



Healthy Anchorage Indicators Project

Helping Anchorage measure its health and quality of life



Municipality of Anchorage

Department of Health and Human Services

Community Health Promotion

This project is an outgrowth of the Anchorage Healthy Futures Project

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Child Abuse

Currently, the incidence of child abuse and neglect is difficult to measure. Data-tracking systems are incomplete, many cases of child abuse go unreported, and variations in the way cases are screened and investigated by State child protective services (CPS) can significantly impact estimates. It is generally believed that current data-collection methods produce conservative estimates of the problem. For example, national research studies found that 85 percent of child abuse and neglect deaths had been systematically misidentified due to poor medical diagnoses, incomplete police and child protection investigations, inaccurate or incomplete crime reports, and flaws in the way the cause of death is recorded on death certificates.¹

Because countless cases of suspected child abuse and neglect remain unreported, the actual number of abused and neglected children is unknown.

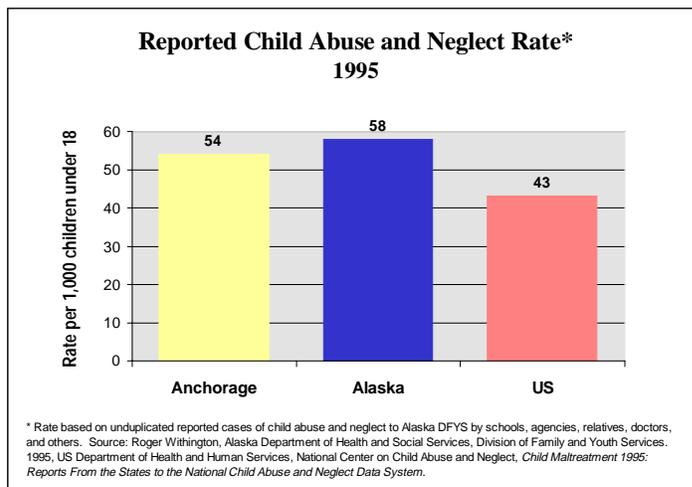
-Shay Bilchik, U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

What Is Child Abuse?

Each State provides definitions of child abuse and neglect. In general, child maltreatment is defined as any act or failure to act resulting in the imminent risk of serious harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation of a child (under the age of 18), by a person with custodial responsibilities for a child's welfare. Alaska statutes regarding child abuse may be found at the Internet website, *The Child Abuse and Neglect State Statutes Series* at <http://www.calib.com/nccanch/services/statutes.htm#Series>.

Child Abuse in Anchorage

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) measures child abuse and neglect in two principal ways: 1) the number of reported cases, and 2) the number of substantiated cases. "Substantiated" means an allegation of maltreatment was confirmed according to the level of evidence required by State law or State policy. Experts disagree over which measure is more valid.

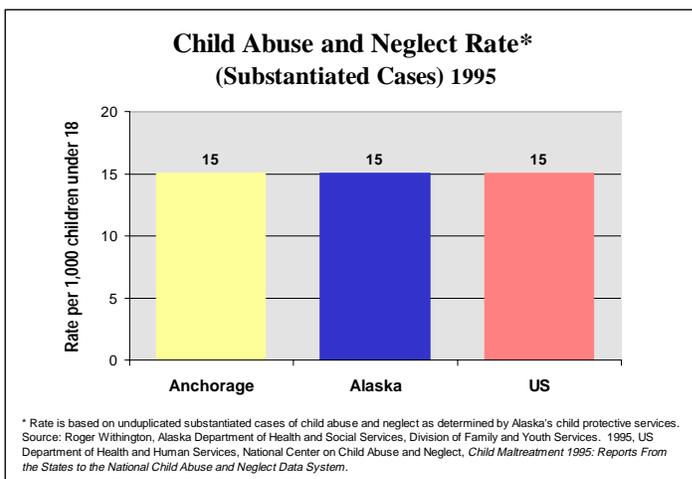


Anchorage's rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect is the same as for Alaska and the US, but Anchorage's rate of reported child abuse is higher than in the U.S. and lower than in Alaska.

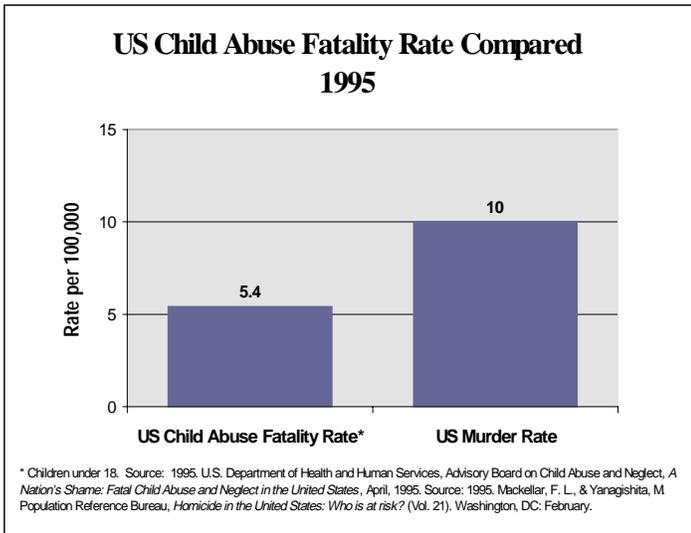
100,000 children (approximately 2,000 a year) are killed by child abuse and neglect.² In comparison, the overall U.S. murder rate is 10 per 100,000.³ See chart on next page.

Research indicates that Nationally 5.4 out of every

Studies find the majority of maltreated children are abused by birth parents (78%), by non-birth



Healthy Anchorage Indicators or HAI is a data-collection project assembling indicators that describe Anchorage's health and quality of life. Periodically, HAI looks in-depth at an indicator that tells an important story about the state of Anchorage's health. Together, we can use this information to improve our quality of life.



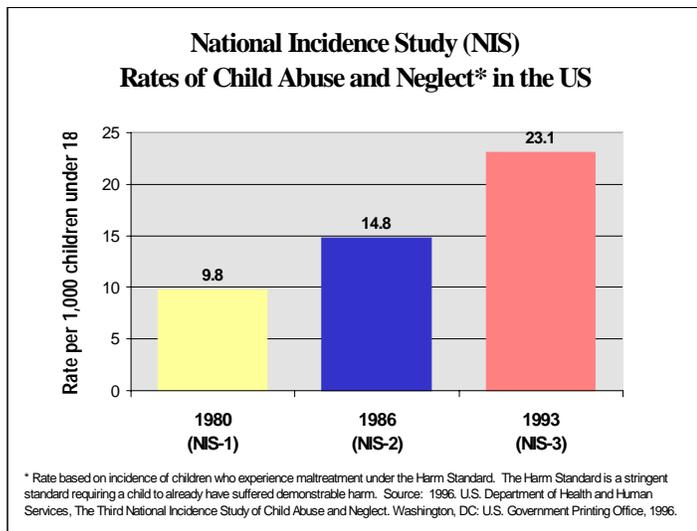
parents or parent-substitutes (step-parent, foster parent, or parent's boyfriend or girlfriend) (14%), and by others (9%).⁴

National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect

The National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect is a Congressionally-mandated, periodic effort of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) to provide estimates of the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the U.S. and to measure changes in inci-

dence from earlier studies. There have been three NIS studies to date: 1980, 1986, and 1993.

Many experts believe the NIS studies are a better measure of child abuse and neglect than the CPS data. The NIS study includes children investigated by State Child Protective Service (CPS) *plus* cases seen by community professionals which were not reported to CPS or which were screened out by CPS without investigation. In addition, there is some evidence the CPS system has reached its capacity to respond to reports of



maltreated children. Only 28% of the children identified by the NIS study as harmed by abuse and neglect in 1993 were investigated by CPS.⁵ This represents a drop from 44% having been investigated in 1986, although the number of children investigated by CPS has remained constant.⁶ The accuracy of CPS measures of child abuse depend on how well CPS does its job, which in turn depends on many factors, such as funding, community norms, state law, etc.

The latest NIS study (1993) estimated that 23.1 out of every 1,000 children in the U.S. are abused or neglected.⁷ This represents a 67% increase in the incidence of child maltreatment since 1986 and a 147% increase since 1980.⁸

Analysts believe that while the increases are partially due to greater public willingness to report suspected incidents, the magnitude of the increase denotes real increases in the scope of the problem as well.⁹ They believe the greater public willingness to report child abuse is due to greater public awareness both of child maltreatment as a social problem and the resources available to respond to it.¹⁰

The Social Costs: The Cycle of Violence

The effects and long-term ramifications of child abuse affect everyone in the community. Research shows that children who were victims of maltreatment were significantly more likely to display problem behaviors during adolescence, including serious and violent delinquency, teen pregnancy, drug use, low academic achievement, and mental health problems.¹¹

Childhood maltreatment increases the risk by at least 25% for each of the above outcomes and doubles the risk that they will experience more than one of these problems during adolescence.¹²

- ◆ Maltreatment in childhood increases likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 53%, as an adult by 38%, and for a violent crime by 38%.¹³ See chart on following page.
- ◆ Being a victim of childhood maltreatment increases the odds of future delinquency and adult criminality by 40%.¹⁴
- ◆ One-third of child abuse victims will become abuse parents themselves.¹⁵

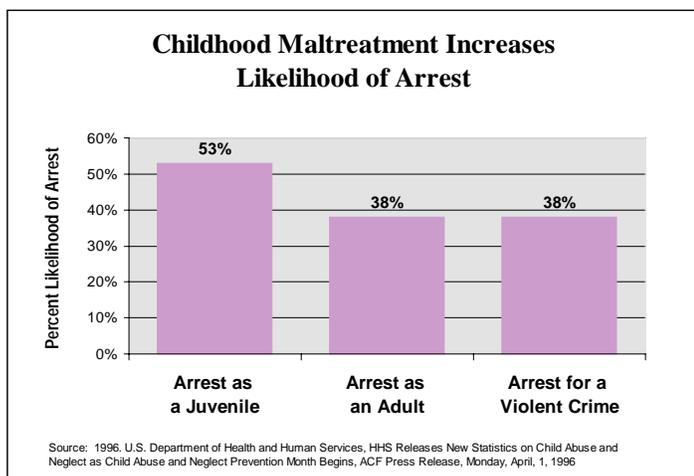
The evidence grows stronger every day - if you don't get childhood right, you're not going to get adulthood right.
- Governor Tony Knowles

Causes of Child Abuse

The causes of child maltreatment are complex and not fully understood. Some important contributing factors, however, have been identified. They include: alcohol and substance abuse, family structure and size, poverty, domestic violence, and community violence.

Alcohol, Substance Abuse and Child Abuse

Children in alcohol-abusing families were nearly 4 times more likely to be maltreated overall. They were almost 5 times more likely to be physically neglected and 10 times more likely to be emotionally neglected than children in non-alcohol abusing families.¹⁶



◆ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that 50 to 80 percent of all child abuse cases substantiated by Child Protective Services (CPS) involve some degree of substance abuse by the child's parents.¹⁷

◆ In Alaska, a 1997 special audit of DFYS child abuse cases found 83% of child abuse cases with at least 6 reports within 2 years were alcohol-related.¹⁸

Note: The following are not included in child abuse statistics.

◆ The National rate for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is 1.9 per 1,000 live births.¹⁹

◆ 1 in 10 babies are born exposed to illegal drugs taken by their mother during pregnancy.²⁰

Family Structure and Size

Children in the largest families were physically neglected at nearly three times the rate of children from one-child families.²¹ Children of single parents were at higher risk of physical abuse and all types of neglect and children living with only their fathers were approximately one and two-thirds more likely to be physically abused than children living with

only their mothers.²² Research suggests that the stress and responsibilities associated with single-parenting and with numerous children may partially explain the relationship between the incidence of maltreatment and family structure and size.

Poverty

The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect found that family income was significantly related to incidence rates in nearly every category of maltreatment.²³ Children whose families had annual incomes below \$15,000 were more than 22 times more likely to experience maltreatment, more than 44 times more likely to be neglected, and more than 22 times more likely to be seriously injured by maltreatment than families with incomes of \$30,000 or more.²⁴ A number of problems associated with poverty may contribute to higher child maltreatment, including: transiency in residence; poorer education; higher rates of substance abuse and emotional disorders; and less adequate support systems.²⁵ The study added the decreased economic resources among poor families and the increase in the number of children

living in poverty may at least partially explain the increase in the child maltreatment incidence rate since 1986.²⁶

Domestic Violence

In their 1995 report, *A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the U.S.*, the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect concluded that a clear link existed between assaults on women and child abuse.²⁷

Nineteen percent of State liaisons in a National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (NCPCA) survey reported that a significant percentage of their adult clients experienced domestic violence and had their own history of battering.²⁸

Child protection workers in the Massachusetts Department of Social Services reported that an average of 32.5 percent of their cases statewide involved domestic violence.²⁹

Child Abuse: Some National Facts

◆ Between 1985 and 1994 child abuse reporting levels increased by 63%.³⁰

◆ Between 1990 and 1994, substantiated child abuse rates increased by 27%.³¹

◆ Between 1986 and 1993 the number of children seriously injured by abuse rose 400% from 141,700 to 565,000.³²

◆ Since 1985, the rate of child abuse fatalities has increased by 48%.

◆ 18,000 children a year are permanently disabled due to child abuse.³³

◆ More than three children die each day as a result of maltreatment.³⁴

◆ Children in alcohol-abusing families were nearly 4 times more likely to be maltreated. They were almost 5 times more likely to be physically neglected and 10 times more likely to be emotionally neglected than children in non-alcohol abusing families.³⁵

◆ 50 to 80 percent of all child abuse cases substantiated by Child Protective Services (CPS) involve some degree of substance abuse by the child's parents.³⁶

◆ Using an alternate standard of harm, the NIS study estimated as many as 41.9 of every 1,000 children are maltreated in the US in 1993.³⁷

◆ A 1995 telephone survey of parents conducted by the Gallup Poll estimated 49 out of every 1,000 children in the US suffered physical abuse and 19 per 1,000 suffered sexual abuse.³⁸

- ◆ A 1990 survey found that 50 percent of men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently physically abused their children. This study also found that mothers who were beaten were at least twice as likely to physically abuse their own children as mothers who were not abused.³⁹

Community Violence

Increasingly, studies are showing that violence in all its forms adversely affects the young people who experience, witness, or feel threatened by it. Exposure to violence can adversely affect mental health and development and increases the likelihood that they themselves will commit acts of violence.⁴⁰ Currently, youths (ages 12 to 17) are more likely than adults to be victims of violent crime.

Although young children usually are not participants in criminal activity, their presence in a violent environment increases their risk of being physically and psychologically harmed. Homicide accounts for 10 percent of all deaths of children ages 1 to 4.⁴¹ According to the American Humane Association (1996), 13 children are killed and 30 children are wounded by guns every day in the United States. Since 1988, American teenage boys have been more likely to die from gunshot wounds than from all other causes combined. According to the Children's Defense Fund (1996), firearm violence—whether homicide, suicide, or accidental shooting—killed 5,367 children (ages 1 to 19) in 1992.⁴²

Contacts/Resources

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Current Initiatives

What Kids Need to Succeed: A how-to book about building assets in children is available for \$4.95 from the Alaska Council on the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Call 258-6021.

SAFE City Program: A Department of Health and Human Services program that coordinates with agencies in the community to build and maintain a collaborative system of prevention and intervention services in areas of interpersonal violence, e.g., sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse/neglect, emergency alcohol services, and homelessness. For information contact Mark Lessard at 343-6589.

House Bill No. 375/Senate Bill No. 272: Governor's Child Protection Initiative: Legislation introduced by Governor Tony Knowles to strengthen penalties for crimes against kids, better protect them against sexual predators, provide for quicker and more effective intervention when children are in peril and better facilitate adoption of hard-to-place children.

National Youth in Action Campaign: A newly launched national campaign to involve youth in solving problems in their communities. The campaign is offering \$1,000 grants to middle and high school students. For more information contact the National Youth in Action Campaign, 3020 Children's Way, MC #5093, San Diego, CA 92123 or visit their Internet website at <http://www.youthlink.org>.

Alaska Child Abuse Response & Evaluation Services (Alaska CARES): Alaska CARES is a "child friendly" center where social workers and detectives team with staff nurse practitioners to conduct child sexual abuse evaluations. CARES makes a special effort to get children and their families connected to therapy. For more information contact Diana Weber, Center Manager, 561-8301.

The Office of Public Advocacy CASA Program: CASA or Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained volunteers who speak up in court for children in the state's custody due to child abuse or neglect. For information contact the Office of Public Advocacy at 269-3500.

Eklutna Child Advocacy Center (ECAC): The Center was established by the Native Village of Eklutna (NVE) to deliver: 1) advocacy and social services to tribal children and their families involved in ICWA cases, 2) recruit and train Native volunteers to be CASAs for native children, and 3) provide technical assistance to the NVE Tribal Court Committee. For more information call ECAC at 278-KIDS.

Anchorage Sexual Assault, Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Caucus: The mission of the Caucus is to unite the community effort to end sexual assault, family violence, and child abuse and neglect. For more information contact Jan MacClarence, Director of AWAIC, at 279-9581.

Web Site Links

- ✓ Healthy Anchorage Indicators Project web site, MOA, Department of Health and Human Services:
<http://www.ak.org/hai/hai.htm>
Includes information on health and social indicators for Anchorage.
- ✓ National Clearinghouse of Child Abuse and Neglect, US Department of Health and Human Service
<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/index.htm>, includes:
Special section on National Child Abuse Prevention Month
<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/prevmnth/index>
Child Abuse and Neglect Clearinghouse: Publications and Fact Sheets
<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs/index.htm>
- ✓ Justice Information Center, National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)
<http://www.ncjrs.org/>
- ✓ Department of Health and Human Services
<http://www.os.dhhs.gov/>, includes:
Administration on Children and Families
<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/>
- ✓ Kids Count Alaska
<http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/kids.htm>

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