.htm.

The National Standard was later updated in IM, *ACYF-CB-IM-01-07*:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/2001/im0107.htm.

The National Standard revisions for the second round of the CFSR are discussed in this IM, *ACYF-CB-IM-09-01*:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/2009/im0901.htm.

For more information about the CFSR process, go to:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr>.

Question 5: What is the difference between alternative response “victims” and “non-victims?”

Fourteen States submit data to NCANDS about reports and children with alternative response dispositions. An alternative response (or assessment) is used in certain situations—as defined by each State with such a program—and focuses on the service needs of the child and family. A determination about the alleged maltreatment may or may not occur. Each State maps or crosswalks their internal codes to NCANDS definitions.

NCANDS defines alternative response victim as: The provision of a response other than an investigation that determines at least one child in the report was a victim of maltreatment. NCANDS defines alternative response non-victim as: The provision of a response other than an investigation that did not determine that any child in the report was a victim of maltreatment.

Alternative response is an emerging field and there is no consensus in the programs across States. The numbers of children involved in alternative response programs are relatively small. For FFY 2009, more than 3.6 million children received a CPS response in the form of an investigation or alternative response. Of those, 294,417 duplicate children were reported with a disposition of alternative response non-victim and 17,684 duplicate children were reported with a disposition of alternative response victim. These children accounted for fewer than 9 percent of the 3.6 million children who received a CPS response. (See *Child Maltreatment 2009* report Table 3–1 Children Who Received a CPS Response by Disposition).

More than one-third of the children reported with alternative response dispositions for FFY 2009 were from North Carolina. Other States that reported alternative response included Alaska, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. Readers are encouraged to read these States’ commentary in Appendix D of the *Child Maltreatment 2009* report.

Question 6: When you look at percentage breakdown of all maltreatment by maltreatment type, has the percentage for neglect increased over the years? In looking at past reports, and I know the methodology has likely changed over the years, it looks like trends of increased percentages of neglect.

The NCANDS Technical Team ran the maltreatment type data in a 5-year trend analysis for data years 2005–2009 using a consistent methodology. The same States were used for all 5 years, therefore if a State did not submit data to NCANDS for 1 or more years during the time period, that State was not included in this analysis. The total number of States used in the analysis was 47. A victim may have suffered from more than one type of maltreatment, which is why the total maltreatment incidents sum to more than 100.0 percent.

As the data in the following table show, the percentages have been relatively stable during the 5 years, with slight increases in neglect and medical neglect and slight decreases in “other,”

physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, sexual abuse, and unknown. Percentages are calculated against the unique count of victims.

Reported Maltreatment Types of Victims, 2005-2009 (unique count)

Year	Unique Victims	Medical Neglect	Neglect	Other	Physical Abuse	Psychological Maltreatment	Sexual Abuse	Unknown	Total Maltreatment Incidents
Percentages									
2005	757,169	2.2	69.4	15.8	18.0	7.8	10.4	1.2	124.9
2006	756,454	2.2	70.4	16.4	17.5	7.3	9.9	1.4	125.1
2007	671,470	2.3	76.7	9.0	17.4	7.5	10.1	0.1	123.1
2008	649,468	2.3	77.1	8.7	17.3	6.9	10.2	0.1	122.6
2009	636,752	2.4	78.2	8.9	17.3	6.2	9.8	0.0	122.9
Total	3,471,313	2.3	74.1	12.0	17.5	7.2	10.1	0.6	123.8
Numbers									
2005	757,169	16,887	525,653	119,874	135,912	59,116	78,783	9,430	945,655
2006	756,454	16,898	532,473	123,759	132,630	55,256	75,008	10,221	946,245
2007	671,470	15,253	514,858	60,242	116,513	50,651	67,989	837	826,343
2008	649,468	14,960	500,936	56,487	112,468	44,989	66,152	555	796,547
2009	636,752	15,259	497,830	56,790	110,210	39,731	62,576	164	782,560
Total	3,471,313	79,257	2,571,750	417,152	607,733	249,743	350,508	21,207	4,297,350

Based on data from 47 States. The same States were used for each year.

A victim may have suffered from more than one type of maltreatment, which is why the total maltreatment incidents are more than 100.0 percent.

Percentages are based on the number of maltreatment incidents divided by the unique count of victims.

These numbers and percentages may be slightly different from published reports as the number of States were controlled for missing data.

The percentages shifted between 2006 and 2007. Since 2007, the percentages have been relatively stable with slight increases in neglect and medical neglect and slight decreases in "other," physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, sexual abuse, and unknown.

Question 7: Could you please address concerns about factors that may perhaps impact validity and reliability of data? We have heard skepticism from professionals that the decline in the rate of abuse is “real.” People ask if the decline may be related to calls to CPS not getting answered or responded to, or other factors related to the CPS system in States or at the county level. [AND AGAIN] We have heard from a number of professionals working to address child maltreatment. They are concerned that the declining rates of maltreatment are not real, but are in fact related to inadequate funding of CPS, problems in State reporting systems, varying definitions of types of abuse, changes in the way reports of maltreatment are treated at intake, recorded or tracked, etc.

As the *Child Maltreatment 2009* report, Figure 3-1 shows, the rate of (unique) child victimization has declined over the past 5 years, from 10.9 per 1,000 children in the community (in 2005) to 9.3 per 1,000 children in the community (in 2009). As the question points out, the extent to which this decline is “real” can be affected by several factors, including changes to how States define, investigate, and report maltreatment. To address this concern, several researchers (e.g., Finkelhor, Jones, and Shattuck, 2009) have pointed out that the declines seen in NCANDS

mirror declines seen in other national studies of maltreatment, such as the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) and victim self-report surveys. Because these studies use consistent definitions of abuse and do not rely exclusively on agency reporting, they are unlikely to be affected by changes to how States respond to maltreatment. The fact that these studies show similar declines over the same time period provides credible evidence that the declines seen in NCANDS represent a true decline in the incidence of maltreatment.

Finkelhor, D., Jones, L., & Shattuck, A. (2009). Updated trends in child maltreatment, 2009. Retrieved from Crimes Against Children Research Center website:
http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Updated_Trends_in_Child_Maltreatment_2009.pdf.

Question 8: Are there specific software packages (the “digital dashboard”), which the presenters would recommend using to compile the data sets?

There is a wide range of products and solutions, at varying costs and complexity, for creating digital dashboards that display large amounts of data in a clear and user-friendly format. There is also no one size fits all, so it is difficult to recommend any particular approach.* However, the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRCCWDT) provides on its website several examples of how States are using technology, such as digital dashboards, to improve their use of data (see e.g., “[Tips, Tools, and Trends](#)”). Examples include:

- “[Iowa’s Digital Dashboard](#)” –Iowa’s use of a digital dashboard to track CFSR and other outcomes of interest
- “[Using Data to Monitor PIP Progress](#)” – Texas’ use of an on-line data management tool to support its CPS quality assurance system
- “[PivotTables: Making the Connection Between Outcomes](#)” – Vermont’s use of Microsoft Excel PivotTables and PivotCharts to track outcomes for use by district managers and staff

* The ACF does not endorse or promote the use of any particular software product or application. Any reference to specific applications or vendors is for information purposes only and is not intended to promulgate industry best practices.

Question 9: Could you provide the reference for the morbidity/mortality report on victims younger than age 1?

The article is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5713a2.htm>.

Question 10: Could you please provide a link to the National Child Abuse Data Archive at Cornell?

The link to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect is:
<http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/>.

Question 11: Are there hard copies available to order?

The report is an Internet-only document. *Child Maltreatment 2009* is available for download in portable document format (PDF) at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm09/index.htm>. Prior editions of the annual report are available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can. Readers may be able to purchase a copy of the report from GPO Access at www.gpoaccess.gov.