

Child Maltreatment

Headline

The number of children who were victims of child maltreatment increased from 829,000 in 1999 to 903,000 in 2001, reversing a decline between 1996 and 1999. ([See Table 1](#))

Importance

The causes of child maltreatment are not well understood, although abuse and, especially, neglect, are more common in poor and extremely poor families than in families with higher incomes.¹ Child abuse or neglect is often associated with physical injuries, delayed physical growth, and even neurological damage. Child maltreatment is also associated with psychological problems such as aggression, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, child abuse is linked to an increased risk of substance abuse in later life.² In extreme cases, child abuse and neglect can lead to death. In 2001, approximately 1,300 children died as the result of abuse or neglect.³

In the national statistical system that tracks child maltreatment, children are counted as victims if an investigation by the state child welfare agency classifies their case as either “substantiated” or “indicated” child maltreatment. Substantiated cases are those in which an allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment was supported or founded according to state law or policy. Indicated cases are those in which an allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment could not be substantiated, but there was reason to suspect maltreatment or the risk of maltreatment.⁴

Trends

Between 1990 and 1996, the number of children for whom child abuse or neglect was either substantiated or indicated rose from nearly 861,000 to about 1,012,000—a rate of 14.7 per 1,000 U.S. children under age 18 in 1996. Between 1996 and 1999, the trend reversed as the number of maltreated children dropped to around 829,000—a rate of 11.8 per 1,000. However, the number of maltreated children increased to 903,000 by 2001—a rate of 12.4 per 1,000 U.S. children. ([See Table 1](#))

Among maltreated children, the percentage reported as sexually abused declined from 17 percent in 1990 to 10 percent in 2001. Similarly, the percentage reported as physically abused declined from 27 percent to 19 percent over the same period. Conversely, the percentage of maltreated children reported as neglected increased from 49 percent in 1990 to 57 percent in 2001.

Distribution by Age

Although children age one and under accounted for 11 percent of all children under age 18 in 2001, they accounted for 16 percent of child maltreatment victims (in 2001). Children ages 14 to 17, on the other hand, are underrepresented among victims of child maltreatment (22 percent of the child population but only 15 percent of the victims). ([See Figure 1](#))

Distribution by Race⁵ and Hispanic origin

Blacks and American Indian or Alaskan Natives are overrepresented among victims of child maltreatment. Although blacks account for 16 percent of all children, they accounted for 25 percent of child maltreatment victims in 2001. American Indian or Alaska Natives are also overrepresented (1 percent of population versus 2 percent of victims). Conversely, white children (78 percent of population versus 50 percent of victims) and Asian or Pacific Islander children (4 percent of population versus 1 percent of victims) are underrepresented among victims of child maltreatment. Hispanics account for a nearly equal share of the population and victims (18 percent and 15 percent, respectively). ([See Figure 2](#))

State and Local Estimates

State estimates for 2001 are available at:

http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/table2_5.htm and
http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/table3_8.htm

International Estimates

None

National Goals

The *Healthy People 2010* initiative has set a goal to reduce child maltreatment rates (from 12.9 per 1,000 in 1998 to 10.3 per 1,000 by 2010) and maltreatment fatalities in children (from 1.6 per 100,000 in 1998 to 1.4 per 100,000 by 2010).

For additional information visit:

<http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/document/html/objectives/15-33.htm> (Goal 15-33)

Definition

Child maltreatment can be defined as “behavior towards [a child] . . . which (a) is outside the norms of conduct, and (b) entails a substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm. Behaviors included will consist of actions and omissions, ones that are intentional

and ones that are unintentional.”⁶ Four types of maltreatment are generally recognized, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment.

In the national statistical system that tracks child maltreatment, children are counted as victims if an investigation by the state child welfare agency classifies their case as either “substantiated” or “indicated” child maltreatment. Substantiated cases are those in which an allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment was supported or founded according to state law or policy. Indicated cases are those in which an allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment could not be substantiated, but there was reason to suspect maltreatment or the risk of maltreatment.⁷

Data Source

All estimates for 2001: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, *Child Maltreatment 2001* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003).

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/index.htm>

All estimates for 2000: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, *Child Maltreatment 2000*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO. 2002.

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cmreports.htm>

Population estimates for 2000 and 2001: Original analysis by Child Trends of *Bridged Race 2000 and 2001 Population Estimates for Calculating Vital Rates*, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2003.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/dvs/popbridge/popbridge.htm>

All estimates for 1990-1999 (except rate per 1,000): *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 2001*. Table HC 2.10 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/01/trends/> (See Table HC 2.10)

Rate per 1000 for 1990-1999: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. "Child Maltreatment 1999."

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm99/>

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).

<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/>

Next Update

April 2004

¹ National Research Council, *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1993. <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309048893/html/>

² Guterman, N.B., *Stopping Child Maltreatment Before It Starts: Emerging Horizons in Early Home Visitation Services*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, *Child Maltreatment 2001* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003).

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/index.htm>

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. *Child Maltreatment 1999*, 2001.

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm99/>

⁵ Estimates for whites, blacks, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Asian/Pacific Islanders include Hispanics.

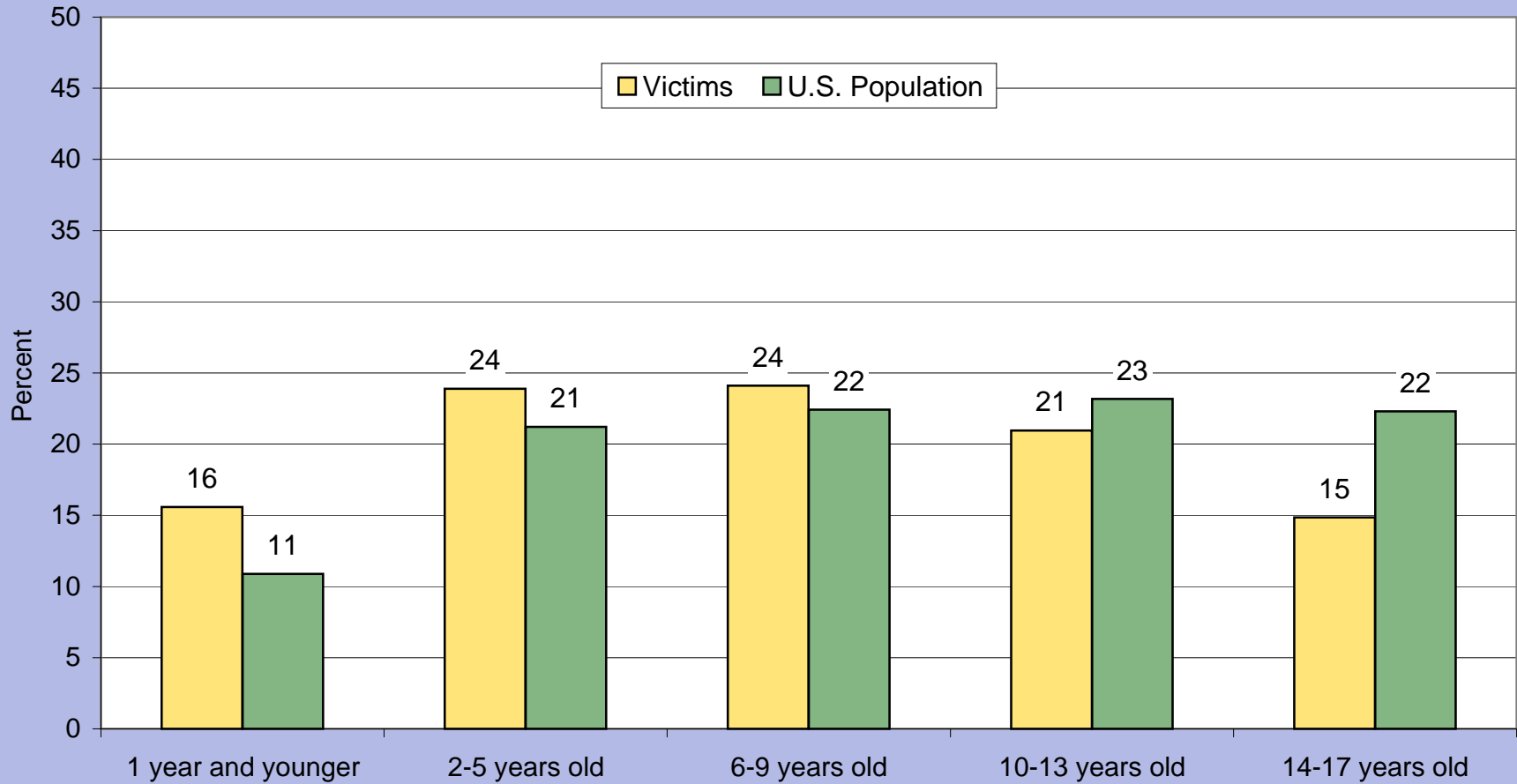
⁶ Christoffel, K.K., Scheidt, P.C., Agran, P.F., Kraus, J.F., McLoughlin, E. & Paulson, J.A. "Standard Definitions for Childhood Injury Research: Excerpts of a Conference Report." *Pediatrics* 89:1027-1034, 1992.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. *Child Maltreatment 1999*, 2001.

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm99/>

Figure 1

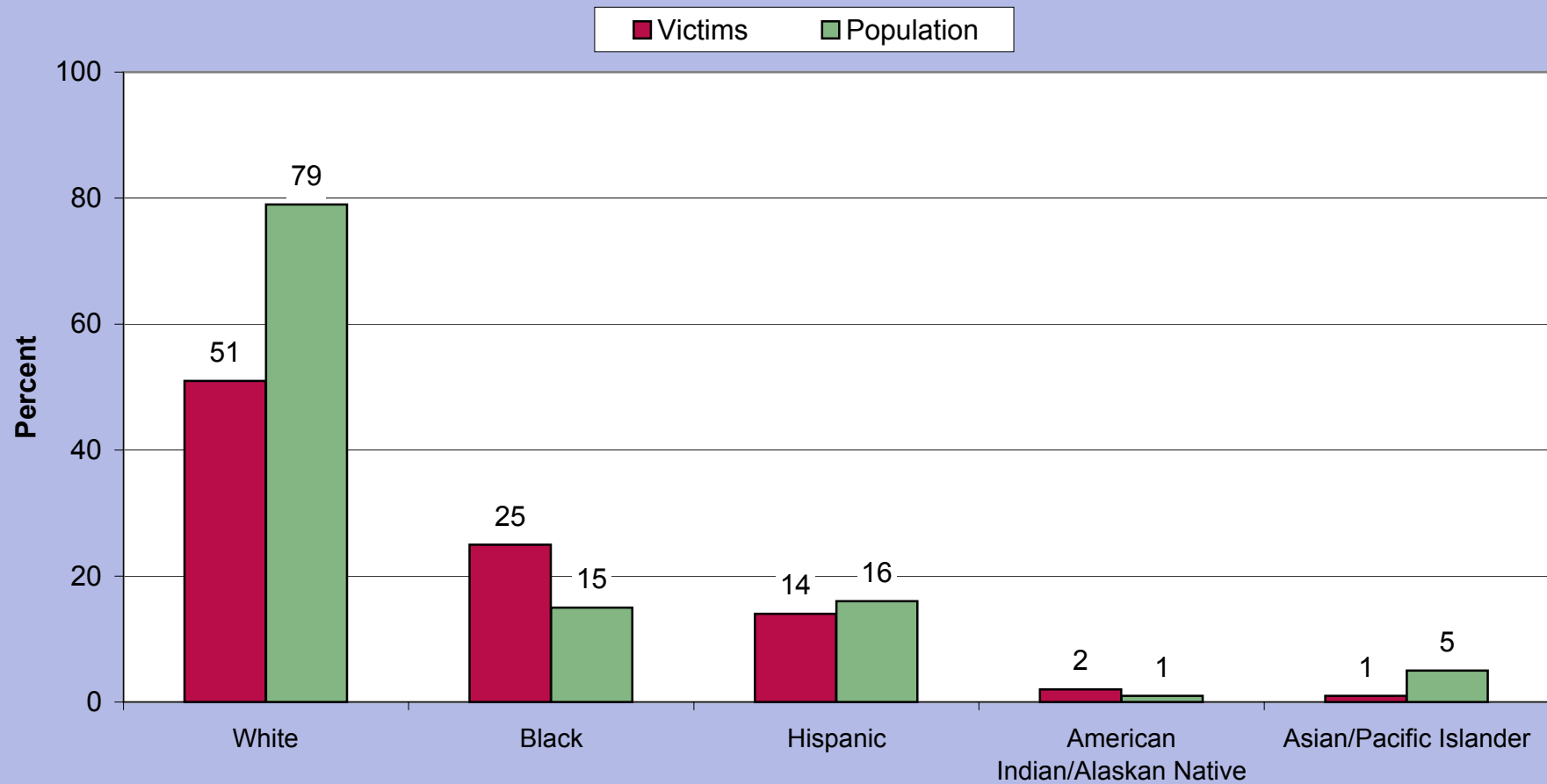
Percent Distribution of Victims of Child Maltreatment, and U.S. Child Population, by Age, 2001



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Child Maltreatment 2001 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003); Population estimates from original analysis by Child Trends of Bridged Race 2000 and 2001 Population Estimates for Calculating Vital Rates, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2003. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/dvs/popbridge/popbridge.htm>

Figure 2

Victims of Child Maltreatment and U.S. Population, by Race¹ and Hispanic origin, 2000



¹Estimates for whites, blacks, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Asian/Pacific Islanders include Hispanics.

Consequently, percentages total to more than 100 percent.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, *Child Maltreatment 2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002). Population estimates for 2000: Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. July 1st estimates: http://eire.census.gov/popest/archives/national/nat_90s_detail/nat_90s_1.php

Table 1

Children Who are Victims of Child Maltreatment by Gender, Age, Race and Hispanic origin, and Type of Maltreatment

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Number of Victims¹	860,577	911,690	994,655	1,026,331	1,032,000	1,005,511	1,011,973	956,711	904,000	829,000	879,000
Rate per 1,000	13.4	14.0	15.1	15.3	15.2	14.7	14.7	13.8	12.9	11.8	12.2
Gender											
Male	44	45	45	41	41	40	39	40	48	48	48
Female	50	52	51	47	46	45	43	44	52	52	52
Age of Victim											
1 year and younger	13	14	13	12	12	11	11	11	14	14	15
2-5 years old	24	25	25	23	23	23	22	21	25	24	24
6-9 years old	22	23	23	21	20	21	21	21	25	25	24
10-13 years old	19	20	19	18	17	17	16	17	20	20	20
14-17 years old	14	15	15	14	13	13	13	12	15	15	15
18 and older	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
Race and Hispanic Origin of Victim²											
White	53	56	53	51	48	47	50	49	56	54	51
Black	25	27	27	25	25	24	22	22	25	26	25
Hispanic	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	13	14	14
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Other Races	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	3	2	11	7
Type of Maltreatment											
Neglect	49	46	50	49	52	52	52	55	54	56	60
Physical Abuse	27	26	23	24	24	24	24	24	23	21	19
Sexual Abuse	17	16	14	14	14	13	12	12	12	11	10
Psychological or Emotional Abuse	7	6	5	5	5	4	6	6	6	8	8
Medical Neglect	0	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	3
Other and Unknown	10	13	21	17	16	17	19	12	26	28	17

¹ Indicated is a type of investigation disposition that concludes the allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment was supported or founded by State law or State policy and is the highest level of finding by a State Agency. Indicated or reason to suspect is an investigation that cannot be substantiated, but there is a reason to suspect that the child may have been maltreated or was at risk of maltreatment. This is applicable only to states that distinguish between substantiated and indicated dispositions. All percentages reported here are based on reporting states, no estimates were made unless otherwise noted.

² Estimates for Whites and Blacks include Hispanics of those races. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Sources: Rate per 1000 for 1990-1999 and number of victims for 1994, 1998, 1999, and 2000: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. "Child Maltreatment 1999." Population estimates for 1999: Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. Internet release date: April 11, 2000; All other estimates for 1990-1999 except rate per 1000: Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 2001. Table HC 2.10 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; Data for 2000: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, *Child Maltreatment 2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002). Population estimates for 2000: Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. July 1st estimates: http://eire.census.gov/popest/archives/national/nat_90s_detail/nat_90s_1.php

