

A REPORT ON CHILDREN IN NEGLECTING FAMILIES

The State of Minnesota
1982/1992

By Esther Wattenberg
with the assistance of William J. Craig

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*Unless otherwise stated, all information is derived from the *Child Maltreatment Report, 1982-1991*, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Family and Children's Services Division, September 1993. Selected data were made available by the Quality Services Division, Minnesota Department of Human Services. 1993 data will not be available until late summer, 1994.



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The interpretation of the data is solely the responsibility of the author and does not reflect official positions.

Introduction

This report was prepared to delineate that portion of child maltreatment in Minnesota that is identified as "neglect."

The figures presented in this report are based on statistical data as reported by county social service agencies to the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

The commentaries are entirely those of the author.

Throughout this document we use the word "substantiated" for those cases where alleged maltreatment has been upheld. The current Minnesota Department of Human Services terminology used for such cases is "determined." Where their terminology may be technically correct, we used "substantiated" because it more clearly states the intent.

*"Being resilient or adaptive does not imply immunity to negative life events. If relentless cumulative stress affects most adults, then it logically follows that children are also affected by cumulative stress."**

Norman Garmezy
Professor Emeritus
University of Minnesota

*Garmezy, Norman (1991). "Resilience in Children's Adaption to Negative Life Events and Stressed Environments," *Pediatric Annals* 20:9.

Legislative Highlights

The following excerpts from the Reporting of Maltreatment to Minors Act (Minnesota Statutes, section 626.556) clearly state its purposes:

- to protect children whose health or welfare may be jeopardized through physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse;
- to strengthen the family and make the home, school, and community safe for children by promoting responsible child care in all settings;
- to provide, when necessary, a safe temporary or permanent home environment for physically or sexually abused or neglected children;
- to require the reporting of neglect, physical or sexual abuse of children in the home, school, and community settings;
- to provide for the voluntary reporting of abuse or neglect of children;
- to require the assessment and investigation of the reports; and
- to provide protective and counseling services in appropriate cases.

Changes in the Mandatory Reporting Law*

Federal involvement in child maltreatment began in 1935 through the Social Security Act. This Act provided funding to public welfare agencies "for the protection and care of homeless, dependent and neglected children and children in danger of becoming delinquents."

Minnesota's reporting law requiring physicians to report suspected cases of child physical and sexual abuse was passed in 1963.

Twelve years later, in 1975, the mandatory reporting law required reporting by other professionals, including social services, hospital administration, mental health, child care, education and law enforcement. It also added requirements for record retention and destruction.

It was not until 1978 that neglect in the areas of food, clothing, shelter and medical care were added. Prior to 1978, the law required reporting only for cases in which the abuse or neglect resulted in physical injury.

Other changes in the law have been made throughout the years. Statutes are open to changes and additions during each legislative session. Two major recent amendments to the reporting act include adding clergy as mandated reporters in 1989 and adding mental injury and threatened injury to the definition of maltreatment.

The law also encourages anyone who suspects child maltreatment to voluntarily report their concerns to the local social service agency. Both mandated and voluntary reporters reporting in good faith are immune for any civil or criminal liability.

*Excerpts from Chapter 1, *Child Maltreatment Report, 1982-1991*, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Family and Children's Services Division, September 1993.

Mandated Reporters

A professional (or delegate) who practices:

- healing arts
- social services
- hospital administration
- psychological treatment
- child care
- education
- law enforcement
- clergy

Definitions of Neglect

The Minnesota Reporting of Maltreatment to Minors Act (Minnesota Statutes, section 626.556, as found in subdivision 2) contains the following definition of child neglect:

Neglect means failure by a person responsible for the child's care to supply a child with necessary food, clothing, shelter or medical care when reasonably able to do so or failure to protect a child from conditions or actions which imminently and seriously endanger the child's physical or mental health when reasonably able to do so. Nothing in this section shall be construed to mean a child is neglected solely because the child's parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's care in good faith selects and depends on spiritual means or prayer for treatment or care of disease or remedial care of the child in lieu of medical care; except that there is a duty to report if a lack of medical care may cause imminent and serious danger to the child's health. This section does not impose upon persons, not otherwise legally responsible for providing a child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, a duty to provide that care. "Neglect" includes prenatal exposure to a controlled substance, as defined in section 253B.02, subdivision 2⁶, used by a mother for a non-medical purpose, as evidenced by a toxicology test performed on the mother at delivery or the child at birth, or medical effects or developmental delays during the child's first year of life that medically indicate prenatal exposure to a controlled substance. Neglect also means "medical neglect" as defined in section 260.015, subdivision 2a, clause (5).

The definition of child neglect was expanded in the 1993 legislative session in an effort to tighten the state's truancy law. Under law, parents and guardians are already legally responsible for providing a child with food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and protection from harm. The truancy statute adds "educational neglect" to the list. Under the age of 12, families are legally responsible for educational neglect. Over the age of 12, it is the child who may be declared a truant.

A further change enacted in the 1993 Legislative session dealt with the issue of "abandonment" (Section 1 [609.3791]. As used in this section:

(1) *abandon* means to leave a child without the supervision of an adult or other person who is of suitable age to assume responsibility for the care of the child; and a parent, legal guardian, or caretaker who abandons a child under ten years of age for 24 hours or more is guilty of a felony and may be sentenced to imprisonment for not more than five years or to payment of a fine of not more than \$10,000, or both.

The court may stay imposition or execution of the sentence if it finds that a stay is in the best interest of the complainant or the family unit and that the defendant is willing to participate in any necessary or appropriate treatment. In determining an appropriate sentence when there is a family relationship between the complainant and the defendant, the court shall be guided by the policy of preserving and strengthening the family unit whenever possible.

Risk Assessment

Upon receiving a report of maltreatment, child protection workers are required to respond by making an assessment as to whether maltreatment has occurred. This assessment of risk requires information to be gathered that may either document conditions that place the child at risk of harm or comes to a conclusion that there is no risk or that the risk is insufficient to warrant a child protection intervention.

Risk Assessment Factors

1. vulnerability of the child
2. location, severity, frequency and recentness of abuse
3. severity, frequency and recency of neglect
4. physical, intellectual or emotional capacities and control of the person or persons responsible for the child's care
5. degree of cooperation of the person or persons responsible for the child's care
6. parenting skills and knowledge of the persons or persons responsible for the child's care
7. alleged offender's access to the child
8. presence of a parent substitute or other adult in the home
9. previous history of child maltreatment
10. strength of family support systems
11. stressors of the family

Level of Risk

Also, according to the Minnesota Reporting of Maltreatment to Minors Act:

A level of risk of maltreatment must be assigned at the conclusion of each assessment. A child protection worker must assign a risk level of no risk, low risk, medium risk and high risk to each of eleven factors as well as an overall risk level.

The first factor that must be assessed for each child in the home relates to the vulnerability of each child. The vulnerability depends on the child's age as well as physical, mental and/or emotional abilities. For example, the younger the child, the more vulnerable he or she is for risk of maltreat-

ment. Factors two and three assign a risk level depending on the severity, recency and/or frequency of the abuse or neglect and are to be assigned to each child in the family. Assessment of the fourth, fifth and sixth factors determine a level of risk based on the caretaker's age, physical, intellectual or emotional abilities and self-control, level of cooperation, and parenting skills and/or knowledge.

Factor seven is the alleged perpetrator's access to the child. For example, the greater the access the alleged perpetrator has to the child, the higher the risk level for that factor. The eighth factor assesses the presence of a parent substitute or other person in the home who may be able to protect the child. Previous history of child abuse or neglect is the ninth factor that needs to be assessed. The tenth factor, strengths of the family support system, is assigned a risk dependent on the existence of individuals or agencies available to the parent to help protect the child and support the parent in times of crisis. The eleventh and last factor is stresses. The more stresses a family has, the higher the level of risk. An overall risk is then assigned to the family based on the worker's judgment taking in consideration all the factors together.

Physical and Behavioral Indicators of a Child's Potential Need for Protection from Neglect

Physical Indicators	Behavioral Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• abandonment• unattended medical needs• consistent lack of supervision• consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene• lice, distended stomach, emaciated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• regularly displays fatigue or listlessness, falls asleep in class• steals food, begs from classmates• reports that no caretaker is at home• frequently absent or tardy• self destructive• school dropout (adolescents)

Figure 1. TYPES OF MALTREATMENT ALLEGED, 1992

(Based on Number of Children in Reports of Maltreatment)

- In 1992 there were 27,462 reports of alleged maltreatment of children. (However, because of overlap, i.e., some children being involved in more than one type of maltreatment, the sum of allegations reached 30,536.
- Of all cases of alleged maltreatment, 55.6 percent involve neglect.
- Of all cases of maltreatment, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect showed the greatest increase (118 percent) over the decade from 1982-92, even more than physical abuse—which also more than doubled over the period. (See Figure 2.)
- Inadequate supervision and disregard for safety describe the majority of the children in neglecting families. (See Figure 4.)
- Children in neglecting families have a high rate of recycling: entering and reentering out-of-home placement.
- Protection from neglect was the single largest reason for placing children in out-of-home care.*

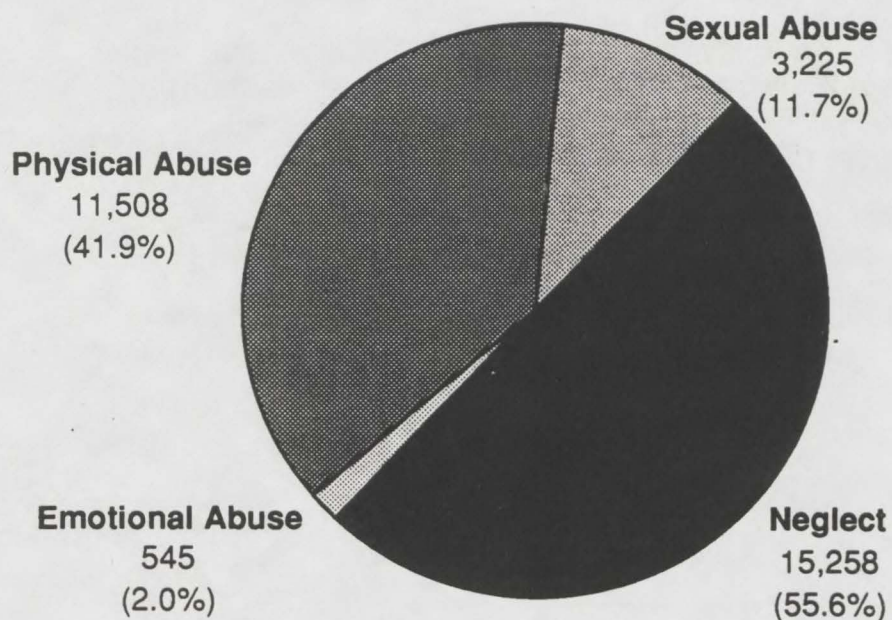
*Unpublished statistical detailed report prepared from 1992 data; Out of Home Care Data Section, Quality Services Division, Minnesota Department of Human Services.

For additional reference, see *Children of the State: Children in the Child Welfare System*, by Esther Wattenberg and Donald W. Cassidy, School of Social Work and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, and All University Consortium on Children, Youth, and Families, University of Minnesota, April 1992. And "Childhood Poverty and Child Maltreatment," by Joan I. Vondra, in *Child Poverty and Public Policy*, Chapter Five, edited by Judith A. Chafel, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C., 1993.

Figure 1

Types of Maltreatment Alleged, 1992*

Based on Number of Children in Reports of Maltreatment



Source: Quality Services Division
Mn Department of Human Services

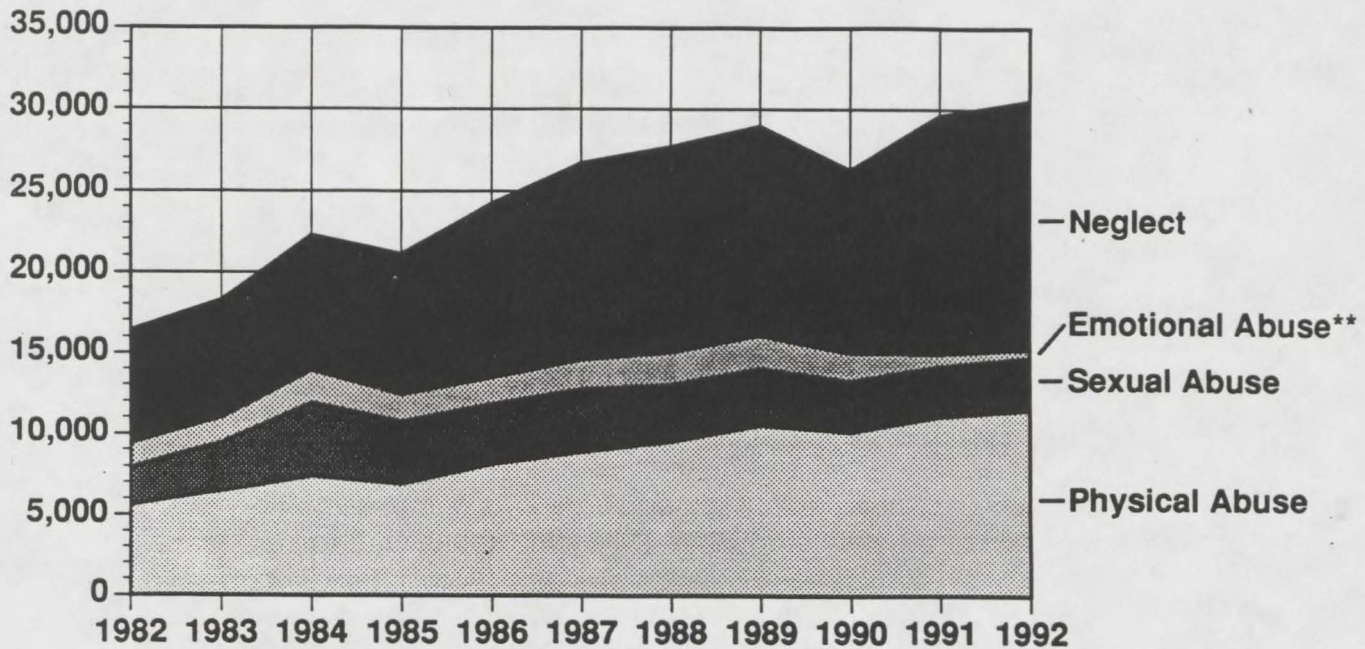
*Note: Chart is based on alleged maltreatments. Percentages add to more than 100 percent because of multiple allegations. Specifically, the number of alleged victims was 27,462; the sum of allegations across the four types of maltreatment is 30,536.

Figure 2. NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN ALLEGED MALTREATMENT

- In 1992, of the more than 27,462 children affected by cases of maltreatment, 55.6 percent involved neglect.
- *Neglect is the fastest growing component of maltreatment reports. Neglect grew by 118 percent.* Physical abuse grew by 107 percent, sexual abuse 37 percent, and emotional abuse dropped by 63 percent (largely due to a change in definition in 1991).
- Overall, maltreatment grew by 91 percent throughout the decade—representing a steady rise (with one exception being 1990).
- Whether or not there is under-reporting, or whether the continuing rise in maltreatment reports is due to an expansion of mandatory reporters, remains an open question.

Figure 2

Number of Children in Alleged Maltreatment*



Sources: *Child Maltreatment Report*, Table 3; Quality Services Division, Mn Department of Human Services.

*Note: Numbers add to more than the total number of alleged victims (27,462 in 1992) because some reports allege more than one kind of maltreatment.

**A definitional change was made in 1991.

	Neglect	Emotional Abuse**	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Total
1982	6,994	1,465	2,348	5,571	14,388
1983	7,260	1,547	3,002	6,442	16,162
1984	8,356	2,015	4,524	7,374	19,575
1985	8,668	1,681	3,817	6,903	18,947
1986	10,745	1,677	3,670	8,139	21,548
1987	12,159	1,830	3,864	8,877	23,931
1988	12,671	2,025	3,496	9,519	24,513
1989	12,859	2,069	3,501	10,513	25,693
1990	11,299	1,748	3,151	10,101	23,626
1991	14,690	783	3,074	11,096	26,663
1992	15,258	545	3,225	11,508	27,462

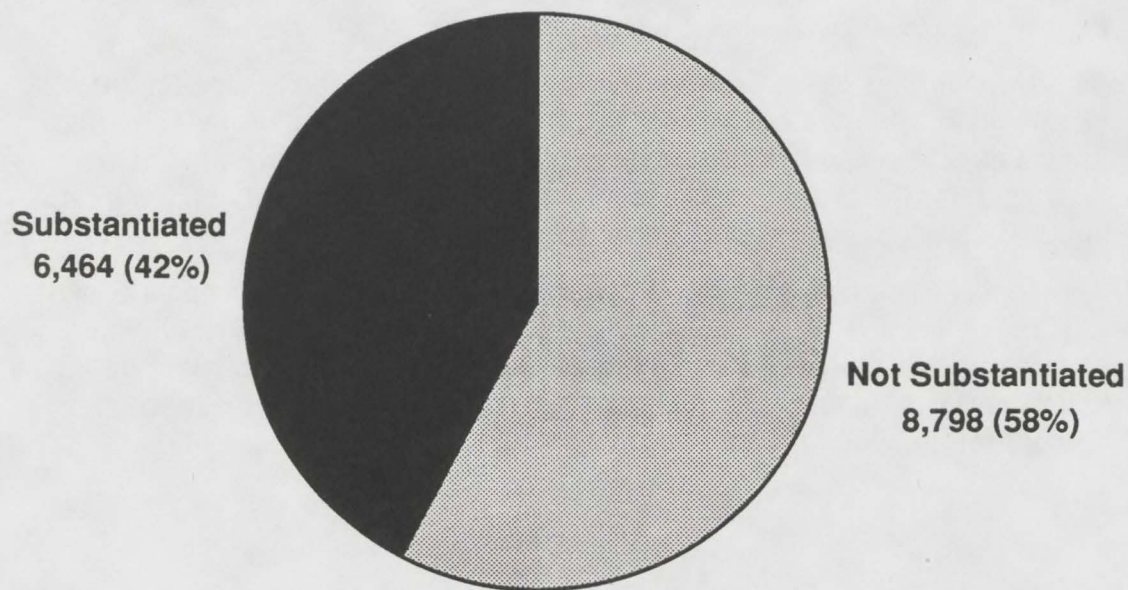
Figure 3. PERCENT OF NEGLECT ALLEGATIONS SUBSTANTIATED, 1992

(Based on Number of Children in Reports of Neglect)

- In 1992, of all neglect allegations, 42 percent (6,464) were substantiated.
- Neglect constitutes the highest number of substantiated reports of maltreatment, followed, in order, by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.
- "Substantiated reports" means that information gathered during the assessments indicates that conditions have been documented that place the child at risk of harm if services are not provided.
- Of the mandated reporters, education personnel accounted for the highest number of reports accepted for assessment.
- The highest number of reports of unsubstantiated allegations came from relatives (national data).
- A detailed study of the 58 percent of neglect reports in the last three years that have not been substantiated is not available. However, there is a general understanding that "standards" of assessing neglect are in flux. Acceptable conditions of home environments for children have been tempered by a rising community tolerance for poor housing, inadequate family income, and unavailable health and mental health care.
- With mandatory reporting there is a wide assortment of reporting sources, and the significant rates of "unsubstantiation" may reflect a "screening out" by intake workers on an ever-increasing pool of reports. The numbers of undetermined reports of maltreatment may also reflect a rising number of borderline cases.
- Child protection workers struggle to determine whether the level of neglect measured by severity, pattern, and likelihood of "imminent harm" is sufficient to open a case for investigation.

Figure 3

**Percent of Neglect Allegations
Substantiated, 1992**
Based on Number of Children in Reports of Neglect



Source: Quality Services Division, Mn Department of Human Services

Figure 4. DETAILED NATURE OF NEGLECT

(Substantiated Cases of Neglect, 1991)

- Inadequate supervision and disregard for safety are the chief conditions reported for neglect.
- Beginning in 1989, neglect was the major problem of new cases, and 40 percent of these were associated with chemical dependency.*
- 45 percent of the cases represented in substantiated neglect reflect the incapacity of reported families to provide a suitable home for their children. This is almost always associated with the problems of poverty: the incapacity to provide for the basic needs of children. Of these, safe and habitable housing is the most pressing problem (national data).**
- Substantiated cases of "neglect," typically, have combined elements of poverty, family turmoil, chemical dependency, and mental illness, resulting in severe deprivation for a child. In those cases where an assessment of "failure to thrive" is made, this indicates that minimal standards of growth and development for a child have not been secured.

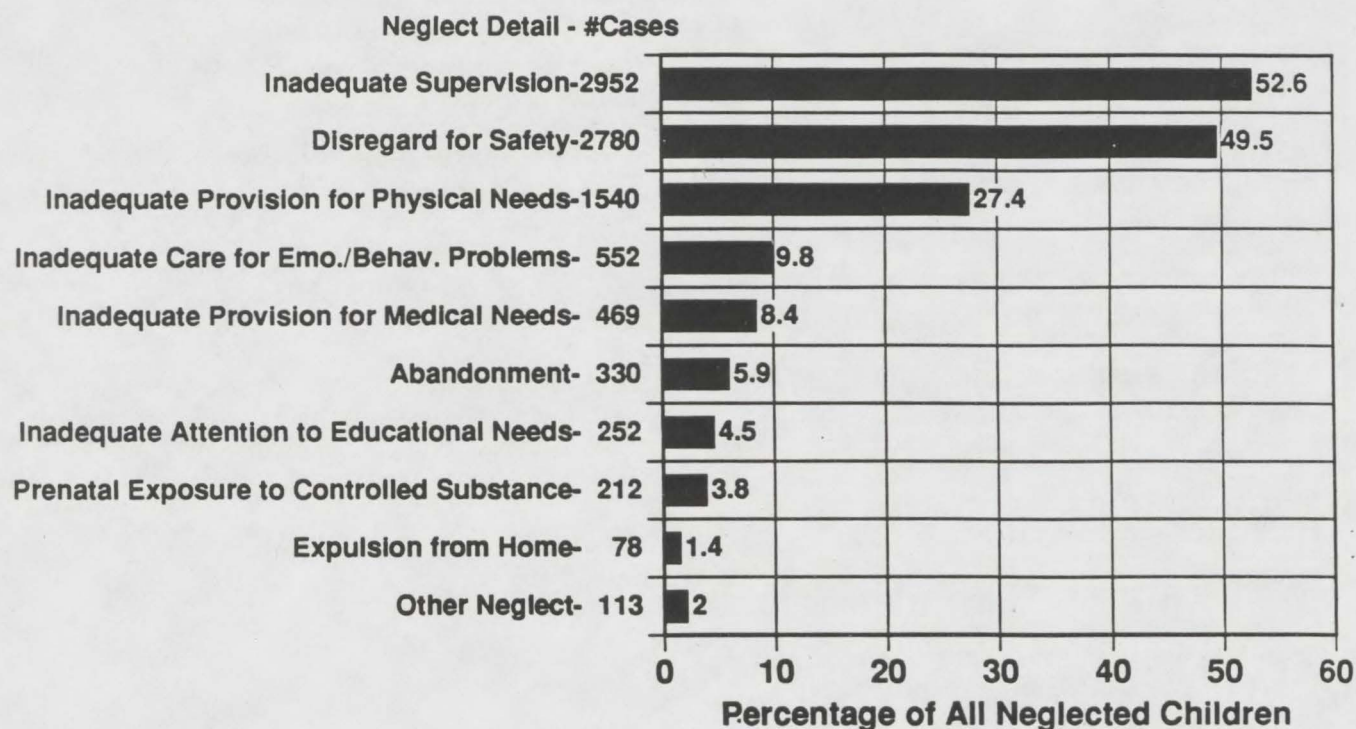
**Children of the State: Children in the Child Welfare System*, by Esther Wattenberg and Donald W. Cassidy, School of Social Work and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, and All University Consortium on Children, Youth, and Families, University of Minnesota, April 1992, p. 8.

***"Childhood Poverty and Child Maltreatment," by Joan I. Vondra, in *Child Poverty and Public Policy*, Chapter Five, edited by Judith A. Chafel, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C., 1993.

Figure 4

Detailed Nature of Neglect*

Substantiated Cases of Neglect, 1991



Source: *Child Maltreatment Report*, Figure 11.

*Any one victim may be neglected in more than one way, so the sum exceeds 100 percent. Overall, there were 5,612 substantiated victims of neglect.

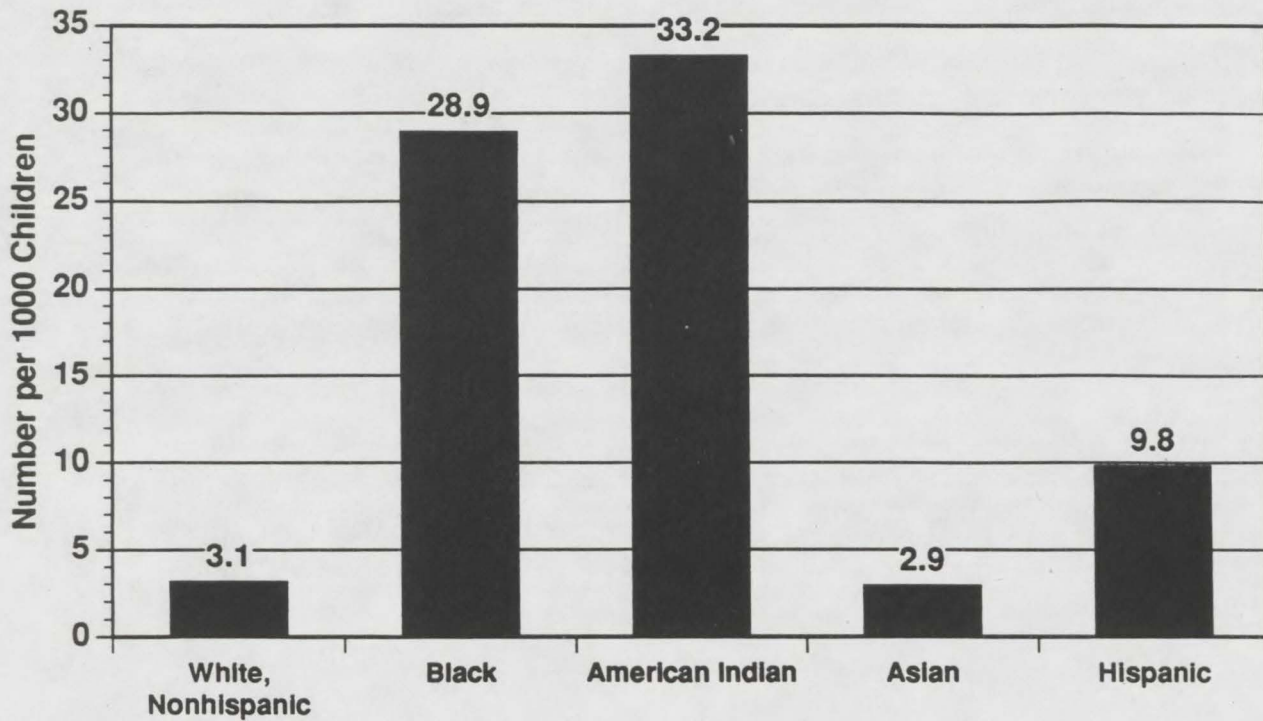
**Figure 5. RATE OF NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN
SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS BY RACE AND
HISPANIC HERITAGE, 1991***

- There are some remarkable disparities by race and Hispanic heritage in maltreatment reports. African American and American Indian rates are up to ten times the rates for white non-Hispanics and Asians.
- While African American and American Indian children are represented disproportionately in physical abuse reports, these two groups have an even more *strikingly* disproportionate share in the neglect reports.
- American Indian children are represented in the neglect component three times more often than in physical abuse.
- African American children are represented in the neglect component at twice the rate as physical abuse.

*Rate based on per 1,000 children of that race/ethnicity in the population.

Figure 5

Rate of Neglected Children in Substantiated Reports by Race and Hispanic Heritage, 1991*



Source: *Child Maltreatment Report*, Figure 20.

*Rate based number of children of that race/ethnicity in the population.

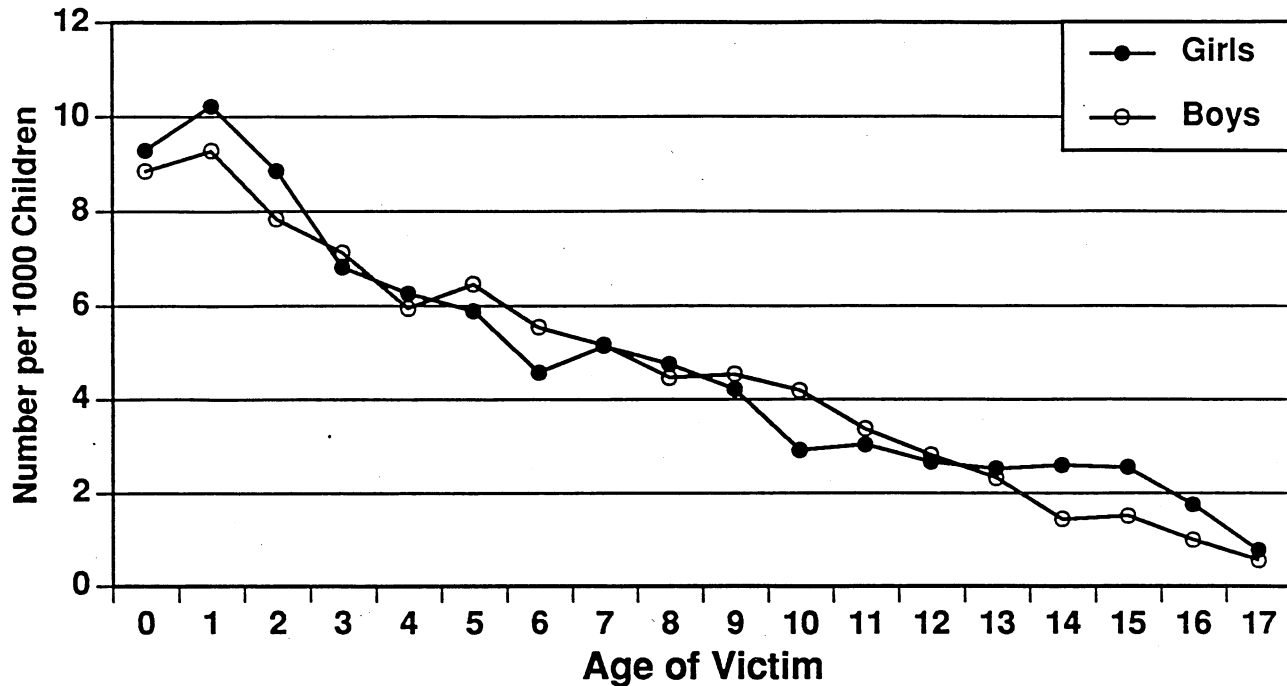
**Figure 6. RATE OF NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN
SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS BY
GENDER AND AGE, 1991**

- The highest rates of substantiated neglect involves children two years old and under, with one year of age as a peak of substantiated reports.
- The highest number of children exposed to threatening and dangerous conditions were primarily victims of neglect.
- The vulnerability of very young children, infants and toddlers is reflected in the surge of reporting by non-mandated reporters. (In national data, the source is primarily relatives.)
- Reports of neglect decline after two years of age. Comparatively, physical and sexual abuse of girls increases slightly with age and peaks at ages 14-15.
- There is no substantial gender difference in neglect.
- According to California data*, almost one-third of infants placed in foster home care were still in care four years later. In a study of neglected infants, African American infants were more likely to remain in foster care than white infants.

*Richard P. Barth, et al, *Performance Indicators for Child Welfare Services in California*, Family Welfare Research Group, School of Social Welfare, Berkeley, California, January, 1994.

Figure 6

Rate of Neglected Children in Substantiated Reports by Gender and Age, 1991*



Source: Child Maltreatment Report, Figure 16.

*Rate based number of children of that gender/age in the population.

Rate per 1000 Children

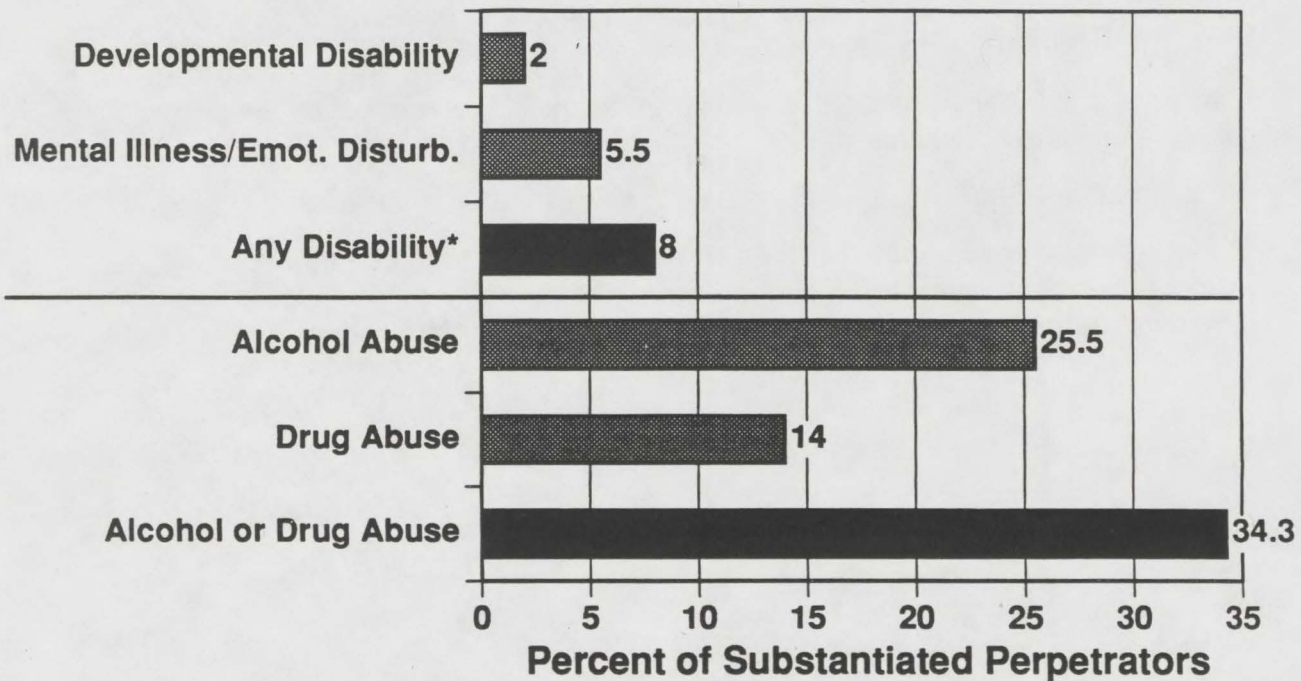
Age	Boys	Girls	Age	Boys	Girls
0	8.850	9.289	9	4.533	4.216
1	9.287	10.214	10	4.183	2.912
2	7.827	8.862	11	3.365	3.029
3	7.127	6.819	12	2.809	2.658
4	5.940	6.261	13	2.324	2.519
5	6.455	5.890	14	1.428	2.590
6	5.544	4.574	15	1.509	2.547
7	5.162	5.135	16	0.987	1.755
8	4.458	4.751	17	0.552	0.765

**Figure 7. DISABILITIES AND CHEMICAL ABUSE OF
SUBSTANTIATED PERPETRATORS
OF NEGLECT, 1991**

- 8 percent of the perpetrators of neglect have a disability related to an impairment which includes developmental disability; mental illness; emotional disturbance; visual, hearing, or speech impairment; and other physical disabilities. This rate is typical across most kinds of maltreatment, although it is higher for emotional abuse (13.4 percent).
- More than one-third of perpetrators of neglect have a chemical abuse related condition.
- Chemical abuse plays a much larger role in neglect than in other types of maltreatment.
- While alcohol abuse is the largest single component of chemical abuse, drug abuse is 2 to 3 times higher in neglect than other forms of maltreatment.
- Women (71 percent) are chiefly associated with neglecting children. Of these, one-third were assessed with an alcohol or drug abuse condition.

Figure 7

Disabilities and Chemical Abuse of Substantiated Perpetrators of Neglect 1991



Source: *Child Maltreatment Report*, Figure 23.

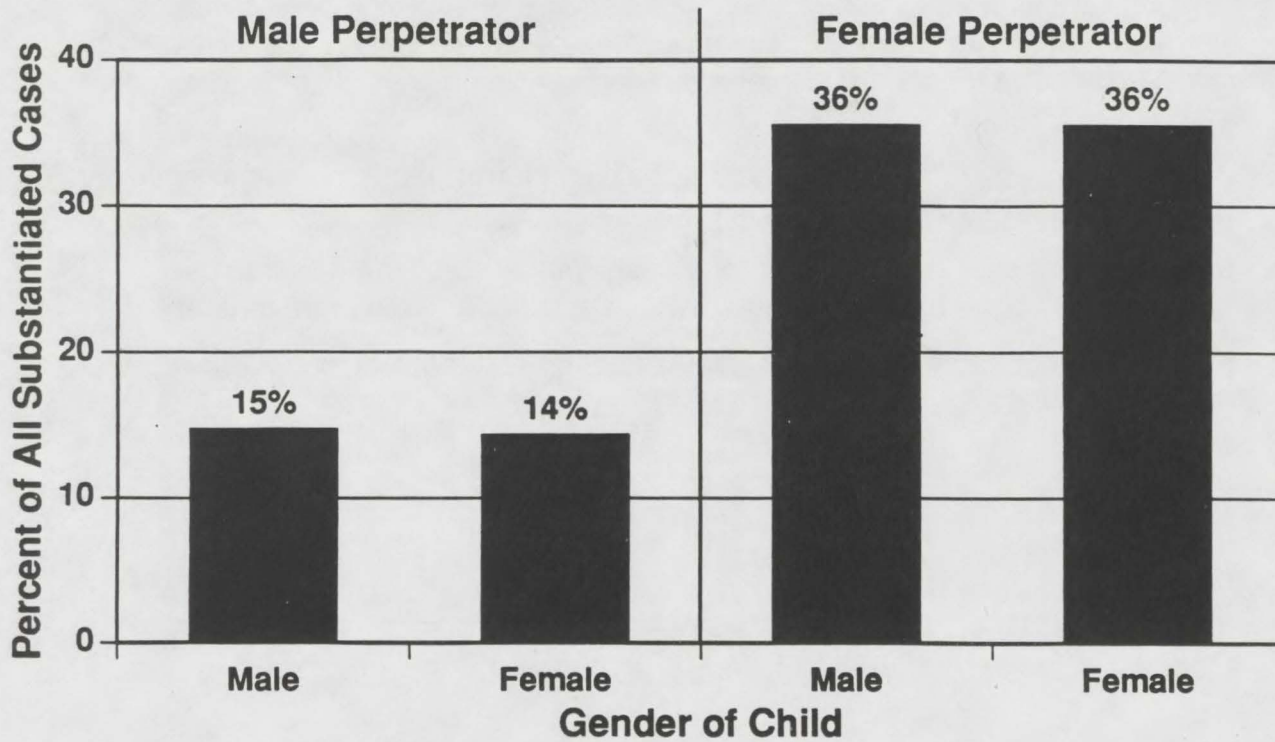
* Includes developmental disability; mental illness or emotional disturbance; visual, hearing or speech impairment; and other physical disability.

**Figure 8. GENDER OF PERPETRATORS OF NEGLECT
AND GENDER OF NEGLECTED CHILDREN
IN SUBSTANTIATED CASES, 1991**

- Female caretakers are 2 1/2 times as likely as males to be the perpetrators of neglect. However, in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, male perpetrators predominate.
- No gender difference emerges for children as victims of neglect by either female or male perpetrators.
- The dominant relationship is birth parent, whether male or female.
- Of males who are not birth parents, the step-parent and the companion are most often the perpetrators. In other forms of maltreatment, these step-parents and male companions, proportionately, have a larger role.

Figure 8

Gender of Perpetrators of Neglect and Gender of Neglected Children in Substantiated Cases, 1991



Source: *Child Maltreatment Report*, Figure 21.

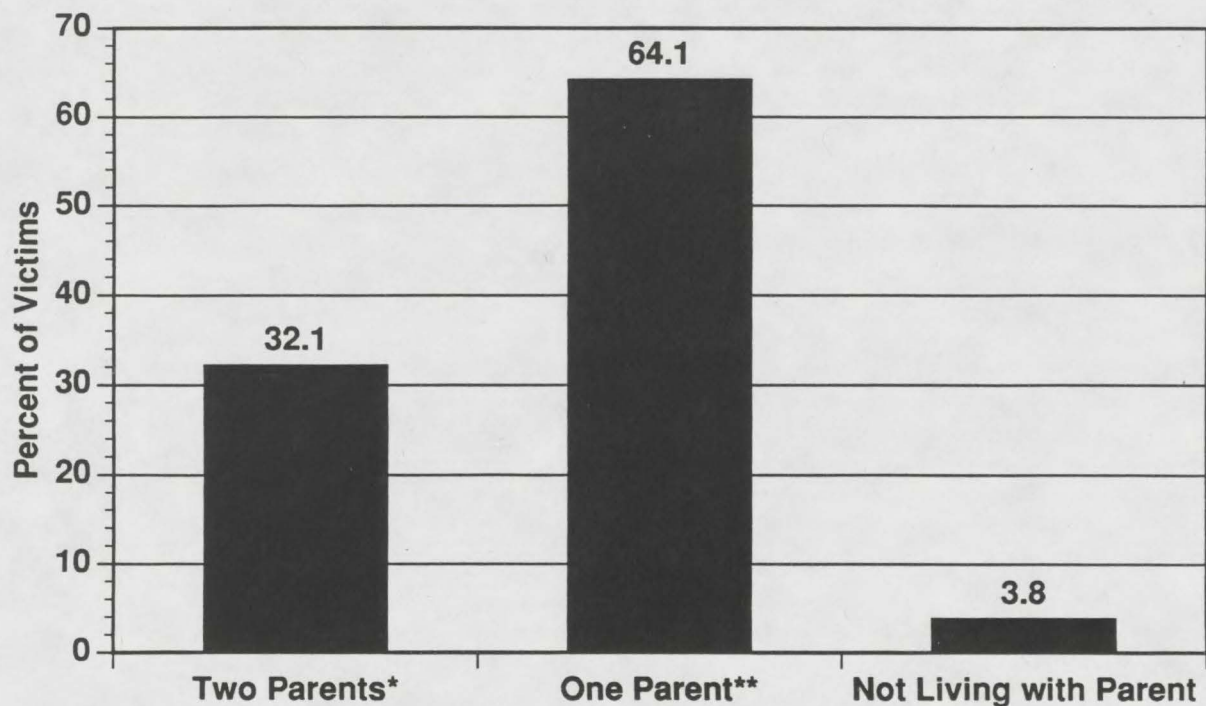
Figure 9. LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS, 1991

- Single-parent families predominate in neglect reports.
- The household composition of children in neglecting families revealed that more than half (52 percent) are living with one parent and no parent companion. Another 12 percent are single-parent families with a parent/companion.
- Neglected children in two-parent households are least likely to live with a step-parent (4 percent). They are more likely to live in a two-parent household with natural or adoptive parents (28 percent).
- In 1992, a significantly greater number of children entered out-of-home care, chiefly foster home care, from neglect than any other maltreatment reason.*
- Protection from neglect was the single largest reason for placing children in out-of-home care.*

*Unpublished statistical detailed report prepared from 1992 data; Out of Home Care Data Section, Quality Services Division, Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Figure 9

Living Arrangements of Neglected Children in Substantiated Reports, 1991



Source: *Child Maltreatment Report*, Figure 26.

* Birth, Adoptive or Stepparent.

** With or without parent companion.

Notes from National References

- "Given the abundance of research journals in several disciplines, the limited amount of published research on child neglect during the four-year period that is the focus of this paper is surprising.... Neglect subareas—abandonment, education neglect, emotional deprivation and emotional neglect, physical neglect—received scant attention."*
- "The important role that poverty plays in neglect is also suggested by Zuravin...whose ecological study found that the strongest predictors of maltreatment are the percentage of families with income less than 200 percent of poverty and *the percent of vacant housing within a community*."**
- At the national level, 42 percent of families reported for neglect included an unemployed caretaker and 51 percent were headed by a single female.**
- "...financial hardship typically implied such long-term stressors as inadequate housing, residence in a dangerous and/or resourceless neighborhood, inability to pay for practical and human services, and lack of transportation to access affordable resources."**
- "...factors from within and outside the family converge to Ecreate a family situation characterized by both extreme need and an inability to develop or maintain the external supports that could help bolster [this] fragile system'."**
- "...characteristics such as the child's ethnicity or the number of children in the household had an impact on predicting whether a case would be substantiated..."**
- Children removed from their parents for reasons of general neglect, severe neglect, or caretaker incapacity, were reunified at a slower rate than children removed due to physical abuse or sexual abuse.***
- Children removed for neglect reasons were less likely to experience positive outcomes than children removed for other reasons, whether their first placement was with kin or non-kin.***

*A Review of Selected Journal Articles on Child Neglect Research: 1988-1991. National Center on Child Abuse Neglect, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 1993.

**From "Childhood Poverty and Child Maltreatment," by Joan I. Vondra, Chapter 5 in *Child Poverty and Public Policy*, edited by Judith A Chafel, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C, 1993.

***Richard P. Barth, et al, *Performance Indicators for Child Welfare Services in California*, Family Welfare Research Group, School of Social Welfare, Berkeley, California, January, 1994.