



CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT FACT SHEET

All children should be raised in safe, nurturing, and loving families. It is a tragedy when children are victimized by abuse, neglect, alcohol and drug abuse, or domestic violence. The physical or emotional scars from such experiences can sometimes last a lifetime if not treated. They can prevent children from learning in school. They can make young people more vulnerable to violence and alcohol and drug abuse. It must be an urgent priority to strengthen the web of child and family supports to keep children safe, to prevent problems before they occur, and to resolve problems that do happen before they become crises. Permanent homes for all children who must be removed from their own homes must also be a priority. For many children this means helping to reunite them safely with their families. For those who cannot return home, adoption offers the best assurance of long-term stability for the child; although other permanent living arrangements, including placements with grandparents and other relatives, might be best in individual cases.

Children: Abused, Neglected, and/or Who Witness Violence

- An estimated 3 million children were reported as suspected victims of child abuse and neglect and referred for investigation or assessment in 2003; approximately 900,000 children were confirmed as victims of child abuse and neglect.¹ In other words, a child is abused or neglected every 35 seconds.
- Fewer than 6 out of 10 (57.1%) of these children who were abused or neglected receive any post-investigation services. Several reasons are given for why only some children and families receive post-investigation services, including unavailability of services and long waiting lists.²
- Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment. Three times as many children are victims of neglect (63.2 percent) as are victims of physical abuse (18.9 percent). Another 9.9 percent are recorded as victims of sexual abuse; 4.9 percent emotional and psychological maltreatment; and 16.9 percent other.³
- Research indicates that children who live in families with annual incomes less than \$15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than children living in families with annual incomes of \$30,000 or more.⁴ This higher rate can be attributed to the stress that poverty places on parents and to the increased likelihood that child abuse and neglect will be detected, reported and substantiated in low-income homes that are more closely supervised by social services and law enforcement agencies.⁵ This does not mean that most poor parents abuse and neglect their children. In 2003,

there were 12.9 million poor children in this country and fewer than 1 million confirmed to have been abused and neglected – and not all of these children were poor.⁶

- Young children are most at risk for being abused and neglected. Infants represent the largest proportion of victims; almost 29 percent of the victims are between the ages 0-3 and over one half of all victims are 7 years of age or younger.⁷
- Both child maltreatment and domestic violence occur in an estimated 30 to 60 percent of families where there is some form of family violence⁸
- Estimates of the number of children who witness family violence are in the millions.

Families with Alcohol and Drug Problems in the Child Welfare System

- Children whose parents abuse drugs and alcohol are almost three times more likely to be abused and more than four times more likely to be neglected than children of parents who do not abuse alcohol and other drugs.⁹
- An estimated 40-80 percent of the families who become child protective service cases have problems with alcohol and/or drugs.¹⁰
- 77 percent of caregivers with children in foster care need substance abuse services but less than a third of these caregivers have their needs met.¹¹

Children in Foster Care

- 523,000 children were reported to be in foster care as of September 30, 2003.¹²
- At least 58 percent of the children in foster care are children of color; 35 percent are Black, 17 percent are Hispanic, 2 percent are American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1 percent is Asian Pacific Islander. 2 percent are of two or more races.¹³
- Black children and American Indian/American Native children are over-represented in the foster care system. Black children represent 16 percent of the general population but 35 percent of the foster care population; and American Indian/Alaskan Native children represent 1 percent of the general population but 2 percent of the foster care population.¹⁴
- Infants and young children are entering foster care in greater numbers than any other age group and remaining in care longer than older children.¹⁵

- The average length of stay for children in foster care is two years and seven months. Half of the children in foster care on September 30, 2003 stayed in care longer than 18 months.¹⁶ Federal law requires states to initiate termination of parental rights proceedings for children who have been in care for 15 of the past 22 months.¹⁷

Youths Aging Out of Foster Care

- Teenagers represent an estimated 30 percent of the foster care population.¹⁸
- A majority of youth experience multiple placements, some experience 7 or more placements before they emancipate.¹⁹
- An estimated 20,000 young people leave foster care at age 18 or 19 each year with no formal connections to family; they have not been returned to their birth families or adopted.²⁰
- Many youths aging out of foster care have a difficult time making it on their own. A national study reported that within two to four years of leaving foster care only 54 percent had completed high school, fewer than half were employed, 25 percent had been homeless, 30 percent had no access to needed health care, and 60 percent of the young women had given birth.²¹

Children in Kinship Care

- In 2000, more than six million children -- approximately 1 in 12 children -- were living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. Approximately 2.5 million of these children are living in grandparent- or other relative-headed household with no parents present.²²
- An estimated one-fourth to one-third of all children in foster care nationally are in relative care arrangements.²³
- In fourteen states and the District of Columbia, kin must meet all foster care requirements to care for a child in the foster care system. All but two of these provide relative foster parents the same financial support as non-kin foster parents. California and Oregon deny foster payments to kin who care for children who are not eligible for Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, the federal Foster Care Program. The remaining thirty-six states either waive certain licensing standards such as physical space and training requirements or offer kin foster caregivers a special, less stringent

August 2005

licensing process. Less than half of these states, however, pay the same foster care rate to relatives as non-relatives. Typically, states offer a lesser amount, such as a cash welfare grant.²⁴

Children Awaiting Permanent, Adoptive Homes

- 49,340 children were adopted from foster care in 2003²⁵
- Approximately 119,000 children in foster care were waiting to be adopted on September 30, 2003; 40 percent of them are black.²⁶

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For further information, please contact CDF's Child Welfare and Mental Health Division at 202-662-3629 or email jchang@childrensdefense.org.

¹ Children's Bureau, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Maltreatment 2003* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), 5 & 21.

² *Ibid*, 70-71.

³ *Ibid*, 34-35. The percent of children neglected includes those who are neglected and medically neglected.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3)*. (Washington, DC: Author, September 1996).

⁵ David Shieler, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

⁶ US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census

⁷ *Supra* note 1, table 3-9.

⁸ Jeffrey L. Edleson, "The Overlap Between Child Maltreatment and Woman Battering," *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 2 (February 1999): 134-154.

⁹ P. Jaudes and J. Voohis, "Association of Drug Abuse and Child Abuse," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 19, no. 9 (1995): 1065-1075.

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- ¹⁰ Nancy K. Young and Sidney L. Gardner, *Responding to Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Child Welfare: Weaving Together Practice and Policy* (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press, 1998).
- ¹¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation, *National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being: One Year in Foster Care Report*. (Washington, DC: Author, November 2003).
- ¹² Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The AFCARS Report Preliminary FY03 Estimates as of April 2005* (Washington, DC: Author, 2005).
- ¹³ *Ibid.* States were unable to determine the race/ethnicity of 3 percent of children in foster care.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2003* (December 2003), Table 13, calculations by the Children's Defense Fund. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The AFCARS Report Preliminary FY03 Estimates as of April 2005* (Washington, DC: Author, 2005).
- ¹⁵ Fred Wulczyn & Kristen Hislop. (2002). Babies in foster care: The numbers call for attention. *ZERO TO THREE Journal*, (22) 4, 14-15.
- ¹⁶ *Supra* note 10
- ¹⁷ Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) P.L. 105-89.
- ¹⁸ Child Welfare League of America, *State Agency Survey* (Washington, DC: Author, 1998).
- ¹⁹ Mark E. Courtney, Sherri Terao and Noel Bost, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care* (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2004).
- ²⁰ *Supra* note 12.
- ²¹ Ronna Cook, *A National Evaluation of Title IV-E Foster Care Independent Living Programs for Youth, Phase 2, Final Report*. (Rockville, Md.: Westat, Inc., 1992).
- ²² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Children and the Households They Live In: 2000, "Characteristics of Children Under 18 Years by Relationship to Householder: 2000"* (February 2004), Table 3.
- ²³ *Supra* note 10. See also, The Urban Institute and Chapin Hall Center for Children, *Formal and Informal Kinship Care, Report for ASPE Task Order HHS-1000-95-0021 "Characteristics of Informal Kinship Care."* (Washington, DC: DHHS, June 1997).
- ²⁴ Amy Jantz and Rob Geen, *The Continuing Evolution of State Kinship Care Policies* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, December 2002).
- ²⁵ *Supra* note 12.
- ²⁶ *Supra* note 12.