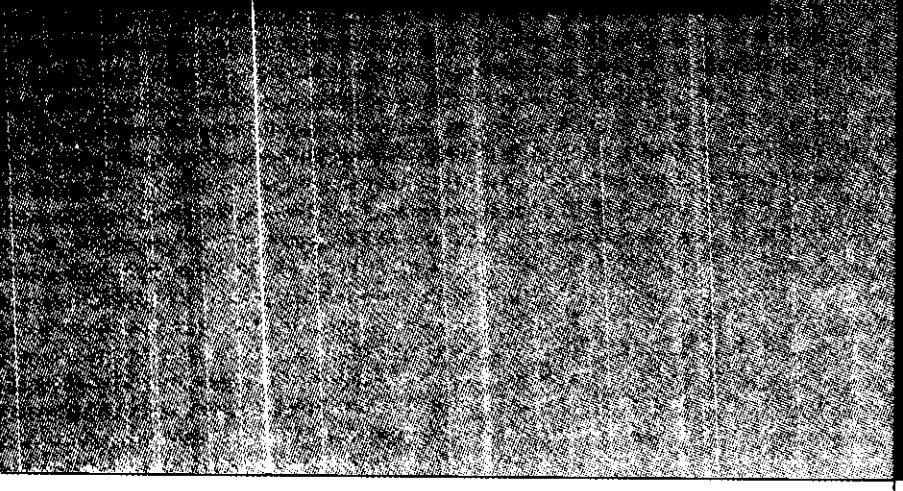
# The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3)





**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect

This document reports the findings from the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–3), which was conducted by Westat, Inc., and its subcontractor James Bell Associates, under contract number 105–91–1800 from the Department of Health and Human Services. The authors were Andrea J. Sedlak, Ph.D., and Diane D. Broadhurst, M.L.A., Westat's NIS–3 Project Director and Senior Researcher, respectively. Production services were provided by Houston Associates, Inc., under contract number ACF–105–94–1840.

For additional copies of this document, any of the four technical reports on the NIS–3 (*Revised Study Design*, *Sample Selection Report*, *Data Collection Report*, and *Analysis Report*), reports on the NIS–3 policy substudies (*Court Referral Study, CPS Screening Policy and Recordkeeping Study, Sentinel Questionnaire Follow-up Study*), or the NIS–3 public use data tape, contact the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, P.O. Box 1182, Washington, D.C. 20013–1182, (800) FYI–3366.

The NIS–3 public use data tape is also available from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, Cornell University, Family Life Development Center, Ithaca, NY 14853, (607) 255–7794.

# THIRD NATIONAL INCIDENCE STUDY OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

## FINAL REPORT

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect

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## FOREWORD

This report presents the results of the congressionally mandated Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–3). The NIS is the single most comprehensive source of information about the current incidence of child abuse and neglect in the United States. The NIS–3 findings are based on a nationally representative sample of over 5,600 professionals in 842 agencies serving 42 counties. The study used two sets of standardized definitions of abuse and neglect. Under the Harm Standard, children identified to the study were considered to be maltreated only if they had already experienced harm from abuse or neglect. Under the Endangerment Standard, children who experienced abuse or neglect that put them at risk of harm were included in the set of those considered to be maltreated, together with the already-harmed children.

The NIS–3 provides us with important insights about the incidence and distribution of child abuse and neglect and about changes in incidence since the previous studies.

### Incidence

- There have been substantial and significant increases in the incidence of child abuse and neglect since the last national incidence study was conducted in 1986.
- Under the Harm Standard definitions, the total number of abused and neglected children was two-thirds higher in the NIS–3 than in the NIS–2. This means that a child's risk of experiencing harm-causing abuse or neglect in 1993 was one and one-half times the child's risk in 1986.
- Under the Endangerment Standard, the number of abused and neglected children nearly doubled from 1986 to 1993. Physical abuse nearly doubled, sexual abuse more than doubled, and emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect were all more than two and one-half times their NIS–2 levels.
- The total number of children seriously injured and the total number endangered both quadrupled during this time.

**Child Characteristics**

- Girls were sexually abused three times more often than boys.
- Boys had a greater risk of emotional neglect and of serious injury than girls.
- Children are consistently vulnerable to sexual abuse from age three on.
- There were no significant race differences in the incidence of maltreatment or maltreatment-related injuries uncovered in either the NIS–2 or the NIS–3.

**Family Characteristics**

- Children of single parents had a 77-percent greater risk of being harmed by physical abuse, an 87-percent greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect, and an 80-percent greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from abuse or neglect than children living with both parents.
- Children in the largest families were physically neglected at nearly three times the rate of those who came from single-child families.
- Children from families with annual incomes below $15,000 as compared to children from families with annual incomes above $30,000 per year were over 22 times more likely to experience some form of maltreatment that fit the Harm Standard and over 25 times more likely to suffer some form of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard.
- Children from the lowest income families were 18 times more likely to be sexually abused, almost 56 times more likely to be educationally neglected, and over 22 times more likely to be seriously injured from maltreatment as defined under the Harm Standard than children from the higher income families.

**Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation**

- CPS investigated only 28 percent of the recognized children who met the Harm Standard. This was a significant decrease from the 44 percent investigated in 1986.
- Although the percentage of children whose abuse or neglect was investigated declined, the actual number of children investigated remained constant.
- CPS investigated less than one-half of all Harm Standard children recognized by any source and less than one-half of all Endangerment Standard children recognized by any source except police and sheriffs' departments (52%).

- Schools recognized the largest number of children maltreated under the Harm Standard, but only 16 percent of these children were investigated by CPS.
- CPS investigated only 26 percent of the seriously injured and 26 percent of the moderately injured children.

This study would not have been possible without the support of hundreds of agencies and individual caseworkers, teachers, police officers, social workers, probation officers, nurses, and other professionals in the study counties who contributed their enthusiastic support and much of their time in the effort to assess accurately the incidence, nature, and distribution of child abuse and neglect in the United States. I extend my appreciation to these dedicated respondents.

Olivia A. Golden
Commissioner
Administration on Children, Youth
and Families

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–3). It includes nontechnical descriptions of the study design and methodology and presents the national estimates of the incidence of abused and neglected children, the nature and severity of their maltreatment and its distribution by various demographic factors, the sources who recognized their maltreatment, and the proportions of these children who were reported to and investigated by child protective service (CPS) agencies.

This final report is a self-contained document, in that it is not necessary to refer to any other reports or materials to understand the design, methods, and findings of the main NIS–3 study. However, there are two series of other reports that provide further information for interested readers. The first series comprises the technical reports on the key NIS–3 activities, detailing the procedures and results at each stage of implementation. This series includes the following four reports, which can be read as a sequence that culminates in this, the final report:

- The *Revised Study Design* presents the background for the NIS–3 effort and the process of developing and revising the study design; describes the overall study design and its components; and presents the technical approach plan for the sampling, data collection, and analysis phases.

- The *Sample Selection Report* describes all the sample development and selection procedures that were used in this project.

- The *Data Collection Report* includes a brief overview of the study background and design and describes all data collection activities, including the recruitment methods and degree of success, the data collection procedures, and the numbers of different data forms ultimately received.

- The *Analysis Report* details the data processing steps, including basic and evaluative coding; the data retrieval, keying, and cleaning processes; the unduplication methods; the weighting and nonresponse adjustment approaches; the derivation of the annualization multipliers; and the development of the national estimates and variances.

The second series of additional reports presents the findings from policy-relevant substudies, which were self-contained efforts directly devoted to addressing outstanding questions in the legislative mandate that authorized the NIS–3, as described below. This second series comprises the following three reports:

- The report on the *Court Referral Study* presents the results of two approaches to examine the involvement of civil and criminal courts in cases of substantiated child abuse and neglect. One approach used case-level data from the NIS–3 CPS agencies to generate estimates of the percentages of substantiated cases that were referred for civil or criminal court action. The other approach used interviews with representatives of the civil and criminal courts in the NIS–3 counties in order to describe how these courts process child abuse and neglect cases and to determine what records are maintained at different points in the court system.

- The report on the *CPS Screening Policy and Recordkeeping Study* provides the results of special interviews with intake supervisors at all CPS agencies that participated in the NIS–3. This study examines their criteria for screening reported cases of child abuse and neglect prior to investigation and identified what records were kept regarding screened-out cases.

- The report on the *Sentinel Questionnaire Follow-up Study* provides the findings from a follow-up questionnaire mailed to all the NIS–3 sentinels in schools. It describes the experiences of these sentinels in reporting or attempting to report cases of suspected child abuse and neglect to CPS and analyzes the factors that affect the sentinels' decisions on whether to report.

The remaining sections of this chapter describe the legislative mandate that authorized the NIS–3 and provide an overview of the complete NIS–3 design, including the various substudies and the reasons that they were developed. This chapter ends with a brief orientation to the topics that will be covered in the remaining chapters of this report.

## 1.1 Background

The National Incidence Study (NIS) is a congressionally mandated, periodic effort of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN), a center within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The first NIS (NIS–1), mandated under Public Law (P.L.) 93–247 (1974), was conducted in 1979 and 1980 and published in 1981. The second NIS (NISB2), mandated under P.L. 98–457 (1984), was conducted in 1986 and 1987 and published in 1988. The third NIS (NIS–3) was mandated under the Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1988 (P.L. 100–294, as amended), conducted between 1993 and 1995, and published in 1996.

The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–3) was designed to meet several congressional mandates issued in the Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1988 (P.L. 100–294). Specifically, the NIS–3

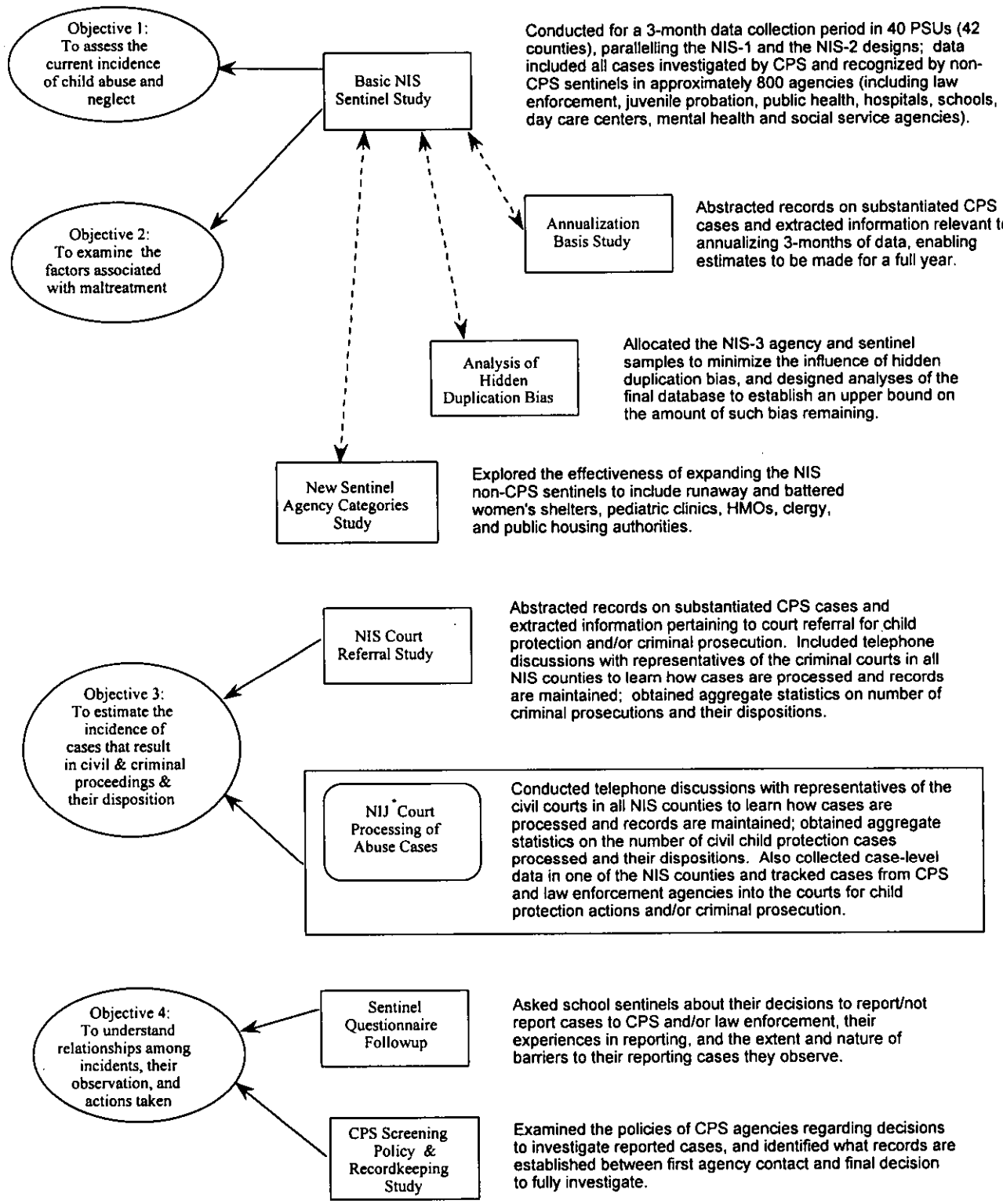
- provides current estimates of the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the United States and measures changes in these estimates from earlier studies;
- examines the distribution of child maltreatment in relation to various demographic factors;
- estimates the incidence of substantiated maltreatment cases that result in civil and criminal proceedings and their disposition; and
- develops an understanding of the relationships between an incident of maltreatment, its observation, its report to a child protective service agency, and any actions taken by the agency.

## 1.2 The NIS–3 Study Design

Exhibit 1–1 presents the NIS–3 study design. To accomplish the NIS–3 objectives, Westat and Westat's subcontractor, James Bell Associates, Inc., undertook seven studies. These are shown in the seven rectangular boxes in Exhibit 1–1, where they are also briefly described. Exhibit 1–1 also describes an eighth study, which is shown in the rounded-corner oblong box and delineated with a dotted line. This eighth study, which was primarily funded by the National Institute of Justice in the U.S. Department of Justice, was *not* formally part of the NIS–3 in its entirety, but it was directly relevant to one of the NIS–3 objectives and was therefore coordinated with the NIS–3, with supplemental funding from NCCAN.

**Objective 1: Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect.** All three major studies of the national incidence of child abuse and neglect, the NIS–1, the NIS–2, and the NIS–3, used similar methodologies. The principal purpose of all three studies was to go beyond cases of child maltreatment that come to the attention of the official CPS system and attempt to assess the overall national incidence of the problem of child maltreatment.

## Exhibit 1–1. NIS–3 Study Design




* This study was funded under a separate grant from the National Institute of Justice, and was coordinated with the NIS-3 effort.

To fulfill this goal, these studies collected data on maltreated children from CPS agency workers and from "sentinels" in different sectors of community agencies such as law enforcement, public health, juvenile probation, hospitals, schools, day-care, mental health, and voluntary social services. While the NIS–3 closely followed the same methodology, it also incorporated substantive improvements in methodology to strengthen the quality of the findings in several respects. Major improvements within the NIS–3 *Basic NIS Sentinel Study* included efforts

- to improve the precision of the overall incidence estimates by increasing the number of counties (primary sampling units, or PSUs) included in the study;
- to enhance the precision of measures of change by ensuring that counties that participated in the NIS–2 were also included in the NIS–3; and
- to increase the efficiency of the agency samples by providing greater representation of the more productive agency categories.

Three additional, separate studies were also incorporated in the main NIS–3 design in order to improve and/or examine the quality of the final incidence estimates derived from the *Basic NIS Sentinel Study* data and to guide future NIS efforts:

- The *Annualization Basis Study* was included to update the basis for annualizing the information reflecting a 3-month data period in order to provide estimates reflecting a complete year;
- The *Analysis of Hidden Duplication Bias* was undertaken to establish an upper bound to the amount of bias in the NIS estimates due to hidden duplication of cases; and
- The *New Sentinel Agency Categories Study* was conducted to indicate the extent to which the current configuration of NIS non-CPS sentinels provides comprehensive coverage of abused and neglected children recognized by community professionals.

Because of the technical nature of these specialized substudies, the details of their design, methodology, and their findings are reported and discussed in the series of technical reports on the main NIS–3.

**Objective 2: Factors Associated with Maltreatment.** The data collected for the *Basic NIS Sentinel Study* (Objective 1) provide sufficient information to reveal the relationship between maltreatment and

- the characteristics of the children: their sex, age, and race;

- the characteristics of the families: their income, two-parent or single-parent status, number of children in the household, residence in a metropolitan versus rural area; and

- the maltreatment circumstances: the perpetrator's relationship to the child; the perpetrator's sex, age, and employment status; the nature and severity of harm; and for children investigated by CPS, whether any previous reports of maltreatment in this family had been substantiated by the agency.

In addition, the *Basic NIS Sentinel Study* provides information concerning the children who experience different types of abuse and neglect, indicating the agencies that typically recognize the maltreated children and the proportion of these children whose maltreatment was reported to and investigated by CPS.

**Objective 3: Incidence of Civil and Criminal Proceedings.** This objective addressed the congressional mandate that required NCCAN to "conduct research on ... the incidence of substantiated reported child abuse cases that result in civil child protection proceedings or criminal proceedings, including the number of such cases with respect to which the court makes a finding that abuse or neglect exists and the disposition of such cases" (P.L. 100–294, Section 6).

In the NIS–3, this question was examined in the *Court Referral Study*, in which records on substantiated CPS cases were abstracted in order to extract any information in the CPS case files pertaining to the referral of the case to civil child protection or criminal proceedings. In addition, this study included telephone discussions with prosecutors and criminal court representatives in all the NIS–3 counties in order to identify the processing methods and records that are characteristic at various stages of case flow.

As noted above, the findings obtained through this NIS–3 study were combined with information obtained by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in its study, *Justice System Processing of Child Abuse Cases*. The NIJ study tracked physical and sexual child abuse and serious neglect cases from their official point of entry into either CPS or law enforcement agencies to their disposition in the criminal and/or dependency court, thereby providing case-level information about the factors associated with different court responses and dispositions. In addition, this NIJ study included interviews with representatives of the civil courts in all NIS counties to learn how child abuse and neglect cases are processed in the dependency courts in the different jurisdictions and what records are maintained through the various stages of the judicial process.

**Objective 4: Relationships among Incidents, Their Observation, and Actions Taken.** This objective focuses on an improved understanding of whether or not abused and neglected children are reported to CPS agencies and the response of CPS to reported cases. Key findings in both the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 were that only a minority of the children who were countable as abused or neglected had been reported to and investigated by CPS. The NIS–3 *Basic Sentinel Study* was designed to provide comparable estimates of the proportions of maltreated children who were reported to and investigated by CPS, so that changes since the earlier studies could be examined. In addition, the NIS–3 included two studies that provided further information bearing on this objective by illuminating potential reasons that sentinels who observe abused or neglected children may not submit official reports to the authorities and why a number of the children whose maltreatment is reported to CPS agencies may not have their maltreatment investigated. The two NIS–3 substudies that provide information relevant to these issues are

- the *Sentinel Questionnaire Follow-up Study*, which obtained responses from school sentinels concerning their decision-making about reporting cases to CPS and/or law enforcement. This study also explored the nature of their experiences in reporting or attempting to report cases to the authorities and the extent and nature of any barriers that exist to their official reporting of suspected cases; and

- the *CPS Screening Policy and Recordkeeping Study*, which examined the policies of CPS agencies that participated in the NIS–3 concerning their criteria for deciding whether or not to proceed with an investigation on a reported case of child abuse and neglect. This study also determined the nature of any records that are established on a case between the time the agency is first contacted about the welfare of a child to the time the final decision is made to proceed with a full investigation.

## 1.3 Focus of This Report

The remainder of this report comprises seven chapters and five appendices.

Chapter 2, "Methodology," summarizes the design and methodology of the NIS–3. It provides an overview of the conceptual model that has guided the NIS methodology since its inception and describes the approach taken in the NIS–3, including the NIS–3 sample design, data collection, and analysis activities.

Chapter 3, "Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect," provides the current national incidence of child abuse and neglect as defined using both the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard. It

discusses statistically significant changes in the incidence rates since the NIS–1 and the NIS–2, describes the distribution of children across different categories of maltreatment and across different levels of severity of injury/harm, and compares these distributions with the distributions found in the earlier studies.

Chapter 4, "Distribution of Abuse and Neglect by Child Characteristics," examines the relationship between child characteristics and the incidence and severity of abuse and neglect. It discusses the NIS–3 findings on the relationship between maltreatment and the child's sex, age, and race; examines whether differences among children in terms of these characteristics systematically relate to differences in incidence rates for different maltreatment categories or severities of outcome; and describes statistically significant changes since the NIS–2 in the distribution of child maltreatment by the different characteristics.

Chapter 5, "Distribution of Abuse and Neglect by Family Characteristics," examines the relationship between specific characteristics of the children's families and the incidence and severity of abuse and neglect. It presents the NIS–3 results concerning the incidence of different maltreatment categories and severities of outcome for children who come from families with different income levels, parent structures, and numbers of dependent children and whose counties of residence differ in degrees of urbanization. This chapter also describes statistically significant changes since the NIS–2 in the distribution of child maltreatment by these family characteristics.

Chapter 6, "Distribution of Abuse and Neglect by Perpetrator Characteristics," discusses how the children who were abused and neglected according to the Harm Standard are distributed according to their relationship with their perpetrator; their perpetrator's sex, age, and employment status; and in relation to their maltreatment, its severity, and their own race.

Chapter 7, "Recognizing and Investigating Abused and Neglected Children," considers what community sources recognize maltreated children as abused or neglected and what percentages of these children are reported to and investigated by CPS agencies. The chapter also examines the changes that have occurred in recognition at different agencies since the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 and compares the percentages of children who received investigation by CPS with the percentages found to receive CPS investigation in the prior studies.

Chapter 8, "Summary, Key Findings, and Implications," summarizes the highlights of the NIS–3 findings and discusses their policy implications.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter summarizes the design and methodology of the NIS–3. It provides an overview of the conceptual model that has guided the NIS methodology since its inception and indicates the approach taken in the present study. Sections offer abbreviated descriptions of the study definitions, the agency and sentinel samples, and the methods of data collection and processing. Further details about the study design and methodology are provided in the series of NIS–3 technical reports: the *Revised Study Design*, the *Sample Selection Report*, the *Data Collection Report*, and the *Analysis Report*.

## 2.1 Study Design

Since the main purposes of the NIS–3 were identical to those of the NIS–1 and the NIS–2, and because cross-study comparisons were a primary interest, the study design for the NIS–3 substantially paralleled the design of the previous studies. A simple conceptual model provided the rationale for this design; it is explained in the next subsection. A description of the general approach derived from the conceptual model follows.

### 2.1.1 Rationale

Although substantial numbers of abused and neglected children are investigated by CPS agencies, these children represent only the "tip of the iceberg." The NIS methodology is based on the five-level model given in Figure 2–1, which depicts the investigated children at Level 1. As the model indicates, other abused and neglected children are at levels below this, with each succeeding level associated with decreasing degrees of official recognition or public awareness.

At Level 2 are those children who are not investigated by CPS but who are recognized as maltreated at other "investigatory" agencies, such as police departments, courts, or public health departments. These agencies may have overlapping or even conflicting responsibilities concerning certain situations, such as felonious assault, homicide, delinquency, dependency, domestic violence, "children in need of control," or nutrition and hygiene problems. Children may remain at Level 2 because of questions of definition or disputes concerning the appropriate responsibilities of these

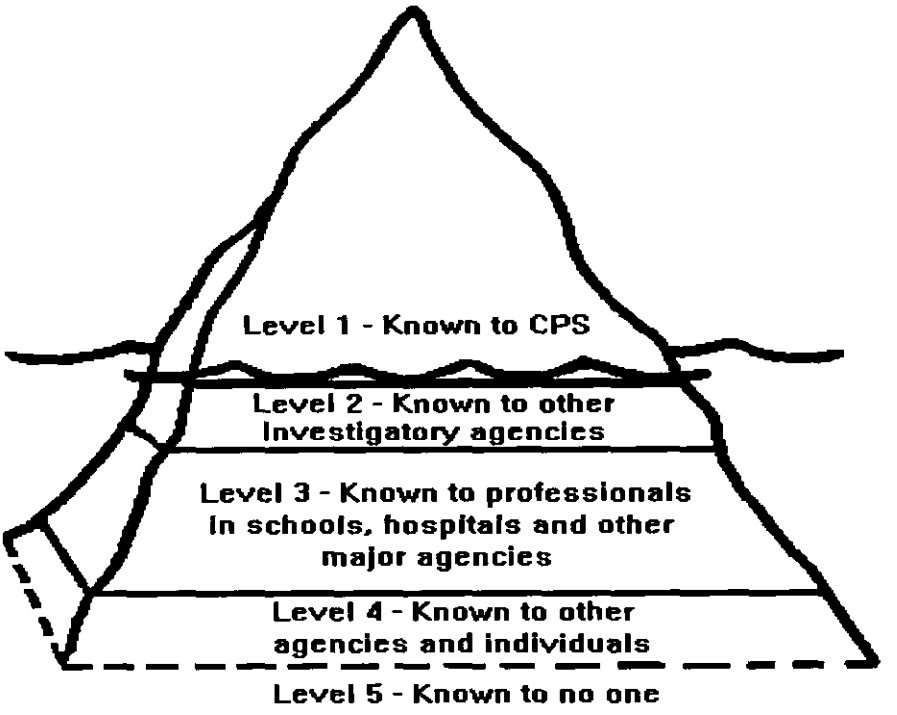



Figure 2–1. Levels of Recognition of Child Abuse and Neglect

different agencies in relation to CPS. Although Level 2 children are in some sense "officially known," they are not necessarily regarded by the community as abused or neglected in the same sense as Level 1 children are, and they do not necessarily receive assistance that specifically targets their abuse or neglect problems.

Level 3 includes abused and neglected children who are not known to CPS or to any Level 2 agency but who are known to professionals in other major community institutions, such as schools, hospitals, day-care centers, and voluntary social service or mental health agencies. Children may remain at this level because the professional who recognized them did not report them for any number of reasons. One reason may be definitional ambiguities as to what types of cases should be reported to CPS (or to other investigatory agencies). Other reasons relate to the attitudes and assumptions of the professionals who are aware of these situations. For example, they may feel that they are in the best position to help, may not trust CPS to handle the problem appropriately, or may have apprehensions

about becoming involved in an official investigation. Children also can remain at this level when the professional who recognized their maltreatment did report them, but CPS declined to accept their cases for investigation. As with nonreporting, there are multiple possible reasons for screen-outs. A child's case may not meet the agency's criteria (e.g., the maltreatment is not in the CPS agency's jurisdiction, or it may not be sufficiently serious to warrant investigation). Another possibility is that the professional did not provide sufficient information to CPS to enable investigation.

The abused and neglected children at Level 4 are recognized as maltreated by someone outside of the purview of the first three levels, such as a neighbor, another member of the family, or by one or both of the involved parties—the perpetrator and the child. However, none of the individuals recognizing the maltreatment at this level has made it known to Levels 1 through 3. Here again, it is possible that these Level 4 individuals did reveal the maltreatment to persons at Levels 1, 2, or 3, but that the latter did not recognize the maltreatment as such. (This would include CPS screening out a Level 4 child.)

At Level 5 are those children who have not been recognized as abused or neglected by anyone. These are cases where the individuals involved do not themselves regard their behaviors or experiences as child maltreatment and where their situations have not come to the attention of outside observers who would recognize them as abuse or neglect.

This model conveys the inherent difficulty of any attempt to measure the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Level 5 cases are by definition impossible to document (unless they can be brought into Level 4). In principle, it should be possible to identify children at Level 4 through methods such as surveys of parents, children, and/or neighbors, and several such surveys have been conducted.[1] The possibility of using a general population survey methodology was, in fact, entertained in the NIS–1, the NIS–2, and the NIS–3 during early design stages. However, the stigmatizing nature of acknowledgments of abuse and neglect introduces serious (and unknown degrees of) underreporting bias into estimates of cases at this level.[2] As a result, all NIS efforts have focused on assessing the incidence of cases only at Levels 1, 2, and 3.

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[1] For example, in 1995, the Gallup Organization conducted a random telephone survey of parents in an attempt to calculate the incidence of physical and sexual abuse of children.

[2] In the NIS–1, telephone and in-person interviews with parents were pretested, but the approach was abandoned before the main study was implemented. In the NIS–2, a household interview instrument was developed, but the survey itself was not undertaken. In the NIS–3, NCCAN's original request for proposal included a household survey component in the specified

### 2.1.2 Approach

The key components of the NIS design are schematically diagrammed in Figure 2–2. The assumption that the children investigated by CPS represent only the "tip of the iceberg" is apparent in the fact that data are collected from *both* CPS and non-CPS sources.

The NIS uses a survey methodology that begins with a nationally representative sample of counties. In the NIS–3, the county sample comprised 42 counties, which included two pairs of adjacent rural counties that were sampled as pairs. Thus, the NIS–3 sample included 40 independent primary sampling units, or PSUs. The method used to sample these counties ensured that they would represent different regions of the country and different degrees of urbanization.

In each county, both CPS and non-CPS agencies participate. CPS provides information about all reported cases that are accepted for investigation during the study time-period. In the NIS–3, each county CPS agency participated (i.e., 42 CPS agencies). The NIS–3 study data period was from September 5 to December 4, 1993, inclusive. In addition, community professionals at both Level 2 and Level 3 agencies served as "sentinels" by remaining on the lookout for child maltreatment cases during the study data period.

Non-CPS participants in each county include professional staff in public schools; day-care centers; children's and short-stay, general hospitals; municipal police departments; voluntary social service agencies; the county juvenile probation and public health departments; and the county sheriff or state police division with jurisdiction over any unincorporated areas not served by municipal law enforcement. The targeted staff are all professionals at every one of these agencies within each county who are likely to come into contact with maltreated children during the normal course of their job duties, and who would have sufficient contact with these children to enable them to (1) recognize them as maltreated and (2) provide the information necessary to evaluate them against the study criteria for classifying children as abused or neglected. In implementing the NIS, however, it is often necessary to sample the agencies in each county in a given category (rather than including all qualifying agencies in the county) and to sample from among the qualifying staff within each agency. In the NIS–3, 981

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design, but that component was dropped before the study contract was awarded. In each instance, the survey was judged too costly.

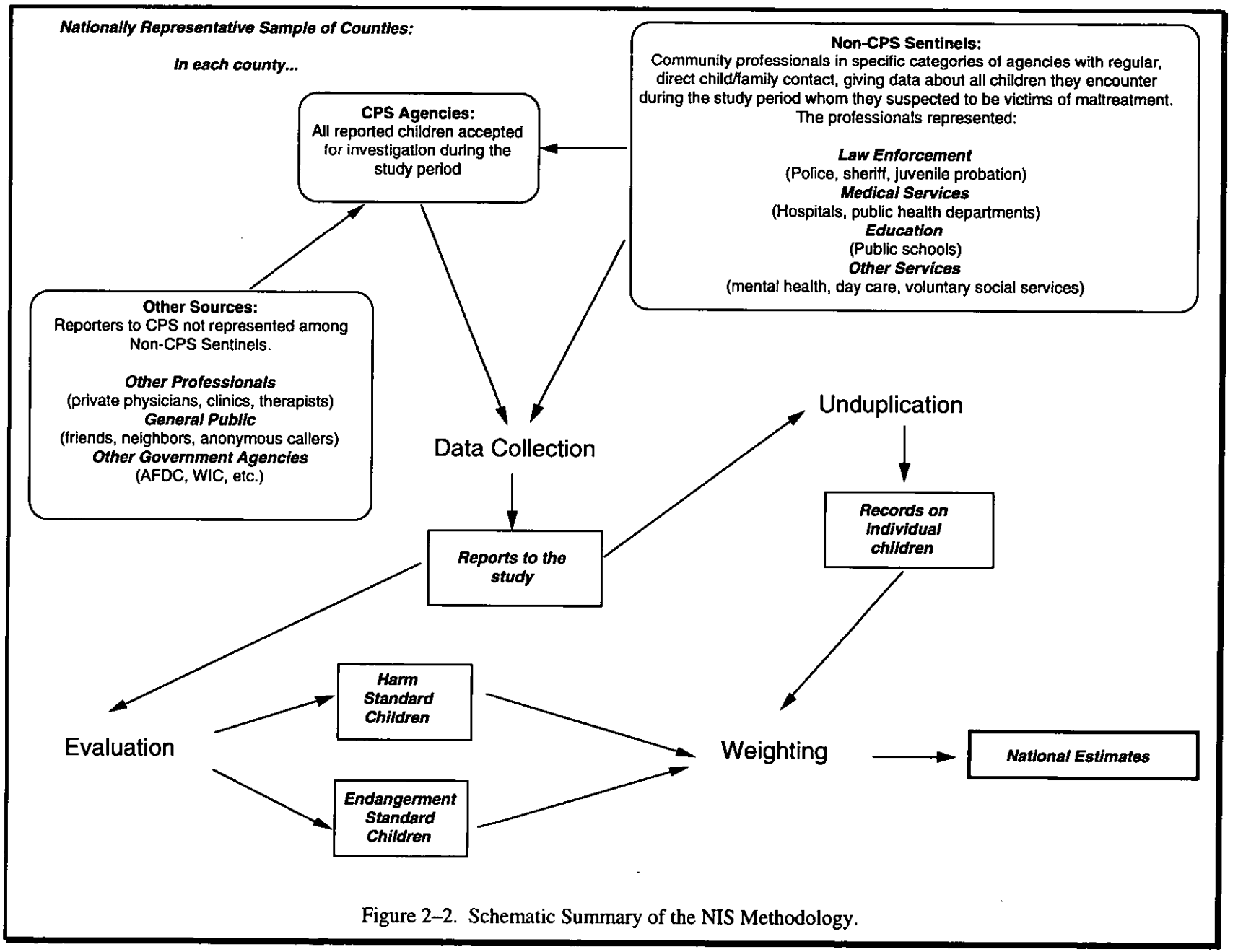


Figure 2–2. Schematic Summary of the NIS Methodology.

eligible non-CPS agencies were sampled and asked to participate. Of these, 800 agreed to do so, representing 81.5 percent of the sampled agencies. Within these recruited agencies, a total of 5,612 sentinels participated, representing 95.3 percent of the total sampled.

Note that in Figure 2–2 the CPS data include reports from the non-CPS sentinels, but also include reports from sources that are not represented in the non-CPS sector of the NIS design. These are Level 3 sources that are outside of the NIS purview (e.g., private physicians and therapists) as well as all Level 4 sources (neighbors, friends, etc.). By definition, Level 5 sources are not observable through any methodology.

## 2.2 Data Collection

The NIS–3 study period began on September 5, 1993, for all agencies other than schools and day-care centers, and on September 26, 1993, for those two categories of agencies. The period continued through December 4, 1993, for all agencies. Data collection was prospective in nature. CPS agencies were asked to submit data forms on all cases that were reported during the period and accepted for investigation by the agency. As was the case in the previous NIS efforts, two types of CPS data forms were used: a Long Form, which obtained sufficient details on the case to allow it to be assessed for countability according to study definitions, and a Short Form, which was for the specific purpose of identifying duplicate reports concerning the same child. Long Forms were filled out on all cases in small CPS agencies and on representative samples of the targeted cases in the remaining CPS agencies. Short Forms were filled out for all targeted cases in agencies where samples were drawn for the Long Forms. All CPS data forms were "family-level" forms, which documented the information concerning all children in the investigation of a given household or family.

As noted above, non-CPS participants are sentinels in that they are asked to remain on the lookout for cases of child maltreatment that occur during the study data period. They are trained in the study definitions of maltreatment and asked to submit a study data form on each maltreated child they encounter during the study period. The Non-CPS Form was a "child-level" form, which recorded the details on suspected maltreatment of an individual child.

The NIS–3 received a total of 50,729 data forms (3,154 CPS Long Forms, 42,864 CPS Short Forms, and 4,711 Non-CPS Forms). This was over seven times the number of forms received in the NIS–2.[3]

## 2.3 Evaluation against the Study Definitions

To a considerable extent, state legislatures have left it up to professionals in the field to interpret what constitutes "abuse" or "neglect." At the same time, consensus has yet to be reached as to the precise meaning of these terms, with different professional groups and individuals maintaining widely varying perceptions concerning the kinds and degrees of problems that constitute "child abuse" and "child neglect."[4]

As shown in Figure 2–2, reports received by the study undergo a process of evaluation in which they are assessed for conformity to the study definitions of abuse and neglect. All cases submitted to the NIS are "screened" for conformity to specific definitional standards, and only those cases that fit the standards are considered "countable" and used as the basis for generating incidence estimates.

Among the key achievements of the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 were the development and expansion of operational definitions of child maltreatment that were both clear and able to be reliably applied in order to specify whether or not a given situation should be included in the study. For the NIS–1, a single, objective set of definitions was developed and applied. In the NIS–2, a second set of definitions was also used and applied in parallel with the first set of definitions. This dual-standard approach was also used in the NIS–3. All data were assessed for conformity to both definitional standards, and the findings reported in later chapters reflect estimates derived from cases of maltreatment that were found to be "countable" under one or both sets of definitions.

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[3] Specifically, the totals reflect nearly twice the number of CPS Long Forms, nearly 44 percent more Non-CPS Forms, and almost 19 times the number of CPS Short Forms. CPS Short Form data collection was more comprehensive in the NIS–3 than it had been in the NIS–2. See the *Sample Selection Report* for details.

[4] See, for example, Besharov, D., *Child Abuse Reporting and Investigation.* Washington: American Bar Association, 1988.

### 2.3.1 Definitional Standards

In order for an alleged case of child maltreatment to be considered "countable," the following definitional standards had to be met:

(1) *Child's Age*: The child had to be live-born and under 18 years of age at the time of the maltreatment in question.[5]

(2) *Child's Residence*: The child had to live in one of the study counties at some time during the study period.[6]

(3) *Custody Status*: The child had to be a noninstitutionalized dependent of parent(s)/ substitute(s) at the time of the maltreatment.[7]

(4) *Time of Maltreatment*: Maltreatment had to occur during the study period that applied to the respondent agency.[8]

(5) *Purposive and Avoidable Acts/Omissions*: The maltreatment behavior had to be nonaccidental and avoidable.[9]

In addition to these five standards, there were requirements concerning the allowable *nature of the abusive acts or neglectful omissions* that could be included, concerning the *perpetrator* of the acts/omissions, and concerning the degree of *harm* to the child. A case was considered countable only if it met all eight standards.

In assessing the countability of cases in the present study, two different sets of definitional standards concerning *harm* and *perpetrator* criteria were used: both the original NIS–1 standards (the *Harm Standard*) and the revised set of standards first used in the NIS–2 (the *Endangerment Standard*). The Harm Standard provides a consistent basis of comparison among all three studies. The Endangerment Standard permits comparisons between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 estimates concerning a

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[5] Acts or omissions that occurred during pregnancy or delivery were excluded.

[6] Temporary residence in a study county (vacationing or visiting there) was included. It was not necessary for the maltreatment itself to have occurred in the study county.

[7] Institutional abuse and neglect were excluded.

[8] For CPS data, a report concerning the maltreatment had to have been made to CPS during the study period and accepted for investigation by CPS; for non-CPS data, the maltreatment itself had to have occurred during the study data period.

[9] The study excluded problems or hazards that the parent/substitute lacked the financial means to prevent or alleviate and for which appropriate assistance was not available through public agencies. Also excluded was lack of care stemming from parent/substitute death, hospitalization, incarceration, or other circumstances that made it physically impossible to provide or arrange for adequate care.

broader group of children. As a result of this approach, the NIS–3, like the NIS–2 before it, generated two sets of national estimates: the Harm Standard estimates, based on the original NIS–1 definitions, and the Endangerment Standard estimates, based on the revised standards developed during the NIS–2.

**Harm Standard Requirements.** The NIS Harm Standard requirements are stringent. For maltreatment to be countable under the Harm Standard, it is generally necessary that the child have suffered demonstrable harm as a result of the maltreatment. In order to be countable under the Harm Standard, an abused child had to have experienced the abuse at the hands of a parent or parent-substitute (such as a foster parent, step-parent, or adult caretaker); a neglected child had to have experienced the neglect at the hands of a parent or parent-substitute. In addition, the Harm Standard generally required that a child had been *moderately* harmed by abuse in order to be included in the abuse total, whereas it generally required that a child had been *seriously* harmed by neglect before permitting the child to be included in the neglect estimates.

**Endangerment Standard Requirements.** The Endangerment Standard requirements are less stringent than the Harm Standard requirements. *The Endangerment Standard includes all the Harm Standard children, but adds others as well, by relaxing the definitional requirements in several respects.* The central feature of the Endangerment Standard is that it adds in those children who have not yet been harmed by maltreatment but who experienced abuse or neglect that put them in danger of being harmed, according to the views of community professionals or CPS agencies. Specifically, in order to qualify as "endangered," the child's maltreatment had to have been substantiated or indicated by a CPS agency, or a participating non-CPS sentinel had to have explicitly rated the child as having been endangered by the abuse or neglect in question. In addition, the perpetrator criteria under the Endangerment Standard are more inclusive than the perpetrator criteria under the Harm Standard in two principal ways. First, situations where adult caretakers other than parent(s)/substitute(s) permitted sexual abuse and situations where nonparental teenage caretakers perpetrated or permitted sexual abuse also were countable. Second, other adult caretakers, in addition to parent(s)/substitute(s), were allowable perpetrators for two forms of neglect: inadequate supervision and other physical neglect (such as inadequate food, clothing, shelter, disregard of physical hazards, and other inattention to the child's physical safety and well-being).

### 2.3.2 Categories of Maltreatment

Based on the nature of the abusive acts or neglectful omissions, maltreatment situations are classified into six major types: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, and educational neglect. With the exception of physical abuse, each of these categories is then broken down into subtypes. The categories, their subtypes, and their perpetrator and harm requirements under each definitional standard are given in Exhibit 2–1. In this section, the allowable abusive acts or neglectful omissions for each category (and where applicable, each subtype) are described, together with actual examples drawn from the NIS–3 data.

**Physical Abuse.** The category of physical abuse is unique in that it is not broken down into subtypes. Acts constituting physical abuse include hitting with a hand, stick, strap, or other object; punching; kicking; shaking; throwing; burning; stabbing; or choking a child. As Exhibit 2–1 shows, only the harm requirement for this form of maltreatment differs under the Endangerment Standard: the criterion is relaxed from one of moderate demonstrable harm to one of endangerment.

In the NIS–3, children who were classified as physically abused included a 1-year-old child who died of a cerebral hemorrhage after being shaken by her father; a teen whose mother punched her and pulled out her hair; a child who sustained second- and third-degree "stocking" burns to the feet after being held in hot water; a preteen whose grandfather gave her a black eye; a teen who sustained bruises after being beaten with an extension cord; and a 3-year-old who had welts and bruises from being beaten with a belt by his father.

**Sexual Abuse.** Children who experienced any one of three specific forms of sexual abuse are counted in estimates of the overall incidence of sexual abuse. The three forms of sexual abuse reflect different kinds of acts:

**Intrusion**

Evidence[10] of oral, anal, or genital penile penetration or anal or genital digital or other penetration was required for this form of maltreatment.

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[10] Evidence means credible information (e.g., the perpetrator acknowledged his actions). As in the previous studies, the term does *not* have a technical meaning here, either legal or medical.

Exhibit 2–1. Overview of Perpetrator and Harm Components of the Definitional Standards Used in the NIS–3.

| MALTREATMENT | REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HARM STANDARD | | EXPANSIONS ALLOWED IN THE ENDANGERMENT STANDARD | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PERPETRATOR | HARM | PERPETRATOR | HARM |
| **I. PHYSICAL ABUSE:** | | | | |
| Physical Assault | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| **II. SEXUAL ABUSE:** | | | | |
| Intrusion | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Assumed | Any caretaker | - |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Assumed | Any caretaker | - |
| Genital molestation | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Assumed | Any caretaker | - |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Assumed | Any caretaker | - |
| Other or unknown | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Moderate | Any caretaker | Endangerment |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Moderate | Any caretaker | Endangerment |
| **III. EMOTIONAL ABUSE:** | | | | |
| Close Confinement: Tying or binding | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Assumed | - | - |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Assumed | - | - |
| Close Confinement: Other | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Verbal or emotional assault | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Other or unknown abuse | | | | |
| Committing | Adult caretaker | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Permitting | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |

| MALTREATMENT | HARM STANDARD | | ENDANGERMENT STANDARD | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PERPETRATOR | HARM | PERPETRATOR | HARM |
| **IV. PHYSICAL NEGLECT:** | | | | |
| Refusal of health care | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Delay in health care | Parent/substitute | Serious | - | Endangerment |
| Abandonment | Parent/substitute | Assumed | - | Endangerment |
| Expulsion/refusal of runaway | Parent/substitute | Assumed | - | - |
| Other custody-related maltreatment | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Inadequate supervision | Parent/substitute | Serious | Adult caretaker | Endangerment |
| Other physical neglect | Parent/substitute | Serious | Adult caretaker | Endangerment |
| **V. EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT:** | | | | |
| Permitted chronic truancy | Parent/substitute | Assigned | - | - |
| Other truancy/failure to enroll | Parent/substitute | Assigned | - | - |
| Inattention to special educational need | Parent/substitute | Assigned | - | - |
| **VI. EMOTIONAL NEGLECT:** | | | | |
| Inadequate nurturance/affection | Parent/substitute | Serious | - | Endangerment |
| Chronic/extreme spouse abuse | Parent/substitute | Serious | Parent/substitute their paramours and ex-spouses | Endangerment |
| Permitted drug/alcohol abuse | Parent/substitute | Serious | - | Endangerment |
| Permitted other maladaptive behavior | Parent/substitute | Serious | - | Endangerment |
| Refusal of psychological care | Parent/substitute | Moderate | - | Endangerment |
| Delay/failure of psychological care | Parent/substitute | Serious | - | Endangerment |
| Other inattention to emotional needs | Parent/substitute | Serious | - | Endangerment |

| MALTREATMENT | HARM STANDARD | | ENDANGERMENT STANDARD | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PERPETRATOR | HARM | PERPETRATOR | HARM |
| **VII. OTHER** | | | | |
| Involuntary neglect[a] | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| General or unspecified neglect[a] | N/A | N/A | Parent/substitute | Endangerment |
| Other or unspecified maltreatment[b] | N/A | N/A | Adult caretaker | Endangerment |
| Chemically Dependent Newborns | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Nonmaltreatment Cases | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

- Not changed. The Harm Standard requirements were used without revision.

[a] Countable under the Endangerment Standard only and entered the analyses and estimates for "All Neglect."

N/A Not applicable. This category was not countable under this definitional standard.

[b] Countable under the Endangerment Standard only and entered the analyses and estimates for "All Maltreatment."

**Molestation with Genital Contact**

This form of maltreatment involved acts where some form of actual genital contact had occurred, but where there was no specific indication of intrusion. When intrusion had been coded for a given child, molestation also was not coded, unless it reflected a distinctly different type of event in the child's experience (e.g., involved different perpetrators).

**Other or Unknown Sexual Abuse**

This category was used for unspecified acts not known to have involved actual genital contact (e.g., fondling of breasts or buttocks, exposure) and for allegations concerning inadequate or inappropriate supervision of a child's voluntary sexual activities.

As Exhibit 2–1 shows, no direct evidence of injury is required for the first two forms of sexual abuse to be countable under either definitional standard. That is, it is *assumed* that sexual abuse involving intrusion is inherently traumatic and injurious to a child; hence, when the situation fits the definitional criteria in all other respects, injury is simply assumed to have occurred. For cases classified under the third form of sexual abuse ("other or unknown") to be countable under the Harm Standard, circumstantial or direct evidence of at least moderate physical or emotional injury/impairment is required. The Endangerment Standard relaxes this criterion to allow cases where a child was considered "endangered" as a result of other or unknown sexual abuse.

Under the Harm Standard, any of these three specific forms of maltreatment is countable only when it is perpetrated by an adult caretaker or is either perpetrated or permitted by a parent/substitute. The Endangerment Standard expands the set of countable cases to include also cases where a caretaker has permitted these forms of maltreatment and where the caretaker is a teenager or not clearly of adult status.

In the NIS–3, children who were classified as sexually abused included a 10-year-old who was raped by her father; two sisters and a brother sexually molested by their mother's live-in boyfriend; a teen whose mother prostituted her; a preteen who had to lie next to her father with his body pressed against her after he watched a pornographic movie and who was afraid to sleep in her room as a result; a 17-year-old fondled by her stepfather, who had emotional problems and ran away as a result; and a 4-year-old fondled by his father during weekend visitations.

**Emotional Abuse.** The category of emotional abuse encompasses three distinct forms of maltreatment:

**Close Confinement (Tying or Binding and Other Forms)**

Tortuous restriction of movement, as by tying a child's arms or legs together or binding a child to a chair, bed, or other object, or confining a child to an enclosed area (such as a closet) as a means of punishment.[11]

**Verbal or Emotional Assault**

Habitual patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, or other nonphysical forms of overtly hostile or rejecting treatment, as well as threats of other forms of maltreatment (such as threats of beating, sexual assault, abandonment, etc.).[12]

**Other or Unknown Abuse**

Overtly punitive, exploitative, or abusive treatment other than those specified under other forms of abuse, or unspecified abusive treatment. This form includes attempted or potential physical or sexual assault,[13] deliberate withholding of food, shelter, sleep, or other necessities as a form of punishment, economic exploitation, and unspecified abusive actions.

As Exhibit 2–1 shows, in order for cases to be countable under the Harm Standard these forms of maltreatment have to be perpetrated by an adult caretaker or permitted by a parent/substitute. Moreover, except for the more extreme forms of close confinement (i.e., except for abuse involving tying or binding, where harm could be assumed automatically), circumstantial or direct evidence of at least moderate injury/impairment is required. The Endangerment Standard does not alter the perpetrator requirements on these forms of abuse, as Exhibit 2–1 indicates, but it does expand the harm requirement to allow cases where the child was judged to have been endangered, though not yet actually injured or impaired, by the maltreatment in question.

In the NIS–3, children who were classified as emotionally abused included a young child strapped in a high chair all day while her parents went to work; a child forced by her parents to live in a

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[11] Does *not* include generally accepted practices such as use of safety harnesses on toddlers, swaddling of infants, or discipline involving "grounding" a child or restricting a child to his/her room.

[12] This category was not used if verbally assaultive or abusive treatment occurred simultaneously with other abusive behavior (e.g., during a physical beating) unless adverse effects occurred that were separate and distinct from those in the other category.

[13] Where actual physical contact did not occur (e.g., throwing something at the child).

basement, to use the floor as a toilet, and then to clean it up, and who suffered emotional problems, including acting out, that required counseling as a result of her maltreatment; a 4-year-old who was locked in a closet as a means of discipline; children traumatized when their father took them to a store to buy a gun with which he threatened to kill them and their mother; a child who ran away because his mother punished him by refusing to feed him, by feeding him spoiled food, and by putting him out of the house without a coat or shoes; and siblings whose emotional problems, which required professional treatment, were a result of their mother's constant verbal abuse.

**Physical Neglect.** As Exhibit 2–1 shows, there are seven specific varieties of physical neglect. Of these, the first two reflect inattention to remedial health care needs, the next three involve custody-related maltreatment, and the last two forms involve inadequate supervision and other types of physical neglect. The acts or omissions that are classified under each of these forms of maltreatment are

**Refusal of Health Care**

Failure to provide or allow needed care in accord with recommendations of a competent health care professional for a physical injury, illness, medical condition, or impairment.[14]

**Delay in Health Care**

Failure to seek timely and appropriate medical care for a serious health problem that any reasonable layman would have recognized as needing professional medical attention.[15]

**Abandonment**

Desertion of a child without arranging for reasonable care and supervision. This category included cases in which children were not claimed within 2 days and cases where children were left by parents/substitutes who gave no (or false) information about their whereabouts.

**Expulsion**

Other blatant refusals of custody, such as permanent or indefinite expulsion of a child from the home without adequate arrangement for care by others or refusal to accept custody of a returned runaway.

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[14] This category does not apply to treatment needs concerning educational, emotional, or behavior problems, which were classified under educational neglect and/or emotional neglect, as described in subsequent sections.

[15] Lack of preventive health care, such as failure to have the child immunized, is not included here. It is classified under "general neglect," defined in a later section.

**Other Custody Issues**

Custody-related forms of inattention to the child's needs other than those covered by abandonment or expulsion. For example, repeated shuttling of a child from one household to another, due to apparent unwillingness to maintain custody, or chronically and repeatedly leaving a child with others for days or weeks at a time.

**Inadequate Supervision**

Child left unsupervised or inadequately supervised for extended periods of time or allowed to remain away from home overnight without the parent/substitute knowing (or attempting to determine) the child's whereabouts.[16]

**Other Physical Neglect**

Conspicuous inattention to avoidable hazards in the home; inadequate nutrition, clothing, or hygiene; and other forms of reckless disregard of the child's safety and welfare, such as driving with the child while intoxicated, leaving a young child unattended in a motor vehicle, and so forth.[17]

Exhibit 2–1 presents the harm and perpetrator requirements for these forms of maltreatment. As the exhibit shows, the harm required for physical neglect cases to be countable under the Harm Standard ranges from none (since harm can be assumed to have occurred for the traumatic occurrences of abandonment and expulsion), through evidence of moderate injury/impairment (for refusal of health care and for "other" custody-related maltreatment), to serious injury/impairment (for delay in health care, inadequate supervision, and other physical neglect). Under the Endangerment Standard, cases are countable if a respondent judges the child to have been endangered by the acts in question or if CPS officially substantiates the case upon investigation. As Exhibit 2–1 further shows, under the Harm Standard, all forms of physical neglect have to be perpetrated by parents/substitutes. Under the Endangerment Standard, other adult caretakers are allowable perpetrators of the last two forms of physical neglect: inadequate supervision and other physical neglect.

In the NIS–3, children who were classified as physically neglected included a teen whose mother refused to provide needed medication for his seizures; an infant whose parents delayed 24 hours before seeking medical attention for his serious head injury and loss of consciousness; a 12-year-old whose mother abandoned him; a preteen whose mother threw him out of their home and told him not to return; a 2-year-old, reported as endangered, who was found wandering in the street late at night, naked and alone; an infant who had to be hospitalized for near-drowning after being left alone in a bath;

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[16] This form of maltreatment also covers cases where the child is temporarily locked out of the home.

[17] This does *not* include situations that result from the parents' financial inability to provide (or obtain through AFDC) reasonably safe, hygienic living conditions.

a 3-year-old who had roaches in her leg cast; children endangered when their mother left a 6-year-old in charge of an infant and toddler so long that the older child feared her mother would not return and called 911 for help; and children endangered by living in a home contaminated with animal feces and rotting food.

**Educational Neglect** Educational neglect is broken down into three specific forms, as follows:

**Permitted Chronic Truancy**

Habitual truancy averaging at least 5 days a month was classifiable under this form of maltreatment if the parent/guardian had been informed of the problem and had not attempted to intervene.

**Failure to Enroll/Other Truancy**

Failure to register or enroll a child of mandatory school age, causing the child to miss at least 1 month of school; or a pattern of keeping a school-age child home for nonlegitimate reasons (e.g., to work, to care for siblings, etc.) an average of at least 3 days a month.

**Inattention to Special Education Need**

Refusal to allow or failure to obtain recommended remedial education services, or neglect in obtaining or following through with treatment for a child's diagnosed learning disorder or other special education need without reasonable cause.

As Exhibit 2–1 shows, there are no differences between the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard in the perpetrator and harm requirements for the category of educational neglect. Under both sets of standards, the parent/substitute is the required perpetrator for all three forms. Also, under both standards and for all three forms, the harm criterion is considered to have been met (that is, harm is automatically rated as moderate) if the case fulfills the descriptive requirements of the classification, on the assumption that the circumstances would necessarily impair a child's educational development to at least a moderate degree.

In the NIS–3, children who were classified as educationally neglected included an 11-year-old and a 13-year-old who were chronically truant; a young teen, previously adjudicated as truant, whose parents did not send him to school; a 12-year-old whose parents permitted him to decide whether to go to school, how long to stay there, and in which activities to participate; a young teen whose mother did not enroll him in school after he was returned from foster care to her custody; and a special education student whose mother refused to believe he needed help in school.

**Emotional Neglect.** As Exhibit 2–1 shows, the category of emotional neglect includes seven specific forms of maltreatment:

**Inadequate Nurturance/Affection**

Marked inattention to the child's needs for affection, emotional support, attention, or competence.[18]

**Chronic/Extreme Spouse Abuse**

Chronic or extreme spouse abuse or other domestic violence in the child's presence.

**Permitted Drug/Alcohol Abuse**

Encouragement or permitting of drug or alcohol use by the child; cases of the child's drug/alcohol use were included in this category if it appeared that the parent/guardian had been informed of the problem and had not attempted to intervene.[19]

**Permitted Other Maladaptive Behavior**

Encouragement or permitting of other maladaptive behavior (e.g., severe assaultiveness, chronic delinquency) under circumstances where the parent/guardian had reason to be aware of the existence and seriousness of the problem but did not attempt to intervene.

**Refusal of Psychological Care**

Refusal to allow needed and available treatment for a child's emotional or behavioral impairment or problem in accord with competent professional recommendation.

**Delay in Psychological Care**

Failure to seek or provide needed treatment for a child's emotional or behavioral impairment or problem that any reasonable layman would have recognized as needing professional psychological attention (e.g., severe depression, suicide attempt).

**Other Emotional Neglect**

Other inattention to the child's developmental/emotional needs not classifiable under any of the above forms of emotional neglect (e.g., markedly overprotective restrictions that foster immaturity or emotional overdependence, chronically applying expectations clearly inappropriate in relation to the child's age or level of development, etc.).

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[18] Cases of nonorganic failure to thrive are classified under this form of maltreatment in addition to other instances of passive emotional rejection of a child or apparent lack of concern for a child's emotional well-being or development. Not included here were overt expressions of hostility and rejection, which are classified under verbal/emotional abuse.

[19] Administering drugs to a child for nonmedical or nontherapeutic purposes (e.g., giving a child alcohol or marijuana) is classified here if the child was of school age (and hence likely to predispose the child behaviorally to self-administer the drugs) but is classified under "other or unknown abuse" for younger children.

As Exhibit 2–1 shows, the Endangerment Standard makes no changes in the perpetrator requirements for these forms of maltreatment but uniformly relaxes the harm criteria to endangerment.

In the NIS–3, children who were classified as emotionally neglected included a child with a diagnosis of failure to thrive; siblings reported as endangered, who were subjected to repeated incidents of family violence between their mother and father; a 12-year-old whose parents permitted him to drink and use drugs; an 8-year-old whose parents permitted him to smoke; a child whose mother helped him to shoot out the windows of a neighbor's house; and a 4-year-old whose caretakers refused to permit evaluation and treatment of his severe behavior problems.

### 2.3.3 Countability Assessment

Cases recorded on CPS Long Forms and on Non-CPS Forms were assessed as to their "countability" in relation to the study definitions. For each child substantiated by CPS or thought to meet the study requirements on either type of data form, the NIS–3 project staff rated the degree to which the situation fit each of the two sets of definitional standards: the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard. Each applicable form of suspected or substantiated maltreatment was assessed as to its substance (who was alleged to have done what to whom, when, with what effect, and with what quality of evidence). Ratings were made of the degree to which the situation fit each individual aspect of the Harm Standard and of the Endangerment Standard. Following this, overall assessments were made under each of the definitional standards. Maltreatment was judged to be "countable" under a given standard if there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had experienced maltreatment that met all of the requirements of the definitional standard in question.

Despite the complexity of this assessment, it was reliable. Measurements of the reliability of these judgments on a random 10 percent of the coded data forms (i.e., on 737 data forms) showed that coders had an agreement of 95.1 percent overall, an agreement of 98.2 percent as to whether a case was countable under the Harm Standard, and an agreement of 98.9 percent as to whether a case was countable under the Endangerment Standard. Details about the evaluative coding procedures and about the assessment of coding reliability can be found in the NIS–3 technical volume, the *Analysis Report*.

## 2.4 Unduplication

More than one data form could be submitted to the study concerning an individual child. Such duplicates could occur because the same maltreatment event was reported by more than one study source or because the same child had experienced more than one occurrence of maltreatment during the study period that was reported by the same study source. In either case, it was necessary to identify and resolve all such duplicate reports in order to permit estimates based on the child as the unit of measurement. At the same time, unduplication had to be accomplished without the use of fully identifying information, which had been avoided in the interests of confidentiality. Following the approach taken in the previous studies, only enough close-to-identifying information was obtained in the NIS–3 to allow fairly certain judgments as to whether or not two data forms described the same child. These decisions about duplicate data forms on a given child relied on the child's sex, first name, last initial, date of birth, race, city of residence, and number of other children in the child's household. The decisions were sometimes clarified by the nature of the maltreatment, the child's relation to the perpetrator, and the first names and dates of birth of other children in the family, when these were available.

Having determined which data forms were duplicates, only one record was retained to represent an individual child. Also, whenever a child had been identified to the study as a maltreated child both by CPS and by a non-CPS respondent, CPS was credited with having submitted the case. (For details, see the *Analysis Report*.) Non-CPS respondents were credited only with those children they submitted to the study *beyond* those whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS. Moreover, within each sector, duplicate records were credited according to a priority system that was based on the "level of recognition" (iceberg) model described earlier in Section 2.1.1. Further details about this priority system are provided later, in Chapter 7.

## 2.5 Weighting and Estimation

National estimates were obtained by "weighting" each child's final record in accordance with the probability of having selected the source who reported that child to the study. By use of appropriate weights at each level, the cases obtained were used to represent the much larger database that would have been obtained if all potential data sources had participated and no sampling had been used.

A number of important issues were taken into account in the process of weighting, including multiple sources for children who appeared in duplicate data forms, corrections for incomplete or poor participation by non-CPS respondents, annualization to provide estimates for a full 12-month period, and calculation of sampling errors or variances to indicate the precision of estimates and to permit significance tests.

**Multiple Probabilities of Selection.** When a child appeared in more than one data form, these forms were unduplicated, as described above, in order to ensure that the child was represented only once in the final analyses. Besides selecting only a single record form among the multiple records available, it was also necessary that the child's final weight reflect the fact that he or she had come into the study through multiple sources. The exact procedures used to unify the multiple probabilities of selection in computing the child's final weight are described in the *Analysis Report.*

**Correcting for Poor and Incomplete Participation.** Efforts were made to compensate for any incomplete or poor participation by non-CPS respondents in the weights assigned to the cases.

The sentinel nature of non-CPS data collection makes it particularly vulnerable to distortion by low participant interest.[20] Ideally, the number of cases submitted by a participant should be informative about the number of maltreated children he or she encountered. Participants with low degrees of interest in or commitment to the study can easily distort the incidence estimates downward by their failure to submit data forms on the cases they encounter. To minimize this source of distortion, evaluations of each participant's degree of interest in and commitment to the study were obtained, and weighting adjustments were made for any who received particularly poor ratings.

A similar downward distortion was possible when an otherwise interested and committed participant did not participate for the full data period for whatever reason (e.g., sickness, vacation, etc.). All such absences were monitored during the study, and the final weights were adjusted to correct for any lost time. These corrections corresponded to analogous corrections that were computed in the NIS–2.

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[20] Sedlak, Andrea J., "Estimating the National Prevalence of Child Abuse from Sentinel Data," *1993 Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section,* Alexandria, VA: American Statistical Association, 1993.

**Annualization.** Data were collected for a 3-month period in most agencies (for only 10 weeks in schools and day-care centers). Data from all agencies were weighted so as to represent the number of cases that would have been obtained had the data period lasted for a full year. A special study, the *Annualization Basis Study*, provided updated information for translating the data gathered during the 3-month data collection into estimates that reflected the number of children maltreated in the course of a year. The annualization data were used to calculate two annualization multipliers for NIS–3 cases: one for cases recognized by school sentinels and one for all other recognition sources. Details on how the annualization factors were calculated are provided in the *Analysis Report*.

**Sampling Errors.** There is some degree of uncertainty associated with any estimate that is made on the basis of a sample. The standard error provides some idea of how much uncertainty is associated with a given estimate as a result of the use of a sample rather than a complete study of the total population.[21] (It does not reflect other sources of error.) Thus, the standard error indicates the precision of an estimate, and having reliable estimates of the standard error is a prerequisite for conducting statistical comparisons of the estimates for different groups.

The standard error of estimate was calculated for all of the NIS–3 estimates reported in the subsequent chapters of this report. These can be found in Appendices A and B.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

The principal findings of the study are the incidence estimates themselves, and these required no further analysis after estimation and calculation of their standard errors. However, in order to compare the findings of the NIS–1, the NIS–2 and the NIS–3, or to examine patterns of differences across subgroups within the NIS–3 (such as across the different age groups), some further statistical analysis was necessary. In order to keep the text of this report accessible to readers without statistical expertise, only the conclusions drawn from these analyses are provided in the following chapters. Readers who are interested in examining the details of the analyses themselves can find them reported in Appendix C, which presents the within-NIS–3 tests of significance, and Appendix D, which presents the between study tests of significance.

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[21] The range or "window" around an estimate within which one can be confident the estimate lies is called a "confidence interval." One can be 95-percent certain that the true incidence falls within the range specified by the 95-percent confidence interval.

## 2.7 Methodological Differences from the NIS–2

The NIS–3 closely followed the methodology used in the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 but improved upon those previous studies in several ways:

- **County sample:** The county sample was increased from 29 counties comprising 28 Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) in the NIS–2 to 42 counties comprising 40 PSUs in the NIS–3. In addition, the NIS–3 counties had maximum overlap with the NIS–2 counties.

- **Agency sample:** The more productive non-CPS agency categories were given proportionally greater representation to increase the efficiency of the agency samples.

- **Data forms:** CPS Short Forms were obtained in all large counties to enhance the basis for unduplicating between CPS and non-CPS sources.

These changes in the methodology were made in order to provide greater precision in the NIS–3 estimates. They have no influence on the magnitude of the estimates.

# 3. INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first two sections are devoted to the main Harm Standard and Endangerment Standard estimates. Each section addresses the following questions:

- What is the current national incidence of child abuse and neglect as defined by each standard?
- Have there been any statistically significant changes since the NIS–2 (and for the Harm Standard, since the NIS–1) in the annual incidence of children who experience abuse or neglect?
- Among the children who experienced abuse or neglect under each standard, what was their most serious injury or harm?
- How does this distribution of children across levels of severity of injury/harm compare with the severity distribution found in the NIS–2 (and for the Harm Standard with the NIS–1)?

In addition, the Endangerment Standard estimates for different maltreatment types and outcomes are compared with the Harm Standard estimates in order to clarify the distribution of the additional children who are considered to be abused or neglected under the more lenient Endangerment Standard guidelines. The third and final section summarizes the main findings and discusses their implications.

Throughout this and the subsequent chapters, it is important to bear in mind that all maltreatment in the NIS, by whatever standard, was perpetrated by a parent or caretaker (i.e., the maltreatment reflects circumstances that are within the jurisdiction of child protective service agencies). That is, the NIS estimates systematically exclude maltreatment by non-caretaker family members (e.g., siblings who were not in a caretaking role), non-caretaker neighbors, acquaintances, or strangers. Thus, the incidence totals and rates given in this report do *not* reflect the children who were physically assaulted or sexually abused by persons in any of these latter categories.

It is also important to note that the estimates presented in this section and throughout the remainder of this report are based on the unduplicated numbers of maltreated children in the United States who experienced the maltreatment in question. That is, the unit of measurement is the child, and

each estimate counts each child only once. The estimates are given both in terms of the estimated totals and in terms of rates per 1,000 children. Estimated totals reflect the number of children nationwide who are maltreated annually. The incidence rates indicate the numbers of children maltreated annually per 1,000 children in the U.S. population. Readers should also note that this report follows the usage of the congressional mandate and refers to the estimates as "incidence estimates." In the epidemiological literature,[1] however, they would be more appropriately termed "annual prevalence estimates." Technically, they are period prevalence estimates, where the focal period is a year.[2]

## 3.1 National Incidence of Child Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

This section presents the estimates of the incidence of children who experienced maltreatment under the Harm Standard in 1993. The Harm Standard is relatively stringent in that it generally requires a child to have already suffered demonstrable harm as a result of maltreatment in order to be "countable" (i.e., in order to be included in the estimated totals).

### 3.1.1 Overall Incidence of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Table 3–1 presents the NIS estimates for maltreatment under the Harm Standard. The NIS–3 estimates are given in the shaded section with bold text. These reflect annual estimates for 1993, the year the NIS–3 data were collected. The right-hand side of the table compares the NIS–3 figures with the estimates for the corresponding categories generated by the earlier studies—the NIS–2 estimates reflect the incidence of maltreatment during 1986, and the NIS–1 estimates index the incidence of maltreatment in 1980. The statistical significance of the comparison in question is indicated by the asterisk or letter, as explained in the table footnotes.

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[1] Ahlbom, A., & Norell, S. (1984). *Introduction To Modern Epidemiology.* Chestnut Hill, MA: Epidemiology Resources, Inc.

[2] In epidemiologic usage, "incidence" refers to the number of *new* cases that occur in the population during a given period of time. "Prevalence" can mean a number of different things, depending on whether it is used with or without a modifying adjective. When used without a qualifier, it is most often interpreted to mean "point prevalence," which is the total number of cases that exist in the population at a given point in time. Prevalence can also be defined as "lifetime prevalence," which refers to the total number of persons known to have been cases at some time in their lives, or "period prevalence," which denotes the total number of persons known to have been cases at any time during a specified period.

Table 3–1. National Incidence of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 (1993), and Comparison with the NIS–2 (1986) and the NIS–1 (1980) Harm Standard Estimates.

| Harm Standard Maltreatment Category | NIS–3 Estimates 1993 | | Comparisons With Earlier Studies | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | NIS–2: 1986 | | | NIS–1: 1980 | | |
| | **Total No. of Children** | ***Rate per 1,000 Children*** | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | **1,553,800** | ***23.1*** | 931,000 | *14.8* | * | 625,100 | *9.8* | * |
| *ABUSE:* | | | | | | | | |
| ALL ABUSE | **743,200** | ***11.1*** | 507,700 | *8.1* | m | 336,600 | *5.3* | * |
| Physical Abuse | **381,700** | ***5.7*** | 269,700 | *4.3* | m | 199,100 | *3.1* | * |
| Sexual Abuse | **217,700** | ***3.2*** | 119,200 | *1.9* | * | 42,900 | *0.7* | * |
| Emotional Abuse | **204,500** | ***3.0*** | 155,200 | *2.5* | ns | 132,700 | *2.1* | m |
| *NEGLECT:* | | | | | | | | |
| ALL NEGLECT | **879,000** | ***13.1*** | 474,800 | *7.5* | * | 315,400 | *4.9* | * |
| Physical Neglect | **338,900** | ***5.0*** | 167,800 | *2.7* | * | 103,600 | *1.6* | * |
| Emotional Neglect | **212,800** | ***3.2*** | 49,200 | *0.8* | * | 56,900 | *0.9* | * |
| Educational Neglect | **397,300** | ***5.9*** | 284,800 | *4.5* | ns | 174,000 | *2.7* | * |

* The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.
m The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).
ns The difference between this and the NIS—3 estimate is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).
Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100.

As Table 3–1 shows, an estimated 1,553,800 children experienced some form of maltreatment under the Harm Standard during 1993. This total reflected an annual incidence rate of 23.1 children per 1,000 children in the general population nationwide.[3] This is equivalent to 2.31 children per

[3] In this and subsequent chapters, all estimates concerning total numbers of children are rounded to the nearest hundred in order to avoid conveying a false sense of precision. That is, all the estimates have associated standard errors that reflect their degree of precision. For simplification, all the estimates together with their standard errors and their upper and lower 95-percent confidence bounds are given in Appendices A and B.

100, or to 1 child in every 43 in the United States. The comparisons in the right-hand sections of the table indicate that the 1993 incidence of all maltreatment under the Harm Standard is significantly higher than the corresponding estimates for 1986 and 1980.[4] Specifically, there was a two-thirds increase (67%) in the total number of maltreated children since the 1986 NIS–2 and a 149-percent increase since the 1980 NIS–1. Note that this latter increase means that the total number of children who experienced maltreatment under the Harm Standard at the time of the NIS–3 was nearly two and one-half times the number with similar experiences during the NIS–1.[5]

These increases correspond to a 56-percent rise in the rate per 1,000 of overall maltreatment since the NIS–2 in 1986 and a 136-percent increase in the overall maltreatment rate since the NIS–1 in 1980. The rate measure can be interpreted as reflecting a child's degree of risk of experiencing the maltreatment. This means one can say that a child's risk of suffering maltreatment identified in the NIS under the Harm Standard was more than two and one-third times higher in 1993 than it was in 1980.

### 3.1.2 Incidence of Abuse and Neglect under the Harm Standard

In addition to the overall incidence estimates, Table 3–1 provides estimates for different categories of maltreatment. Two main categories are presented: abuse and neglect. Each of these is, in turn, divided into specific types. The main categories and the specific types are discussed individually.

In order to be countable under the Harm Standard, an abused child had to have experienced the abuse at the hands of a parent (birth or adoptive), parent-substitute (e.g., foster parent, step-parent), or adult caretaker; a neglected child had to have experienced the neglect at the hands of a parent or parent-substitute. Also, as detailed further below, the Harm Standard generally required a child to have been *moderately* harmed by abuse in order to be included in the abuse total, whereas it generally required a child to have been *seriously* harmed by neglect before permitting the child to be included in the neglect estimates.

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[4] Comparisons across studies should be made with the rate measures (i.e., comparing the number of children maltreated per 1,000) in order to take account of any changes in the size of the U.S. child population across the time intervals. Accordingly, statistical differences between the 1993 study and the 1986 and 1980 studies generally have been assessed by the use of the *t*-statistic on the rate measures. The details of these tests and of other significance tests used are given in Appendix D.

[5] Note that an increase of 100 percent reflects a *doubling* of the original figure.

As shown in Table 3–1, an estimated 743,200 children were abused under the Harm Standard definitions in 1993, while an estimated 879,000 children were neglected during the course of that year. These totals represent incidence rates of 11.1 abused children per 1,000 and of 13.1 neglected children per 1,000 in the U.S. population. This means that the majority of Harm Standard children (57%) were neglected, and slightly less than one-half (48%) were abused. Note that the separate "all abuse" and "all neglect" estimates sum to more than the total number of maltreated children given in the first row. This is because children who were both abused and neglected (an estimated 68,400, or 1.1 per 1,000) are included in both of these estimates.

In comparison to the NIS–2 estimates, the increase in neglect under the Harm Standard was statistically significant, but the increase in abuse, although substantial, was marginal (i.e., approached statistical significance but did not meet the traditional standard). There was a 46-percent increase in the total number of abused children since the NIS–2, and an 85-percent increase in the total number of children who were neglected. Alternatively, considering the changes in incidence rates in order to take into account the increase in child population size since the earlier studies, there was a 37-percent increase in the abuse rate since the NIS–2 and a 75-percent increase in the neglect rate. This means that children in 1993 had a more than one-third higher risk of being abused and a three-fourths greater risk of being neglected compared to the corresponding risks for children in 1986.

Statistical analyses revealed that the 1993 NIS–3 incidence estimates were significantly above the 1980 figures for both abuse and neglect. More than twice as many children experienced Harm Standard abuse in 1993 compared to 1980, whether one indexes this by the estimated totals (which show a 121% increase) or by the incidence rates (which show a 109% increase). The increase in the incidence of neglect was even greater, with a 179-percent increase in the total number of neglected children since 1980, and a 167-percent increase in the neglect rate per 1,000 children nationwide over the 13-year time interval. These findings mean that a child's risk of abuse under the Harm Standard in 1993 was more than two times greater than in 1980, and his or her risk of neglect was two and two-thirds times the 1980 risk level.

### 3.1.3 Incidence of Types of Abuse under the Harm Standard

Under the main category of abuse under the Harm Standard, Table 3–1 provides the incidence statistics for three specific types of abuse—physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Children

who experienced more than one type of abuse are reflected in the estimates for each applicable type. As a result, the estimates for the different abuse types sum to more than the total number of abused children.

**Physical Abuse.** In order to be classified as physically abused under the Harm Standard, a child had to have suffered at least a moderate injury from physical abuse. Moderate injuries were defined as physical, mental, or emotional injuries or conditions (or behavior problems) resulting from physical abuse that were serious enough to persist in observable form for at least 48 hours. Examples include bruises, nightmares, depression, and fearfulness.

Table 3–1 indicates that 5.7 children per 1,000 (or an estimated 381,700 children) experienced physical abuse as defined by the Harm Standard in 1993. These children reflected just over one-half (51%) of all abused children under the Harm Standard.

**Sexual Abuse.** Sexual abuse subsumed a range of behaviors, including intrusion, genital molestation, exposure, inappropriate fondling, and unspecified sexual molestation. For intrusion and genital molestation, the Harm Standard guidelines permit the assumption that serious emotional injury occurred even if explicit symptoms are not yet observable. However, for the remaining abusive actions, at least moderate injury or harm (physical, emotional, or behavioral) is required before the child is permitted to count as sexually abused under the Harm Standard.

An estimated 3.2 children per 1,000 (or a total of 217,700) were sexually abused under the Harm Standard in 1993. Sexually abused children accounted for 29 percent of the total who suffered abuse.

**Emotional Abuse.** In the NIS definitions, this type of abuse includes close confinement, verbal or emotional assaults, and other or nonspecific abuse. Close confinement refers to tying, binding, and other inappropriate confinement or physical restriction. Verbal or emotional assault involves systematic patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, or other nonphysical forms of overtly rejecting treatment, as well as threats of other forms of maltreatment, such as threats of abandonment, beatings, or sexual assault. Emotional abuse also subsumes all varieties of abusive, exploitative, or overtly punitive behaviors where actual physical contact did not occur (such as intentional withholding of food, shelter, sleep, or other necessities, or excessive responsibilities or excessive demands for income-producing work by a child). For the more extreme forms of tying and binding, the Harm Standard guidelines permit the assumption that serious emotional injury occurred (that is, explicit

symptoms are not required for the child to qualify as emotionally abused under the Harm Standard). However, for all other forms of emotional maltreatment, the Harm Standard requires direct or circumstantial evidence of injury or impairment of at least moderate severity.

Table 3–1 indicates that, in 1993, an estimated 3.0 children per 1,000 (a total of 204,500 children) suffered emotional abuse that fit the Harm Standard definitions. The emotionally abused children represented 28 percent of all abused children counted under the Harm Standard.

**Changes since Earlier NISs in the Incidence of Abuse under the Harm Standard.** Among the different types of Harm Standard abuse, the only statistically significant increase since the NIS–2 was in the incidence of sexual abuse, which rose in incidence from 1.9 children per 1,000 in 1986 to 3.2 children per 1,000 in 1993 (a 68% increase in the rate of occurrence). Because of the simultaneous increases in the size of the general child population during that time interval, the percentage increase in the total number of sexually abused children was even greater. (The NIS–3 total of 217,700 children reflects an 83% increase over the 1986 total of 119,200 children.) The number of children who suffered physical abuse also rose during the NIS–2/NIS–3 interval, but as Table 3–1 indicates, that gain did not match the sexual abuse increase, either in size or in statistical strength. The total number of children who experienced physical abuse grew 42 percent since the NIS–2, while the incidence rate rose from 4.3 to 5.7 children per 1,000, constituting a 33-percent increase in rate. This increase approached, but did not quite reach, the level traditionally required for statistical significance.

The NIS–3 Harm Standard estimates for both physical and sexual abuse are significantly higher than the corresponding NIS–1 estimates. The total number of physically abused children nearly doubled in the interval between 1980 and 1993 (rising by 92%). The increased incidence rate for physical abuse under the Harm Standard meant that a child in the United States faced an 84-percent higher risk of being harmed from physical abuse in 1993 than in 1980. At the same time, more than five times the number of children were victims of sexual abuse under the Harm Standard in 1993 compared with 1980 (that is, the NIS–3 estimated total is 407% higher than the NIS–1 estimate). Taking into account the changes in the child population size over that time period does little to ameliorate the magnitude of this gain: the incidence rate increased by 357 percent during that interval. In 1993, a child's risk of sexual abuse was more than four and one-half times greater than in 1980. Emotional abuse showed a marginal increase of 43 percent in incidence rate during the 1980 to 1993 interval (affecting 54% more children in the NIS–3 than in the NIS–1.)

The incidence rates in the three incidence studies for the specific types of abuse under the Harm Standard are graphed in Figure 3–1. Several features are noteworthy. First, emotional abuse as defined by the Harm Standard is the one type of abuse with a relatively stable incidence throughout the 1980 to 1993 time period, showing only a statistically marginal increase across the studies. Second, the chart conveys the predominance of physical abuse among the three Harm Standard abuse categories in all three studies. Third, the incidence rate for sexual abuse in the NIS–3 (3.2 children per 1,000) is slightly above the current incidence rate for emotional abuse (3.0 children per 1,000), and this reverses the pattern of both earlier studies, where emotional abuse was more prevalent than sexual abuse. Fourth, note that the current (NIS–3) rate for sexual abuse is on a par with the NIS–1 incidence rate for physical abuse. Fifth, the patterns illustrate that the increments in the incidence of physical abuse and sexual abuse have been of comparable absolute magnitudes across these incidence studies—the incidence rates for physical and sexual abuse have risen consistently by 1.2 to 1.4 children per 1,000 from one study to the next.

### 3.1.4 Incidence of Types of Neglect under the Harm Standard

Under the main category of neglect in Table 3–1 are the incidence estimates for three specific types of neglect under the Harm Standard—physical, emotional, and educational neglect. Again, children are included in each type that applied to them, so the sum of the rows for these types is greater than the total of all neglected children.

**Physical Neglect.** This type of neglect includes inadequate supervision; inadequate attention to needs for food, clothing, or personal hygiene; disregard for safety; medical neglect; abandonment; and other custody-related maltreatment. In all categories, except the last three, the maltreatment must have resulted in demonstrable injury or impairment that was serious or fatal for the child to be countable under the Harm Standard. Serious harm was defined as life-threatening or requiring professional treatment in order to prevent significant long-term impairment. The Harm Standard criteria for the last three categories of physical neglect were somewhat less demanding,

permitting harm to be inferred or allowing moderately harmed children to count in the Harm Standard estimates.[6]

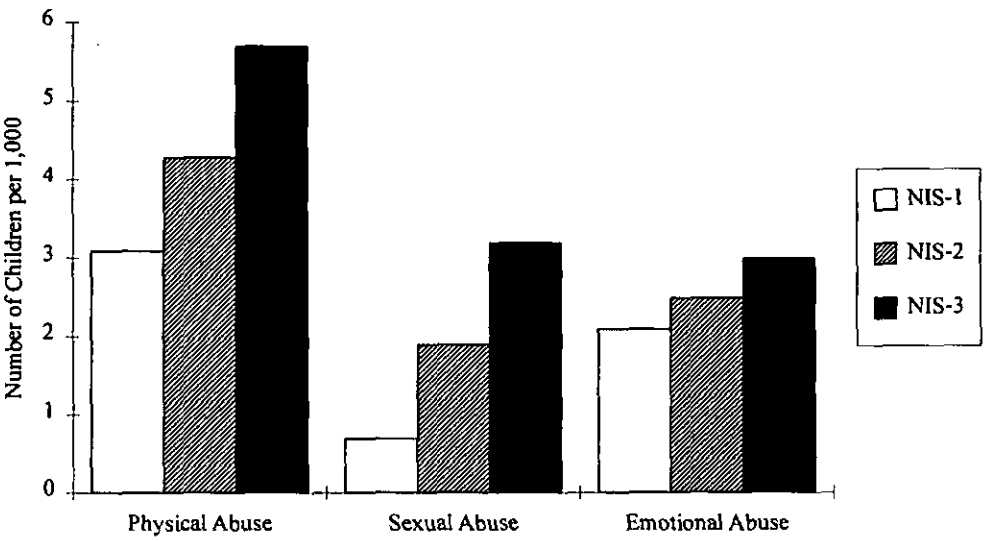


Figure 3–1. Changes across the Three National Incidence Studies in the Incidence Rates of Types of Abuse under the Harm Standard.

As shown previously in Table 3–1, physically neglected children are the second largest subset in the neglected population under the Harm Standard. An estimated 338,900 children experienced physical neglect in 1993, reflecting an incidence rate of 5.0 children per 1,000 in the general population.

**Emotional Neglect.** Maltreatment of this type includes inadequate nurturance or affection, chronic or extreme domestic violence in the child's presence, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse or other maladaptive behavior, failure (or refusal) to seek needed treatment for an emotional or behavioral problem, and other inattention to the child's developmental or emotional needs. In all cases,

[6] For acts of blatant abandonment or refusal of custody, the Harm Standard guidelines permit the assumption that serious emotional injury occurred (that is, explicit symptoms are not required), while for other custody-related maltreatment, moderate harm had to be demonstrated or the circumstances must have strongly supported the inference that moderate harm had probably occurred. To be countable as physical neglect under the Harm Standard, medical neglect had to result in moderate harm (if it entailed an outright refusal to follow professional recommendations regarding needed medical care) or serious harm (if it reflected a simple failure to obtain needed treatment).

it was necessary for this maltreatment to have caused serious harm in order for the child to be countable as emotionally neglected under the Harm Standard.

Although emotionally neglected children were the smallest of the neglect subgroups listed in Table 3–1, their numbers were still substantial at an estimated total of 212,800 children (equivalent to 3.2 children per 1,000 in the general 1993 child population).

**Educational Neglect.** Children were included in this category when their parent (or parent-substitute) knowingly permitted their chronic truancy for an average of at least 5 days per month; exhibited a pattern of keeping the child home for nonlegitimate reasons; failed to register or enroll a school-age child in school in violation of state law; or refused to allow or provide needed attention for a diagnosed educational problem, learning disorder, or other special education need. In all of these categories, if the evidence supported the conclusion that the acts or omissions in question had occurred, then the child was countable as educationally neglected under the Harm Standard and the NIS guidelines permitted the assumption that the child had experienced moderate educational harm.

Table 3–1 shows that educational neglect is the most prevalent type of neglect under the Harm Standard, affecting an estimated 397,300 children, or 5.9 children in 1,000 in 1993, and involving 45 percent of all children who experienced neglect under the Harm Standard.

**Changes since Earlier NISs in the Incidence of Neglect as Defined by the Harm Standard.** Two types of Harm Standard neglect evidenced substantial and significant increases since the NIS–2. The estimated number of children who suffered Harm Standard emotional neglect in 1993 was four and one-third times higher than the 1986 estimate. (There was a 333% increase from the NIS–2 estimated total of 49,200 children to the NIS–3 estimate of 212,800.) This means that children were at four times higher risk of this maltreatment in 1993 compared with their risk in 1986. (There was a 300% increase in the incidence rate.) At the same time, the number of physically neglected children who fit the Harm Standard criteria more than doubled, from 167,800 in the NIS–2 to 338,900 in the NIS–3 (a 102% increase), and there was an 85-percent increase in the risk rate per 1,000 for this type of maltreatment. The only neglect category under the Harm Standard that failed to demonstrate change since the last NIS was educational neglect. As Table 3–1 indicates, the fluctuation in the numbers of children who experienced educational neglect was nonsignificant.

When the NIS–3 incidence figures are compared with the incidence of Harm Standard neglect at the time of the NIS–1, all three types of neglect exhibit significant increases. The estimated total of 212,800 emotionally neglected children in 1993 is three and three-fourth times higher than the 1980 estimate of 56,900 (a 274% increase in the total), and the rate per 1,000 children was more than three and one-half times higher (a 256% increase in the incidence rate). Physical neglect under the Harm Standard more than tripled from its 1980 level during the NIS–1, whether one indexes the rise on the basis of total maltreated children in this category (which showed a 227% increase from 103,600 in the NIS–1 to 338,900 in the NIS–3) or on the basis of the incidence rate (which increased by 213% in this interim). Finally, although the increases in the incidence of educational neglect between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 and between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 (above) were not statistically significant as separate increases,[7] their cumulative effect is both substantial and significant. That is, the estimated total number of educationally neglected children more than doubled in the NIS–1 to NIS–3 interval (showing a 128% increase from 174,000 children to 397,300 children). The incidence rate increased by 119 percent during the intervening time period, so that a child in the United States was more than twice as likely to experience educational neglect in 1993 as compared with 1980.

Figure 3–2 presents the incidence rates for the three types of neglect under the Harm Standard across the NIS–1, the NIS–2, and the NIS–3. The patterns illustrate that the relative prevalence of the three categories of neglect under the Harm Standard have remained very stable across studies, with educational neglect most prevalent, physical neglect second, and emotional neglect the least prevalent in each NIS. The dramatic rise in the incidence rate of emotional neglect in the NIS–3 is also evident in the figure, bringing the current incidence rate for emotional neglect above the level of physical neglect in both previous studies and above the level of educational neglect in the NIS–1. The figure also conveys the fact that the rise since the NIS–2 in incidence rates for physical neglect and emotional neglect under the Harm Standard affected comparable numbers of additional children in each of these categories—an additional 2.3 and 2.4 children per 1,000, respectively.

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[7] Details regarding the significance of the differences between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 were reported in Sedlak, A.J. (1991). *National Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect: 1988, Revised.* Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc.

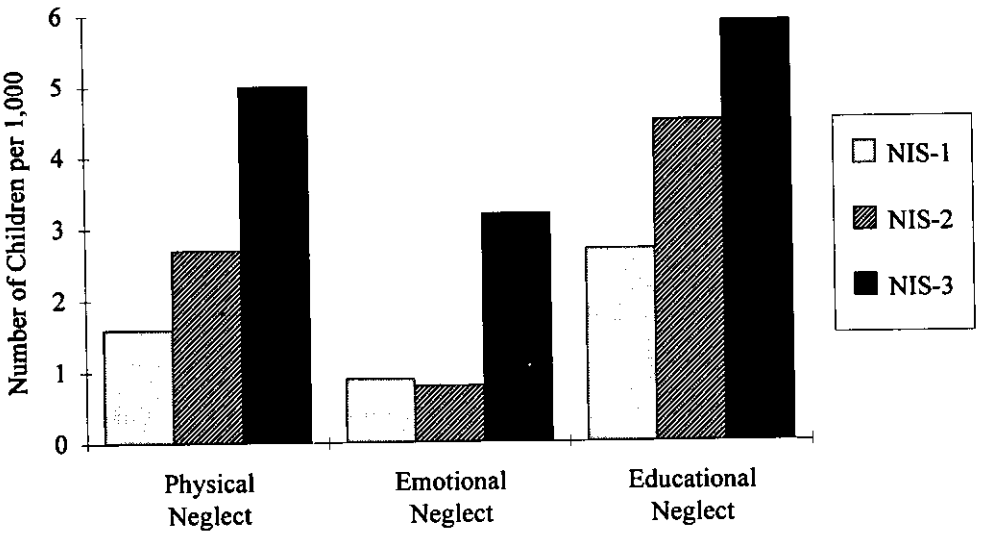


Figure 3–2. Changes across the Three National Incidence Studies in the Incidence Rates of Types of Neglect under theHarm Standard.

### 3.1.5 Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Children were classified on the basis of the most severe injury or harm they suffered from Harm Standard maltreatment. Table 3–2 presents their distribution across different degrees of injury/impairment. Each maltreated child appears in only one row of this table, so the row entries sum to the total number of children who were countable under the Harm Standard.[8]

**Fatal Injury.** An estimated 1,500 children died in 1993 as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by the Harm Standard. This reflected an annual incidence rate of maltreatment-related fatalities of 0.02 per 1,000 children in the United States, which is equivalent to 2 children per every 100,000, or 1 in every 50,000, in the U.S. child population.

[8] Compare Table 3–2 "Total" with "All Maltreatment" in Table 3–1.

Table 3–2. Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 (1993), and Comparison with the NIS–2 (1986) and the NIS–1 (1980) Harm Standard Findings.

| Severity of Injury or Impairment From Harm Standard Maltreatment | NIS–3 Estimates 1993 | | Comparisons With Earlier Studies | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | NIS–2: 1986 | | | NIS–1: 1980 | | |
| | **Estimated Total** | ***Rate per 1,000 Children*** | Estimated Total | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | | Estimated Total | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| Fatal | **1,500** | ***0.02*** | 1,100 | *0.02* | ns | 1,000 | *0.02* | ns |
| Serious | **565,000** | ***8.4*** | 141,700 | *2.3* | * | 131,200 | *2.1* | * |
| Moderate | **822,000** | ***12.2*** | 682,700 | *10.8* | ns | 393,400 | *6.2* | * |
| Inferred | **165,300** | ***2.5*** | 105,500 | *1.7* | m | 97,500 | *1.5* | * |
| Unknown | **0** | ***0.0*** | 0 | *0.0* | -- | 2,000 | *0.0* | -- |
| TOTAL | **1,553,800** | ***23.2*** | 931,000 | *14.8* | * | 625,100 | *9.8* | * |

* The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.
m The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).
ns The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).
Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100.

**Serious Injury or Harm.** As noted above, an injury or impairment is defined as serious when it involves a life-threatening condition; represents a long-term impairment of physical, mental, or emotional capacities; or requires professional treatment aimed at preventing such long-term impairment. Examples of serious injuries/impairments include loss of consciousness, stopping breathing, broken bones, schooling loss that required special education services, chronic and debilitating drug/alcohol abuse, diagnosed cases of failure to thrive, third degree burns or extensive second degree burns, and so forth.[9] Serious injuries from Harm Standard maltreatment occurred to 8.4 children per 1,000 in 1993, representing 565,000 children, or over one-third (36%) of all children who were countable under the Harm Standard.

[9] See "Evaluative Coding Manual," Appendix C in the NIS–3 *Analysis Report*.

**Moderate Injury or Harm.** Moderate injuries or impairments were those that persisted in observable form (including pain or impairment) for at least 48 hours (e.g., bruises, depression, or emotional distress not serious enough to require professional treatment). Moderate degrees of injury/impairment were experienced by 12.2 children per 1,000 (or 822,000 children) in 1993, and these accounted for over one-half (53%) of all children countable under the Harm Standard.

**Inferred Harm.** The nature of the maltreatment itself gave reasonable cause to assume that injury or impairment probably occurred for 2.5 children per 1,000 in the United States in 1993, or 165,300 children countable under the Harm Standard.[10] Following the hierarchy conveyed by the ordering in Table 3–2, a Harm Standard child was placed in the "inferred harm" category only if he or she had not sustained fatal, serious, or moderate harm. However, inferred injury should not be interpreted as less serious than moderate injury, because the types of maltreatment that generally warranted inferred harm (e.g., incest, abandonment) could actually have a devastating impact on a child.

**Changes since Earlier NISs in the Severity of Maltreatment Outcomes.** Tests of differences between the NIS–3 estimates for 1993 and the corresponding findings of the earlier NIS–2 in 1986 revealed a significant rise in the incidence of seriously injured children and a marginal increase in those who could be presumed harmed based on the character of their abuse or neglect but showed no significant changes in the incidence of fatalities or in the incidence of children who were moderately harmed by maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

There was a substantial and significant increase in the incidence of children who were seriously harmed by maltreatment under the Harm Standard. Specifically, the estimated number of seriously injured children essentially quadrupled (increasing by 299%) in the intervening 7 years between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3. In terms of incidence rates, this increase meant that the risk of a child being seriously injured by abuse or neglect under the Harm Standard was 282-percent higher in 1993 than in 1986.

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[10] As described in the preceding sections, there were instances where the Harm Standard guidelines permitted the assumption that a child was harmed, even though observable symptoms were not yet evident. These conditions included the more serious forms of sexual abuse, blatant abandonment, and extremely close confinement (tying or binding). In addition, the Harm Standard guidelines permitted circumstantial evidence of harm to support a child's countability in connection with "other" sexual abuse (i.e., beyond intrusion and genital molestation), "other" close confinement, verbal or emotional assault, "other" abuse or exploitation (i.e., beyond the forms readily classifiable as sexual, physical, or verbal), and "other" custody-related neglect (i.e., outside of outright abandonment).

Also, there was a 57-percent increase since the NIS–2 in the estimated number of children for whom injury could be inferred under the Harm Standard guidelines, reflecting a rise of 47 percent since 1986 in the incidence rate per 1,000 for this category of injury. This increase approached, but did not attain, the level traditionally required for statistical significance.

Finally, the categories of fatal injury and moderate injury showed no significant changes since the NIS–2. That is, although the NIS–3 estimate that 1,500 children were killed in 1993 by abuse or neglect under the Harm Standard appears to reflect an increase over earlier NIS findings, these differences between the 1993 estimate and earlier NIS estimates were not statistically significant. Similarly, the finding that there were no significant changes in the incidence of children who were moderately harmed by Harm Standard maltreatment despite the addition of 139,300 children to this category in the NIS–3 may seem puzzling. Both of these results derive from the fact that the NIS estimates in these categories are not precise enough for the differences in question to meet (or approach) statistical significance. The conclusion in both categories (fatalities and moderate injuries) is that the NIS–3 did not provide reliable evidence of change from the levels of the NIS–2 estimates.

More marked differences are apparent when one compares the NIS–3 findings with the 1980 NIS–1 estimates. The NIS–3 demonstrates significant increases since the NIS–1 in all but fatal injuries from Harm Standard maltreatment. Specifically, the estimated number of seriously injured Harm Standard children rose by 331 percent since the NIS–1 (i.e., was 4.3 times the 1980 estimated total), and the estimated number of moderately injured children more than doubled (increasing by 109% since the NIS–1). Compared to the situation in 1980, children in 1993 had a 300-percent higher risk of being seriously injured and a 97-percent higher risk of being moderately injured by Harm Standard maltreatment. The number of children who experienced forms of maltreatment so egregious that one could infer that they had been injured by it rose by 70 percent between 1980 and 1993. This means that a child had a 67-percent higher risk of experiencing maltreatment with inferable harm in 1993 under the Harm Standard, compared with the risk to a child in 1980.

Figure 3–3 graphically shows the incidence rates for children who suffered serious, moderate, or inferred harm from Harm Standard maltreatment across the three national incidence studies. The most notable aspect of this figure is the dramatic rise in the incidence of seriously injured children in the NIS–3. In fact, the current incidence rate for seriously injured children exceeds the NIS–1 incidence rate for moderately injured children. The patterns also show that the three Harm Standard severity categories have maintained their same relative positions across the three studies, with moderately injured

children the most prevalent category, seriously injured children second, and children with inferred injuries last.

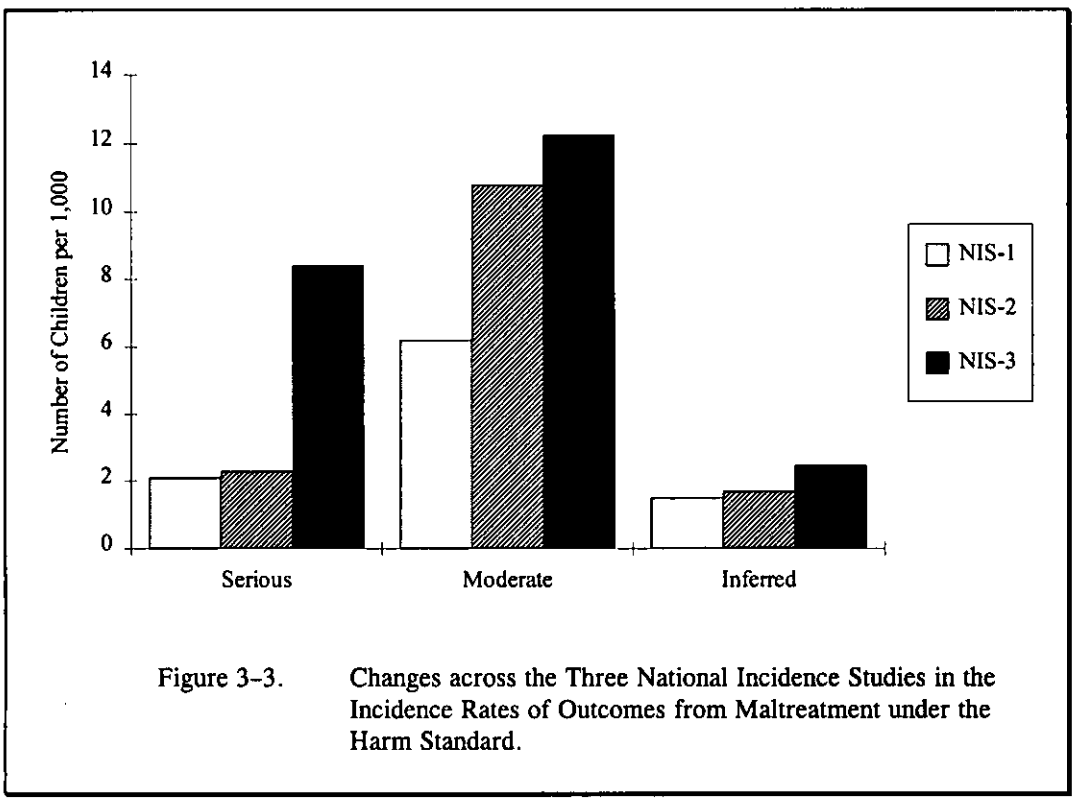


Figure 3-3. Changes across the Three National Incidence Studies in the Incidence Rates of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

## 3.2 National Incidence of Child Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

This section presents the NIS–3 findings on the incidence of children who experienced maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in 1993. *The Endangerment Standard estimates include all the Harm Standard children, but add others as well by relaxing the definitional requirements in several respects.* The central feature of the Endangerment Standard is that it includes children who have not yet been harmed by maltreatment, but who have experienced abuse or neglect that put them in danger of being harmed according to the views of community professionals or child protective service agencies.[11] In addition, the Endangerment Standard slightly enlarges the set of allowable perpetrators in

[11] Specifically, in order to qualify as "endangered," the child's maltreatment had to have been substantiated or indicated by a child protective service (CPS) agency, or a participating sentinel in a non-CPS agency (such as a teacher in a school, a nurse or social worker in a hospital, etc.) had to have explicitly rated the child as having been endangered by the abuse or neglect they described.

several categories and incorporates two additional maltreatment classifications, as will be explained in subsequent sections.

Each of the following subsections begins with a presentation of the full scope of the abuse and neglect estimates that result when the Endangerment Standard is used. Following that, the Endangerment Standard estimates are compared with the Harm Standard estimates given above, in order to clarify the distribution of these additional children. Each subsection concludes with a comparison between the NIS–3 Endangerment Standard estimates and the Endangerment Standard findings in the NIS–2. Note that whereas the Harm Standard was used in all three national incidence studies, the Endangerment Standard has been applied only in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

### 3.2.1 Overall Incidence of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

Table 3–3 presents incidence levels based on the Endangerment Standard definitions. The shaded and bold-faced section reports the NIS–3 findings, which provide annual estimates for 1993. The right-hand section provides the NIS–2 findings for comparison. (As mentioned above, the Endangerment Standard was not used in the NIS–1.)

The estimate of all maltreated children under the Endangerment Standard includes all children who were abused or neglected in all categories listed. In addition, the Endangerment Standard enlarged the categories of allowable maltreatment by also including children who were considered to have been endangered by their parents' problems (such as alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution) without a description of the specific abusive or neglectful actions that derived from those problems.[12]

As the first row in Table 3–3 indicates, an estimated 2,815,600 children experienced some form of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard during 1993. This corresponds to an incidence rate of 41.9 children per 1,000, which is equivalent to 4.2 children per 100, or 1 child in 24 in the general U.S. child population.

[12] Thus, the "All Maltreatment" category includes all children in the "All Abuse" total, all children in the "All Neglect" total, and also other children who were endangered by their parents' problems.

Table 3–3. National Incidence of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993), and Comparison with the NIS–2 (1986) Endangerment Standard Estimates.

| Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Category | NIS–3 Estimates 1993 | | Comparison With NIS–2 1986 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total No. of Children** | ***Rate per 1,000 Children*** | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | **2,815,600** | ***41.9*** | 1,424,400 | *22.6* | * |
| *ABUSE:* | | | | | |
| ALL ABUSE | **1,221,800** | ***18.2*** | 590,800 | *9.4* | * |
| Physical Abuse | **614,100** | ***9.1*** | 311,500 | *4.9* | * |
| Sexual Abuse | **300,200** | ***4.5*** | 133,600 | *2.1* | * |
| Emotional Abuse | **532,200** | ***7.9*** | 188,100 | *3.0* | * |
| *NEGLECT:* | | | | | |
| ALL NEGLECT | **1,961,300** | ***29.2*** | 917,200 | *14.6* | * |
| Physical Neglect | **1,335,100** | ***19.9*** | 507,700 | *8.1* | * |
| Emotional Neglect | **584,100** | ***8.7*** | 203,000 | *3.2* | * |
| Educational Neglect | **397,300** | ***5.9*** | 284,800 | *4.5* | ns |

* The difference between this estimate and the NIS–3 estimate is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.

Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100.

**Comparison to the Overall Estimate under the Harm Standard.** The Endangerment Standard included an additional 1,261,800 children in the total population of maltreated children beyond those who were countable under the Harm Standard. The Endangerment Standard estimate of the maltreated population of 2,815,600 (or 41.9 children per 1,000) is 81-percent greater than the Harm Standard estimate of 1,553,800 (or 23.1 per 1,000). An alternative way of viewing this is to note that Harm Standard children represent 55 percent of the Endangerment Standard estimate of all maltreated children. This is graphically illustrated in the first bar in Figure 3–4.

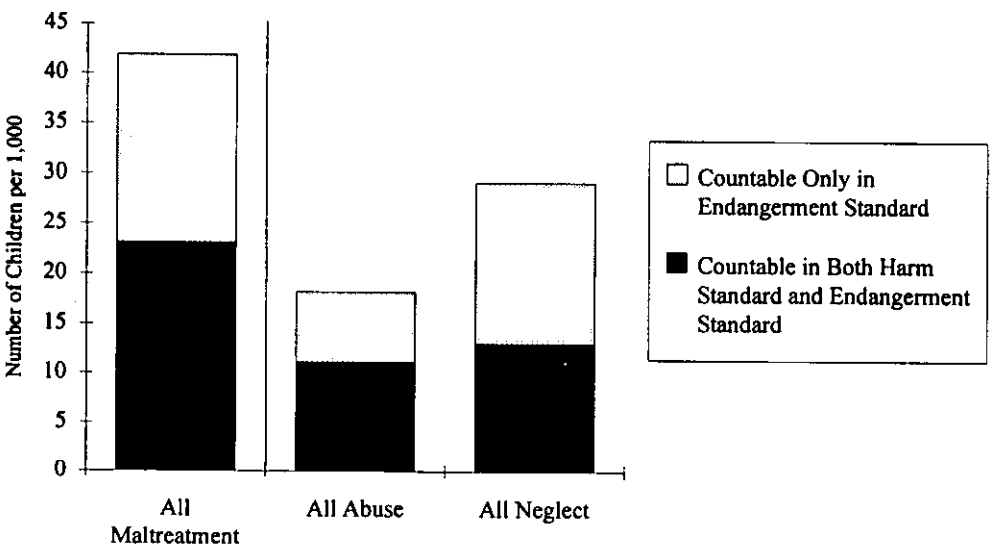


Figure 3–4. Components of the NIS–3 Endangerment Standard Estimates for Different Maltreatment Categories.

**Changes since 1986 in the Incidence of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** The right-hand section in Table 3–3 reveals that the 1993 Endangerment Standard total represents a significant increase over the 1986 estimate. In fact, the total number of children who were abused or neglected under the Endangerment Standard nearly doubled since the NIS–2, increasing by 98 percent (from 1,424,400 in 1986 to 2,815,600 in 1993). The incidence rate increased by 85 percent (from 22.6 children per 1,000 to 41.9 children per 1,000). This rise in the incidence means that a child had a more than one and four-fifths times higher risk of being abused or neglected in accordance with the Endangerment Standard in 1993 compared to a child's risk in 1986.

### 3.2.2 Incidence of Abuse and Neglect under the Endangerment Standard

Table 3–3 gives estimates for different categories of maltreatment. In the second and third sections of the table, the Endangerment Standard children are categorized into those who were abused and those who were neglected, respectively. The Endangerment Standard neglect estimate includes all the types of neglect described earlier, as well as neglect that was not classifiable under the Harm Standard, such as lack of preventive health care and unspecified forms of neglect.

An estimated 1,221,800 children were abused under the Endangerment Standard definitions, while an estimated 1,961,300 children were neglected. These totals represent incidence rates of 18.2 abused children per 1,000 in the U.S. population and of 29.2 neglected children per 1,000 nationwide. This means that the majority of Endangerment Standard children (70%) were neglected and less than one-half (43%) were abused. Again, children who were both abused and neglected are included in both categories, so they sum to more than the total number of maltreated children. An estimated 367,500 children (or 5.5 per 1,000) experienced both abuse and neglect that fit the Endangerment Standard.

**Comparison with the Total Abused and Neglected under the Harm Standard.** The abuse estimate under the Endangerment Standard is 64-percent higher than the abuse estimate under the Harm Standard, while the neglect estimate under the Endangerment Standard estimate is 123-percent greater than the neglect estimate under the Harm Standard. The less stringent requirements reflected in the Endangerment Standard brought substantially more children into the neglect estimate (an additional 1,082,300 children) than into the abuse estimate (where 478,600 children were added). This pattern was also the case in the NIS–2. The two bars on the right-hand side of Figure 3—4 depict the pattern in the NIS–3 estimates. Harm Standard children account for 61 percent of the Endangerment Standard total of all abused children and 45 percent of the Endangerment Standard total of all neglected children.

**Changes since 1986 in the Incidence of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** In comparison to the NIS–2 estimates, both abuse and neglect under the Endangerment Standard evidenced statistically significant increases. There was a 107-percent increase in the total number of abused children fitting the Endangerment Standard since the NIS–2 and a 114-percent increase in the total number of Endangerment Standard children who were neglected. In terms of incidence rates, there was a 94-percent increase in the rate of abuse under the Endangerment Standard and a 100-percent increase in the rate of neglect under the Endangerment Standard. Thus, from the perspective of the Endangerment Standard, children in 1993 had nearly double the risk of being abused and exactly twice the risk of being neglected compared to the corresponding risks for children in 1986.

### 3.2.3 Incidence of Types of Abuse under the Endangerment Standard

Table 3–3 provides the incidence statistics for the main types of abuse under the Endangerment Standard: physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The estimates for the different abuse

types add up to more than the total number of abused children because children who experienced more than one type of abuse are reflected in the estimates for each applicable type.

**Physical Abuse.** Table 3–3 shows that 9.1 children per 1,000 (or an estimated 614,100 children) experienced Endangerment Standard physical abuse in 1993.

**Sexual Abuse.** The Endangerment Standard enlarges the set of allowable perpetrators of sexual abuse by permitting children to count in the sexual abuse estimates if they are abused by teenage (i.e., nonadult) caretakers. An estimated 4.5 children per 1,000 (or a total of 300,200) were sexually abused in 1993 under the Endangerment Standard guidelines.

**Emotional Abuse.** Table 3–3 indicates that, in 1993, an estimated 7.9 children per 1,000 (532,200 children) suffered emotional abuse that fit the Endangerment Standard definitions.

**Comparison with Estimates of Abuse under the Harm Standard.** The estimates for the different abuse types under the Endangerment Standard are all notably higher than the corresponding estimates under the Harm Standard, but the largest difference is in the category of emotional abuse. Specifically, the number of physically abused children under the Endangerment Standard is 61-percent higher than the number of children who count as physically abused under the Harm Standard; the number of sexually abused children is 38-percent higher under the Endangerment Standard than under the Harm Standard; and the number of emotionally abused children is 160-percent higher under the more lenient Endangerment Standard compared to the stringent Harm Standard criteria. Figure 3–5 presents the Endangerment Standard estimates for each abuse type, showing the portion represented by children who were counted as maltreated under the Harm Standard. Specifically, Harm Standard children accounted for 62 percent of the estimated total who suffered physical abuse, 73 percent of those who suffered sexual abuse, and 38 percent of those who experienced emotional abuse.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in the Incidence of Abuse under the Endangerment Standard.** All types of abuse under the Endangerment Standard exhibited significant increases since the NIS–2. The total number of physically abused children nearly doubled, from 311,500 to 614,100, an increase of 97 percent. A child in 1993 had an 86-percent greater risk of being physically abused under the Endangerment Standard than his or her counterpart had in 1986. Under the Endangerment Standard, both the number and incidence rate of sexual abuse more than doubled since the NIS–2. There was also a 125-percent increase in the estimated total number of children who had been sexually abused under the

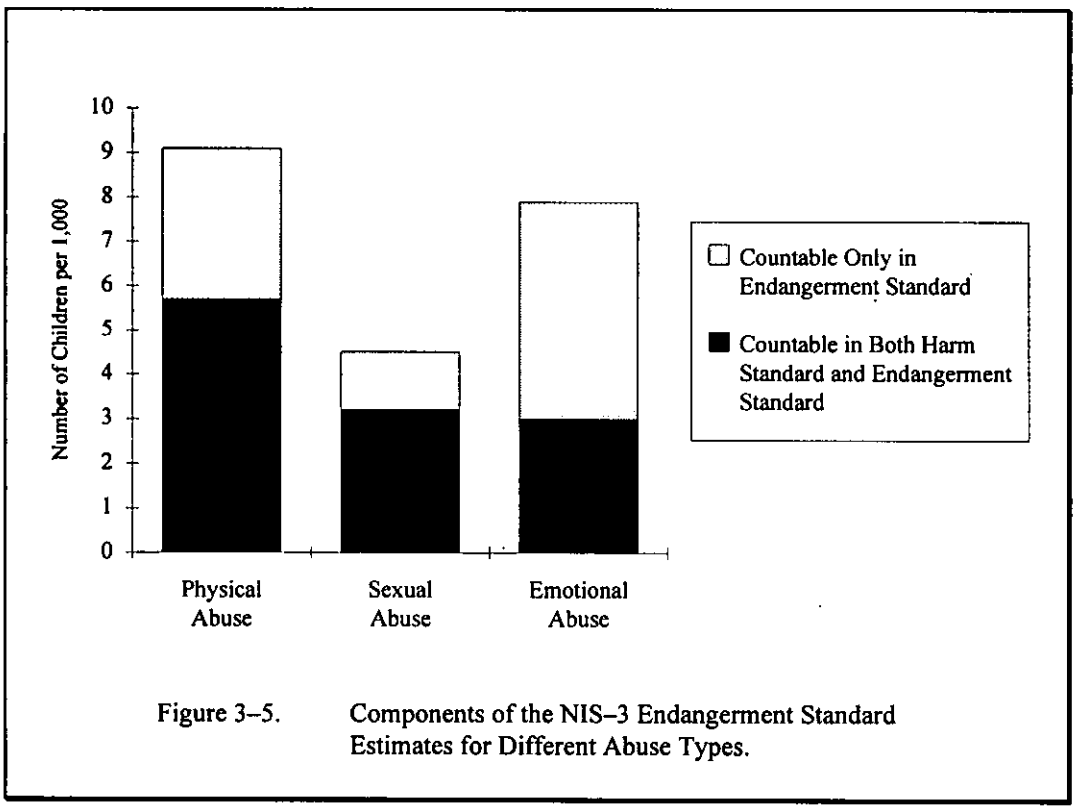


Figure 3–5. Components of the NIS–3 Endangerment Standard Estimates for Different Abuse Types.

Endangerment Standard: a child had a 114-percent higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse in 1993 compared to 1986. Emotional abuse under the Endangerment Standard showed the largest relative increase since the NIS–2, with the total number of emotionally abused children rising by 183 percent and the incidence rate per 1,000 children in the United States increasing by 163 percent. Thus, a child had a nearly two-and-two-thirds greater risk in 1993 compared to 1986 of being the victim of emotional abuse under the Endangerment Standard.

The graph in Figure 3–6 compares the NIS–2 and NIS–3 incidence rates for the abuse types under the Endangerment Standard. Note that even in the face of significant increases in all categories, the three types of abuse retained their relative prevalence ordering within each incidence study: physical abuse > emotional abuse > sexual abuse. Also observe that, under the Endangerment Standard, the 1993 incidence rate for sexual abuse (4.5 children per 1,000) approaches the 1986 incidence rate for physical abuse (4.9 children per 1,000) and exceeds the NIS–2 incidence rate for emotional abuse (3.0 children per 1,000). In absolute terms, the largest abuse increase since the NIS–2 was in the category of emotional abuse under the Endangerment Standard, which affected 4.9 more children per 1,000 in 1993 than it had in 1986. Moreover, its latest rate (7.9 children per 1,000) exceeds the NIS–2 rates for both

physical abuse and sexual abuse under the Endangerment Standard. Physical abuse is a close second in terms of the absolute size of its increase since the NIS–2 (an additional 4.2 children per 1,000), now affecting a total of 9.1 children per 1,000, or 1 out of every 110 children in the United States.

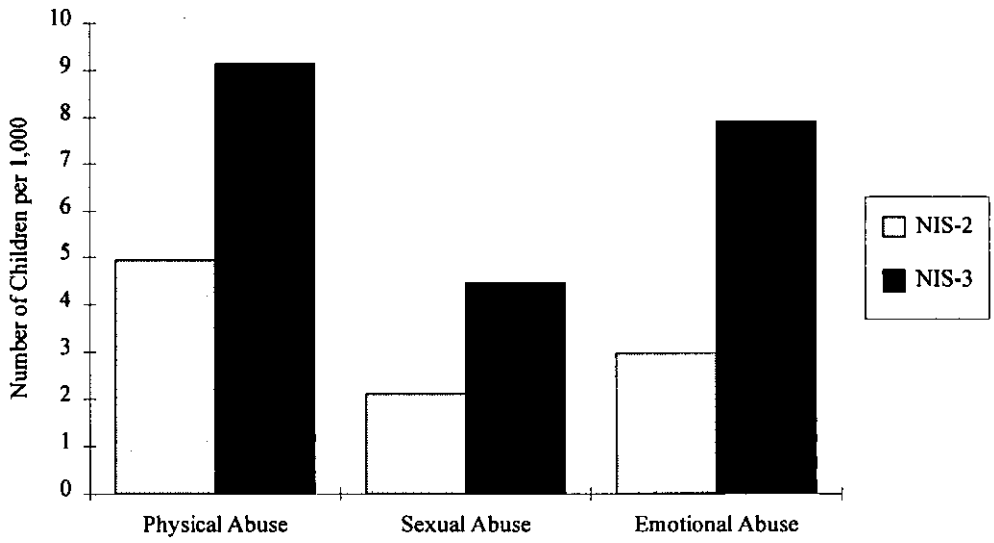


Figure 3–6. Changes across Two National Incidence Studies in the Incidence Rates of Types of Abuse under the Endangerment Standard.

### 3.2.4 Incidence of Types of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard

Table 3–3 presents the incidence estimates for the main types of Endangerment Standard neglect—physical, emotional, and educational. Again, children are included in each type that applied to them.

**Physical Neglect.** The Endangerment Standard enlarged the set of allowable perpetrators of this type of neglect by permitting the inclusion of children who were neglected by an adult caretaker (i.e., not necessarily a parent or parent-substitute) who inadequately supervised them; failed to meet their needs for food, clothing, or personal hygiene; or demonstrated disregard for their safety. Physically neglected children are the largest neglect category under the Endangerment Standard, with an estimated

1,335,100 children physically neglected in 1993. This reflected an incidence rate of 19.9 children per 1,000 in the general population, or 2.0 children per 100, which is equivalent to 1 in every 50 children in the United States.

**Emotional Neglect.** Children who were emotionally neglected are the second largest sector of neglected children as defined by the Endangerment Standard. This category included an estimated total of 584,100 children (equivalent to 8.7 children per 1,000 in the general 1993 child population).

**Educational Neglect.** The same requirements for educational neglect were applied under both the Harm and Endangerment standards. Thus, the estimated number of educationally neglected children is the same under both standards. (Compare Tables 3–1 and 3–3.) The last row in Table 3–3 shows that educational neglect is the least prevalent of all categories of neglect under the Endangerment Standard—slightly less prevalent than emotional neglect under this standard. It affected an estimated 397,300 children, or 5.9 children in 1,000 in 1993.

**Comparison with Estimates of Neglect under the Harm Standard.** As could be expected, estimates for both physical neglect and emotional neglect were higher with the more lenient Endangerment Standard criteria than with the more restrictive Harm Standard requirements. Compared to the corresponding Harm Standard estimates, the estimated incidence of physical neglect under the Endangerment Standard is almost four times greater (294% higher), while the estimated incidence of emotional neglect under the Endangerment Standard is nearly two and three-fourths times greater (174% higher). Figure 3–7 graphs the Endangerment Standard estimates, showing the portion accounted for by Harm Standard-countable children. Harm Standard children represent 25 percent of the estimated total who suffered physical neglect and 36 percent of those who experienced emotional neglect.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in the Incidence of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard.** Figure 3–8 presents the incidence rates in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for the different types of neglect under the Endangerment Standard. Physical and emotional neglect evidenced substantial and significant increases since the NIS–2. The estimated number of children who suffered emotional neglect under the Endangerment Standard showed the largest percentage increase, with the 1993 estimated total 188-percent higher than the 1986 estimate. There was a 172-percent increase in the incidence rate of emotional neglect since the NIS–2. This means that children were at almost two and three-fourths times greater risk of this maltreatment in 1993 compared with their risk in 1986. The number of physically

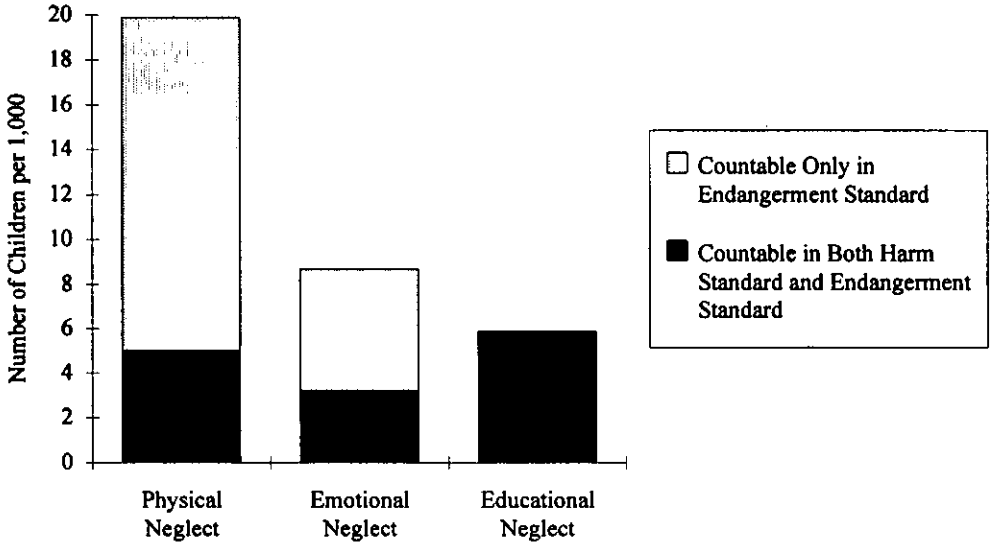


Figure 3–7. Components of the NIS–3 Endangerment Standard Estimates for Different Neglect Types.

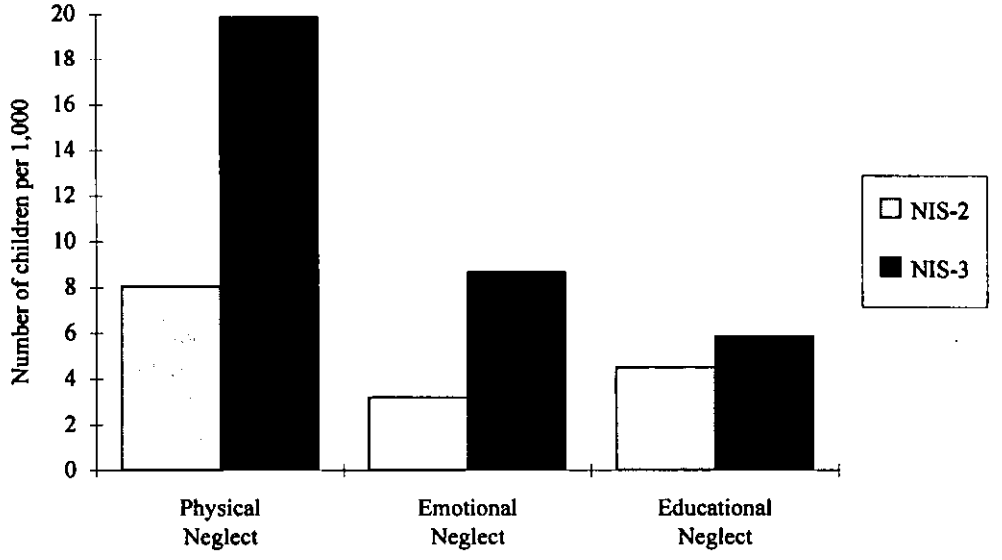


Figure 3–8. Changes across Two National Incidence Studies in the Incidence Rates of Types of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard.

neglected children who fit the Endangerment Standard criteria was nearly two and two-thirds higher in the NIS-3 than in the NIS-2 (a 163% increase), and there was a 146-percent increase in the risk rate per 1,000 children for this type of maltreatment. The smallest percentage increase since the last NIS was in the category of educational neglect, which rose 39 percent in the total number of affected children and 31 percent in incidence rate per 1,000 children.

### 3.2.5 Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

Children were classified on the basis of the most severe injury or harm they suffered from Endangerment Standard maltreatment. Table 3–4 presents their distribution across different degrees of injury/impairment. Because each maltreated child appears in only one row of this table, the row entries sum to the total number of children who were countable under the Endangerment Standard.[13] This section follows the structure of the preceding sections. The estimates themselves are presented first. After that, they are examined in relation to the Harm Standard estimates in order to identify the proportion of the Endangerment Standard estimate that reflects children who were countable under both standards. Finally, they are compared with the Endangerment Standard estimates from the NIS–2 to determine whether there have been any notable changes in incidence since that previous study.

**Fatal Injury.** An estimated 1,600 children died in 1993 as a result of abuse or neglect that fit the more inclusive Endangerment Standard guidelines. This reflected an annual incidence rate of maltreatment-related fatalities of 0.02 per 1,000 children in the United States, which is equivalent to 2 children per every 100,000 in the U.S. child population.

**Serious Injury or Harm.** An estimated 569,900 children were seriously injured in 1993 due to maltreatment that fit the Endangerment Standard requirements. This total corresponds to an incidence rate of 8.5 children per 1,000 in the United States.

**Moderate Injury or Harm.** Moderate injuries or impairments due to qualifying Endangerment Standard maltreatment occurred to an estimated 986,100 children in 1993. This means that moderate injuries affected 14.7 children per 1,000 in 1993.

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[13] Compare Table 3–4 "Total" with "All Maltreatment" in Table 3–3.

Table 3–4. Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993), and Comparison With the NIS–2 (1986) Estimates.

| Severity of Injury or Impairment from Endangerment Standard Maltreatment | NIS–3 Estimates 1993 | | Comparison With NIS–2 1986 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total No. of Children** | ***Rate per 1,000 Children*** | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| Fatal | **1,600** | ***0.02*** | 1,100 | *0.02* | ns |
| Serious | **569,900** | ***8.5*** | 143,300 | *2.3* | * |
| Moderate | **986,100** | ***14.7*** | 873,100 | *13.9* | ns |
| Inferred | **226,000** | ***3.4*** | 152,800 | *2.4* | ns |
| Endangered | **1,032,000** | ***15.4*** | 254,000 | *4.0* | * |
| TOTAL | **2,815,600** | ***41.9*** | 1,424,400 | *22.6* | * |

* The difference between this estimate and the NIS–3 estimate is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.
m The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).
ns The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).
Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100.

**Inferred Harm.** An estimated 226,000 children were countable under the Endangerment Standard with maltreatment experiences sufficiently severe that one could assume they had been harmed by those events. In 1993, harm was inferable on the basis of Endangerment Standard maltreatment for 3.4 children per 1,000 in the general U.S. child population.

**Endangered.** More than one million children (a total of 1,032,000) were endangered, though not yet harmed, by abuse or neglect in 1993, which reflects 15.4 children per 1,000 in the United States.

**Comparison with the Harm Standard Estimates for Different Outcome Levels.** As emphasized above, the key feature of the Endangerment Standard is that it includes both children who are counted under the Harm Standard and children who were endangered, but not yet harmed, by abuse or neglect. Thus, the "endangered" row of Table 3–4 represents children who did not count in any of the Harm Standard estimates in Section 3.1. However, recall that the Endangerment Standard also permits a

somewhat broader set of perpetrators and maltreating actions, as discussed above, thereby including additional children in the totals of children who did experience injury or harm (fatal, serious, moderate, or inferred) but who were excluded from the Harm Standard counts because of the identity of their perpetrators or the specific nature of their maltreatment.

The more lenient guidelines for the Endangerment Standard resulted in estimates that were 7-percent higher for fatalities due to abuse or neglect, only 1-percent greater for children seriously injured from maltreatment, 20-percent higher for the number of children who experienced moderate harm, and 37-percent higher for the number of children whose maltreatment was severe enough to permit harm to be inferred. Alternatively, children countable under the Harm Standard are 94 percent of the fatalities total, 99 percent of the seriously injured total, 83 percent of the moderately injured total; and 73 percent of the total for whom injury or harm could be inferred. Figure 3–9 graphs these relationships. Note that all the children classified as "endangered" are children who count only in the Endangerment Standard because they have not yet experienced any harm or injury as a result of their abuse or neglect.

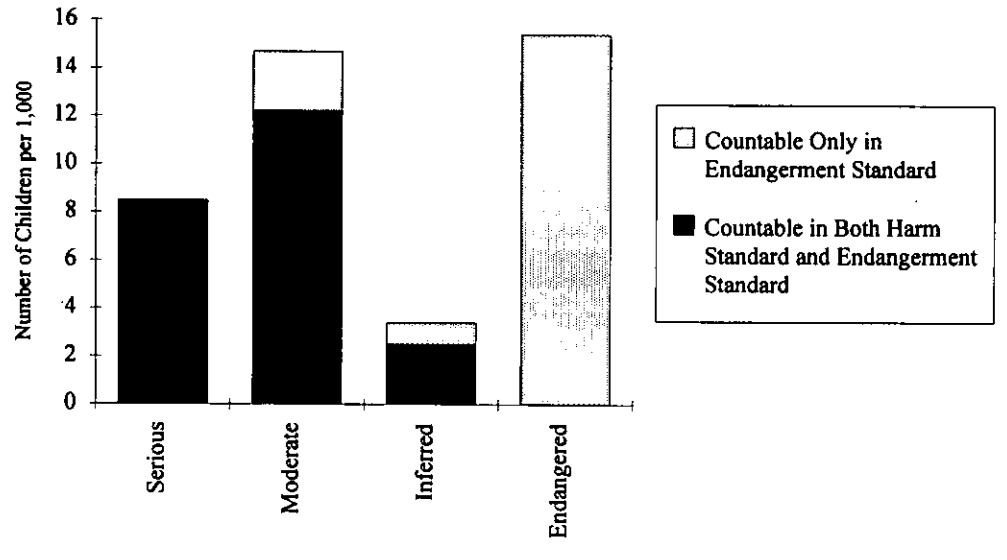


Figure 3–9. Components of Estimates for Different Severities of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** The analyses for the severity of outcomes using the definitions under the Endangerment

Standard revealed that the NIS–3 estimates differed significantly from the NIS–2 estimates for two categories of maltreated children: those who had been seriously injured by their maltreatment and those who had been endangered but not yet harmed. There were only slight (and nonsignificant) increases in the number of children who had been moderately injured and for whom harm could be inferred on the basis of the severity of the abusive or neglectful actions they experienced.

Figure 3–10 offers a visual comparison of the incidence estimates in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3. The NIS–3 estimate for the number of seriously injured children is nearly four times the NIS–2 estimate for this category (a 298% increase in the estimated total). Considering the incidence rates for this group in the two studies, the NIS–3 rate is more than three and two-thirds times greater than the NIS–2 estimated rate (a 270% increase in rate). Thus, a child had a more than three and two-thirds times higher risk in 1993 than in 1986 of suffering serious injury from maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard. Recall from the previous subsection that nearly all (99%) of the seriously injured children under the Endangerment Standard were children who had also been countable under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3. This was also the case in the NIS–2 (that is, children countable under the Harm Standard accounted for nearly all the seriously injured children in the Endangerment Standard).

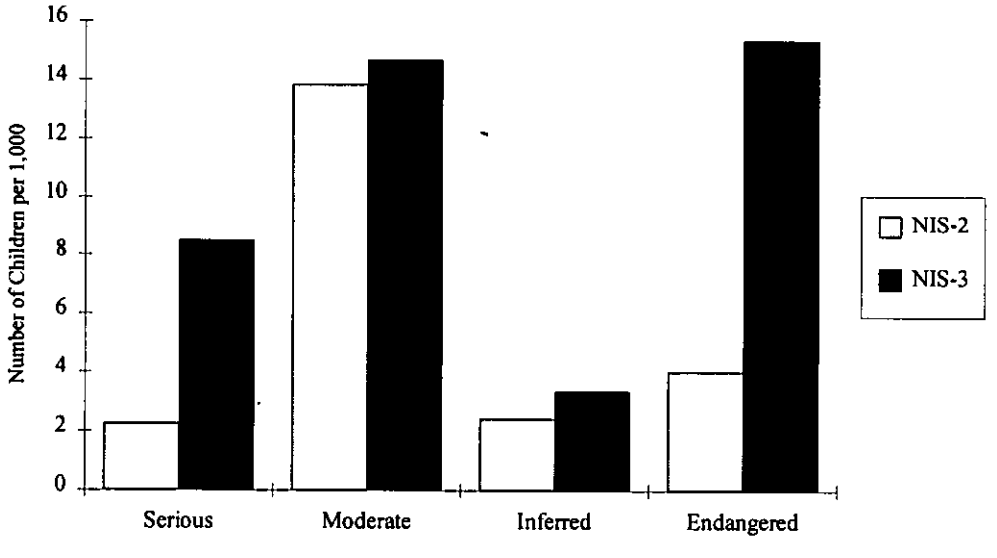


Figure 3–10. Changes across Two National Incidence Studies in the Incidence Rates of Different Severities of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.

Figure 3–10 also reveals the dramatic increase in the endangered category. The number of children who were endangered by abuse or neglect increased by 306 percent since the NIS–2, from 254,000 in 1986 to 1,032,000 in 1993. This reflects an increase in the incidence rate per 1,000 children of 285 percent, which means that a child was nearly four times more likely to be endangered by maltreatment in 1993 than his or her counterpart was in 1986.

## 3.3 Implications of the Findings

The NIS–3 reveals substantial and significant increases in the incidence of child abuse and neglect since the last national incidence study, which was conducted in 1986. The increases were demonstrated under both the Harm and Endangerment Standard definitions.

Using the same stringent Harm Standard definitions that had been used in both previous national incidence studies, the total number of abused and neglected children was found to be two-thirds higher in the NIS–3 than the total found in the NIS–2. Taking into account the fact that the size of the child population increased during the time interval, the finding means that a child had more than one and one-half times the risk of experiencing abuse or neglect that caused harm in 1993 compared to a child's risk in 1986. The most marked increases in harm-causing maltreatment occurred among the emotionally neglected children and for those who were seriously injured. The estimated totals in both of these categories quadrupled since the NIS–2.

Using the Endangerment Standard definitions, which bring additional children into the estimates by including those who have been endangered but not yet harmed by maltreatment, the estimated total number of abused and neglected children nearly doubled since the NIS–2. Physical abuse nearly doubled since its NIS–2 level; the number of children who were sexually abused was two and one-fourth times the NIS–2 total; and emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect were all more than two and one-half times their NIS–2 levels. The total of children seriously injured and the total of those endangered by maltreatment quadrupled since the NIS–2.

What do these dramatic increases mean? Do the increases in the numbers of countable children identified by the NIS mean that the number of children who are being abused and neglected has increased since the NIS–2? Is it that community professionals are more likely to recognize cases than they were in 1986? The fact that the increases occurred among children who were seriously injured and

among children who were endangered suggests that the answer is "both." That is, both of these dynamics contributed to the NIS–3 findings, each in a different sector of the maltreated child population.

The first part of the answer is that there has been a real increase in the number of children who are abused and neglected. One can reasonably assume that seriously injured victims of abuse and neglect are relatively unlikely to escape notice by community professionals compared to their less seriously injured counterparts. A community professional who encounters a child who has been seriously injured by abuse or neglect is very likely to bring that child to the attention of the NIS. The rise among the seriously injured children cannot be plausibly explained on the basis of heightened awareness on the part of NIS sentinels. Instead, the most reasonable interpretation of the rise in the numbers of seriously-injured children seen in the NIS–3 is that this reflects a real increase in the numbers of these children nationwide. The fact that the numbers of these children quadrupled in the 7 years since the NIS–2 and now include more than one-half million children is cause for serious concern.

The second part of the answer is that the capability of community professionals to recognize abuse and neglect has simultaneously improved in the interval between the studies. That is, by the same reasoning set forth above, the rise in the number of endangered children could reflect increased recognition of more subtle cues concerning abusive and neglectful behaviors. The endangered children are precisely the ones who would escape notice when awareness of abuse and neglect is suboptimal. As professionals pay greater attention to obtaining information about any abuse or neglect experiences among the children they encounter, one would expect them to identify greater numbers of children who are endangered by these experiences.

It is interesting to recall that, in the interval between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2, the increase had been in the number of children who were moderately injured by maltreatment. In interpreting the meaning of that increase, the pattern had suggested that community professionals had improved their attentiveness to indicators of moderate injury. Since the NIS–2, there have been no noteworthy changes in the incidence of moderately injured children (that is, the NIS–3 did not document any overall reliable change in the numbers in this category). This suggests that professionals had reached close to maximum recognition rates for moderately injured children at the time of the NIS–2. However, the fact that the NIS–3 demonstrates a fourfold increase in the numbers of endangered children does suggest that professionals have continued to increase their attentiveness to not-yet-injurious instances of abuse and neglect.

Overall, then, the findings reported here imply both that more children are being seriously injured by abuse or neglect and that community professionals are better able to identify those children who have been endangered, but not yet harmed, by abuse or neglect.

# 4. DISTRIBUTION OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter examines the relationship between child characteristics and the incidence and severity of abuse and neglect. It is divided into three main sections that discuss the NIS–3 findings on the relationship between maltreatment and, in turn, child's sex, age, and race. The discussion in each section addresses the following questions:

- Do differences among children in terms of the characteristic systematically relate to differences in incidence rates of different types of maltreatment or of different severities of outcomes due to maltreatment?
- Have there been any statistically significant changes since the NIS–2 in the distribution of child maltreatment by the characteristic in question?

In each section, these questions are considered from the standpoint of both the Harm and the Endangerment Standards. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the general implications of the findings.

As in the previous chapter, the tables here reflect unduplicated estimates: that is, each estimate counts each child only once. Also, because the incidence rates adjust for differences across the categories in the numbers of children in the general population with the characteristic of interest,[1] all tables and graphs presented in this chapter provide only the rate measures. For the same reason, all statistical comparisons were based on the rate measures.[2]

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[1] For instance, the incidence rate of Harm Standard maltreatment for males indicates the number of males who experience Harm Standard abuse or neglect among every 1,000 males in the general population. Analogously, the incidence rate for females is couched in terms of the number of maltreated females among every 1,000 females in the population. Comparisons of the incidence rates for males and females thus take account of the fact that there are different numbers of males and females in the general population of children and provide a more valid comparison of their risks of experiencing the maltreatment in question.

[2] Readers interested in the specific estimated totals in the different categories should consult Appendices A and B, which provide all NIS–3 estimates, including the estimated rates as well as totals, together with their standard errors of estimate and their upper and lower 95-percent confidence bounds. The detailed results of all statistical comparisons are provided in Appendices C and D.

## 4.1 Sex Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment

This section presents estimates of the incidence of maltreatment of males and females. The findings that fit the relatively stringent Harm Standard are presented first, followed by the distribution patterns for abuse and neglect under the more lenient Endangerment Standard.

### 4.1.1 Sex Differences in Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

The NIS–3 incidence rates of abuse and neglect under the Harm Standard for males and females are given in Table 4–1. The incidence rates for males and females are significantly different in only two categories of maltreatment (all abuse and sexual abuse) and in one category of outcome severity (inferred injury). The difference approaches significance in the categories of all maltreatment and serious injury.

#### Overall Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Girls were 13-percent more likely than boys to experience Harm Standard maltreatment. (Harmful abuse or neglect occurred to 24.5 per 1,000 females versus 21.7 per 1,000 males.) This difference is statistically marginal (i.e., it approaches, but does not quite reach, the level traditionally required for statistical significance).

#### Abuse under the Harm Standard

Because of their higher risk of sexual abuse (see below), girls had a significantly higher risk than boys for abuse overall: 12.6 females per 1,000 experienced some form of abuse that fit the Harm Standard criteria, compared to 9.5 males per 1,000. Thus, girls' risk of abuse was 33-percent higher than that of boys.

**Sexual Abuse.** Sexual abuse is the only specific type of maltreatment where girls' risk was significantly higher than that of boys. Girls experienced sexual abuse under the Harm Standard at more than three times the rate boys did; 4.9 females per 1,000 in the general population were countable in this

maltreatment category, compared to 1.6 males per 1,000. In other words, girls were 206-percent more likely than boys to be sexually abused under the Harm Standard.

Table 4–1. Sex Differences in Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 (1993).

| Harm Standard Maltreatment Category | Males | Females | Significance of Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *21.7* | *24.5* | m |
| ABUSE: | | | |
| All Abuse | *9.5* | *12.6* | * |
| Physical Abuse | *5.8* | *5.6* | ns |
| Sexual Abuse | *1.6* | *4.9* | * |
| Emotional Abuse | *2.9* | *3.1* | ns |
| NEGLECT: | | | |
| All Neglect | *13.3* | *12.9* | ns |
| Physical Neglect | *5.5* | *4.5* | ns |
| Emotional Neglect | *3.5* | *2.8* | ns |
| Educational Neglect | *5.5* | *6.4* | ns |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | |
| Fatal | *0.04* | *0.01* | ns |
| Serious | *9.3* | *7.5* | m |
| Moderate | *11.3* | *13.3* | ns |
| Inferred | *1.1* | *3.8* | * |

* The difference is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.

m The difference is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

ns The difference is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).

## Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment as Defined by the Harm Standard

**Serious Injury**. Boys were 24-percent more likely than girls to suffer serious injury from maltreatment under the Harm Standard. The incidence rates of serious injury from maltreatment under the Harm Standard, given in Table 4–1, were 9.3 per 1,000 for males and 7.5 per 1,000 for females. Because there was no category under the Harm Standard where boys were more likely to be maltreated, this finding means that when boys are abused or neglected, their maltreatment must itself be more severe.

**Inferred Injury.** Girls were significantly more likely than boys to experience maltreatment of a type that justified the inference under the Harm Standard that they had been harmed. Inferred injuries occurred to 3.8 per 1,000 females versus 1.1 per 1,000 males, meaning that females' risk of inferred injury was 245-percent greater than that of males. Note that this pattern is probably a result of the fact that females are more often sexually abused and that the Harm Standard guidelines permit injuries to be inferred for the more severe forms of sexual abuse. (See Chapter 3.)

## Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment as Defined by the Harm Standard in Relation to a Child's Sex

Comparisons with the NIS–2 revealed two areas where there were significant shifts in sex differences in Harm Standard maltreatment from that earlier study—physical neglect and fatal injuries.[3] Interestingly, both of these were areas where *neither* study uncovered significant sex differences overall. However, the analyses indicate that there have been important and reliable shifts in the sex-related distribution of these categories of maltreatment since the last NIS.

**Physical Neglect.** Chapter 3 reported a significant increase in the incidence of physical neglect under the Harm Standard since the NIS–2. Analyses examining sex differences revealed that the increase in this category was significant for males, but not for females. This is depicted in Figure 4–1, which graphs the incidence rates of physical neglect under the Harm Standard for males and females in

[3] For simplification, nonsignificant but marginal shifts between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 that relate to child characteristics are *not* described in this chapter. Interested readers can locate information concerning marginal between-study changes in the results of the significance tests in Appendix D.

the two incidence studies. Boys' risk of physical neglect according to the Harm Standard is two and one-half times greater in the NIS–3 than in the NIS–2. The NIS–3 incidence rate of 5.5 per 1,000 males is 150-percent greater than the NIS–2 incidence rate of 2.2.[4] In contrast, girls' rate of physical neglect under the Harm Standard shows no statistically noteworthy change since the NIS–2.

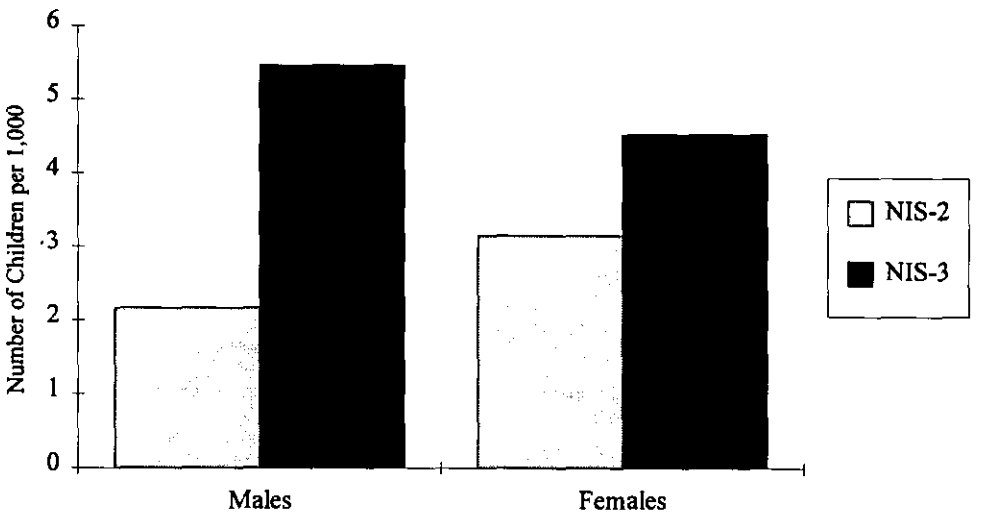


Figure 4–1. Changes from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 for Males and for Females in the Incidence of Physical Neglect under the Harm Standard.

**Fatal Injuries.** Figure 4–2 shows the changes between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 in the incidence of fatalities due to maltreatment under the Harm Standard for the two sexes. Unlike the situation with physical neglect described above, there were no significant changes in the incidence of fatalities, either overall (see Chapter 3) or for either sex. However, Figure 4–2 indicates that, since the NIS–2, rates of death from Harm Standard maltreatment have shifted in opposite directions for boys and girls, with boys becoming more likely and girls becoming less likely to be fatally injured by abuse or neglect.

[4] This percentage was computed on the more precise estimates of 2.173 in the NIS–2 and 5.477 in the NIS–3.

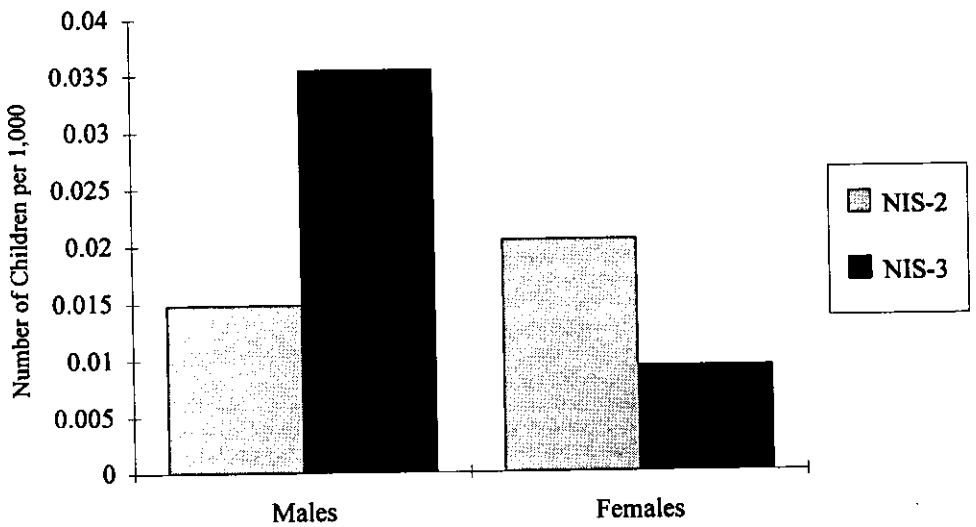


Figure 4–2. Changes from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 for Males and for Females in the Incidence of Fatalities from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

### 4.1.2 Sex Differences in Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

Incidence rates of maltreatment for males and females under the Endangerment Standard are given in Table 4–2. As the last column indicates, males and females differ significantly in two maltreatment categories (all abuse and sexual abuse) and in one category of outcome severity (inferred injury). The difference is statistically marginal (not quite significant) in the categories of emotional neglect and serious injury. Note that, with few exceptions, the overall pattern here mirrors that found with Harm Standard estimates.

#### Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

There is no sex difference in the overall incidence of maltreatment using the Endangerment Standard, but there are differences in the main category of abuse and in one specific type of abuse and one specific type of neglect.

Table 4–2. Sex Differences in Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993).

| Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Category | Males | Females | Significance of Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *40.0* | *42.3* | ns |
| ABUSE: | | | |
| All Abuse | *16.1* | *20.2* | * |
| Physical Abuse | *9.3* | *9.0* | ns |
| Sexual Abuse | *2.3* | *6.8* | * |
| Emotional Abuse | *8.0* | *7.7* | ns |
| NEGLECT: | | | |
| All Neglect | *29.2* | *27.6* | ns |
| Physical Neglect | *19.7* | *18.6* | ns |
| Emotional Neglect | *9.2* | *7.8* | * |
| Educational Neglect | *5.5* | *6.4* | ns |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | |
| Fatal | *0.04* | *0.01* | ns |
| Serious | *9.4* | *7.6* | m |
| Moderate | *14.1* | *15.3* | ns |
| Inferred | *2.1* | *4.6* | * |
| Endangered | *14.5* | *14.8* | ns |

* The difference is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.

m The difference is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

ns The difference is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).

**Abuse under the Endangerment Standard**

Girls were 25-percent more likely than boys to be victims of abuse under the Endangerment Standard (20.2 females versus 16.1 males per 1,000 in the general U.S. child population). Thus, girls' risk of Endangerment Standard abuse was one and one-quarter times boys' risk.

**Sexual Abuse.** Paralleling the findings reported above in relation to the Harm Standard, girls' greater risk of overall abuse under the Endangerment Standard essentially reflects their greater risk

of sexual abuse, which was nearly three times greater than that of boys. An estimated 6.8 females per 1,000 were victims of this maltreatment type, compared to 2.3 males per 1,000.

### Neglect under the Endangerment Standard

**Emotional Neglect.** There was no sex difference in the rate of emotional neglect under the Harm Standard (see previous section), but boys were marginally more often the victims of emotional neglect under the Endangerment Standard. An estimated 9.2 males per 1,000 experienced this type of maltreatment, compared with an estimated 7.8 females per 1,000. Thus, boys had an 18-percent higher risk of this maltreatment (meaning their risk was more than one and one-sixth times girls' risk of emotional neglect under the Harm Standard).

### Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment as Defined by the Endangerment Standard

**Serious Injury.** As noted in Chapter 3, almost all of the children who experienced serious injury under the Endangerment Standard definitions are also countable as seriously injured under the Harm Standard. It is not surprising, then, to see that Table 4–2 presents a nearly identical finding to that given in Table 4–1 in this category. Boys' risk of serious injury from maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard was almost one and one-fourth times that of girls. (Males' incidence rate of 9.4 per 1,000 was 24% higher than the rate of 7.6 per 1,000 for females.)

**Inferred Injury.** Girls were significantly more likely to be classified as having inferred injuries due to maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard. Specifically, girls were almost two and one-fifth times more likely than boys to be in this category. As shown in Table 4–2, the girls' incidence rate was 4.6 per 1,000, compared to 2.1 per 1,000 for boys (i.e., the girls' rate was 119% greater than the boys' rate). This pattern, which reiterates the Harm Standard finding in this category, is probably related to females' greater risk of sexual abuse. Note that sexual abuse and inferred injuries are linked in that the definitions under both standards permit harm to be inferred when the evidence cited indicates that a serious form of sexual abuse (intrusion or genital molestation) occurred.

### Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment as Defined by the Endangerment Standard in Relation to a Child's Sex

There were three Endangerment Standard categories where changes from the NIS–2 revealed significant differences based on the child's sex: overall maltreatment, emotional abuse, and fatalities.

**Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** There were no sex differences in overall maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in either the NIS–2 or NIS–3. Chapter 3 reported a significant increase in the incidence of this category since the NIS–2, and analyses here verified that the incidence rate has, in fact, increased significantly for both males and females. However, males and females differed in the magnitude of the increases they experienced, as charted in Figure 4–3, and this difference proved to be statistically significant. The incidence rate of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard increased by 20.2 per 1,000 for males (from 19.8 in the NIS–2 to 40.0 in the NIS–3), whereas it increased by 17.1 per 1,000 for females (from 25.2 to 42.3).[5]

**Emotional Abuse.** The situation in connection with emotional abuse under the Endangerment Standard was very similar: that is, neither the NIS–2 nor the NIS–3 detected any sex difference in the incidence of maltreatment in this category. The main NIS–3 analyses demonstrated a significant increase in incidence overall, and subsidiary analyses showed that the incidence rates for both males and females had increased significantly. Here again, the rise in incidence was larger and more significant for males. The incidence rate of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard increased by 5.5 per 1,000 for males (from 2.5 in the NIS–2 to 8.0 in the NIS–3), whereas it increased by 4.2 per 1,000 for females (from 3.5 to 7.7). Figure 4–4 graphs this pattern.

**Fatal Injury.** As noted in Chapter 3, nearly all the children included in the Endangerment Standard estimate for this harm level are also countable under the Harm Standard. For this reason, the finding regarding fatalities under the Endangerment Standard is nearly identical to the finding under the Harm Standard, which was presented earlier in Figure 4–2.

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[5] All incidence rates and differences are rounded to the nearest tenth *after* estimation and computation. Because of this, differences presented in the text may differ by one-tenth from the results obtained by computing using the rounded estimates.

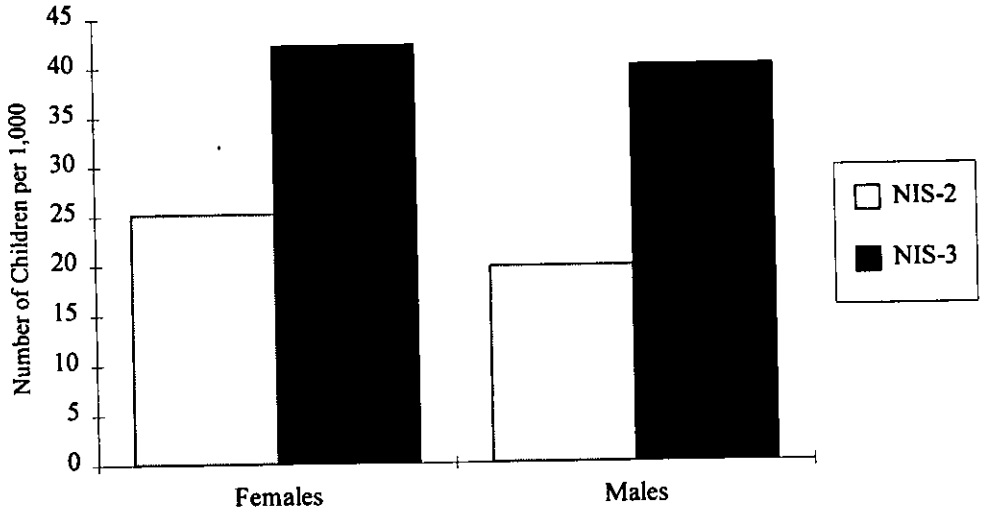


Figure 4–3. Changes from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 for Males and for Females in the Incidence of Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.


Figure 4–4. Changes from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 for Males and for Females in the Incidence of Emotional Abuse under the Endangerment Standard.

## 4.2 Age Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment

This section reports the NIS–3 findings concerning age differences in the incidence of maltreatment. Children were categorized into one of six age groups on the basis of their age at the time of their countable maltreatment: 0- to 2-year-olds, 3- to 5-year-olds, 6- to 8-year-olds, 9- to 11-year-olds, 12- to 14-year-olds, and 15- to 17-year-olds.

### 4.2.1 Age Differences in Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Significant age differences emerged in the incidence of overall maltreatment, abuse, and neglect under the Harm Standard.[6] The patterns are graphed in Figure 4–5.

#### Overall Maltreatment, Abuse, and Neglect under the Harm Standard

Children in the youngest age group (ages 0 to 2) differed significantly from children ages 6 and above in the rate at which they experienced overall maltreatment under the Harm Standard. Only 10 per 1,000 children in this youngest age group were victims of maltreatment of some kind, whereas maltreatment affected more than 22 per 1,000 children among those ages 6 and up. There were no differences among these older children in the incidence rates of overall maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

The age differences in abuse under the Harm Standard reflect the fact that the incidence rate for the youngest children (ages 0 to 2) was significantly below that of all but the 6- to 8-year-olds. The incidence rate of abuse of children ages 0 to 2 was 4.4 children per 1,000. In contrast, the incidence of abuse for older children was 10.4 or more children per 1,000. As Figure 4–5 shows, the incidence rate for the 6- to 8-year-olds was on a par with that of the other older groups, but there was slightly greater variability in the 6- to 8-year-olds' estimate, which precluded the comparisons between them and the younger children from attaining statistical significance.

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[6] In each category of maltreatment or injury, the $\alpha$-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved. Details concerning the statistical tests for the significance of age group differences are given in Appendix C.

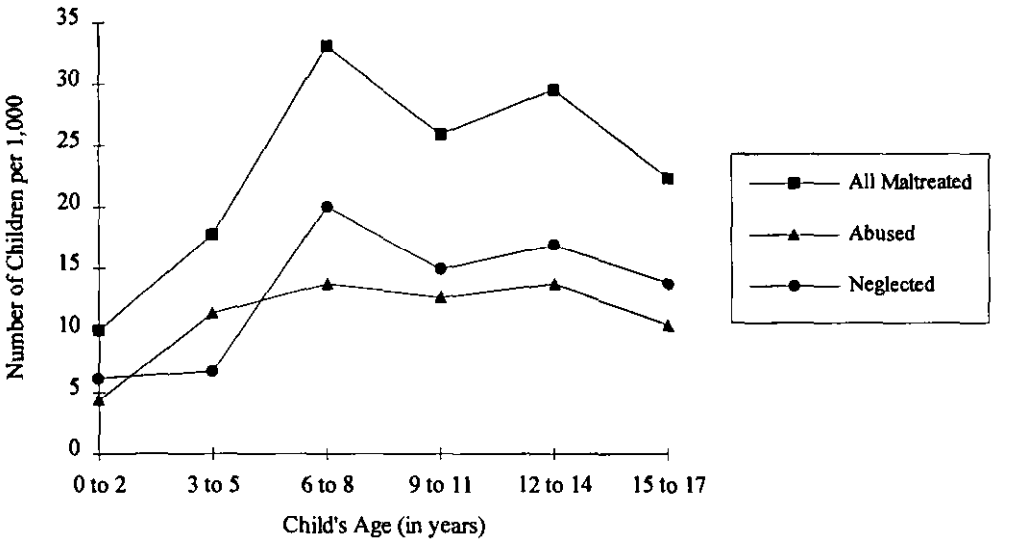


Figure 4–5. Age Differences in All Maltreatment, Abuse, and Neglect under the Harm Standard.

In the category of Harm Standard neglect, incidence rates essentially fell into two overarching age brackets: children ages 6 to 14 were at greater risk than those age 5 and younger. There were no significant differences within each of these age brackets (i.e., among children age 5 and younger or among children ages 6 to 14). Fewer than 7 children per 1,000 in the age 5 and younger bracket experienced Harm Standard neglect versus 14.9 or more children per 1,000 in the 6- to 14-year-old bracket.

**Specific Types of Abuse under the Harm Standard**

Significant age differences were found in all three specific types of abuse under the Harm Standard. These are depicted in Figure 4–6.

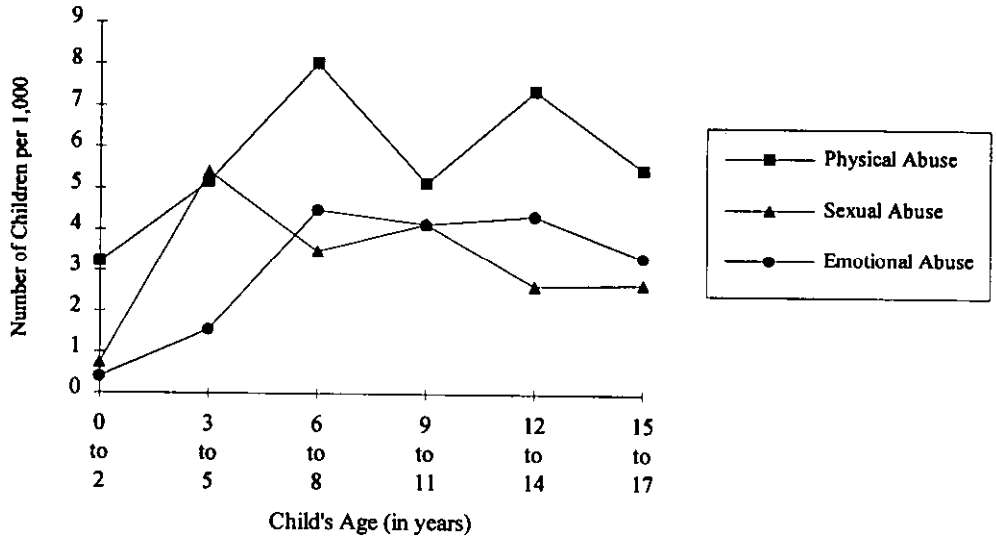


Figure 4–6. Age Differences in Abuse Types under the Harm Standard.

**Physical Abuse.** In the category of physical abuse under the Harm Standard, only one significant comparison emerged. The incidence of physical abuse among 12- to 14-year-olds (where it affected 7.4 children per 1,000) is significantly higher than among children ages 0 to 2 (where 3.2 children per 1,000 were victims). The estimated incidence rate for the 6- to 8-year-olds is less precise, so it does not prove to be significantly or marginally different from the rate of any other age group.

**Sexual Abuse.** There is significant age difference in the incidence rate of sexual abuse under the Harm Standard between children ages 0 to 2 (where fewer than 1 per 1,000 were victims) and children ages 12 to 14 (where 2.6 children per 1,000 were victims). The rate for the children ages 0 to 2 is also marginally lower than that for the 15- to 17-year-olds (where 2.7 children per 1,000 were victims). The variability within the intervening age categories (children ages 3 to 11) means that their apparent differences are statistically unreliable.

**Emotional Abuse.** Children ages 0 to 2 were at significantly lower risk of emotional abuse under the Harm Standard compared to all groups ages 6 to 14 (0.4 children per 1,000 versus 4.2 or more children per 1,000). The incidence rate for 3- to 5-year-olds is marginally lower than the rates for

children ages 6 to 11 (1.6 children per 1,000 versus 4.2 or more children per 1,000), but not reliably different from the incidence rates for children age 12 or older.

### Specific Types of Neglect under the Harm Standard

Among specific categories of neglect under the Harm Standard, only emotional neglect reveals significant age differences.

**Emotional Neglect.** The pattern of age differences in emotional neglect under the Harm Standard is shown in Figure 4–7. The differences generally follow the pattern described above for neglect under the Harm Standard. Specifically, incidence rates fall into two classes reflecting two main age brackets: children age 5 and younger were at lower risk than those age 6 and older (0.5 or fewer children per 1,000 versus 3 or more children per 1,000). Again, there are no significant age differences within these two main age brackets.

### Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

**Moderate Injury.** Among the different severities of outcomes from maltreatment under the Harm Standard, significant age differences were discovered only in the category of moderate injury. The incidence of moderate injuries from Harm Standard maltreatment was lower in the youngest age group, ages 0 to 2 (where 3.1 children per 1,000 were victims), than in all other age groups (where incidence rates ranged from 8.4 to 20.3 children per 1,000, as seen in Figure 4–8). No differences among the older groups are significant.

### Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in Relation to Child's Age

Changes since the NIS–2 in the distribution of five categories of maltreatment under the Harm Standard were significantly related to child's age: overall maltreatment, abuse, neglect, educational neglect, and moderate injury.

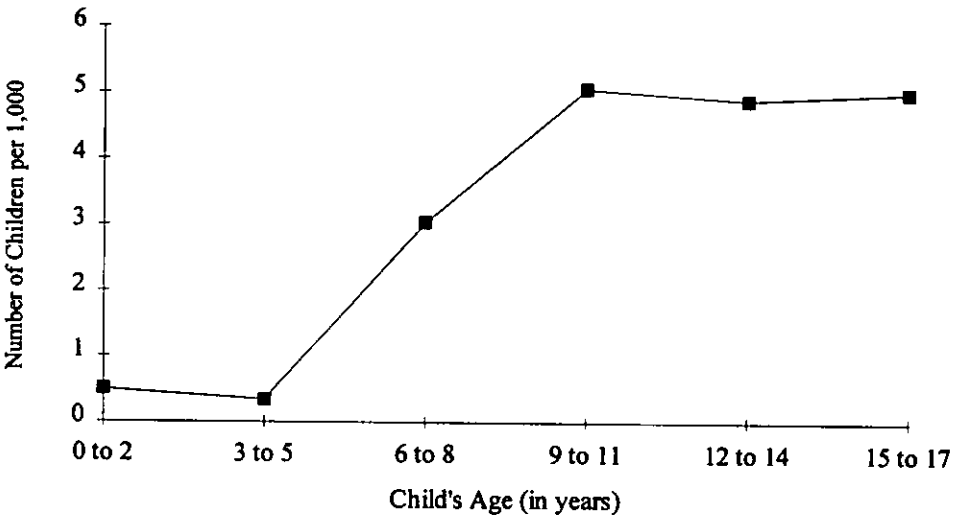


Figure 4–7. Age Differences in Emotional Neglect under the Harm Standard.

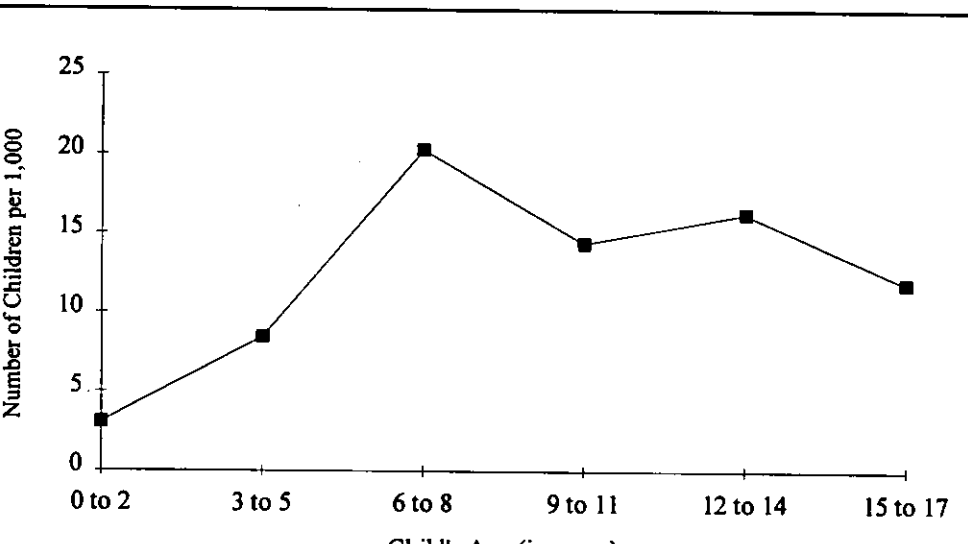


Figure 4–8. Age Differences in Moderate Injuries from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

**Overall Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.** Figure 4–9 presents the different age groups' incidence rates in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for overall maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

Chapter 3 reported a significant rise in the overall incidence of maltreatment under the Harm Standard since the NIS–2. Figure 4–9 shows that this increase was not uniform across all ages. Specifically, children age 12 and older did not exhibit a significant change since the NIS–2 in their risk of maltreatment. Children in all younger age groups (ages 0 to 11) did experience significant increases, with children ages 6 to 11 suffering the largest and most significant increases.

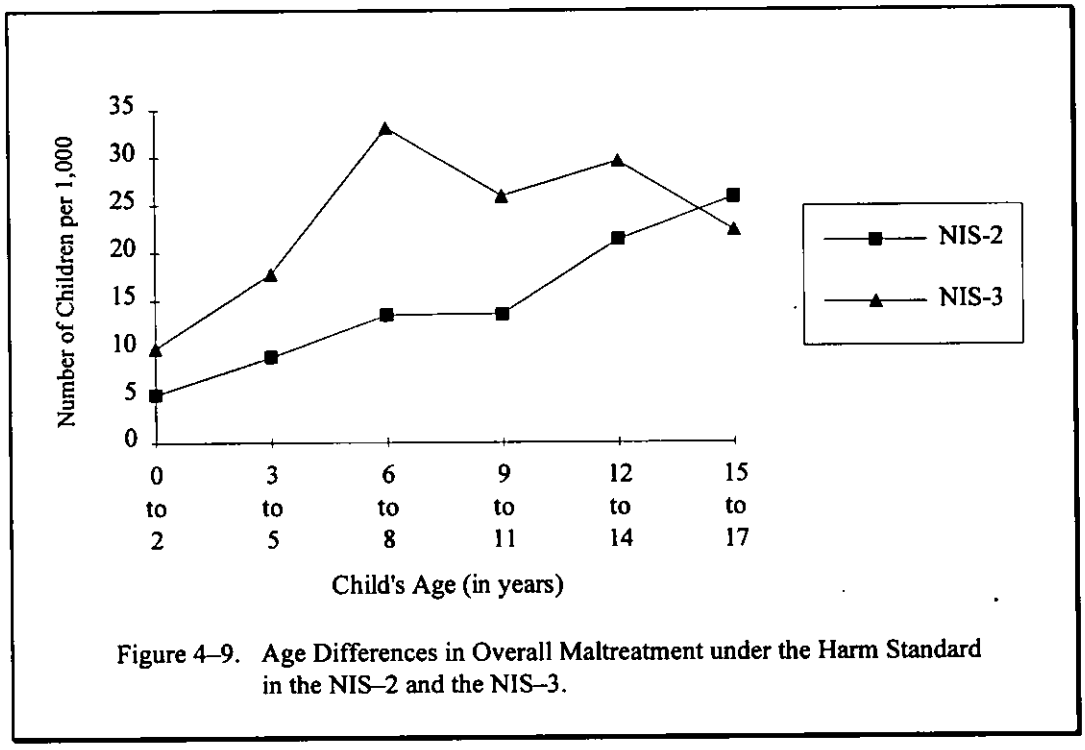


Figure 4–9. Age Differences in Overall Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

**Abuse.** In Figure 4–10, age differences in incidence rates of abuse under the Harm Standard are graphed for the two most recent national incidence studies. Recall that the general increase in abuse under the Harm Standard across all ages was statistically marginal. (See Chapter 3.) Here it can be seen that the increase applied only to children under 12 years of age.

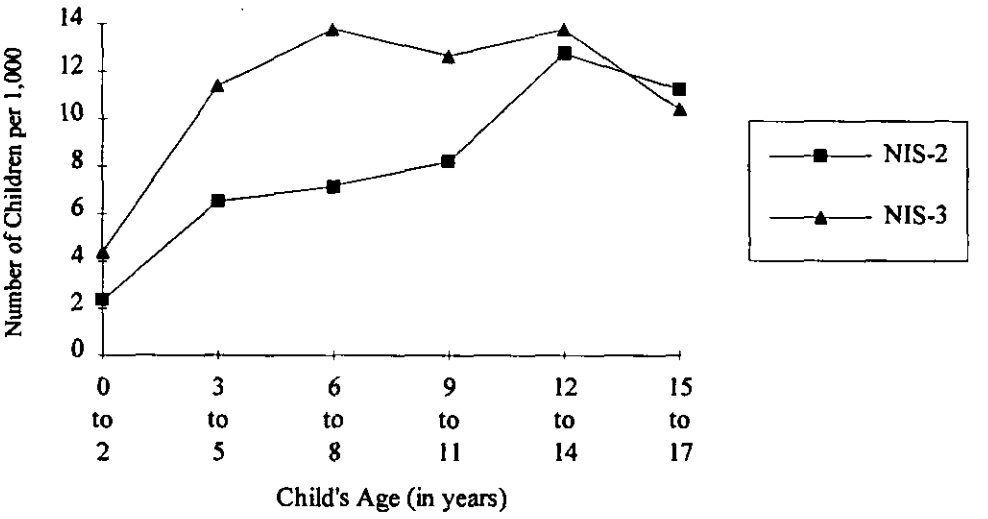


Figure 4–10. Age Differences in Abuse under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

**Neglect.** Age differences in incidence rates of neglect under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and NIS–3 are presented in Figure 4–11. One of the general patterns described in Chapter 3 was a significant increase in neglect under the Harm Standard since the NIS–2. Here, this effect is found to be qualified by child's age, occurring for some age groups and not others. Specifically, there were three age groups with significant increases in incidence rates since the NIS–2: children ages 0 to 2, ages 6 to 8, and ages 9 to 11. While other between-group differences may appear comparable, they are not significant because the estimates were less precise.

**Educational Neglect.** Educational neglect did not evidence any overall change in incidence since the NIS–2, but the analyses that explored the relation between child's age and between-study differences determined that there were significant increases for two of the four school-aged groups: 6- to 8-year-olds and 9- to 11-year-olds. The graph in Figure 4–12 presents the finding.

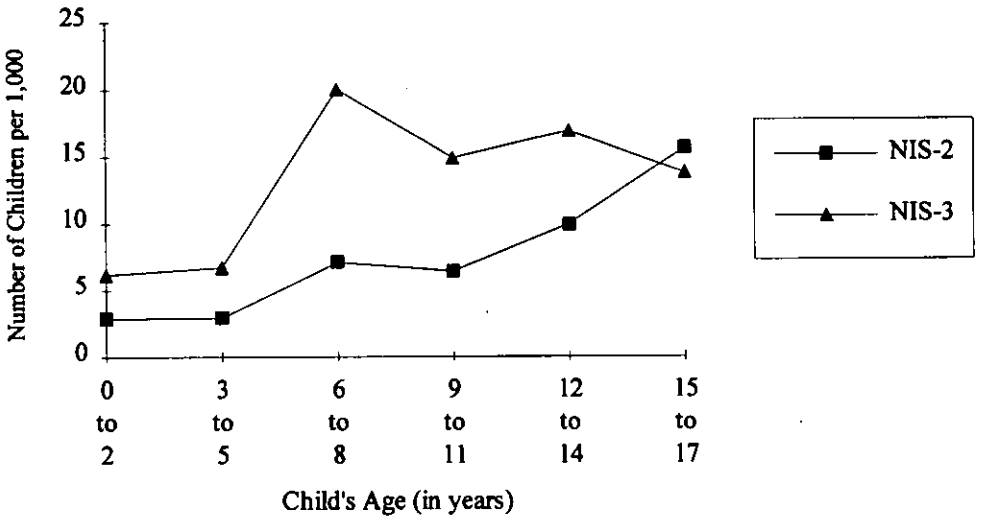


Figure 4–11. Age Differences in Neglect under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.


Figure 4–12. Age Differences in Educational Neglect in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

**Moderate Injury.** The only injury level where changes in incidence since the NIS–2 were related to the child's age was that of moderate injuries, presented in the graph in Figure 4–13. Within-group tests showed that only 6- to 8-year-olds' rate of moderate injury from maltreatment under the Harm Standard had increased significantly since the NIS–2, rising 80 percent from its NIS–2 level of 11.3 children per 1,000 to 20.3 per 1,000 in the NIS–3. Also note that in the NIS–3, 6- to 8-year-olds had the highest rate of moderate injuries from abuse and neglect under the Harm Standard.

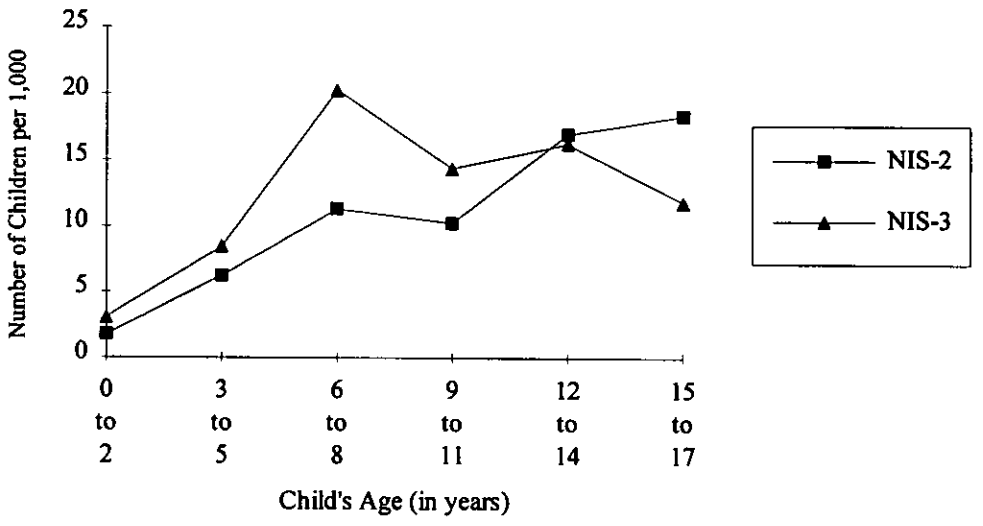


Figure 4–13. Age Differences in Moderate Injuries from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

### 4.2.2 Age Differences in Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

#### Overall Maltreatment, Abuse, and Neglect under the Endangerment Standard

Figure 4–14 graphs the significant age differences in the incidence of overall maltreatment, abuse, and neglect under the Endangerment Standard.

The incidence rate of overall maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard was lower for children ages 0 to 2 than for children ages 6 to 14. Some form of maltreatment under the Endangerment

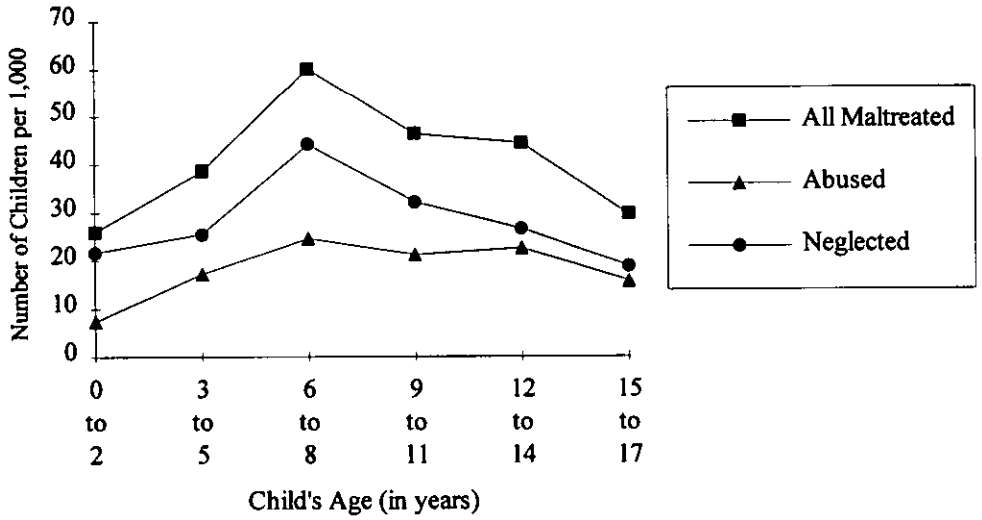


Figure 4–14. Age Differences in All Maltreatment, Abuse, and Neglect under the Endangerment Standard.

Standard affected 26 per 1,000 children ages 0 to 2, compared to more than 44 per 1,000 children ages 6 to 14. The incidence was also relatively low for the oldest age group, where 29.7 children per 1,000 were estimated to be victims of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard. This rate is significantly lower than the rate among children ages 6 to 8 (60.2 children per 1,000) and marginally lower than the rate among children ages 12 to 14 (44.4 children per 1,000).

The age distribution of abuse under the Endangerment Standard, also shown in Figure 4–14, predominantly reflected significant differences between the youngest children, ages 0 to 2, and those in the older groups (except for the 6- to 8-year-olds, for whom the estimate was somewhat less precise). An estimated 7.4 per 1,000 children ages 0 to 2 were abused in ways that fit the Endangerment Standard requirements versus 15.8 or more children per 1,000 in the older groups.

In the category of neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard, the primary feature was the comparatively higher incidence rate for the 6- to 8-year-olds. With an incidence rate of 44.2 children per 1,000, more children in this group experienced neglect that fit the Endangerment Standard than children age 5 or younger and than children age 12 or older, for whom the incidence rates were all below the level of 27 children per 1,000.

**Specific Types of Abuse under the Endangerment Standard**

As shown in Figure 4–15, significant age differences were uncovered in connection with all three specific types of abuse as defined by the Endangerment Standard.

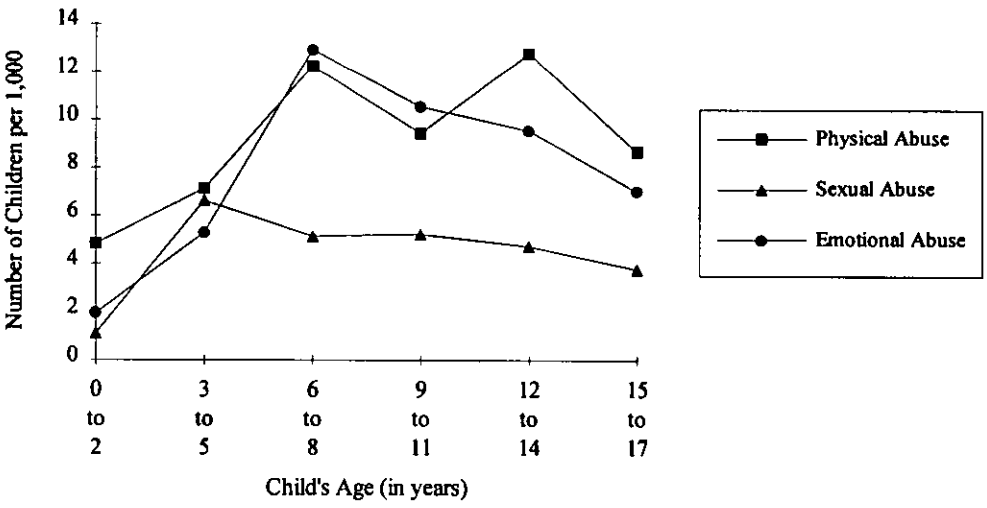


Figure 4–15. Age Differences in Abuse Types under the Endangerment Standard.

**Physical Abuse.** The incidence rate of physical abuse under the Endangerment Standard is significantly higher for children 12 to 14 years old, with 12.8 children per 1,000 physically abused, than it is for the youngest children, ages 0 to 2, with an estimated 4.8 children per 1,000 physically abused.

**Sexual Abuse.** Under the Endangerment Standard, sexual abuse exhibited significant differences in incidence based on child's age. As the graph in Figure 4–15 suggests, children ages 0 to 2 were sexually abused less often than older children. While only 1.1 children per 1,000 in this age group suffered sexual abuse under the Endangerment Standard, this form of maltreatment affected 3.8 or more children per 1,000 in the older age groups. The incidence rate for children ages 0 to 2 differed from the rates for all but the 9- to 11-year-olds (for whom there was a slightly less precise estimate than for the other age groups). One of the more striking aspects of this age distribution is the lack of any differences

among the incidence rates in the older groups. That is, children's risk of sexual abuse as defined by the Endangerment Standard is relatively constant from age 3 on.

**Emotional Abuse.** As Figure 4–15 shows, emotional abuse under the Endangerment Standard was substantially less frequent among the youngest children, ages 0 to 2, than among children ages 3 to 5 and ages 12 to 14. An estimated 1.9 per 1,000 children ages 0 to 2 experienced emotional abuse that fit the Endangerment Standard compared to 5.3 per 1,000 3- to 5-year-olds and 9.6 per 1,000 12- to 14-year-olds.

### Specific Types of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard

Age differences in incidence rates of specific types of neglect under the Endangerment Standard are graphed in Figure 4–16. Educational neglect is absent from this graph because there were no significant age differences in the incidence rates of educational neglect among school-age children (age 6 and older).

**Physical Neglect.** In the category of physical neglect under the Endangerment Standard, children ages 0 to 11 had higher incidence rates than those in the oldest age group, the 15- to 17-year-olds. The younger children experienced physical neglect at a rate of 19.3 or more per 1,000, whereas the rate for the oldest group was only 8.5 per 1,000. Among children age 11 or younger, there were no significant differences in incidence rates, but the especially high rate for the 6- to 8-year-olds (29.2 per 1,000) did prove to be significantly higher than the rate for 12- to 14-year-olds (15.5 per 1,000). Note that the overall pattern in this maltreatment category, with disproportionate vulnerability at the younger ages, undoubtedly derives from the fact that younger children have greater requirements than older children for physical care and supervision under normal circumstances, so that there is a greater opportunity for failing to meet their needs.

**Emotional Neglect.** Age differences in emotional neglect as defined under the Endangerment Standard reflect the fact that children age 5 and under had significantly lower incidence rates than children ages 6 to 11. The incidence rates in the younger age brackets were 4.3 or fewer children per 1,000, whereas the rates among 6- to 11-year-olds were 12.1 children per 1,000 or higher.

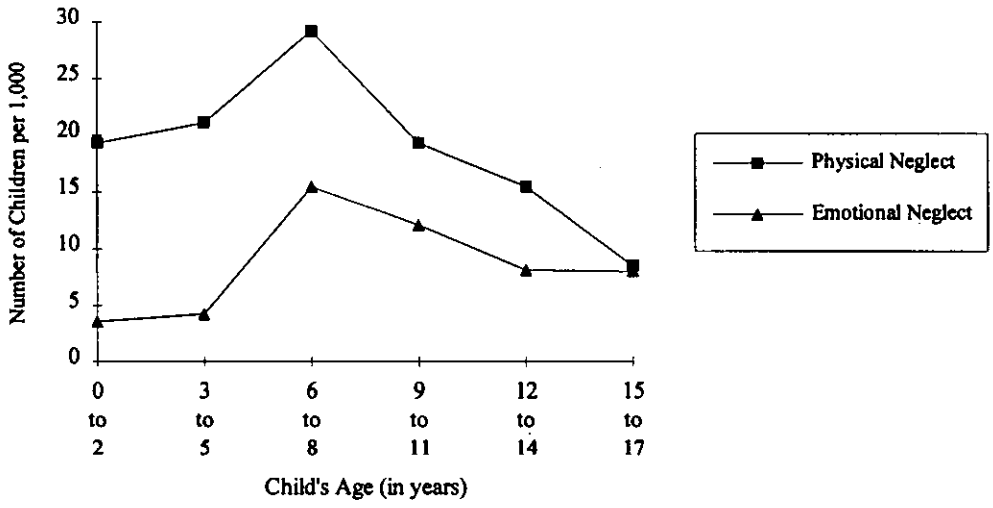


Figure 4–16. Age Differences in Neglect Types under the Endangerment Standard.

**Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard**

There are significant age differences in incidence rates within two categories of outcomes from maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard: moderate injuries and endangered (but not yet injured). These are graphed in Figure 4–17.

**Moderate Injury.** Moderate injuries due to maltreatment that fit the Endangerment Standard were more prevalent among older children. Analyses showed that for the youngest children, those ages 0 to 2, there was a reliably lower incidence rate than for any of the older age groups. Specifically, 5.0 per 1,000 children ages 0 to 2 were moderately injured, compared to 10.5 or more children per 1,000 in the older age groups.

**Endangerment.** In marked contrast to the above patterns, the incidence rates for children perceived to be endangered by maltreatment were higher among the younger age groups: children ages 15 to 17 had significantly lower rates than children ages 0 to 11. An estimated 15.8 or more children per 1,000 in these younger groups were considered endangered (but not yet harmed) by maltreatment,

whereas only 6.3 children per 1,000 in the 15- to 17-year-old age group were classified with this outcome.

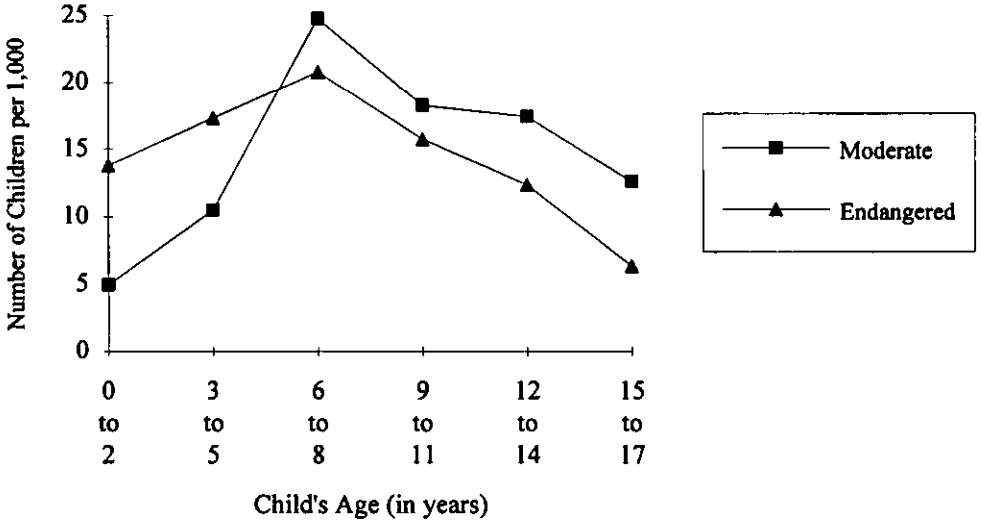


Figure 4–17. Age Differences in Outcomes from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in Relation to Child's Age**

Changes since the NIS–2 in the incidence of six categories of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard were significantly related to child's age: overall maltreatment, neglect, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, educational neglect, and moderate injury.

**Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** As reported in Chapter 3, the overall incidence of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard increased substantially and significantly since the NIS–2. There, it was reported that the total number of children who were abused or neglected under the Endangerment Standard nearly doubled since the NIS–2 (increasing from 1,424,400 in 1986 to 2,815,600 in 1993) and that the incidence rate increased by 85 percent (from 22.6 children per 1,000 to 41.9 children per 1,000). The finding of a significant relation between child's age

and the change in incidence across studies means that the increase was not equivalent at all ages: that is, some age levels experienced more substantial increments than others. The actual pattern is graphed in Figure 4–18.

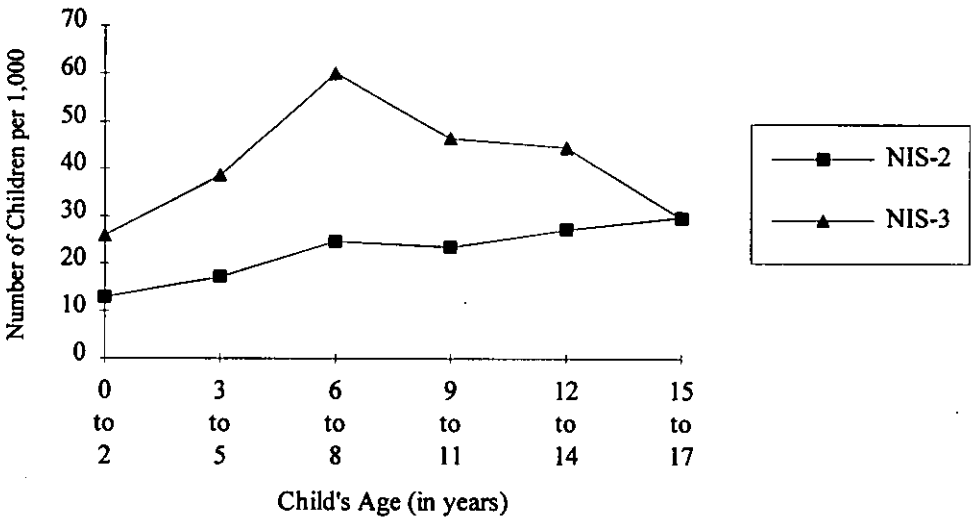


Figure 4–18. Age Differences in Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

The figure indicates that the increase occurred in all but the 15- to 17-year-old age group. Within-group tests of significance bear this out—the increase from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 incidence rate is significant in all age groups from 0 to 14, but the incidence rates for the oldest age group are virtually identical across the two studies. Note the similarity between this pattern and that shown in Figure 4–9 concerning age-related changes in the incidence of overall maltreatment using the Harm Standard. The increase in maltreatment since the NIS–2 has fallen disproportionately on preteens.

**Neglect.** Figure 4–19 shows the age differences in incidence rates of neglect under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3. As reported in Chapter 3, the neglect rate under the Endangerment Standard doubled since the NIS–2. The graph in Figure 4–19 indicates that, again, the increase occurred primarily among the younger children. The between-study differences are significant for all children ages 0 to 11; the difference is statistically marginal for the 12- to 14-year-olds; and there is no statistical difference between the two studies' incidence rates for the 15- to 17-year-olds.

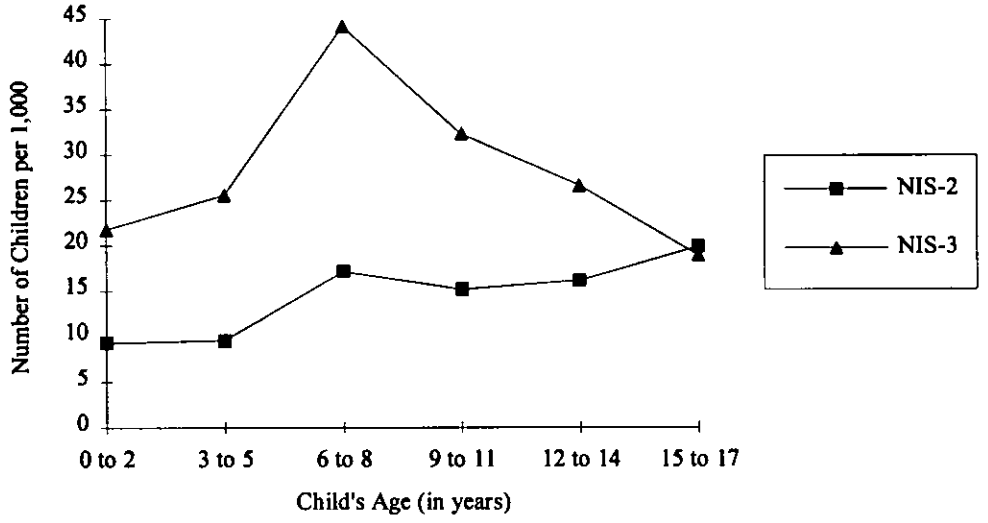


Figure 4–19. Age Differences in Neglect under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

**Emotional Abuse.** Chapter 3 reported that the incidence rate of emotional abuse as defined by the Endangerment Standard increased by 163 percent since the NIS–2. Figure 4–20 demonstrates that this increase differentially affected children ages 3 to 11. Within-group tests indicated that the increase is significant only in these age groups. The very youngest (i.e., ages 0 to 2) and the older children (ages 12 and up) also experienced increases in the incidence of Endangerment Standard emotional abuse, but in these groups the increases were statistically marginal (i.e., they approached, but did not quite reach, the level traditionally required for significance).

**Educational Neglect.** As mentioned in Chapter 3, the definition of educational neglect is the same under both the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard. For this reason, the results presented above in Figure 4–12 describing the findings in connection with educational neglect are not reiterated here.

**Emotional Neglect.** There was a 172-percent increase in the incidence rate of emotional neglect since the NIS–2. (See Chapter 3.) This means that children were at almost two and three-fourths times greater risk of this maltreatment in 1993 than in 1986. However, this finding is qualified by age differences, as shown in Figure 4–21.

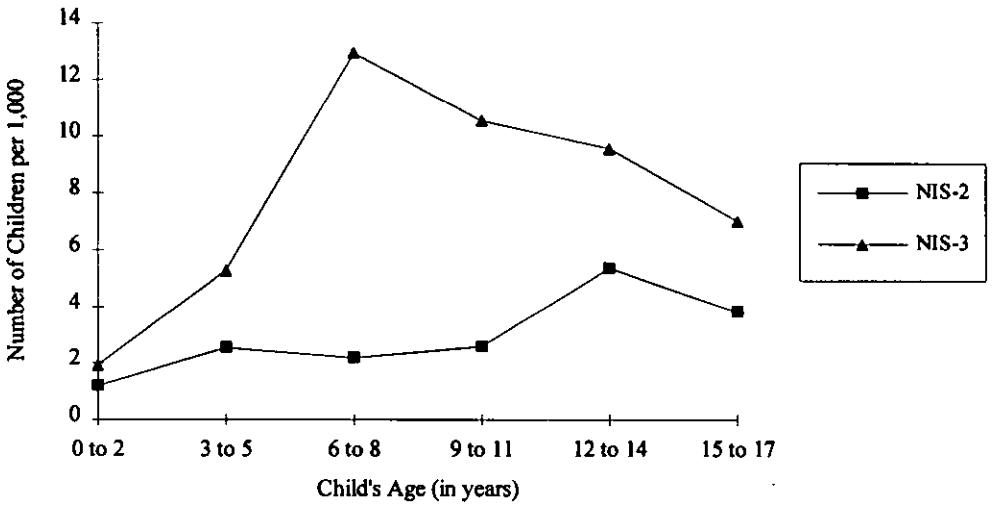


Figure 4–20. Age Differences in Emotional Abuse under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

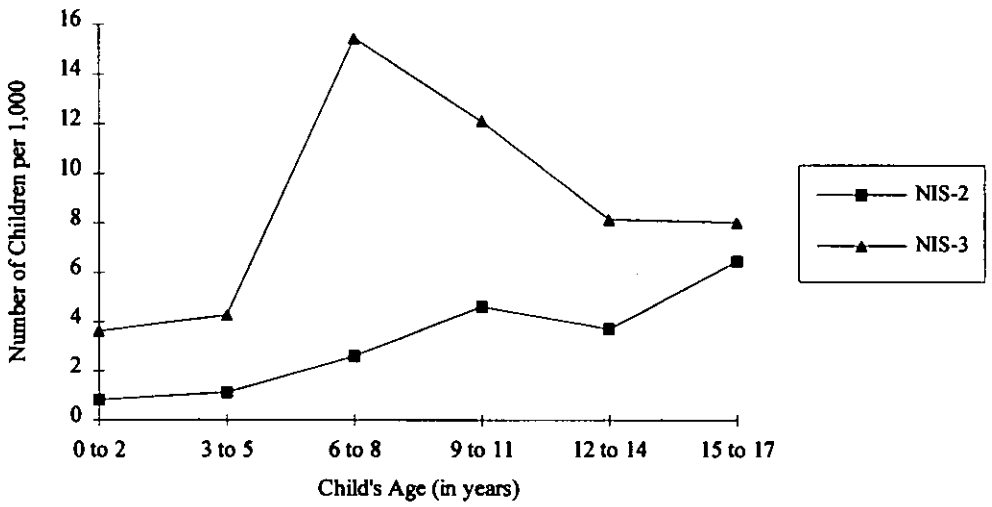


Figure 4–21. Age Differences in Emotional Neglect under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

The figure shows that the increase in the incidence of emotional neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard was particularly severe for children in their middle childhood years, ages 6 to 11. It was significant for all age groups except the 15- to 17-year-olds, for whom there was no statistically reliable change in the incidence of this maltreatment since the NIS–2.

**Moderate Injury.** There were no changes since the NIS–2 in the overall incidence of children who were moderately injured by maltreatment that fit the Endangerment Standard (see Chapter 3), so it is interesting to note that there were changes in incidence in this category for specific age groups and not others. Figure 4–22 shows the statistically significant increase for the 6- to 8-year-old children in this category as well as the significant *decrease* in the incidence of this outcome category among 15- to 17-year-olds. Note that this is one of *only two* instances in the NIS–3 findings where a notable decrease in incidence since the NIS–2 is reported.

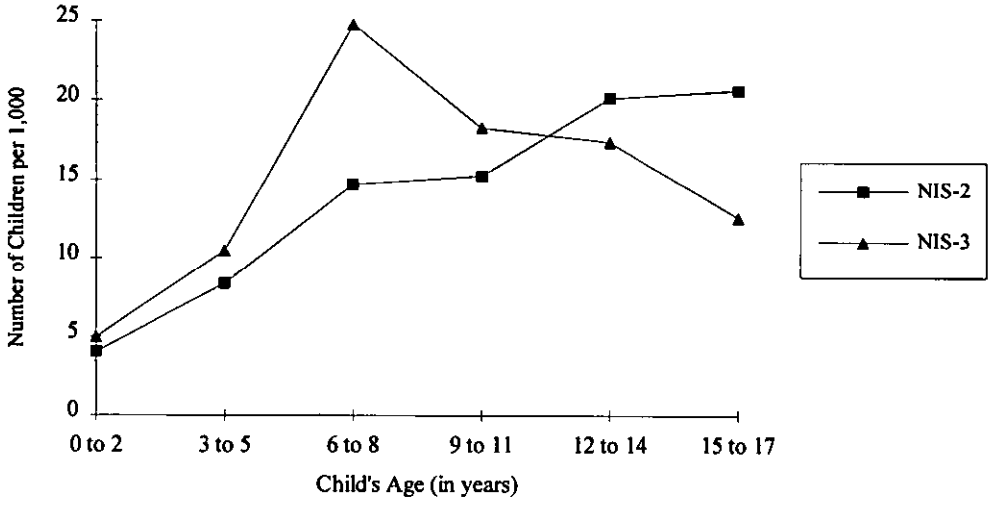


Figure 4–22. Age Differences in Moderate Injuries from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

## 4.3 Race Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment

No significant or marginal race differences in the incidence of maltreatment were found either within the NIS–3 data or in the comparison of changes since the NIS–2. This was true for both the

Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard findings. It is interesting to note that this was also the case in the NIS–2. That is, there were no significant race differences in any category for either standard, and none of the changes between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 were modified by child's race.

## 4.4 Key Findings on the Distribution of Abuse and Neglect by Child Characteristics

Children's sex and age were related to their rate of maltreatment, but different races were found *not* to have different rates of maltreatment.

Under both the Harm and the Endangerment Standards, girls were sexually abused about three times more often than boys. This result is virtually identical to the NIS–2 finding concerning sex differences in rates of sexual abuse, so the disproportionate risk of sexual abuse for females has been quite stable over time. It is this difference in rates of sexual abuse that leads to the higher rates of abuse in general among girls and to their higher incidence of inferred injury.

On the other hand, the NIS–3 also reveals some arenas where there is a higher incidence of maltreatment among boys and where maltreatment risks have increased for boys. Specifically, the NIS–3 found a statistically marginal tendency for boys to have a greater risk of serious injury (24% higher than girls' risk under both definitional standards), and boys were significantly more likely to be emotionally neglected. (Boys had an 18% greater risk than girls.) Also, changes since NIS–2 show greater increases in males' risk of physical neglect as defined by the Harm Standard and of emotional abuse as defined by the Endangerment Standard. Moreover, trends in the incidence of fatal injuries from maltreatment moved in opposite directions for girls and boys: the incidence of fatally injured girls has slightly declined since the NIS–2, while the incidence of fatally injured boys has risen.

A consistent feature of the age differences in incidence rates within the NIS–3 is the lower incidence of maltreatment among the younger children under both definitional standards. In most cases, the differentiation was between children ages 0 to 2 and older children or between children ages 0 to 5 and older children. It is possible that the lower rates at these younger ages reflect undercoverage of these age groups. That is, prior to attaining school age, children are less observable to community professionals.

Another recurring theme that emerged in the discussion of age-related changes in the incidence of maltreatment since the NIS–2 concerned disproportionate increases in the incidence of maltreatment among the younger children (under age 12), especially children in their middle-childhood years (ages 6 to 11). Note that these disproportionate changes altered the overall profiles of age differences in maltreatment described in the NIS–2. During that earlier study, the risk of maltreatment generally increased with the age of the child. With the lopsided increases seen here, which differentially affected younger children and children in middle childhood, the profile has changed toward a flatter (even sometimes hump-shaped) configuration. Note that as circumstances deteriorate and maltreatment becomes more prevalent and more severe, older children have a greater opportunity of escape. This dynamic may have moderated the observed increases at the higher age levels.

Also note that the relatively flattened-out profile of incidence rates across the age spectrum is especially striking in the context of sexual abuse. The rate of sexual abuse under the Endangerment Standard was relatively consistent for age 3 and older, a finding that attests to the vulnerability throughout childhood, from preschool age on.

The lack of any race differences in maltreatment incidence may be somewhat surprising in view of the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare population. This underscores the fact that the NIS methodology identifies a much broader range of children than those who come to the attention of child protective service agencies and the even smaller subset of those who subsequently receive child protective services. The NIS findings suggest that the different races receive differential attention somewhere during the process of referral, investigation,[7] and service allocation and that their differential representation in the child welfare population does not derive from inherent differences in their rates of abuse and neglect. It is also important to recognize that the NIS–3 reiterates the NIS–2 findings in this regard. That is, the NIS–2 also found *no* significant race differences in the incidence of maltreatment or maltreatment-related injuries. Thus, the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 have both consistently failed to uncover any evidence of disproportionate victimization in relation to children's race.

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[7] For instance, subsequent analyses of the NIS–2 data found that *younger* minority children who were physically abused, sexually abused, or educationally neglected were more likely to receive CPS investigation than their white counterparts. (Sedlak, A.J., 1993. *NIS–2 Reanalysis Report*. Appendix B to the *Study of High Risk Child Abuse and Neglect Groups*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993.)

# 5. DISTRIBUTION OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter examines the relationship between specific characteristics of the children's families and the incidence and severity of abuse and neglect. It is divided into four main sections that present the NIS–3 results concerning the incidence of maltreatment for children who come from families with different income levels, parent structures, and numbers of dependent children, and from families living in counties of different levels of urbanization. The discussion in each section addresses the following questions:

- Do children who come from families with different characteristics have systematically different incidence rates for the various types of maltreatment or for the different seventies of outcomes due to maltreatment?
- Have there been any statistically significant changes since the NIS–2 in the distribution of child maltreatment by the family characteristic in question?

In each section, these questions are considered from the standpoint of both the Harm and Endangerment Standards. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the general implications of the findings.

Despite the fact that the topics in this chapter all concern characteristics of families, the unit of measurement for the estimates continues to be the children (and not their families).[1] Thus, the incidence rates reflect the number of children per 1,000 in the general population who live in families with the characteristic of interest (e.g., children who live in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year, children who come from families with four or more dependent children, etc.).

Consistent with previous chapters, the findings presented here reflect unduplicated estimates; that is, each estimate counts each child only once. Also, only incidence rates (rather than total

[1] The technical volumes that describe the NIS methodology (the *Revised Study Design*, the *Sample Selection Report*, the *Data Collection Report*, and the *Analysis Report*) detail the multiple ways in which the NIS design and method were consistently geared toward the child as the unit of measurement. Thus, the NIS data are organized and weighted with the goal of providing estimates of the numbers of children in different categories. A considerably different methodology would be needed throughout in order to provide estimates on another measurement basis, such as families.

numbers of children) are discussed.[2] As mentioned earlier, the rate measures were preferable, both for the analyses and for the presentation here, because they adjust for differences in the numbers of children in the general population who are in the different categories of interest. For the same reason, all statistical comparisons were based on the rate measures.[3]

## 5.1 Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment Related to Family Income

The findings discussed in this section focus on the relationship between family income and the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Children were categorized into one of three groups on the basis of the income level of their family: less than $15,000 per year, between $15,000 and $29,999 per year, and $30,000 or more per year.[4]

### 5.1.1 Differences in Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard Related to Family Income

The NIS–3 revealed significant and pervasive differences in the incidence of maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard in relation to family income. Significant differences in incidence rates for children in the different family income classes occurred in all maltreatment categories except emotional neglect and fatal injuries.[5] Table 5–1 provides the incidence rates of the various categories of maltreatment for children in families with different income levels.[6]

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[2] Appendices A and B detail all NIS–3 estimates, including the estimated rates as well as totals, together with their standard errors of estimate and their upper and lower 95-percent confidence bounds.

[3] The detailed results of all within-NIS–3 statistical comparisons are provided in Appendix C. Appendix D contains the statistical details of all between-study comparisons.

[4] Income information was obtained by means of a four-category response or responses on the study questionnaires. The $30,000 or more category comprised two categories ($30,000 to $44,999 and $45,000 or more), which were combined because of the low frequency of responses in the highest income category.

[5] A substantial percentage of children who were countable under the Harm Standard were missing income data (35% of the weighted total). To ensure that the income-related findings were not distorted by the missing data, special analyses were conducted in which *all* children with missing income information were hypothetically assigned to the higher family income bracket. The findings indicated no need to modify the conclusions about income-related differences reported here. These analyses are detailed in Appendix C.

[6] In each category of maltreatment or injury, the $\alpha$-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved. Details concerning the statistical tests for the significance of income group differences are given in Appendix C.

Table 5–1. Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 (1993) for Different Levels of Family Income.

| Harm Standard Maltreatment Category | <$15K/yr | $15-29K/yr | $30K+/yr | Significance of Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 47.0 | 20.0 | 2.1 | a |
| ABUSE: | | | | |
| All Abuse | 22.2 | 9.7 | 1.6 | a |
| Physical Abuse | 11.0 | 5.0 | 0.7 | a |
| Sexual Abuse | 7.0 | 2.8 | 0.4 | b |
| Emotional Abuse | 6.5 | 2.5 | 0.5 | b |
| NEGLECT: | | | | |
| All Neglect | 27.2 | 11.3 | 0.6 | a |
| Physical Neglect | 12.0 | 2.9 | 0.3 | a |
| Emotional Neglect | 5.9 | 4.3 | 0.2 | ns |
| Educational Neglect | 11.1 | 4.8 | 0.2 | a |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | | |
| Fatal | 0.060 | 0.002 | 0.001 | ns |
| Serious | 17.9 | 7.8 | 0.8 | a |
| Moderate | 23.3 | 10.5 | 1.3 | a |
| Inferred | 5.7 | 1.6 | 0.1 | b |

a All between-group differences are significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.

b The highest income group ($30,000 or more) differs significantly from the others ($p's<.05$), but the difference between the <$15,000 group and the $15,000 to $29,999 group is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

ns No between-group difference is significant or marginal (all $p's>.10$).

**Overall Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard**

Ignoring subgroup differences, the NIS–3 found that some type of maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard occurred to an estimated 23.1 children per 1,000 in 1993. (See Chapter 3.)

However, higher incidence rates were directly associated with lower income levels, and all differences among the income groups were statistically significant. Children in families at the lowest income level had the highest incidence rate for maltreatment under the Harm Standard, with 47.0 children per 1,000 affected. This rate is equivalent to 4.7 children per 100, involving nearly 1 in 21 children among those who live in families with the lowest incomes. This was more than two and one-third times the incidence rate for children in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year (where the rate was 20.0 children per 1,000) and 22 times the incidence rate for children in families with incomes of $30,000 or more per year (where the rate was only 2.1 children per 1,000).[7] The incidence rates for these other children also differed significantly, with children in families with incomes of $15,000 to $29,999 per year abused at over nine and one-half times the rate of children in families with incomes of $30,000 or more per year.

**Abuse under the Harm Standard**

All differences among the income groups were also significant in relation to the main category of abuse under the Harm Standard. Children in families with annual incomes lower than $15,000 had the highest rate of abuse under the Harm Standard (22.2 per 1,000). Their rate was more than two and one-quarter times the rate for children in families with annual incomes of $15,000 to $29,999 (where 9.7 children per 1,000 were abused) and nearly 14 times the rate for children in families with annual incomes of $30,000 or more (among whom only 1.6 children per 1,000 were abused). The children in these other two groups also had significantly different incidence rates of abuse under the Harm Standard. Those living in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year were abused at just over six times the rate of those living in families with incomes of $30,000 or more.

Children living in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year were also at consistently higher risks for all specific types of abuse under the Harm Standard. The patterns were consistent across all specific types of abuse and are graphed in Figure 5–1. (The rates are given in the abuse section of Table 5–1.)

[7] Computations of how many times greater one rate is than another, or of what percentage change occurred from one study to another, are made on the basis of the rounded estimates given in the tables and text of this report. Similar, but slightly different results would be obtained if one were to use the nonrounded estimates, provided in Appendices A and B.

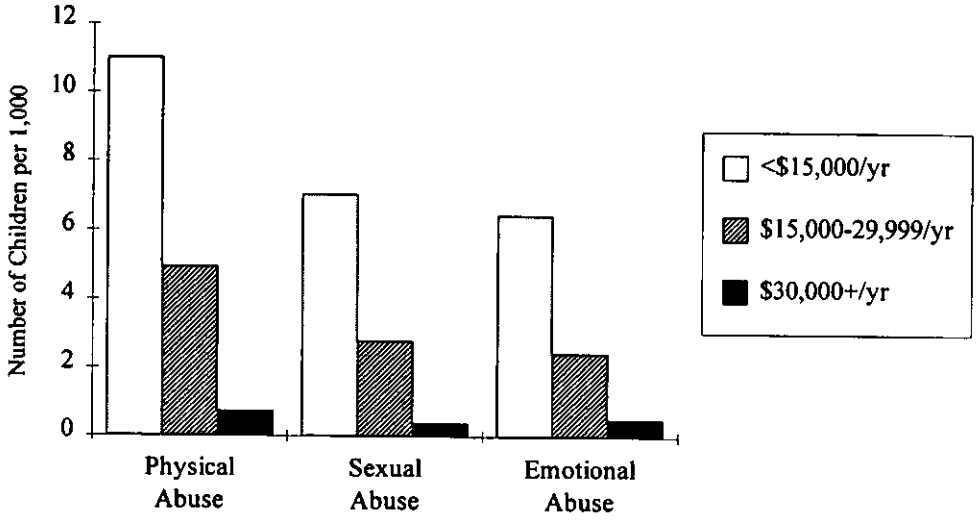


Figure 5–1. Incidence of Types of Abuse under the Harm Standard for Different Levels of Family Income.

**Physical Abuse.** The overall rate of physical abuse under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 was 5.7 children per 1,000. (See Chapter 3.) However, as shown in Figure 5–1, this was not evenly distributed across the different income levels. The incidence rate for children in the lowest income families was nearly two and one-quarter times that for children in the middle-income group and almost 16 times the incidence rate for children in the highest income group. The difference between the latter two income groups was also significant, with children from families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year experiencing physical abuse at more than seven times the rate of children from families with incomes of $30,000 or more per year.

**Sexual Abuse.** The rates of sexual abuse as defined by the Harm Standard (shown in Table 5–1 and in the center of Figure 5–1) should be considered in relation to the overall rate for this maltreatment, which was 3.2 children per 1,000. (See Chapter 3.) There were strong income-related differences in the distribution of this type of abuse as well, and only children in the middle-income group approximated the general rate. Children living in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year experienced sexual abuse under the Harm Standard at more than 17 times the rate of children in families with incomes of $30,000 or more per year. Children from families in the middle-income bracket had seven times the incidence of sexual abuse as children from families with incomes of $30,000 or more per

year. The difference between the less-than-$15,000 income group and the $15,000–$29,999 income group in the rates of sexual abuse was not significant according to the traditional standard, but it did approach significance (i.e., it was marginal, with a probability of less than 10 percent that it was due solely to chance sample fluctuations). The children from families whose annual incomes were less than $15,000 had two and one-half times the incidence rate of children in families with yearly incomes between $15,000 and $29,999.

**Emotional Abuse.** Chapter 3 reported that emotional abuse under the Harm Standard affected 3.0 children per 1,000 overall, but Table 5–1 and Figure 5–1 reveal the substantial subgroup differences in the rate of this maltreatment in relation to family income. There was a significant difference between the lowest and highest income groups: children in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year had a 13 times greater rate of emotional abuse than children in families with incomes of $30,000 or more per year. The rates for children in families in the two higher income groups also differed significantly, with children in families in the middle-income group having a five times greater rate of emotional abuse than children in families in the highest income group.

### Neglect under the Harm Standard

The incidence of overall neglect under the Harm Standard, which is 13.1 children per 1,000 when subgroup differences are ignored (see Chapter 3), was disproportionately higher among children living in the lower income groups. As presented in Table 5–1, the rate is actually 27.2 per 1,000 children in families in the lowest income group. This is two and two-fifths times the rate of 11.3 per 1,000 for children in families in the middle-income group and 45 times the rate of 0.6 per 1,000 for children from families in the highest income group. The incidence rates for the latter two groups of children also differ significantly. Children living in families in the middle-income group had almost 19 times the incidence of Harm Standard neglect compared with children living in families in the highest income group.

When the specific forms of neglect were examined, significant income-related differences were found in the incidence of physical, emotional, and educational neglect. These are charted in Figure 5–2.

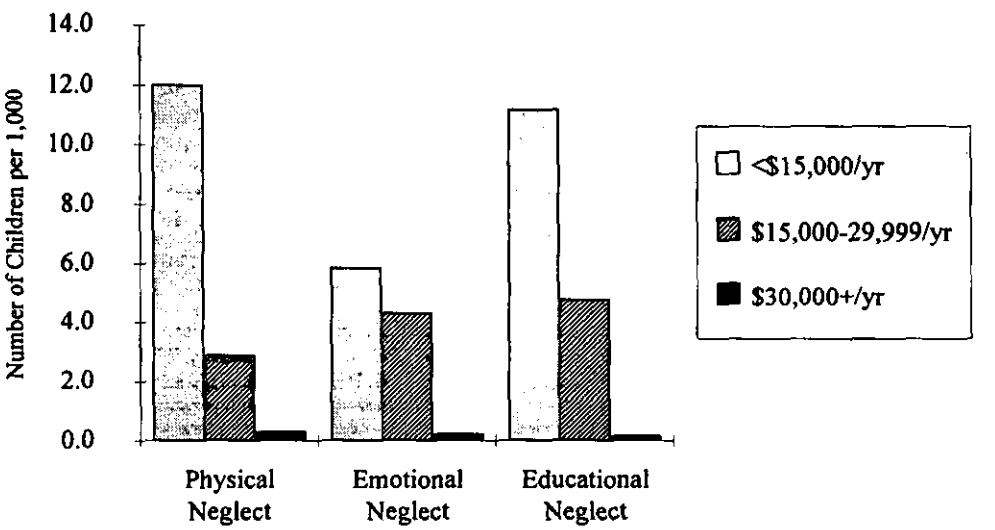


Figure 5–2. Incidence of Types of Neglect under the Harm Standard for Different Levels of Family Income.

**Physical Neglect.** Across all children, physical neglect as defined by the Harm Standard occurred at a rate of 5.0 children per 1,000, as described in Chapter 3. However, Table 5–1 and Figure 5–2 underscore that there are marked differences in this rate as a function of family income. Children living in impoverished families (those with incomes less than $15,000 per year) were over four times more likely to be physically neglected than children in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year; the poorest children were 40 times more likely to be physically neglected than children in families with yearly incomes of $30,000 or more. Income-related differences were also significant among the children where annual family incomes were $15,000 or more: children in families with annual incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 had nine and two-thirds times the physical neglect rate of children in families with annual incomes of $30,000 or more.

**Emotional Neglect.** The poorest children experienced emotional neglect as defined by the Harm Standard at 29 times the rate for children in families in the highest income category (i.e., families with incomes $30,000 per year or more). Children in families in the middle-income group ($15,000 to $29,999 per year) were 21 times more likely to be emotionally neglected than those in families in the higher income group.

**Educational Neglect.** Although 5.9 children per 1,000 were educationally neglected among the overall child population, there are considerable and significant differences in incidence among children living in different economic circumstances. Educational neglect was most prevalent among children in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year, where the rate is 11.1 children per 1,000. These poorest children are nearly two and one-third times more likely to be educationally neglected than are children in families in the next income bracket (with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year), and they are almost 56 times more likely to be educationally neglected than are children in families with incomes of $30,000 per year or more. Income-related differences in educational neglect extended to the other income brackets as well. Children living in families of more modest means (with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year) had a rate of educational neglect that was 24 times that of children in families with incomes of $30,000 per year or more.

## Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard

As Table 5–1 indicates, there were significant income-related differences in the incidence of children who were injured seriously or moderately by maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard and in the incidence of children for whom harm could be inferred because of the extreme nature of their maltreatment. These income group differences are graphed in Figure 5–3.

**Serious Injury.** In general, 8.4 children per 1,000 in the U.S. child population suffered serious injury from some type of maltreatment that fit the Harm Standard. (See Chapter 3.) Income-related differences, however, strongly qualify that finding, as evidenced in Figure 5–3. The poorest children were victims of serious injury at a rate of 17.9 per 1,000, a rate that is more than two and one-fourth times the rate of serious injury among children in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year and more than 22 times the rate of serious injury among children in families with incomes of $30,000 or more per year. Children in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 a year were seriously injured by maltreatment meeting the Harm Standard at a rate of 7.8 children per 1,000, which is nine and three-fourths times the rate for children in families with incomes of $30,000 or more.

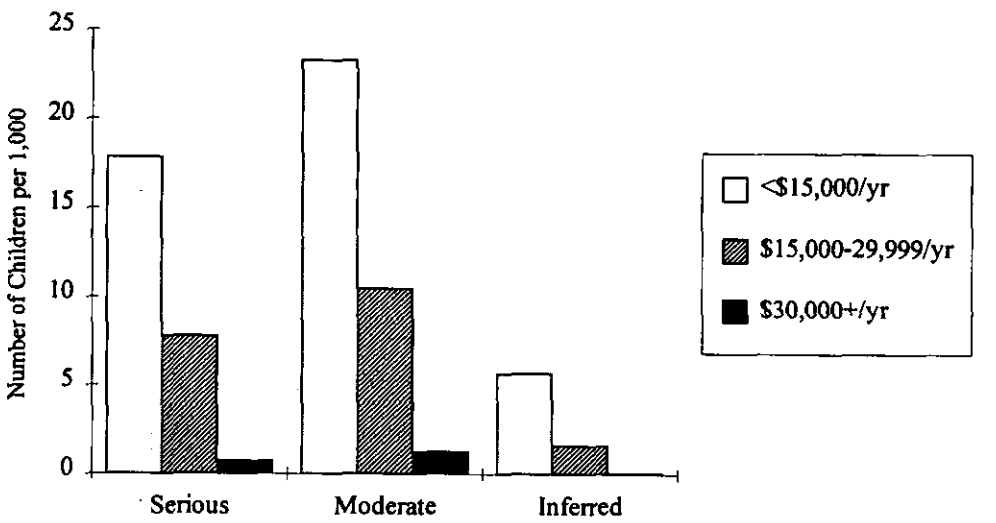


Figure 5–3. Incidence of Injuries from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard for Different Levels of Family Income.

**Moderate Injury.** In the general child population, 12.2 children per 1,000 were victims of moderate injury as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by the Harm Standard. Among children living in the poorest families, the rate was 23.3 children per 1,000. This is more than two and one-fifth times the rate for children in families making between $15,000 and $29,999 a year and almost 18 times the rate for children in families making $30,000 a year or more. The latter two income groups also differed in their rates of moderate injury. An estimated 10.5 per 1,000 children in families making $15,000 to $29,999 a year suffered moderate injury from abuse or neglect meeting the Harm Standard, which is more than eight times the rate of 1.3 children per 1,000 in families earning $30,000 or more annually.

**Inferred Injury.** The Harm Standard definitions permitted injury to be inferred for an estimated 2.5 children per 1,000, based on the severe nature of the maltreatment events they experienced. But this overall rate masks significant income-related differences in the incidence of children with inferred injury. The inferred injury incidence rate was 5.7 per 1,000 among the poorest children, which is more than three and one-half times the rate among children in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 a year and 57 times the rate among children in families with incomes of at least $30,000 a year. The incidence rate of inferred injury was 1.6 per 1,000 for children in families with incomes

between $15,000 and $29,999 a year. This is 16 times the rate among children in families with incomes of $30,000 a year or more, a difference which is also significant.

### Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard in Relation to Family Income

Comparisons between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 did not detect any significant or marginal shifts in income-related differences in the incidence of maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

## 5.1.2 Differences in Maltreatment As Defined by the Endangerment Standard Related to Family Income

The general findings reported in Chapter 3 concerning the incidence of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard are qualified by significant and pervasive differences in its distribution based on family income. Significant differences in incidence rates were found among all income brackets in all categories of maltreatment and severity of outcome, except fatal injuries.[8] The incidence rates for children in families with different income levels are given in Table 5–2.[9]

### Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

In general, as reported in the main NIS–3 results presented in Chapter 3, an estimated 41.9 children per 1,000 experienced some form of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard. However, that finding is qualified by significant differences in children's rate of victimization based on their family

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[8] For a substantial percentage of children who were countable under the Endangerment Standard, income data were missing (31% of the weighted total). To ensure that the income-related findings were not distorted by the missing data, special analyses were conducted in which *all* children for whom income information was missing were hypothetically assigned to the higher family income bracket. The findings indicated no need to modify the conclusions about income-related differences reported here. These analyses are detailed in Appendix C.

[9] As in the preceding section, the $\alpha$-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved in each category. (See Appendix C.)

Table 5–2. Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993) for Different Levels of Family Income.

| Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Category | <$15K/yr | $15-29K/yr | $30K+/yr | Significance of Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 95.9 | 33.1 | 3.8 | * |
| ABUSE: | | | | |
| All Abuse | 37.4 | 17.5 | 2.5 | * |
| Physical Abuse | 17.6 | 8.5 | 1.5 | * |
| Sexual Abuse | 9.2 | 4.2 | 0.5 | * |
| Emotional Abuse | 18.3 | 8.1 | 1.0 | * |
| NEGLECT: | | | | |
| All Neglect | 72.3 | 21.6 | 1.6 | * |
| Physical Neglect | 54.3 | 12.5 | 1.1 | * |
| Emotional Neglect | 19.0 | 8.2 | 0.7 | * |
| Educational Neglect | 11.1 | 4.8 | 0.2 | * |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | | |
| Fatal | 0.060 | 0.002 | 0.003 | ns |
| Serious | 17.9 | 7.9 | 0.8 | * |
| Moderate | 29.6 | 12.1 | 1.5 | * |
| Inferred | 7.8 | 2.7 | 0.2 | * |
| Endangered | 40.5 | 10.3 | 1.3 | * |

* All between-group differences are significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.
ns No between-group difference is significant or marginal (all $p's>.10$).

income. Table 5–2 shows that an estimated 95.9 per 1,000 children from the poorest families, in which annual incomes are below $15,000, suffered maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard. This incidence rate is nearly three times the rate of maltreatment found for children in families with annual

incomes between $15,000 and $29,999. The poorest children had a more than 25 times greater risk of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard compared to children in families in the highest income classification (i.e., that made $30,000 or more per year). In turn, children from families with annual incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 had a more than eight and one-half times greater risk of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard than children from families making $30,000 or more.

**Abuse under the Endangerment Standard**

The general incidence rate of abuse under the Endangerment Standard was 18.2 children per 1,000 across the U.S. child population. However, there were significant differences among all income groups in relation to this category of maltreatment. Children in the most impoverished families had the highest rate of abuse (37.4 children per 1,000), more than twice the rate for children in families with incomes of $15,000 to $29,999 per year and almost 15 times the rate for children in families with incomes of at least $30,000 per year. Children in the $15,000–$29,999 income group had an incidence rate of abuse under the Endangerment Standard of 17.5 children per 1,000, which is seven times the rate for children in the higher income families (those making $30,000 or more a year).

This general pattern pervaded all specific types of abuse as defined by the Endangerment Standard, as shown in Figure 5–4.

**Physical Abuse.** The poorest children had more than twice the rate of physical abuse under the Endangerment Standard as children in families with annual incomes of $15,000 to $29,999 and almost 12 times the rate of those in families with annual incomes of $30,000 or more. Children in families in the middle-income range, which make between $15,000 and $29,999 annually, had a five and two-thirds greater rate of physical abuse than those in families in the highest income category.

**Sexual Abuse.** In this maltreatment category, the risk for children in the lowest income families was more than twice that for children in families at the next income level ($15,000 to $29,999 per year) and more than 18 times the risk for children in families at the highest income level ($30,000 per year or more). Children in families in the middle and upper income ranges also differed significantly in their risk of Endangerment Standard sexual abuse: those in families making $15,000 to $29,999 per year had more than eight times the risk of experiencing this type of maltreatment.

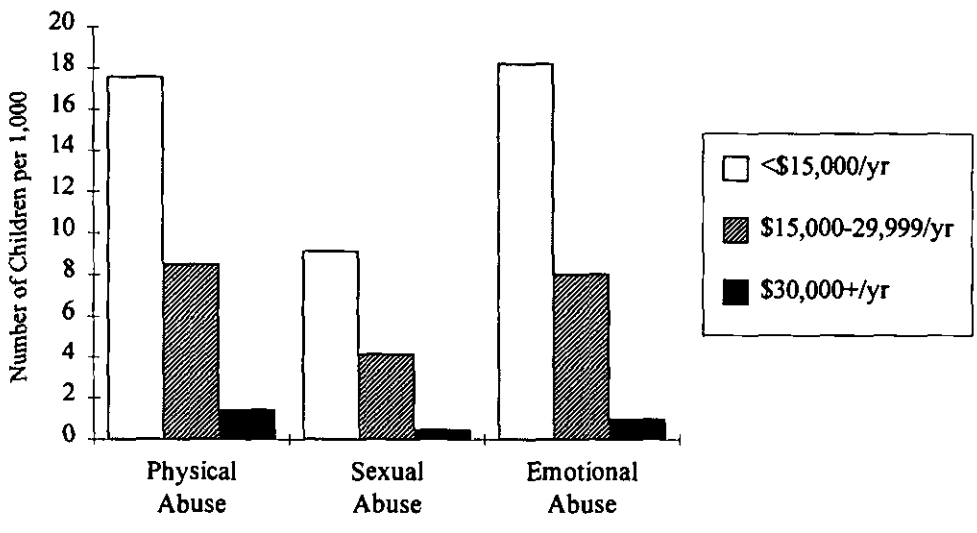


Figure 5–4. Incidence of Types of Abuse under the Endangerment Standard for Different Levels of Family Income.

**Emotional Abuse.** Children in the poorest families had more than a two and one-fourth times greater risk of being emotionally abused compared to children in families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 per year, and their risk was more than 18 times greater than that of children whose families made $30,000 per year or more. The children in families in the middle-income group were more than eight times as likely to be emotionally abused as those in families in the higher income group.

### Neglect under the Endangerment Standard

An estimated 29.2 children per 1,000 were neglected under the Endangerment Standard definitions in 1993 (see Chapter 3), but strong differences across children based on the incomes of their families qualified this general finding. Again, those who live in the poorest families, with incomes less than $15,000 per year, were more than three and one-third times more likely to be neglected than those in families at the next level of income ($15,000 to $29,999 a year). These poorest children were more than 45 times more likely to be neglected than those whose families make $30,000 a year or more. The income-based differences among children in their risk of Endangerment Standard neglect also extend into the other income brackets: children whose families make $15,000 to $29,999 a year had more than 13 times the neglect rate of those in the upper income families.

This configuration of risk differences also characterized every specific type of neglect under the Endangerment Standard, a fact that is evident in the graph in Figure 5–5. Note that the incidence rates for the highest income children in the categories of emotional and educational neglect are almost undetectable on the scale of this graph. (See Table 5–2 for the actual values.)

**Physical Neglect.** The poorest children were physically neglected more than four and one-third times more often than those in families with incomes of $15,000 to $29,999 a year and more than 49 times more often than children in families with incomes of $30,000 a year or more. Those in the middle-income group had, in turn, a more than 11 times greater risk of physical neglect than those in the upper income group.

**Emotional Neglect.** Children in families in the lowest income group (less than $15,000 annually) were almost two and one-third times more likely to be emotionally neglected than those in families in the middle-income group ($15,000 to $29,999 annually). Compared to children in families in the highest income group ($30,000 or more annually), children in families in the lowest income group were over 27 times more likely to be emotionally neglected. Among children in the middle-income families, the risk of emotional neglect was almost 12 times greater than among those in families in the highest income group.

**Educational Neglect.** Children from families with the lowest incomes were almost two and one-third times more likely to be educationally neglected compared to children from families in the middle-income group. The incidence rate of educational neglect was so small in the upper income group that, in comparison, the lowest income group had a more than 55 times greater risk and the middle-income group had a 24 times greater risk.

## Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment As Defined by the Endangerment Standard

There were significant differences based on family income in the incidence of all categories of outcomes from Endangerment Standard maltreatment, except fatalities. The findings are shown in Figure 5–6; again, the incidence rates for children in the highest income group are sometimes only barely visible on the scale of the graph in comparison to the rates for the other income groups.

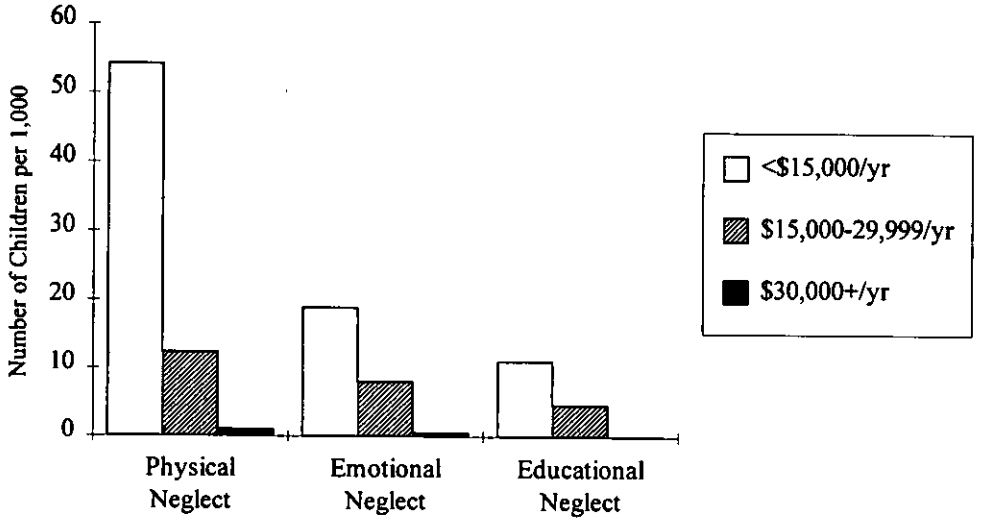


Figure 5–5. Incidence of Types of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard for Different Levels of Family Income.

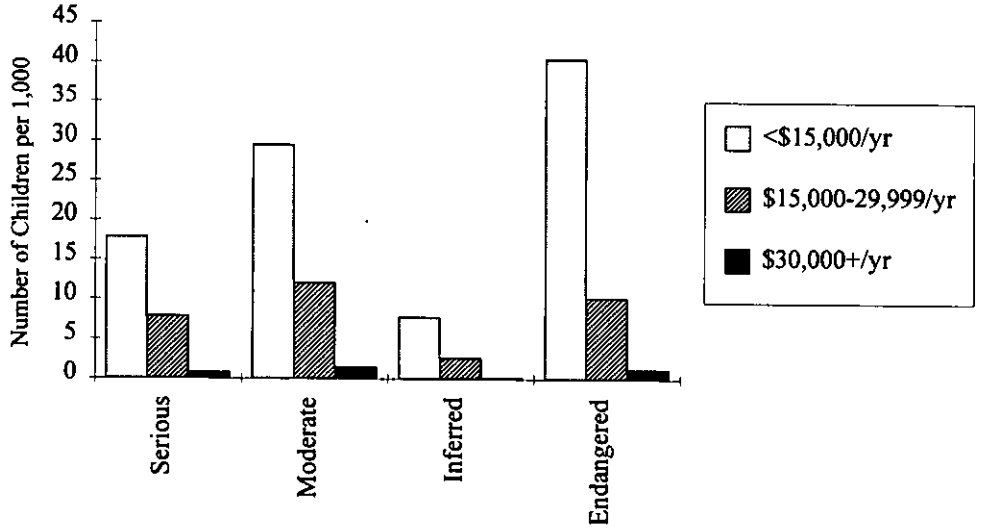


Figure 5–6. Incidence of Injuries from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard for Different Levels of Family Income.

**Serious Injury.** The distribution of serious injury was strongly related to family income. For children in families with the lowest incomes, the rate of serious injuries was more than two and one-fourth times greater than for children in families in the middle-income group. The poorest children had over 22 times the rate of serious injury from maltreatment compared to children in families in the highest income group. Children in the middle-income families had a rate of serious injury that was almost 10 times higher than the rate of serious injury for children in families in the upper income group.

**Moderate Injury.** Children whose families make under $15,000 a year had nearly two and one-half times the rate of moderate injury of children in families making $15,000 to $29,999 a year and almost 20 times the rate of moderate injury of children in families making $30,000 a year or more. Children from families in the middle-income bracket had more than eight times the rate of moderate injury from maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard compared to children from families in the upper income bracket.

**Inferred Injury.** There were significant income-related differences in the incidence of children countable under the Endangerment Standard for whom injury could be inferred on the basis of the extreme nature of their maltreatment. The poorest children qualified for this classification nearly three times more often than those from families with incomes between $15,000 and $29,999 a year. The poorest children were also 39 times more likely to be classified in the inferred injury category than children in families making $30,000 a year or more. Children from families in the middle-income bracket were more than 13 times as likely to be classified in the inferred injury category as children whose families fell into the upper income bracket.

**Endangerment.** The incidence rates for children who had been endangered, but not yet harmed, as a result of maltreatment differed significantly across the three family income brackets. The poorest children had almost four times the incidence rate of children in the middle-income bracket, and they had more than 31 times the incidence rate of children in the highest income group. Children from families making between $15,000 and $29,999 a year were almost eight times more likely to be endangered by abuse or neglect than were children from families making $30,000 a year or more.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Endangerment Standard Maltreatment in Relation to Family Income**

Comparisons between the NIS–3 and the NIS–2 income-based differences used the simple dichotomous classification that had been used in the earlier NIS–2. That is, the comparisons examined the differences in incidence rates between children in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year and those in families with incomes of $15,000 a year or more. The only significant between-study change in the relation between family income and maltreatment was among endangered children (i.e., those who had been endangered but not yet harmed by maltreatment). The finding is charted in Figure 5–7.

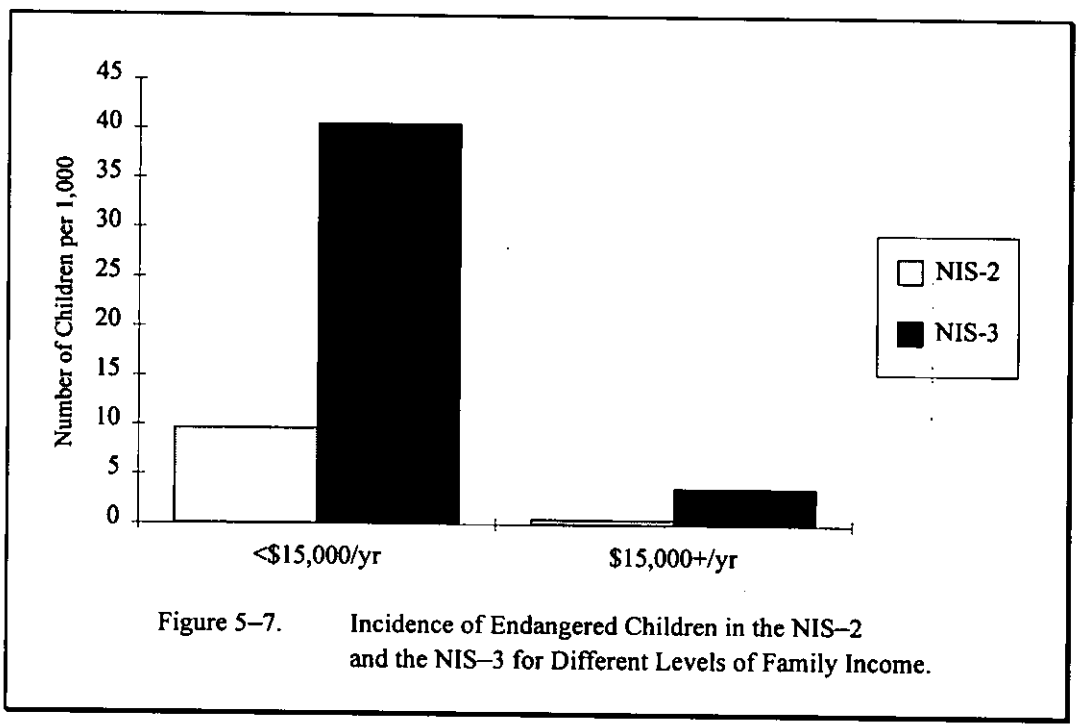


Figure 5–7. Incidence of Endangered Children in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for Different Levels of Family Income.

Although there were significant increases in the incidence of endangered children in both income groups, the figure makes it evident that the increase was much greater among the lower income children.

## 5.2 Family-Structure Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment

This section presents the NIS–3 results on the relationship between the incidence of child abuse and neglect and family structure in terms of the number of parents in the child's household. Children were categorized into groups according to whether they lived with both their parents, only their mother, only their father, or neither mother nor father. The definition of parent followed that used by the Bureau of the Census, which includes birth parents, adoptive parents, and step-parents.[10]

### 5.2.1 Family-Structure Differences in Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

The incidence of maltreatment under the Harm Standard differed significantly across different family structures in seven of the nine maltreatment categories and for two of the four severity levels. Table 5–3 gives the incidence rates for children in families with different parent configurations for all categories of maltreatment and severity.[11] The last column indicates the pattern of any significant or marginal differences across the different family-structure categories. Note that in all categories where differences emerged, children living in single-parent households were at higher risk than those living with both parents. The specific findings in this table are discussed in the subsections that follow.

#### Overall Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Figure 5–8 graphs the differences related to family structure in the incidence of overall maltreatment and of the main categories of abuse and neglect as defined by the Harm Standard.

Among children living with a single parent, an estimated 27.3 per 1,000 suffered some form of maltreatment under the Harm Standard in 1993. This rate is more than one and three-fourths

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[10] Family structure was unknown for 18 percent of the weighted total of children who were countable under the Harm Standard and for 19 percent of the weighted total of children countable under the Endangerment Standard—either because it was not known whether one or the other parent was living in the child's household or because the child's exact relationship to the mother-substitute or to the father-substitute in the household was not known.

[11] In each category of maltreatment or injury, the $\alpha$-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved. Details concerning the statistical tests for the significance of differences based on family structure are given in Appendix C.

Table 5–3. Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 (1993) for Different Family Structures.

| Harm Standard Maltreatment Category | Both Parents | Single Parent | | | Neither Parent | Significance of Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Either Mother or Father | Mother-only | Father-only | | |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *15.5* | *27.3* | *26.1* | *36.6* | *22.9* | A, C, D |
| ABUSE: | | | | | | |
| All Abuse | *8.4* | *11.4* | *10.5* | *17.7* | *13.7* | D, e |
| Physical Abuse | *3.9* | *6.9* | *6.4* | *10.5* | *7.0* | a, D, e |
| Sexual Abuse | *2.6* | *2.5* | *2.5* | *2.6* | *6.3* | ns |
| Emotional Abuse | *2.6* | *2.5* | *2.1* | *5.7* | *5.4* | ns |
| NEGLECT: | | | | | | |
| All Neglect | *7.9* | *17.3* | *16.7* | *21.9* | *10.3* | A, C, D |
| Physical Neglect | *3.1* | *5.8* | *5.9* | *4.7* | *4.3* | A, C |
| Emotional Neglect | *2.3* | *4.0* | *3.4* | *8.8* | *3.1* | a, G |
| Educational Neglect | *3.0* | *9.6* | *9.5* | *10.8* | *3.1* | A, B, f |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | | | | |
| Fatal | *0.019* | *0.015* | *0.017* | *0.005* | *0.016* | ns |
| Serious | *5.8* | *10.5* | *10.0* | *14.0* | *8.0* | A, C |
| Moderate | *8.1* | *15.4* | *14.7* | *20.5* | *10.1* | A |
| Inferred | *1.6* | *1.4* | *1.3* | *2.1* | *4.8* | ns |

A Difference between "Both Parents" and "Either Mother or Father" is significant at or below the $p < .05$ level.
a Difference between "Both Parents" and "Either Mother or Father" is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10 > p > .05$).
B Difference between "Either Mother or Father" and "Neither Parent" is significant at or below the $p < .05$ level.
C Difference between "Both Parents" and "Mother only" is significant at or below the $p < .05$ level.
D Difference between "Both Parents" and "Father only" is significant at or below the $p < .05$ level.
e Difference between "Mother only" and "Father only" is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10 > p > .05$).
f Difference between "Mother only" and "Neither Parent" is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10 > p > .05$).
G Difference between "Father only" and "Neither Parent" is significant at or below the $p < .05$ level.
ns No between-group difference is significant or marginal (all p's > .10).

times the rate of overall maltreatment under the Harm Standard for children living with both parents (15.5 per 1,000), a difference which is significant. Moreover, the higher risk for children of single parents held true for both mother-only and father-only households. Children living with only their mothers experienced maltreatment under the Harm Standard at a rate of 26.1 per 1,000, which is more

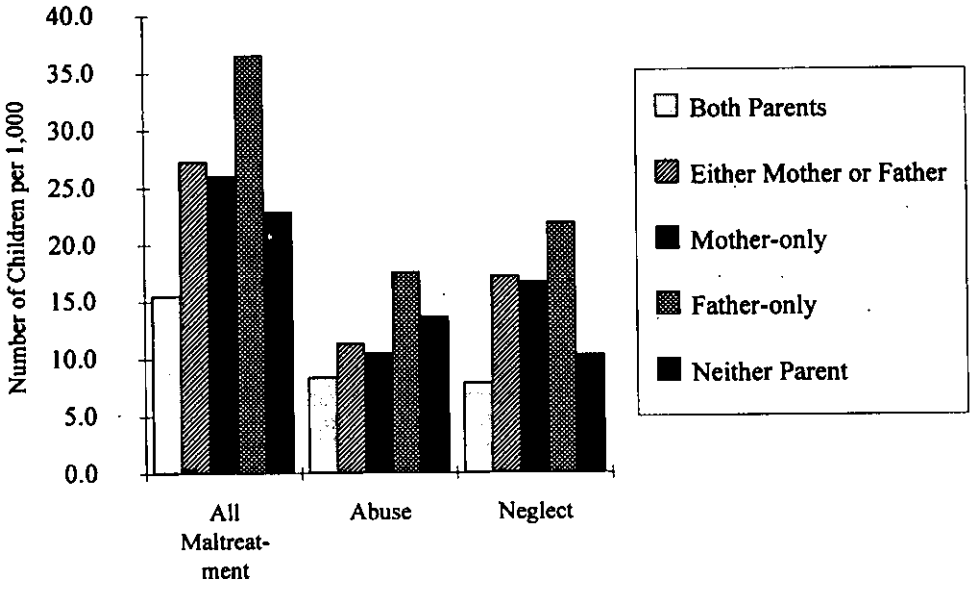


Figure 5–8. Incidence of Overall Maltreatment and of Abuse and Neglect under the Harm Standard for Different Family Structures.

than one and two-thirds times the rate of children living with both parents. An estimated 36.6 per 1,000 of children who are living with only their fathers suffered some form of maltreatment under the Harm Standard. This rate is more than two and one-third times higher than that of children in two-parent families.

**Abuse under the Harm Standard**

Children in father-only families had more than twice the risk of abuse as defined by the Harm Standard compared to children living in both-parent families. Their risk was more than one and two-thirds that of children in mother-only families, a marginal difference in this maltreatment category. Thus, the pattern in connection with abuse essentially reflects the higher risk of children who live with only their fathers.

**Physical Abuse.** When specific types of abuse under the Harm Standard are examined, it is apparent that the findings described in the previous paragraph stem from the disproportionate incidence

of physical abuse among children in father-only households. The graph in Figure 5–9 shows this pattern. An estimated 10.5 per 1,000 children living with only their fathers were harmed by physical abuse in 1993, which is more than two and two-thirds higher than the incidence rate of 3.9 per 1,000 for children living with both their parents. Children in mother-only families were not statistically different from those in both-parent households in their risk of physical abuse under the Harm Standard.

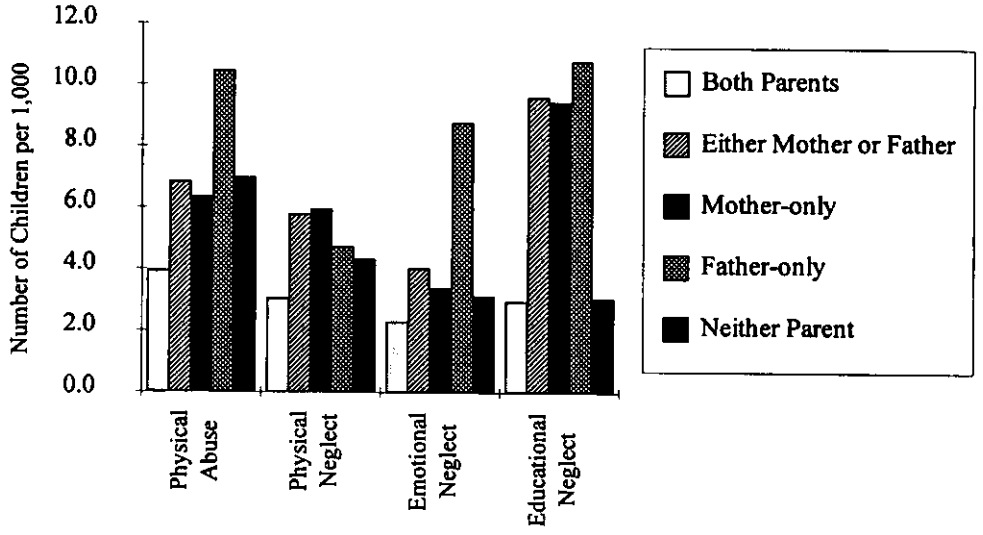


Figure 5–9. Incidence of Types of Abuse and Neglect under the Harm Standard for Different Family Structures.

No incidence differences relating to family structure were uncovered in any of the other specific types of abuse under the Harm Standard.

**Neglect under the Harm Standard**

The incidence of overall neglect under the Harm Standard is significantly higher among children living with a single parent, a pattern which was graphed earlier in Figure 5–8. An estimated 17.3 per 1,000 among single-parented children were neglected, which is almost two and one-fifth times the rate of 7.9 per 1,000 for children in two-parent households. This pattern was true for children from

both mother-only and father-only families, who were not statistically different in their rates of neglect under the Harm Standard.

All three specific types of neglect under the Harm Standard evidenced disproportionately high rates of incidence among children of a single parent, but other aspects of the family structure differences varied across these maltreatment categories, as documented in Figure 5–9.

**Physical Neglect.** In Chapter 3 it was reported that physical neglect as defined by the Harm Standard occurred at a rate of 5.0 children per 1,000. Children living with both of their parents had a lower incidence rate than this (3.1 children per 1,000). An estimated 5.8 per 1,000 children of single parents were harmed by physical neglect, a significantly higher incidence rate. Note that the higher risk for children of single parents in this category predominantly reflects a higher incidence of physical neglect among children living only with their mothers, among whom 5.9 children per 1,000 were physically neglected. There was no statistical difference between the incidence of physical neglect among children in father-only households and those in both-parent households.

**Emotional Neglect.** The incidence of this type of maltreatment was marginally higher among children living with single parents than among children living with both parents. However, in this case, it was also found that children living only with their fathers had a two and four-fifths times greater risk than children who were living with neither parent.

**Educational Neglect.** Across all family structures, educational neglect occurred to 5.9 children per 1,000 in the U.S. population, but there were differences in incidence rates depending on family structure. Children living with a single parent had a three and one-fifth times greater risk of being educationally neglected than those living with both parents. Children living with only their mothers were over three times more likely to be educationally neglected as those living with two parents. Single-parented children also had a more than three times greater risk of educational neglect compared to children who do not live with either parent. Although incidence rates for both mother-only and father-only households were notably high, statistical comparisons showed that children living only with their mothers had a reliably higher risk than children living with neither parent.

**Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard**

As Table 5–3 indicated, there are significant family structure differences in the incidence of children who were seriously or moderately injured by Harm Standard maltreatment. Figure 5–10 charts these findings.

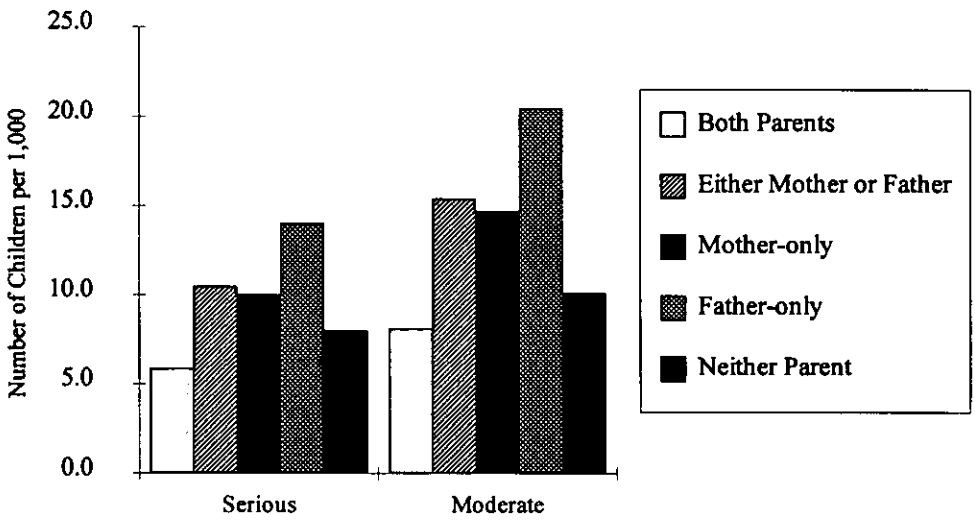


Figure 5–10. Incidence of Injuries from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard for Different Family Structures.

**Serious Injury.** Children living in single-parent households had a more than one and four-fifths times greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from maltreatment that fit the Harm Standard than their peers living with both parents. Separate analyses comparing children in mother-only and father-only households with those living with both parents showed that this pattern was statistically reliable only for children in mother-only householdsCthe father-only estimates were not sufficiently precise to support the statistical reliability of the apparently higher rate in that group as well.

**Moderate Injury.** Children of single parents had nearly twice the risk of moderate injury from Harm Standard abuse or neglect in comparison to children living with two parents.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in Relation to Family Structure**

Comparisons between the NIS–3 and the NIS–2 examined the differences in incidence rates among children in families with both parents, a single parent, and neither parent. A separate analysis also examined whether incidence rates for children in mother-only households differed from those for children in father-only households.

Only one category of maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard evidenced a significant change since the NIS–2 in relation to family structure. As Figure 5–11 shows, the increase in physical abuse under the Harm Standard was greatest among children living with neither parent, where the rate increased from 0.5 children per 1,000 in the NIS–2 to 7.0 children per 1,000 in the NIS–3. This was the only family structure where this maltreatment showed a significant change since the NIS–2.

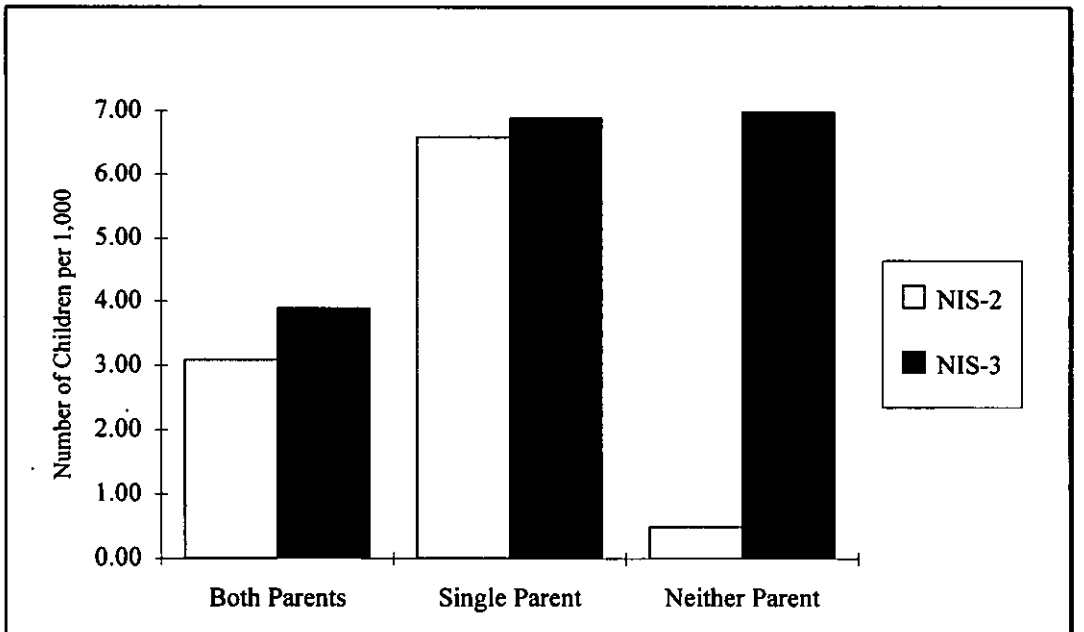


Figure 5–11. Incidence of Physical Abuse under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for Different Family Structures.

### 5.2.2 Family-Structure Differences in Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

Similar patterns characterized the distribution of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard across the different categories of family structure. Significant or marginal differences in incidence rates based on family structure emerged in seven of the nine categories of maltreatment and in three of the five categories of outcomes. Specifically, differences emerged in the incidence of overall Endangerment Standard maltreatment, the main categories of abuse and neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect, serious injuries, moderate injuries, and endangerment. The incidence rates for children in families with different parent structures are provided in Table 5–4.[12]

#### Overall Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

In Chapter 3 it was reported that some form of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard occurred to an estimated 41.9 children per 1,000 nationwide. Significant differences in relation to family structure qualify that general finding. Table 5–4 shows that children in single-parent households experienced a higher rate of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard compared to children living in two-parent households. The graph in Figure 5–12 depicts the incidence rates for overall maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard and for the main categories of abuse and neglect. Children living with a single parent had nearly twice the rate of overall maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard compared to children who live with both parents (i.e., 52 children per 1,000 versus 26.9 children per 1,000).

[12] As in the preceding section, the $\alpha$-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved in each category. (See Appendix C.)

Table 5–4. Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993) for Different Family Structures.

| Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Category | Both Parents | Single Parent | | | Neither Parent | Significance of Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Either Mother or Father | Mother-only | Father-only | | |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *26.9* | *52.0* | *50.1* | *65.6* | *39.3* | A, C, D, G |
| ABUSE: | | | | | | |
| All Abuse | *13.5* | *19.6* | *18.1* | *31.0* | *17.3* | a |
| Physical Abuse | *6.5* | *10.6* | *9.8* | *16.5* | *9.2* | d |
| Sexual Abuse | *3.2* | *4.2* | *4.3* | *3.1* | *6.6* | ns |
| Emotional Abuse | *6.2* | *8.6* | *7.7* | *14.6* | *7.1* | ns |
| NEGLECT: | | | | | | |
| All Neglect | *17.6* | *38.9* | *37.6* | *47.9* | *24.1* | A, C, D, G |
| Physical Neglect | *10.8* | *28.6* | *27.5* | *36.4* | *17.1* | A, c, D |
| Emotional Neglect | *6.4* | *10.5* | *9.7* | *16.2* | *8.3* | a |
| Educational Neglect | *3.0* | *9.6* | *9.5* | *10.8* | *3.1* | A, B, C, f |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | | | | |
| Fatal | *0.020* | *0.015* | *0.017* | *0.005* | *0.016* | ns |
| Serious | *5.9* | *10.5* | *10.0* | *14.0* | *8.0* | A, C |
| Moderate | *9.6* | *18.5* | *17.7* | *24.8* | *11.5* | A, b |
| Inferred | *2.1* | *2.5* | *2.0* | *6.0* | *4.7* | ns |
| Endangered | *9.3* | *20.5* | *20.4* | *20.7* | *15.1* | A, C |

A Difference between "Both Parents" and "Either Mother or Father" is significant at or below the p<.05 level.
a Difference between "Both Parents" and "Either Mother or Father" is statistically marginal (i.e., .10>p>.05).
B Difference between "Either Mother or Father" and "Neither Parent" is significant at or below the p<.05 level.
b Difference between "Either Mother or Father" and "Neither Parent" is statistically marginal (i.e., .10>p>.05).
C Difference between "Both Parents" and "Mother only" is significant at or below the p<.05 level.
c Difference between "Both Parents" and "Mother only" is statistically marginal (i.e., .10>p>.05).
D Difference between "Both Parents" and "Father only" is significant at or below the p<.05 level.
d Difference between "Both Parents" and "Father only" is statistically marginal (i.e., .10>p>.05)
f Difference between "Mother only" and "Neither Parent" is statistically marginal (i.e., .10>p>.05).
G Difference between "Father only" and "Neither Parent" is significant at or below the p<.05 level.
ns No between-group difference is significant or marginal (all p's>.10).

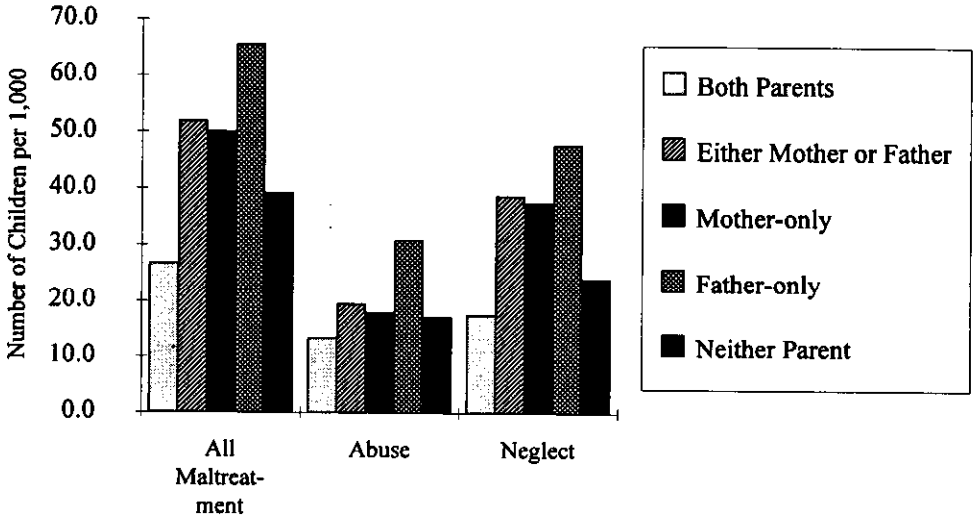


Figure 5–12. Incidence of Overall Maltreatment and of Abuse and Neglect under the Endangerment Standard for Different Family Structures.

**Abuse under the Endangerment Standard**

Abuse of some type as defined by the Endangerment Standard occurred to an estimated 18.2 children per 1,000 across the United States. However, the single-parent family was associated with a marginally higher incidence rate compared to the two-parent family. Children living with only one of their parents were abused at a 45-percent higher rate (19.6 versus 13.5 children per 1,000).

**Physical Abuse.** The only specific type of abuse under the Endangerment Standard that revealed systematic differences in incidence in relation to family structure is physical abuse. Similar to the pattern described above in relation to Harm Standard physical abuse, children who live with only their fathers are at a marginally higher risk of physical abuse than those who live with two parents. (The father-only household is associated with a two and one-half times greater risk.)

No other specific type of Endangerment Standard abuse evidenced systematic fluctuations in incidence in association with family structure.

**Neglect under the Endangerment Standard**

Although some type of neglect conforming to the Endangerment Standard occurred to an estimated 29.2 children per 1,000 nationwide in 1993 (see Chapter 3), this is qualified by the finding that there were significant differences related to family structure. Children living with only one parent had an incidence rate of 38.9 children per 1,000, which is more than two and one-fifth times the rate of neglect under the Endangerment Standard found among children in two-parent families (17.6 children per 1,000). This pattern is depicted in Figure 5–12. Additionally, both the mother-only group and the father-only group had significantly higher incidence rates than the two-parent group, and children living only with their fathers had a significantly higher rate of neglect under the Endangerment Standard than those living with neither of their parents.

Variations in this pattern characterized the distribution of the specific types of Endangerment Standard neglect, as presented in Figure 5–13. (Recall that the definition of educational neglect is identical under both the Harm and Endangerment standards, so the graph in Figure 5–9 above, together with its accompanying discussion, should suffice to describe the pattern for that maltreatment type.)

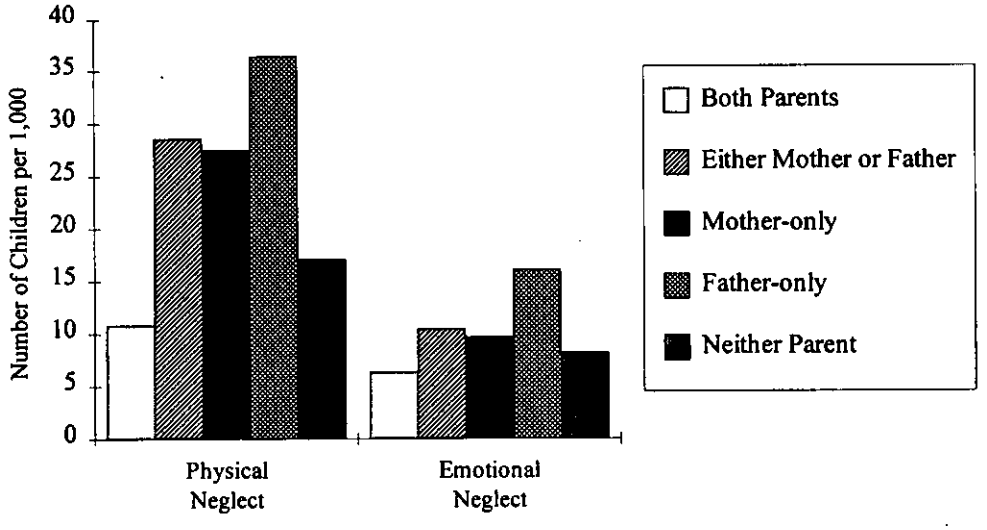


Figure 5–13. Incidence of Two Specific Types of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard for Different Family Structures.

**Physical Neglect.** Those children living with single parents were physically neglected at a rate of 28.6 children per 1,000, which is nearly two and two-thirds times as often as children who live with two parents (10.8 children per 1,000). Significantly higher incidence rates for single-parent households held true for both mother-only and father-only households. Children living with only their mothers were more than two and one-half times as likely to be physically neglected as those with two parents, while the risk for children living with only their fathers was more than three and one-third times that of two-parent children.

**Emotional Neglect.** Figure 5–13 also shows a similar pattern of family-structure differences in the incidence of emotional neglect under the Endangerment Standard. The likelihood of this maltreatment was more than one and three-fifths times greater for children who lived with a single parent (where 10.5 children per 1,000 were emotionally neglected) than for children who lived in two-parent families (where 6.4 children per 1,000 were emotionally neglected).

### Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment As Defined by the Endangerment Standard

There were significant or marginal differences related to family structure in the incidence of three outcomes due to maltreatment using the Endangerment Standard: serious injury, moderate injury, and endangerment. These results are given in Figure 5–14.

**Serious Injury.** The risk of serious injury from abuse or neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard was more than one and three-fourths times greater for children who live with only one parent than for children living with two parents. The greater risk to single-parent children was statistically supported for children in mother-only households. Despite the higher estimated incidence rate of seriously injured children among those who live only with their father, the lack of precision in that estimate made the comparison with that group statistically inconsequential.

**Moderate Injury.** The incidence rate of moderate injury due to Endangerment Standard abuse or neglect was significantly higher for children in single-parent families (18.5 children per 1,000) than for children in families with two parents residing in the home (9.6 children per 1,000). Children who live in single-parent households were nearly twice as likely to be moderately injured compared to those in two-parent families. The distribution of moderately injured children evidenced one additional

feature: their incidence was marginally higher in single-parent households than in households where neither parent was present.

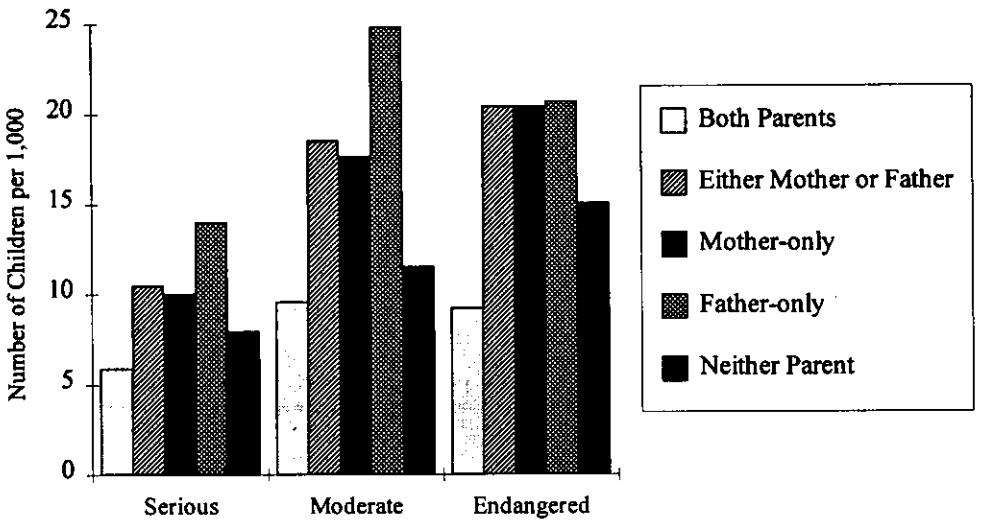


Figure 5–14. Incidence of Injuries from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard for Different Family Structures.

**Endangerment.** The estimated incidence for children who had been endangered, but not yet harmed, by abuse or neglect differed significantly between children in single-parent families and those in families with two parents present. The endangerment incidence rate for children living with only a single parent (20.5 children per 1,000) was more than twice the rate for those living with both parents (9.3 children per 1,000). Again, the comparison bore up for children in mother-only households, but not for those in father-only households (where the NIS–3 estimate is less precise), despite the fact that the estimated incidence of endangered children in these two categories was nearly identical.

### Changes since the NIS–2 in the Incidence of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in Relation to Family Structure

Significant changes since the NIS–2 in the incidence of maltreatment based on family structure emerged in only one of the nine categories of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

and in two categories of outcomes from this maltreatment: emotional abuse, inferred injury, and endangerment.

**Emotional Abuse.** Chapter 3 reported a significant increase in emotional abuse under the Endangerment Standard since the NIS–2. Analyses of how family structure modified increases between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 revealed that although the increase in this category was significant for all groups, it was smaller among children living with a single parent. This pattern is shown in Figure 5–15. The NIS–3 incidence rate of 6.2 per 1,000 for children living with both parents is almost two and one-third times the NIS–2 incidence rate of 2.7 children per 1,000. The NIS–3 incidence among children living with a single parent of 8.6 children per 1,000 is nearly three and one-fifth times the NIS–2 rate of 2.7 children per 1,000. Finally, among children living with neither parent, emotional abuse evidenced its most dramatic increase: the NIS–3 incidence rate of 7.1 children per 1,000 is almost 12 times the NIS–2 incidence rate of 0.6 children per 1,000.

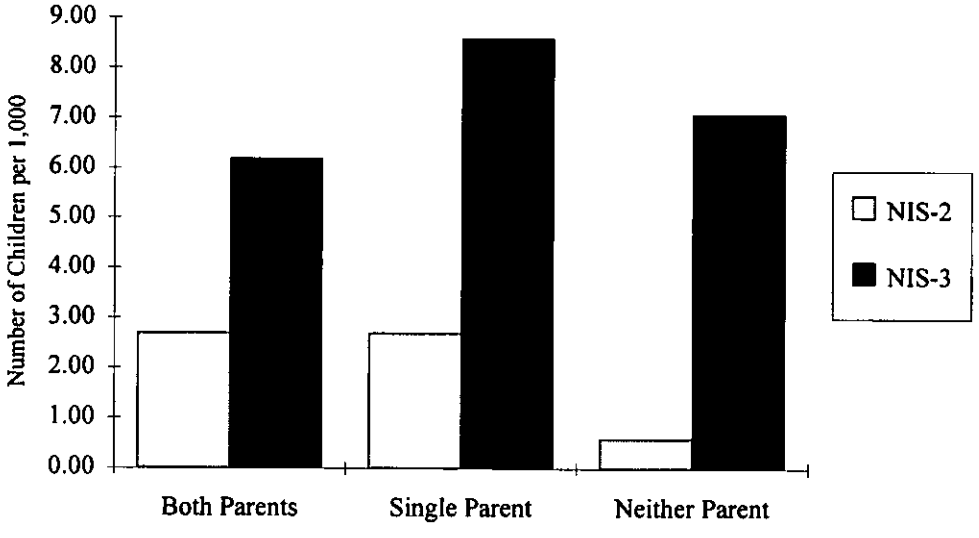


Figure 5–15. Incidence of Emotional Abuse under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for Different Family Structures.

**Inferred Injury**. Changes between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 in the incidence of inferred injury related to family structure are presented in Figure 5–16 for maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard. The NIS–3 incidence rate of 2.5 children per 1,000 for children living with a

single parent was a significant decrease from the NIS–2 rate of 4.7 children per 1,000. This was one of only two categories in the study where NIS–3 rates were found to be significantly lower than NIS–2 rates. In contrast, the inferred injury incidence rate for children living with neither parent significantly

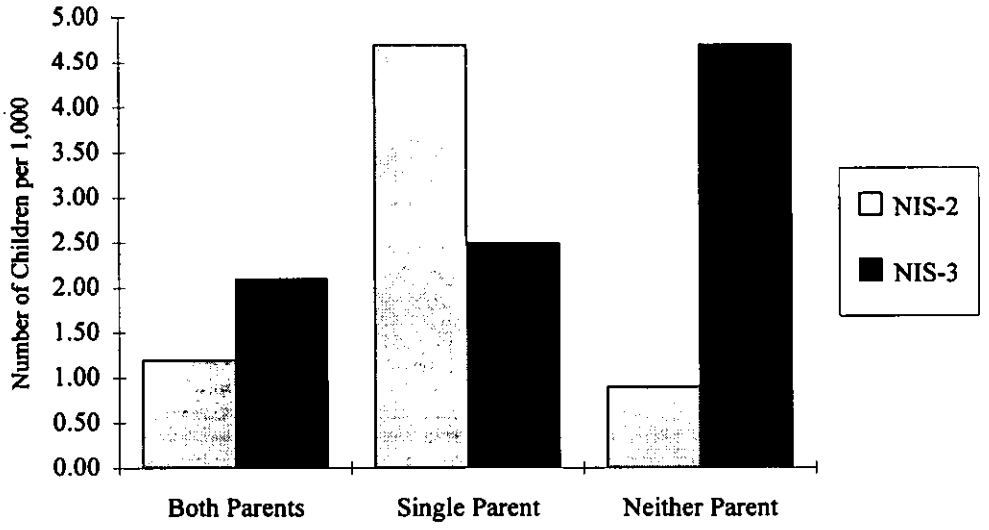


Figure 5–16. Incidence of Inferred Injury from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for Different Family Structures.

increased from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3. The NIS–3 rate of 4.7 children per 1,000 was more than five times the NIS–2 rate of 0.9 children per 1,000. The incidence rate for children in families where both parents were present was marginally higher in the NIS–3 (2.1 children per 1,000) than in the NIS–2 (1.2 children per 1,000).

**Endangerment.** Figure 5–17 shows the significant relation between family structure and changes in incidence between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 in the category of endangerment. Although there were significant increases in the incidence of endangered children among those living in both mother-only and father-only households, the increase was relatively greater for those who live only with their fathers. For children living in father-only households, the NIS–3 incidence rate (20.7 children per 1,000) was more than six times greater than the corresponding NIS–2 rate (3.4 children per 1,000). Children living in mother-only households evidenced an almost twofold increase, from 10.9 children per 1,000 in the NIS–2 to 20.4 children per 1,000 in the NIS–3.

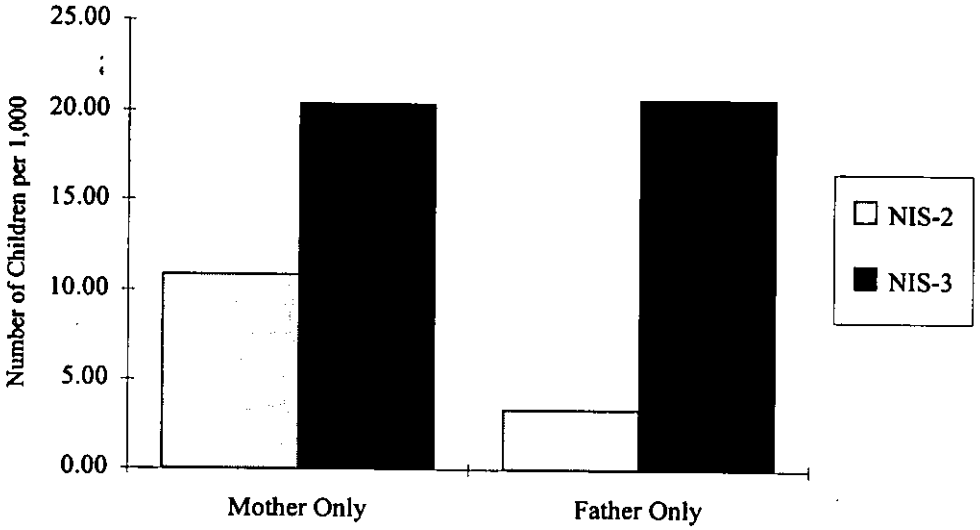


Figure 5–17. Incidence of Endangerment from Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for Different Family Structures.

## 5.3 Family-Size Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment

This section describes the NIS–3 findings concerning the relationship between family size and the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Children were categorized into one of three groups on the basis of the number of dependent children in their family: those in families where they were the only child, those in families with two or three children, and those in families with four or more children.

### 5.3.1 Family-Size Differences in Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

There were several differences in the incidence of maltreatment under the Harm Standard across these three family-size groups. Significant or marginal differences in incidence rates among the family-size groups were found for four categories of maltreatment and in the categories of moderate and inferred injuries. Table 5–5 gives the incidence rates for children in different-sized families for all

Table 5-5. Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in the NIS-3 (1993) for Different Family Sizes.

| Harm Standard Maltreatment Category | One child | 2 or 3 Children | 4+ Children | Significance of Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *22.0* | *17.7* | *34.5* | a, b, C |
| ABUSE: | | | | |
| All Abuse | *10.5* | *9.9* | *13.9* | ns |
| Physical Abuse | *5.1* | *5.2* | *6.4* | ns |
| Sexual Abuse | *3.2* | *2.5* | *5.8* | ns |
| Emotional Abuse | *3.2* | *2.8* | *3.4* | ns |
| NEGLECT: | | | | |
| All Neglect | *12.6* | *8.8* | *21.5* | A, b, C |
| Physical Neglect | *4.4* | *3.8* | *9.1* | c |
| Emotional Neglect | *3.9* | *2.4* | *3.7* | ns |
| Educational Neglect | *6.0* | *3.2* | *9.2* | C |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | | |
| Fatal | *0.019* | *0.024* | *0.018* | ns |
| Serious | *8.1* | *7.3* | *9.8* | ns |
| Moderate | *11.4* | *8.9* | *18.6* | A, C |
| Inferred | *2.5* | *1.5* | *6.0* | ns |

A 'Only' children differed significantly from those in families with 2-3 children ($p<.05$).

a 'Only' children differed marginally from those in families with 2-3 children ($.10>p>.05$).

b 'Only' children differed marginally from those in families with 4+ children ($.10>p>.05$).

C Children in 2 or 3 child families differed significantly from those in families with 4+ children ($p<.05$).

c Children in 2 or 3 child families differed marginally from those in families with 4+ children ($.10>p>.05$).

ns No between-group difference is significant or marginal (all p's>.10).

categories of maltreatment and severity.[13] Note that in all cases where statistically significant or marginal family-size differences emerged in connection with maltreatment under the Harm Standard, the

[13] In each category of maltreatment or injury, the $\alpha$-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved. Details concerning the statistical tests for the significance of family-size differences are given in Appendices C and D.

pattern was the same: the incidence rates were highest for children in the largest families, intermediate for "only" children, and lowest for children in families with two or three children.

**Overall Maltreatment under the Harm Standard**

Figure 5–18 presents the patterns of family-size differences in incidence for overall maltreatment and for the main category of neglect as defined by the Harm Standard.

Among children in families with four or more children, an estimated 34.5 children per 1,000 suffered some form of maltreatment under the Harm Standard in 1993. This rate is equivalent to 3.4 children per 100, or nearly 1 in 30 children in the larger families. This is significantly higher than the rates for the other family-size groups. The incidence rate for children from the larger families is nearly twice the rate for children in families with two or three children (where the rate was 17.7 children per 1,000). Children from larger families had marginally higher incidence rates than "only" children

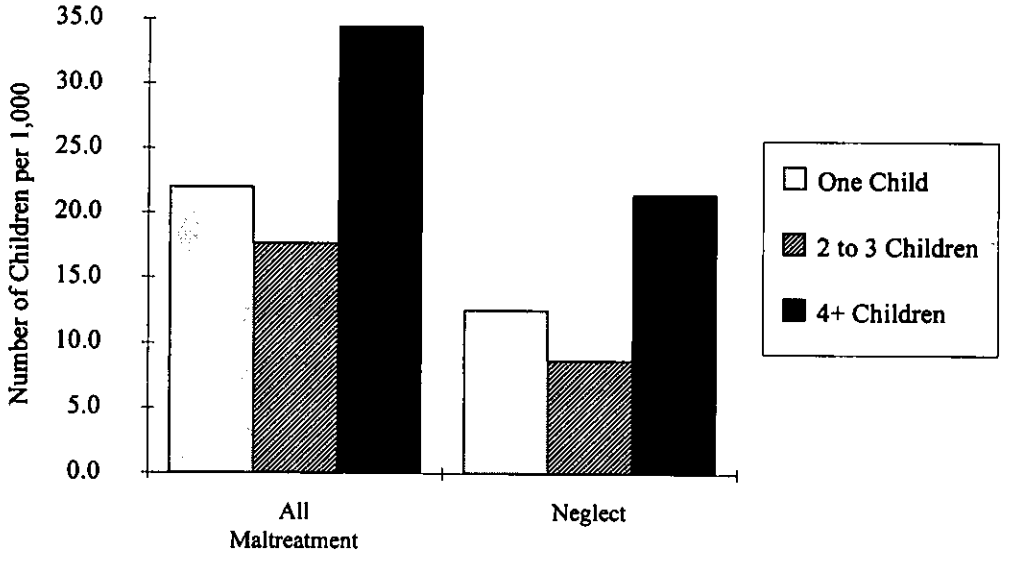


Figure 5–18. Incidence of Overall Maltreatment and Neglect under the Harm Standard for Different Family Sizes.

(34.5 per 1,000 compared to 22.0 per 1,000). The incidence rates for children in these smaller families also differed marginally from each other, with the incidence rate for "only" children almost one and one-fourth times greater than that of children in families with two or three children.

No incidence differences relating to family size were uncovered in the area of abuse—either for abuse overall or for any specific category of abuse as defined by the Harm Standard.

**Neglect under the Harm Standard**

The incidence of overall neglect under the Harm Standard is also notably higher among children living in families with four or more children. As presented in Table 5-5 and graphed in Figure 5-18, the rate is 21.5 per 1,000 children in the larger families. This is almost one and three-fourths times the rate of 12.6 per 1,000 for "only" children, and it is almost two and one-half times the rate of 8.8 per 1,000 for children who have one or two siblings. The incidence rates for children in smaller families also differ significantly. The incidence of neglect under the Harm Standard among children in one-child families is more than one and two-fifths times greater than the neglect rate among children in families with two or three children.

When the specific forms of neglect were examined, marginal or significant differences related to family size were found in the incidence of physical neglect and educational neglect. These are depicted in Figure 5-19. As evident in this graph, the patterns are very similar in these two categories.

**Physical Neglect.** In Chapter 3, it was reported that physical neglect as defined by the Harm Standard occurred at a rate of 5.0 children per 1,000. Figure 5-19 shows that the incidence rate for children in larger families is considerably higher than this, while the rates for children in families with three or fewer children are slightly lower. The only noteworthy difference from a statistical standpoint is the difference between children in families with two or three children and those in families with four or more children. Specifically, children living in families with four or more children were nearly two and two-fifths times more likely to be physically neglected than children who had just one or two siblings, and this difference approached, but did not quite reach, the level traditionally required for statistical significance.

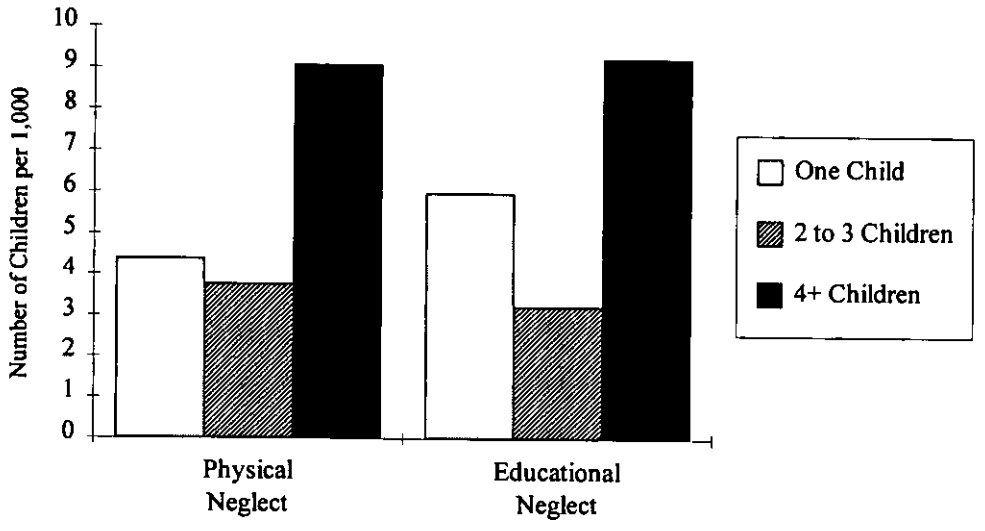


Figure 5-19. Incidence of Two Specific Types of Neglect under the Harm Standard for Different Family Sizes.

**Educational Neglect.** While educational neglect occurred, in general, to 5.9 children per 1,000 in the U.S. population, differences related to family size qualify this overall finding. The rate for "only" children is very close to this general figure, but the rates for children who are not alone in their families differ, depending on the number of children involved. Children in relatively large families (i.e., those with four or more children) have the highest rate, with 9.2 per 1,000 of these children educationally neglected. This rate is more than two and four-fifths times the incidence rate for children who have only one or two siblings, a difference that is significant. No other family-size differences in educational neglect rates are significant or marginal.

## Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard

As Table 5-5 indicates, there are significant family-size differences in the incidence of children moderately injured by maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard. These differences are displayed in Figure 5-20.

**Moderate Injury.** Analyses showed that "only" children and those in the largest families (where there were four or more children) experienced moderate injuries from maltreatment as defined by

the Harm Standard at significantly higher rates than did children living in families where there were two or three children. Among children living in the largest families, the rate was 18.6 children per 1,000. This is more than two times the rate for children in families with two or three children, where an estimated 8.9 children per 1,000 experienced moderate injury from maltreatment under the Harm Standard. An estimated 11.4 children per 1,000 among those who were the "only" children in their families suffered moderate injury from abuse or neglect that fit the Harm Standard, which is more than one and one-fourth times the rate of moderate injury among children who had one or two other children with them in their families.

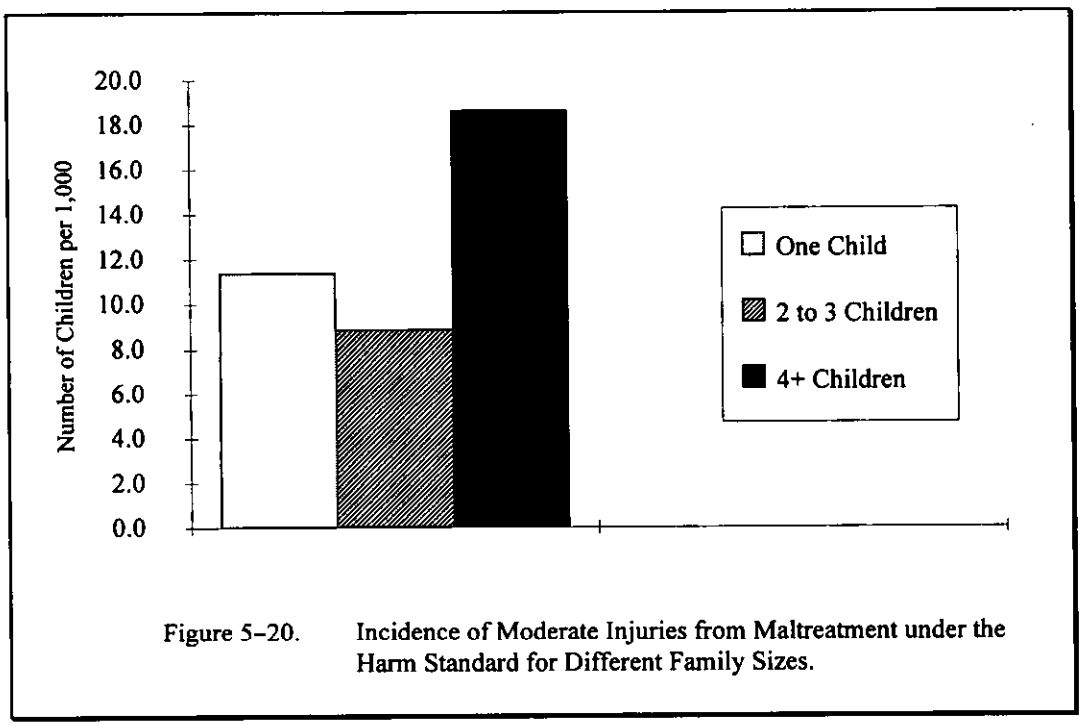


Figure 5–20. Incidence of Moderate Injuries from Maltreatment under the Harm Standard for Different Family Sizes.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in Relation to Family Size**

Comparisons with the NIS–2 identified two categories (overall neglect and emotional neglect) where the increases in the incidence of maltreatment under the Harm Standard since that earlier study depended significantly on family size. The relationships are graphed in Figures 5–21 and 5–22.

**Neglect.** As Figure 5-21 shows, the increase in the incidence of neglect under the Harm Standard was greatest among children living in the largest families (i.e., those with four or more children). In fact, this was the only family-size group where this maltreatment evidenced a significant increase since the NIS-2. For the children from families with four or more children, the incidence of neglect under the Harm Standard increased 172 percent, from 7.9 children per 1,000 in the NIS-2 to 21.5 children per 1,000 in the NIS-3.

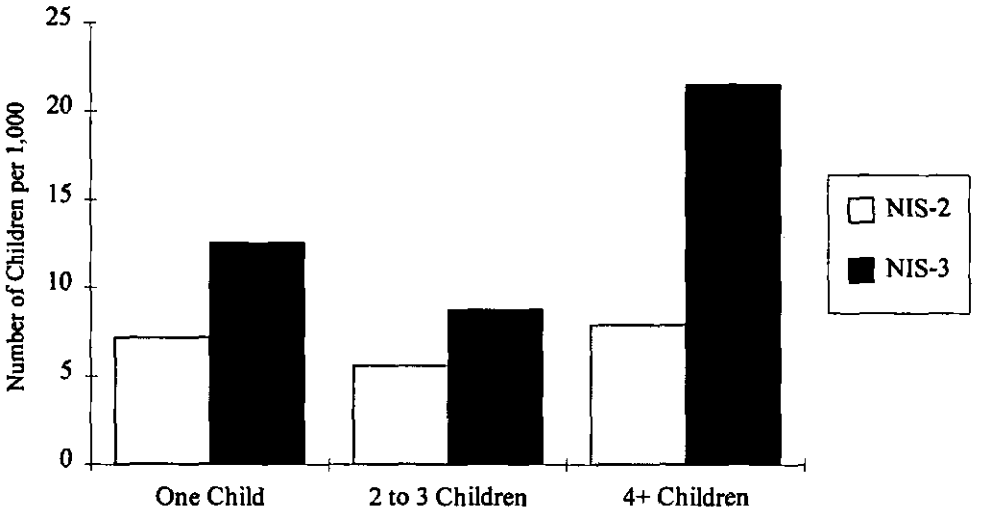


Figure 5-21. Incidence of Neglect under the Harm Standard in the NIS-2 and the NIS-3 for Different Family Sizes.

**Emotional Neglect.** Figure 5-22 depicts the relation between family size and changes from the NIS-2 to the NIS-3 in the incidence of emotional neglect under the Harm Standard. Tests of between-study changes in incidence within each group showed that children living in families of all sizes had experienced significant increases in the incidence of emotional neglect as defined by the Harm Standard. However, the largest increases occurred for "only" children and for those in families with four or more children. There was a more than 19-fold increase in the incidence of emotional neglect among "only" children (from 0.2 to 3.9 children per 1,000) and a nearly fivefold increase among children in families that had four or more children (0.8 to 3.7 children per 1,000). Although there was a substantial between-study increase among children who were one of two or three children in their families, it was somewhat smaller (less than threefold, from 0.9 to 2.4 children per 1,000). Although there were no differences in the incidence of emotional neglect under the Harm Standard related to family size within

either the NIS–2 or the NIS–3, the distribution of emotional neglect across the three family-size groups has essentially reversed. That is, in the NIS–2, children in the middle-sized families had the highest incidence of emotional neglect under the Harm Standard, whereas, in the NIS–3, these are the children with the lowest incidence rate for this type of maltreatment.

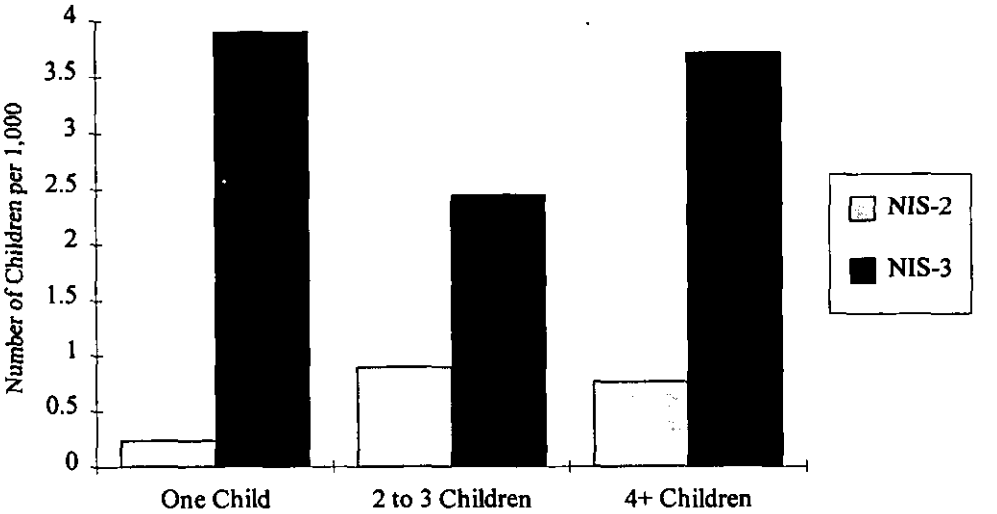


Figure 5–22. Incidence of Emotional Neglect under the Harm Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 for Different Family Sizes.

### 5.3.2 Family-Size Differences in Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

There were several categories of maltreatment and outcomes as defined by the Endangerment Standard where significant or marginal differences based on family size qualified the general findings described in Chapter 3. Significant or marginal differences in incidence rates based on family size were found in five of the nine categories of maltreatment and in three of the five categories of outcomes. Specifically, differences emerged in the incidence of overall Endangerment Standard maltreatment, the main category of neglect, physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect,

moderate injuries, inferred injuries, and endangerment. The incidence rates for children in different-sized families are provided in Table 5-6.[14]

Table 5–6. Incidence Rates per 1,000 Children for Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993) for Different Family Sizes.

| Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Category | One child | 2 or 3 Children | 4+ Children | Significance of Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *34.2* | *34.1* | *68.1* | A, B |
| ABUSE: | | | | |
| All Abuse | *16.9* | *16.3* | *23.5* | ns |
| Physical Abuse | *8.6* | *8.4* | *10.6* | ns |
| Sexual Abuse | *4.7* | *3.6* | *7.0* | ns |
| Emotional Abuse | *6.4* | *7.5* | *10.6* | ns |
| NEGLECT: | | | | |
| All Neglect | *22.3* | *22.7* | *52.2* | A, B |
| Physical Neglect | *13.2* | *16.1* | *38.9* | A, B |
| Emotional Neglect | *7.5* | *7.5* | *12.6* | b |
| Educational Neglect | *6.0* | *3.2* | *9.2* | B |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | | |
| Fatal | *0.023* | *0.024* | *0.018* | ns |
| Serious | *8.2* | *7.4* | *9.8* | ns |
| Moderate | *12.5* | *11.4* | *22.1* | B |
| Inferred | *3.6* | *2.1* | *7.6* | b |
| Endangered | *9.9* | *13.1* | *28.6* | A, B |

A "Only" children differed significantly from those in families with 4+ children ($p<.05$).

B Children in 2 or 3 child families differed significantly from those in families with 4+ children ($p<.05$).

b Children in 2 or 3 child families differed marginally from those in families with 4+ children ($.10>p>.05$).

ns No between-group difference is significant or marginal (all p's>.10).

[14] As in the preceding section, the α-level that was used to determine significance adjusted for the multiplicity of the comparisons involved in each category. (See Appendix C.)

**Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Overall**

Chapter 3 indicated that an estimated 41.9 children per 1,000 nationwide experienced some form of Endangerment Standard maltreatment. That general result is qualified by significant differences among the incidence rates for children living in families of different sizes. Table 5-6 shows that, among children in the largest families, the incidence rate is much higher than that general rate and that the rates for children in the other family-size groups are equivalent and somewhat below the nationwide rate. These results are graphed in Figure 5-23, which charts the incidence rates both for overall maltreatment and for the main category of neglect under the Endangerment Standard.

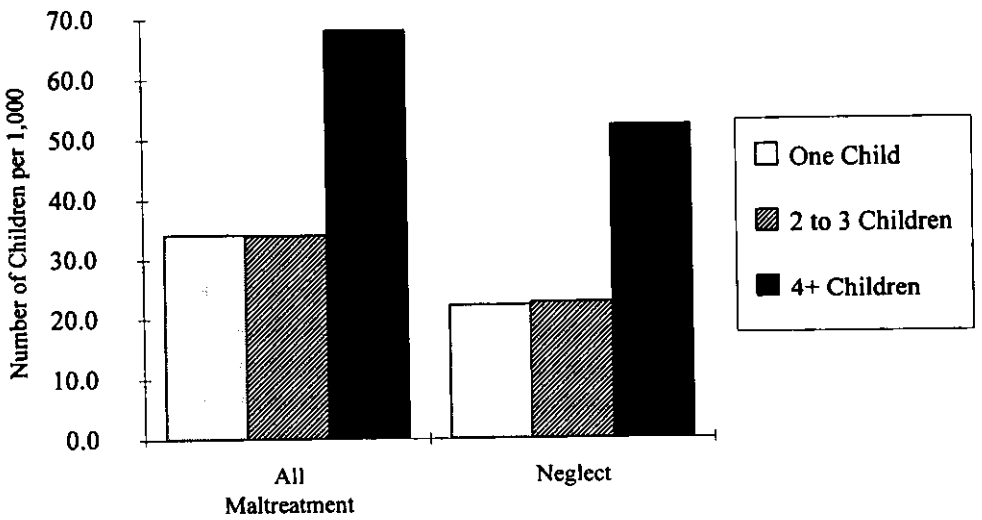


Figure 5-23. Incidence of Overall Maltreatment and Neglect under the Endangerment Standard for Different Family Sizes.

Children in families with four or more children have essentially twice the rate of overall maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard when compared with other children (i.e., 68.1 children per 1,000 versus 34.1 or 34.2 children per 1,000).

**Neglect under the Endangerment Standard**

Based on the Endangerment Standard definition of maltreatment, neglect of some type occurred to an estimated 29.2 children per 1,000 nationwide in 1993 (see Chapter 3), but this general finding does not convey the fact that there were significant differences based on family size. Children in families with four or more children had an incidence rate of 52.2 children per 1,000, which is about two and one-third times the rates of neglect under the Endangerment Standard found among children in smaller families (22.3 and 22.7 per 1,000). This pattern can be viewed in the graph in Figure 5-23. The rates of neglect under the Endangerment Standard for children in the smaller families were not statistically different.

The general pattern described in the previous paragraph also characterized the distribution of physical neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard, and there was a marginal difference consistent with the same pattern in the distribution of emotional neglect. Both of these findings are presented in Figure 5-24. Because the definition of educational neglect was identical under the Harm and Endangerment standards, readers should consult the educational neglect findings presented previously in Figure 5-19 and discussed in connection with that figure, as this section will not reiterate them.

**Physical Neglect.** The children living in the largest families were physically neglected at a rate of 38.9 children per 1,000, which is nearly three times as often as "only" children (13.2 children per 1,000) and over two and two-fifths times more often than those in families with only two or three children (16.1 children per 1,000). Both of these comparisons were significant. There were no differences in the incidence rates of physical neglect under the Endangerment Standard for "only" children and for children from families with two or three children.

**Emotional Neglect.** Also shown in Figure 5-24 is the similar, statistically marginal pattern of family-size differences in the incidence of emotional neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard. Children were about one and two-thirds times more likely to be emotionally neglected when they lived in larger families (where 12.6 children per 1,000 were emotionally neglected) than when they lived in smaller families (those with three or fewer children, where 7.5 children per 1,000 were emotionally neglected).

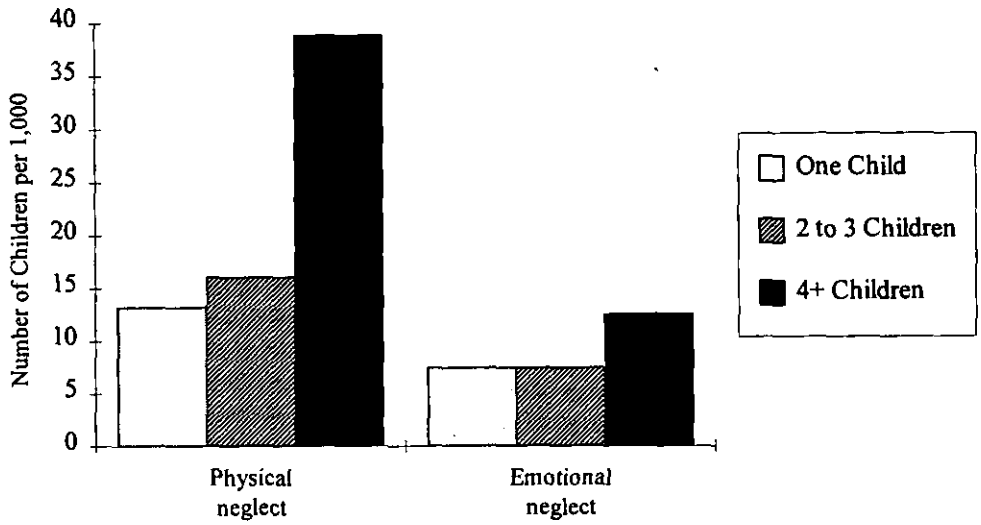


Figure 5-24. Incidence of Two Specific Types of Neglect under the Endangerment Standard for Different Family Sizes.

**Severity of Outcomes from Maltreatment As Defined by the Endangerment Standard**

There were significant or marginal differences relating to family size for the incidence of moderate injury, inferred injury, and endangerment from maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard. These results are given in Figure 5-25.

**Moderate Injury.** The incidence rate of moderate injury due to abuse or neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard was significantly higher for children in families with four or more children (22.1 children per 1,000) than the rate for children in families with two or three children (11.4 children per 1,000). Children who live in large families were nearly twice as likely to be moderately injured by maltreatment that fit the Endangerment Standard than those in medium-sized families.

**Inferred Injury.** The incidence rate of inferred injury due to maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard was marginally greater for children in large families than the rate for those in two- or three-child families. An estimated 7.6 children per 1,000 from large families experienced

maltreatment of a type sufficiently severe that injury could be inferred. This was more than three and one-half times the rate for children from families with two or three children, where only 2.1 children per 1,000 experienced such treatment.

**Endangerment.** The estimated incidence of children who had been endangered, but not yet harmed, by abuse or neglect differed significantly between children in the largest families and those in families with three or fewer children. The endangerment incidence rate for the large-family children (28.6 children per 1,000) was nearly triple the rate for "only" children (9.9 children per 1,000) and more than twice that for children from two- or three-child families (13.1 children per 1,000). There was no statistical difference between the incidence rates for children in the two smaller family categories.

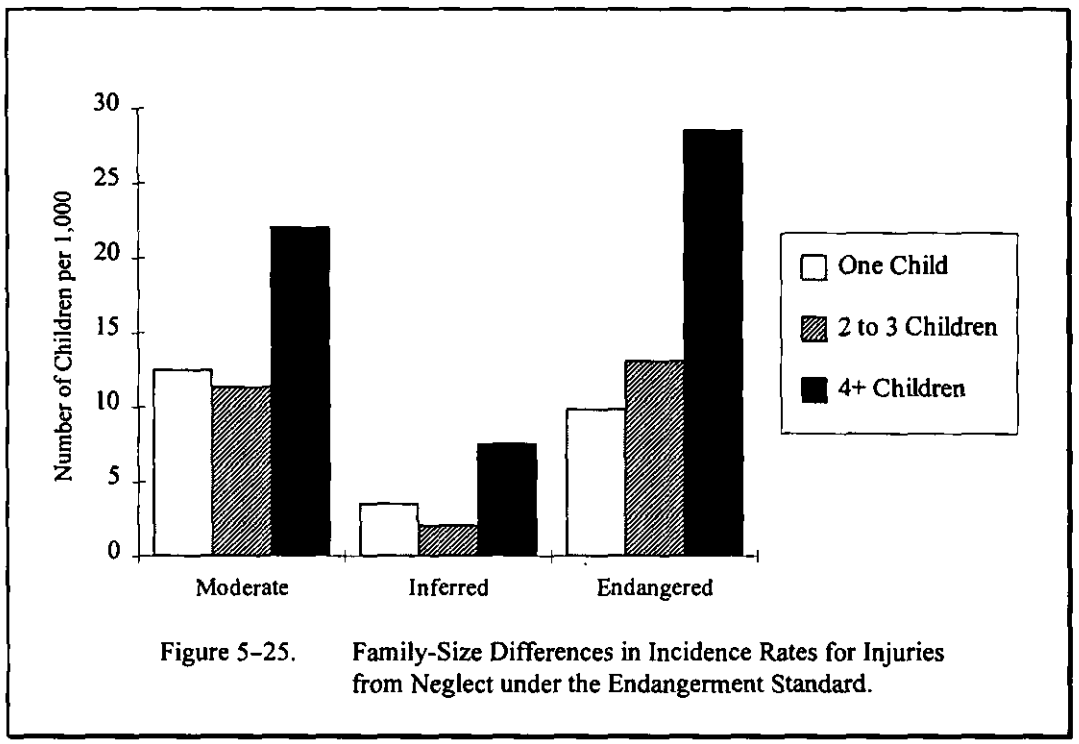


Figure 5-25. Family-Size Differences in Incidence Rates for Injuries from Neglect under the Endangerment Standard.

**Changes since the NIS-2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in Relation to Family Size**

There were no statistically significant relationships between family size and changes in the incidence and distribution of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard since the NIS-2.

## 5.4 Differences in the Incidence of Maltreatment Related to County Metropolitan Status (Metrostatus)

This section describes the NIS-3 findings concerning the relationship between the metropolitan status of a county (termed "metrostatus") and the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Children were categorized into one of three groups on the basis of the metrostatus of their county of residence: those in very large urban counties, those in moderate-sized urban and suburban counties, and those in rural counties. More detailed definitions of these categories are provided in the NIS-3 technical volume, the *Sample Selection Report.*[15]

### 5.4.1 County Metrostatus Differences in Maltreatment As Defined by the Harm Standard

The only significant difference in the incidence of maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard relating to county metrostatus was between large urban and other urban counties in the incidence of children who suffered moderate injury from maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard.

**Moderate Injury.** Children living in major urban counties were significantly less likely to experience moderate injury from maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard than those living in other urban counties. An estimated 7.1 children per 1,000 among those residing in large urban counties were classified as moderately injured by abuse or neglect, whereas an estimated 16.5 children per 1,000 in the other urban counties had been victims of moderate injuries from maltreatment that fit the Harm Standard.[16] The estimated rate of moderate injury among children in rural counties, 14.0 children per 1,000, was not different from these other rates, chiefly because it was less precise.

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[15] Results of the supporting analyses are given in Appendices C and D.

[16] A special analysis was conducted to determine whether the incidence estimate for the large urban counties may have been artificially depressed by data collection problems in schools in several of the large urban counties in the sample. This possible explanation was not borne out, because the same pattern of metrostatus differences emerged when the problem counties were appropriately factored out of a recomputation of the national estimates.

### Changes since the NIS-2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard in Relation to County Metrostatus

None of the changes since the NIS-2 in the incidence of maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard or its outcomes showed any systematic differences in relation to county metrostatus.

## 5.4.2 County Metrostatus Differences in Maltreatment As Defined by the Endangerment Standard

The only significant difference in the incidence rate for moderate injuries from maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard was between the large urban counties and the other urban counties.

**Moderate Injury.** The incidence of children who experienced moderate injury due to abuse or neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard was significantly lower among children living in large urban counties (8.2 children per 1,000) than the rate for children in other urban counties (19.8 children per 1,000).[17] Although the rate for rural children (17.2 children per 1,000) appeared comparable to the rate for children in other urban counties, it did not differ from the large urban county rate, due to its lack of precision.

### Changes since the NIS-2 in the Distribution of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard in Relation to County Metrostatus

As was the case for the Harm Standard, there were no changes in the incidence of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard since the NIS-2 that systematically related to county metrostatus.

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[17] See note 16.

## 5.5 Key Findings and Implications of the Distribution of Abuse and Neglect by Family Characteristics

The incidence of child maltreatment was found to be related to family income, family structure, family size, and county metrostatus. The overview in this section is organized in terms of these different factors, with the discussion concerning family income deferred until the last part of the section, where it is given more extensive treatment.

**Family Structure.** Children of single parents are at higher risk of physical abuse and of all types of neglect. They are disproportionately represented among the seriously injured, moderately injured, and endangered children. Compared with their counterparts living with both parents, children in single-parent families had

- a 77-percent greater risk of being harmed by physical abuse (under the stringent Harm Standard) and a 63-percent greater risk of experiencing any countable physical abuse (under the Endangerment Standard);
- an 87-percent greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect and a 165-percent greater risk of experiencing any countable physical neglect;
- a 74-percent greater risk of being harmed by emotional neglect and a 64-percent greater risk of experiencing any countable emotional neglect;
- a 220-percent (or more than three times) greater risk of being educationally neglected;
- an approximately 80-percent greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from abuse or neglect;
- an approximately 90-percent greater risk of receiving moderate injury or harm as a result of child maltreatment; and
- a 120-percent (or more than two times) greater risk of being endangered by some type of child abuse or neglect.

Among children in single-parent households, a clear difference emerged in the category of physical abuse between those in father-only households and those in mother-only households. Children living in father-only households were approximately one and two-thirds times more likely to be physically abused than those living with only their mothers.

It is important to recognize that the configuration of parents in the child's household is a separate question from who the perpetrators of maltreatment are. That is, parents are not necessarily, nor even most frequently, the perpetrators of maltreatment, especially in certain categories—a point that will be seen in the following chapter. Nevertheless, the relationship between parent structure and maltreatment incidence is understandable, considering the added responsibilities (hence stresses) involved in single-parenting and the greater potential that personal resources as well as surrounding social and practical support may be insufficient to meet the demands.

**Family Size.** The association between the number of dependent children in a family and the incidence of maltreatment primarily reflects differences in incidence based on family size in the categories of physical and educational neglect. For educational neglect, and for physical neglect as defined by the Harm Standard, the pattern is nonlinear: the incidence rates were highest for children in the largest families, intermediate for "only" children, and lowest for children in families with two or three children. Comparing the highest incidence rate with the lowest, children in the largest families (with four or more children) were almost three times more likely to be educationally neglected and nearly two and two-fifths times more likely to be harmed by physical neglect compared with children in families where there are two or three children. In the category of physical neglect under the Endangerment Standard, the pattern is one of increasing incidence with increasing numbers of children. Children in the largest families were physically neglected at nearly three times the rate of those who came from single-child families.

Additional children in a household mean additional tasks and responsibilities and additional demands; from this perspective, it is understandable why incidence rates of child abuse and neglect are higher when there are more children. To account for why, at least in some categories, the incidence rate for "only" children is greater than that for children in medium-sized families (i.e., those with two or three children) requires a different explanation. One possibility is that "only" children may more often be in circumstances where too many expectations are focused on a single individual, whereas expectations (and disappointments) can be diffused better when there are multiple children. Another possibility is that many "only" child households represent the early stages in their families' development, since a number of these families will have additional children in time. Thus, many "only" children are in families with relatively young and inexperienced parents and caretakers.

**County Metrostatus.** The only effect of county metrostatus was in the incidence of children who had been moderately injured by maltreatment, using either definitional standard. The

incidence was lower than expected among children living in large urban counties, significantly lower than the incidence in other urban counties. This appeared to be characteristic of large urban counties in general, even those without data collection difficulties in the NIS-3. One is hard-pressed to fathom ways in which children who live in large urban counties would be protected from experiencing the same degree of abuse or neglect as children in other urban counties. Instead, the most likely explanation for their lower incidence of maltreatment-related moderate injury is that there is a certain degree of undercoverage in the large urban counties in general. One possibility is that maltreated children do not come to the attention of community professionals to the same degree that they do in other counties. Another is that the community professionals who participated in the NIS-3 large urban counties were burdened with the normal responsibilities of their jobs and less likely to provide the NIS with information about all the maltreated children they encountered. Note that any explanation in terms of undercoverage implies that the true incidence of abuse and neglect is somewhat higher than the estimates given by the NIS-3 data.

**Family Income.** Despite the fact that only a rather gross index of family income was available, and despite a substantial percentage of cases with missing data on family income, this factor was found to have a significant association with the incidence of nearly every category of maltreatment. Compared to children whose families earned $30,000 per year or more, children in families with annual incomes below $15,000 per year were

- more than 22 times more likely to experience some form of maltreatment under the Harm Standard and more than 25 times more likely to suffer maltreatment of some type as defined by the Endangerment Standard;
- almost 14 times more likely to be harmed by some variety of abuse and nearly 15 times more likely to be abused as defined by the Endangerment Standard criteria;
- more than 44 times more likely to be neglected, by either standard;
- almost 16 times more likely to be a victim of physical abuse under the Harm Standard and nearly 12 times more likely to be a victim of physical abuse as defined by the Endangerment Standard;
- almost 18 times more likely to be sexually abused as defined by either definitional standard;
- thirteen times more likely to be emotionally abused under the Harm Standard criteria and more than 18 times more likely to be emotionally abused in a manner that fit Endangerment Standard requirements;

- forty times more likely to experience physical neglect under the Harm Standard and over 48 times more likely to be a victim of physical neglect as defined by the Endangerment Standard;

- over 29 times more likely to be emotionally neglected under Harm Standard definitions and over 27 times more likely to be emotionally neglected by Endangerment Standard criteria;

- nearly 56 times more likely to be educationally neglected as defined by either standard;

- sixty times more likely to die from maltreatment of some type under the Harm Standard and over 22 times more likely to die from abuse or neglect under the Endangerment Standard;

- over 22 times more likely to be seriously injured by maltreatment under the Harm Standard and almost 22 times more likely to be seriously injured by maltreatment that fit the Endangerment Standard requirements;

- about 18 times more likely to be moderately injured by abuse or neglect that fit the Harm Standard and nearly 20 times more likely to have a moderate injury from maltreatment circumstances as defined by the Endangerment Standard;

- fifty-seven times more likely to be classified as having an inferred injury due to maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard and 39 times more likely to meet the criteria for inferred injury as defined by the Endangerment Standard; and

- over 31 times more likely to be considered endangered, although not yet injured, by some type of abusive or neglectful treatment.

The NIS-3 findings on the correlation between family income and child maltreatment are entirely consistent with the earlier findings of the NIS-2 in this connection. Given the strength and stability of these findings, some discussion of the possible underpinnings of this correlation may clarify its implications. A key issue is whether this correlation might stem from the higher visibility of lower income families to community professionals.

Although one might initially suppose that children in lower income families more frequently come to the attention of the types of community professionals who are recruited as NIS sentinels, differential observation of the different income sectors does not provide a very plausible account of the findings reported here. That explanation fails on two important grounds: it ignores the substantial degree to which the NIS sentinels observe children and families at the middle- and

upper-income levels, and it requires that one assume that there is an astounding number of still-undetected children in the nation who experience countable maltreatment.

The NIS sentinels regularly observe a very large sector of children whose families have incomes greater than $15,000 (or $30,000) per year. Although the NIS sentinel agency categories do include some that may disproportionately encounter low-income families (such as police and sheriff departments, juvenile probation departments, and public health agencies), Chapter 7 will reveal that those sources recognized only a relatively small sector of the countable abused and neglected child population (only 12% of the Harm Standard countable children and only 14% of the Endangerment Standard total). The large majority of maltreated children were recognized by professionals likely to encounter children and families at all income levels, such as sentinels in hospitals, schools, day-care centers, mental health agencies, and voluntary social service agencies; professionals not represented by NIS sentinel categories; and the general public.

Sentinels in schools recognized the majority of the maltreated children who are counted in the NIS-3 estimates—59 percent of the Harm Standard total and 53 percent of the Endangerment Standard total were recognized as maltreated by professionals in schools. Even though the NIS design includes only public schools, approximately 89 percent of the U.S. population of school-age children attend public schools,[18] so those attending the public schools represent a broad spectrum of family income levels.[19] Similarly, the NIS hospitals encounter a broad spectrum of the population. The hospitals in the NIS-3 include any hospitals in study counties (private as well as public) that provide general medical and surgical services, are primarily short-stay facilities, and meet the required minimum number of annual admissions. Also, social service and mental health agencies are limited to those that provide services on a voluntary basis, including private agencies. Thus, it would seem improbable that the very strong relationship between income and child maltreatment stems from differences in the client sectors seen at the types of agencies that participate in the NIS.

Further, if the income finding is assumed to be an artifact of selective observation of low-income families, then this means that the incidence of abused and neglected children is far higher than

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[18] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Historical Trends: State Education Facts, 1992. Common Core of Data; Digest of Education Statistics, 1992, Table 3.*

[19] Note that private schools include religiously affiliated schools, which often have sliding scales for their tuition fees. Private-school attendees are not necessarily from better economic circumstances than children attending public schools.

the NIS-3 estimates convey. If maltreatment is not differentially connected with income, then there have to be enough undetected abused and neglected children in the middle- and upper-income brackets used here to equalize the incidence rates across different income categories.

Specifically, if the same incidence rates found for children in families with incomes less than $15,000 per year were also to apply to children in families with higher incomes, this would mean that *an additional 2,138,700 children* would have to have suffered maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard yet remained hidden to the NIS sentinels (i.e., beyond those included in the estimates given in Chapter 3).[20] That is, one would have to assume that the NIS-3 identified only 42 percent of the actual total of maltreated children in the United States as defined by the Harm Standard and that the incidence rate found for children from the lowest income families (equivalent to 1 child in every 21.3 in the general population) applies equally to all children. Similarly, applying the same logic to the findings under the Endangerment Standard, if the incidence rates for the different income categories are essentially equal, but the maltreated children differentially come to the attention of community professionals, then *an additional 4,500,700 children* in 1993 who experienced maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard escaped observation by community professionals. This would mean that the NIS-3 tapped only 38 percent of the "true" maltreated child population as defined by the Endangerment Standard and that approximately 1 in every 10 children in the United States "actually" experiences maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard during the course of a year.

Thus, to assume that there is no real relationship between family income and maltreatment is also to assume that there are really more than two and one-third times as many children abused and neglected as defined by the Harm Standard as the NIS-3 estimates indicate and that there are really two and three-fifths times the NIS-3 estimated total of maltreated children as defined by the Endangerment Standard.

Finally, note that the finding concerning a strong association between income and maltreatment is consistent with findings from numerous other studies beyond the NIS-3. For example,

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[20] To equalize incidence rates across income groups for all maltreatment and severity categories would require there to be 3,100 more fatalities and 812,500 more seriously injured children under the Harm Standard. This would mean that the NIS-3 identified only one-third of the "actual" total of Harm Standard fatalities in the United States, and only 41 percent of those who suffered serious injury under the Harm Standard.

Pelton's research[21,22] concerning socioeconomic factors in child maltreatment suggests a strong association between economic and cultural impoverishment and maltreatment, as does the work of Kinard and Klerman[23] and the findings of Gil,[24] the American Humane Association,[25] and Smith, Hanson, and Hoble,[26] among others. While some continue to argue that even the diverse set of corroborating evidence on the greater risk of maltreatment at the lower socioeconomic levels reflects biases in detecting and investigating cases,[27] there nevertheless are a number of problems associated with poverty that are also plausible causal contributors to child maltreatment—including factors such as social mobility, lack of education, and all the stressors that poverty adds to daily life. Low income is also associated with substance abuse and emotional disorders, problems likely to contribute to child maltreatment. For instance, parents with income below the poverty level are overrepresented among the drug-using section of the population,[28,29] and substance-abusing families are, in turn, overrepresented among the child-abusing population.[30] Persons receiving support from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (AFDC) are significantly more likely to seek help for emotional

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[21] Pelton, L. (1978). Child abuse and neglect: The myth of classlessness. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 48*, 608–617.

[22] Pelton, L. (Ed.). (1981). *The Social Context of Child Abuse and Neglect.* New York: Human Sciences Press.

[23] Kinard, E. M., & Klerman, L. V. (1980). Teenage parenting and child abuse. Are they related? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 50*, 481–488.

[24] Gil, D. G. (1970). *Violence Against Children.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[25] Russell, A. B., & Trainor, C. M. (1984). *Trends in Child Abuse and Neglect: A National Perspective.* Denver, CO: American Association for Protecting Children, American Humane Association,

[26] Smith, S., Hanson, R., & Hoble, S. (1975). Parents of battered children: A controlled study. In A. Franklin (Ed.), *Concerning Child Abuse.* Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.

[27] For example, some attribute the overrepresentation of the lower socioeconomic families in the maltreatment statistics to the reluctance of child protective workers to interfere in the lives of more affluent and influential individuals and to the fact that middle-income families have resources (such as the financial wherewithal to get treatment by private service providers) for preventing CPS from hearing about the incident. *Cf.* U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. (1977). *Child Abuse and Neglect Programs: Practice and Theory.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

[28] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. (July 1994). *Substance Abuse Among Women and Parents.* Washington, D.C.

[29] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. (Dec. 1994). *Patterns of Substance Use and Substance-Related Impairment Among Participants in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (AFDC).* Washington, D.C.

[30] National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. (1993). *Study of Child Maltreatment in Alcohol Abusing Families.* Washington, D.C.

problems.[31] Garbarino[32,33] noted that socioeconomic factors are also associated with the availability of social support systems that can assist parents in their child care responsibilities.

The idea that child maltreatment has an essentially classless distribution has persisted in the face of repeated findings, using widely varying methods and data, that the distribution is strongly related to socioeconomic class. As suggested by Biller and Solomon,[34] the longevity of the myth of classlessness may stem from the popularity of models of the etiology of child maltreatment that focus on internal, psychodynamic factors and view the problem as a disease. Also contributing to this belief may be the fact that income per se is assumed to influence the occurrence of abuse or neglect only indirectly through intermediary factors (such as heightened stress, lack of social network support, or lower levels of educational achievement), while it is these intermediary factors that have stronger causal connection to abuse or neglect and speak to unmet service needs.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that the findings reported here have focused on a single characteristic at a time, yet the reality is that these characteristics are correlated and may either potentiate or ameliorate each others' effects. For example, single-parent families generally have lower incomes, and it is possible that the differences in the incidence of maltreatment relating to family structure really derive from differences in income levels. To assess more clearly the relation between family structure and maltreatment incidence *independent of* family income, more complex, multivariate analyses would be needed. In another vein, differences in incidence relating to family size would be less ambiguous if the effect of family income were held constant when examining the relation between family size and maltreatment. Future analyses of the NIS-3 data should pursue multivariate analyses such as these.[35]

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[31] Leon, A. C., and Weissman, M. M. (1993). *Analysis of NIMH's Existing Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) Data on Depression and Other Affective Disorders in Welfare and Disabled Populations.* Report on Grant HHS-100-92-0032 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.

[32] Garbarino, J. (1980). What kind of society permits child abuse? *Infant Mental Health Journal, 1*, 270-281.

[33] Garbarino, J. (1981). An ecological approach to child maltreatment. In L. H. Pelton (Ed.), *The Social Context of Child Abuse and Neglect.* New York: Human Sciences Press.

[34] *Cf.* Biller, H., & Solomon, R. (1986). *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation. A Manifesto for Research, Prevention, and Treatment.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

[35] Analyses of two-way tables such as these require that all tabulations of interest (e.g., family income by family structure, family income by family size, etc.) be extracted from appropriate census data.

# 6. DISTRIBUTION OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY PERPETRATOR CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter discusses how the children who suffer maltreatment defined under the Harm Standard are related to their perpetrators and describes their distribution for each category of relationship and for each type and severity of maltreatment in terms of their perpetrators' sex, age, and employment status and in terms of the children's race.

## 6.1 Information About Perpetrator Identity

As part of evaluating cases for their countability in the NIS–3, it was necessary to identify the perpetrator(s) of every alleged form of maltreatment and to determine that at least one of the persons responsible for the maltreatment qualified as an allowable perpetrator for that form of maltreatment under the study definitions. Cases of alleged abuse had to have been committed by an adult caretaker of the child (such as a parent, adult baby-sitter, etc.) or, if committed by someone other than a caretaker, had to have been permitted by a parent or custodian in order to be countable.[1] Cases of alleged neglect had to have been committed by a parent or custodian in order to be counted in the national estimates. Parents and custodians included the child's natural, foster, step- or adoptive parent, or other person, such as a family member, who had legal custody of the child or at least the primary responsibility for the day-and-night supervision and care of the child at the time of his or her maltreatment.

Readers should be aware of several aspects of the classifications used in the analyses reported in this chapter. First, a parent, a custodian, or a caretaker was included in the tables here only if she or he actually committed the maltreatment itself, so the tables given here reflect who actually *does* the maltreatment in question. Thus, where a parent simply permitted someone else to maltreat the child, that parent was not counted for the purposes of these analyses.[2]

Second, because multiple parties were sometimes involved in maltreating a child, a classification hierarchy was established for the tables presented here. To begin with, if a child had suffered multiple forms of a particular type of maltreatment with different severities of injury or

[1] These were the perpetrator requirements that were applied in conjunction with the Harm Standard, as described in Chapter 2.

[2] Although, as described in Chapter 2, there are categories of maltreatment where children were countable on the basis of their parents' or caretakers' *permitting* their maltreatment.

impairment, then the perpetrators of that type of maltreatment were considered to be those persons who had been responsible for the most severe injury or impairment. For example, if a child who was physically neglected had been both seriously harmed by inadequate supervision and fatally harmed by delay of medical care, then only the person (or persons) responsible for the physical neglect that had the fatal result (in this case, the delay of medical care) were included in this analysis. This strategy applied in a similar way at the summary levels of "all abuse," "all neglect," and "all maltreated." For instance, for a child who was both sexually abused and physically abused, the "all abuse" analyses focused on the perpetrator (or perpetrators) of the abuse that caused the more serious injury or impairment. Next, even within this more focused set of perpetrators, multiple perpetrators were sometimes involved in the maltreatment. For the analyses here, the child was considered to have been maltreated by the most closely related perpetrator who was involved. To determine the most closely related perpetrator for these analyses, a hierarchy of relationships was established. This hierarchy is given by the ordering of perpetrator categories shown in Table 6–1. Whenever multiple categorizations of the child's perpetrators were possible, those who fit the earlier categories in this listing were given precedence over those who fit categories later in the listing.

Third, because some of the types of perpetrators were involved in maltreating only small percentages of the children, the hierarchy shown in Table 6–1 was further simplified for presentation purposes by combining the categories as shown by the brackets in that table.

Fourth, all findings continue to use the child as the unit of measurement, as presented in earlier chapters and as explained in the discussion in subsequent sections. This was necessary because the weights that were constructed to provide national-level estimates in the NIS have all been geared to the child as the unit of analysis. (If perpetrators were to be "counted" and distributed in their own right, a different approach to sample design and statistical weighting would have been required.) Thus, all NIS findings concerning perpetrators must be couched in terms of the child, such as "the percentage of children maltreated by perpetrators who...."

Fifth, this chapter provides only descriptive tabulations concerning the perpetrators of Harm Standard maltreatment. It is intended as a preliminary exploration of NIS–3 perpetrator characteristics. Because perpetrator analyses of the NIS data are very complex and because project resources were limited, no statistical tests of the significance of between-group differences have been conducted, nor have tabulations of the Endangerment Standard perpetrators been undertaken.

Table 6.1 Categorization and Distribution of Perpetrators of Child Maltreatment.

| Perpetrator Category | Percentage of Children with Closest-Related Perpetrator of Most Severe, Countable Maltreatment | |
|---|---|---|
| In-home birth parent | 74.0% | Birth Parents 77.8% |
| Out of home birth parents | 3.8% | |
| In-home step-parent | 4.6% | Other parents and parent-substitutes 13.6% |
| Other in-home parents and parent-substitutes, (foster, adoptive, etc.) | 5.9% | |
| Separated/divorced spouse of in-home parent | 0.02% | |
| Parent's boyfriend or girlfriend | 3.1% | |
| Other family members | 5.5% | Others: 8.7% |
| Other unrelated adults | 3.1% | |
| Others | 0.1% | |

**N = 1,553,800**

## 6.2 Overall Distribution of Perpetrators of Countable Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Table 6–1 lists the hierarchy of perpetrator categories used in the analyses given in this chapter and indicates the percentage of children whose most closely related perpetrator was in a given category in the hierarchy. Note that the majority of countable children (74%) were maltreated by their in-home, birth parent(s) and that other in-home parents and parent-substitutes, such as adoptive, foster, and step-parents, make up the next largest perpetrator categories (5.9% and 4.6%, respectively). Very small percentages of children were maltreated by an out-of-home birth parent (3.8%), by a separated or divorced spouse of a parent who is not related to the child (only about 0.02%), or by a boyfriend or girlfriend of a parent (3.1%). Other family members or relatives were the most closely related perpetrators of maltreatment for 5.5 percent of the countable children. The next-to-last category of perpetrators in this hierarchy comprises other adults known to be unrelated to the child, accounting for another 3.1 percent of the children's maltreatment; and other individuals (who may or may not have been adults) make up the last category, which represents the most closely related perpetrator for only 0.1 percent of the children.

Because of the small numbers of children in the database whose most closely related perpetrators were persons other than their birth parents, the perpetrator categories listed in Table 6–1 were further consolidated for purposes of presentation here, as shown by the brackets in the table, into three major groupings of perpetrators:

- **Birth parent(s):** includes both in-home birth parents and out-of-home birth parents;
- **Other parents or parent-substitutes:** includes in-home adoptive parents and step-parents, and other in-home parents and parent-substitutes, such as foster parents, separated/divorced spouses of in-home parents, and parents' boyfriends or girlfriends (paramours); and
- **Others:** includes all other adults (both those who were and those who were not family members) as well as other perpetrators (persons whose adult status or whose family status in relation to the child was unclear, persons who were clearly not adultsCincluding relatives of the child, and others whose identity was unknown).

## 6.3 Perpetrators' Relationship to the Child and Severity of Harm as a Function of the Type of Maltreatment

The first two columns in Table 6–2 show the distribution of maltreated children according to their most closely related perpetrator for each category of maltreatment. The bottom-most section in this table corresponds to the bracketed categories shown in Table 6–1, again showing that the majority of all children with countable maltreatment (78%) were maltreated by their birth parents and that relatively small minorities were maltreated by other parents or parent-substitutes (14%) or by others (9%). Table 6–2 also shows a marked difference between the distribution of the abused children by their perpetrators and the distribution of neglected children by their perpetrators. Among children who experienced some form of countable abuse, 62 percent had been abused by their birth parents, 19 percent by other parents or parent-substitutes, and 18 percent by someone else. In contrast, 91 percent of all neglected children had been maltreated by their birth parents, only 9 percent by other parents and parent-substitutes, and none by other perpetrators. This pattern accords with countability rules associated with the Harm Standard (as discussed in Chapter 2). According to those rules, neglect could be perpetrated only by a parent or custodian, whereas abuse could, in principle, be committed by anyone (as long as the perpetrator was a caretaker of the child or the abuse had been permitted by a parent or parent-substitute).

Also note that perpetrators of sexual abuse appear to be distinctly different from perpetrators of the other types of abuse (physical and emotional). Slightly more than one-fourth of sexually abused children were sexually abused by a birth parent (29%). One-fourth were sexually abused by other parents or parent-substitutes, such as step-parents, fathers' girlfriends, etc. (25%). Nearly one-half (46%) had been sexually abused by someone other than a parent or parent figure. In contrast, birth parents were the perpetrators for most of the physically abused children (72%) and for most of the emotionally abused children (81%), followed by other parents and parent-substitutes (21% of physically abused children and 13% of emotionally abused children). Only small fractions of physically and emotionally abused children suffered these forms of maltreatment at the hands of someone other than a parent or parent figure.

The remaining three columns of Table 6–2 show the distribution of the maltreated children in each category of maltreatment and for each perpetrator relationship, according to the severity of their injury or impairment. When all maltreated children are considered (the bottom-most section of the table), the nature of the perpetrator does appear to be systematically related to differences in the severity

Table 6–2. Distribution of Perpetrator's Relationship to Child and Severity of Harm by the Type of Maltreatment.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Injury/Impairment. . . Fatal or Serious | Moderate | Inferred |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABUSE: | 100% | 743,200 | 21% | 63% | 16% |
| Natural Parents | 62% | 461,800 | 22% | 73% | 4% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 19% | 144,900 | 12% | 62% | 27% |
| Others | 18% | 136,600 | 24% | 30% | 46% |
| Physical Abuse | 100% | 381,700 | 13% | 87% | + |
| Natural Parents | 72% | 273,200 | 13% | 87% | + |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 21% | 78,700 | 13% | 87% | + |
| Others | 8% | 29,700 | * | 82% | + |
| Sexual Abuse | 100% | 217,700 | 34% | 12% | 53% |
| Natural Parents | 29% | 63,300 | 61% | 10% | 28% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 25% | 53,800 | 19% | 18% | 63% |
| Others | 46% | 100,500 | 26% | 11% | 63% |
| Emotional Abuse | 100% | 204,500 | 26% | 68% | 6% |
| Natural Parents | 81% | 166,500 | 27% | 70% | 2% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 13% | 27,400 | * | 57% | 24% |
| Others | 5% | 10,600 | * | * | * |
| NEGLECT: | 100% | 879,000 | 50% | 44% | 6% |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 800,600 | 51% | 43% | 6% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 78,400 | 35% | 59% | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Physical Neglect | 100% | 338,900 | 64% | 15% | 21% |
| Natural Parents | 95% | 320,400 | 64% | 16% | 20% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 5% | 18,400 | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Emotional Neglect | 100% | 212,800 | 97% | 3% | + |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 194,600 | 99% | * | + |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | * | * | * | + |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | + |
| Educational Neglect | 100% | 397,300 | 7% | 93% | + |
| Natural Parents | 89% | 354,300 | 8% | 92% | + |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 11% | 43,000 | * | 99% | + |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | + |
| ALL MALTREATMENT: | 100% | 1,553,800 | 36% | 53% | 11% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 41% | 54% | 5% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 20% | 61% | 19% |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 24% | 30% | 46% |

+This severity level not applicable for this form of maltreatment.
*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.
^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

of injury or impairment: 41 percent of children who were maltreated by their natural parents suffered fatal or serious injuries, compared to 20 percent of those maltreated by other parent figures and 24 percent of those maltreated by others. Upon further inspection of the table, however, it is evident that this overall difference is due entirely to the fact that birth parents are by far the perpetrators for the majority of the neglected children and neglect, in turn, is associated with a relatively higher incidence of fatal and serious injuries to the children (facts that both derive from the countability rules for the Harm Standard as explained earlier in Chapters 2 and 3). Thus, the overall pattern that suggests a correlation between the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the severity of injury or impairment apparently stems entirely for the nature of the countability rules under the Harm Standard. The pattern may reveal more about the study methodology, and the consistency with which that methodology was followed, than it necessarily does about the distribution of child abuse and neglect. For this reason, it may not be as inherently interesting as it may first appear.

To determine whether or not there are interesting patterns of relationship between the perpetrator's relation to the child and the severity of injury or impairment, one should look across the different perpetrator categories within each specific type of abuse.[3] In fact, when one does so, some interesting patterns emerge: it appears that a sexually abused child was more likely to sustain fatal or serious injury or impairment when he or she was sexually abused by a birth parent,[4] but more likely to suffer moderate or inferred injury or impairment when the perpetrator was someone other than the child's birth parent. In contrast, an emotionally abused child was more likely to sustain moderate injury or impairment when the perpetrator was a birth parent, but more likely to sustain inferred injury or impairment when the perpetrator was another type of parent or parent-substitute. There are no notable differences across the perpetrator categories in the severities of injuries or impairments in relation to physical abuse.

[3] Because neglect is largely committed by birth parents (by definition), there is little opportunity to examine differences in severities of injuries/impairments within the different subtypes of neglect.

[4] Fatal and serious injury or impairment were combined in Table 6–2.

## 6.4 Perpetrator's Sex as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child

Table 6–3 presents the distribution of children according to the sex of their perpetrators for each type of maltreatment and category of perpetrator relationship. Note that Table 6–3 resembles Table 6–2, except for the last three columns. Also observe that a given child who was maltreated by both male and female perpetrators fitting all the classification constraints described earlier was counted under *both* columns, so the percentages shown in the last three columns of this table can sum to more than 100 percent. For example, a child who was physically abused by both his natural mother and his natural father was included under both "male" and "female" columns under "physical abuse by birth parents."[5] Children were classified as having been maltreated by a perpetrator of unknown sex only if sex was unknown for all perpetrators under consideration. Thus, a child who was sexually abused by two "other" perpetrators, one male and one of unknown sex, was classified under the "male" column for other perpetrators of sexual abuse, and not under the "unknown" column.

As the bottom-most section of Table 6–3 shows, the majority of children who were maltreated by their birth parents were maltreated by their mothers (75%), and a sizable minority were maltreated by their fathers (46%). In contrast, children who were maltreated by other parents and parent-substitutes were more likely to have been maltreated by a male (85% by male other parents and parent-substitutes and only 41% by female other parents and parent-substitutes). The pattern is similar for children who were maltreated by other perpetrators (80% were maltreated by males, and only 14% were maltreated by females). For 7 percent of the children maltreated by others, there was no information about the sex of their perpetrators. This is congruent with the fact that the "other" perpetrator category was the general catch-all in this classification scheme and included those cases where the information was insufficient to determine whether or not the perpetrator was a family member or even an adult.

Note that there are different patterns concerning perpetrator's sex for abuse and for neglect. Children tended to suffer neglect from female perpetrators—87 percent of those neglected in any way

[5] In analyses concerning perpetrator's sex, age, and employment status, this type of multiple-categorization of children was possible. Note, however, that it was minimized as far as possible by following the nine-category perpetrator hierarchy (shown in Table 6–1) in identifying the child's perpetrator(s). For example, consider the case where a child was seriously physically abused by two perpetrators—a step-parent and a parent's boyfriend. According to the nine-category hierarchy, the analyses would focus on the step-parent (since this was the most closely related perpetrator according to the hierarchy), and only the sex, age, and employment status of this perpetrator would be considered in the tabulations. Thus, multiple classifications of the child were limited to those cases where there were two (or more) perpetrators of exactly the same degree of relationship according to the nine-category hierarchy.

Table 6–3. Distribution of Perpetrator's Sex by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Sex was . . . | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Male | Female | Unknown |
| ABUSE: | 100% | 743,200 | 67% | 40% | * |
| Natural Parents | 62% | 461,800 | 56% | 55% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 19% | 144,900 | 90% | 15% | * |
| Others | 18% | 136,600 | 80% | 14% | * |
| Physical Abuse | 100% | 381,700 | 58% | 50% | * |
| Natural Parents | 72% | 273,200 | 48% | 60% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 21% | 78,700 | 90% | 19% | * |
| Others | 8% | 29,700 | 57% | 39% | * |
| Sexual Abuse | 100% | 217,700 | 89% | 12% | * |
| Natural Parents | 29% | 63,300 | 87% | 28% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 25% | 53,800 | 97% | * | * |
| Others | 46% | 100,500 | 86% | 8% | * |
| Emotional Abuse | 100% | 204,500 | 63% | 50% | * |
| Natural Parents | 81% | 166,500 | 60% | 55% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 13% | 27,400 | 74% | * | * |
| Others | 5% | 10,600 | * | * | * |
| ALL NEGLECT: | 100% | 879,000 | 43% | 87% | * |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 800,600 | 40% | 87% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 78,400 | 76% | 88% | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Physical Neglect | 100% | 338,900 | 35% | 93% | * |
| Natural Parents | 95% | 320,400 | 34% | 93% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 5% | 18,400 | * | 90% | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Emotional Neglect | 100% | 212,800 | 47% | 77% | * |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 194,600 | 44% | 78% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 18,200 | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Educational Neglect | 100% | 397,300 | 47% | 88% | * |
| Natural Parents | 89% | 354,300 | 43% | 86% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 11% | 43,000 | 82% | 100% | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| ALL MALTREATMENT: | 100% | 1,553,800 | 54% | 65% | 1% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 46% | 75% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 85% | 41% | * |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 80% | 14% | 7% |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate, estimate too unreliable to be given

^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

were neglected by a female. This finding is congruent with the fact that mothers and mother-substitutes tend to be the primary caretakers and are the primary persons held accountable for any omissions and/or failings in caretaking. In contrast, children are more often abused by males (67% of all abused children were abused by males). The predominance of males as perpetrators of abuse held true for each of the specific types of abuse and is most pronounced for sexual abuse, where 89 percent of the children experienced abuse from a male perpetrator.

Also observe that there are sex differences across the different perpetrator categories in abuse overall and in the various types of abuse. Among all abused children, those abused by their birth parents were about equally likely to have been abused by mothers (55%) as by fathers (56%), but those abused by other parents and parent-substitutes or by others were much more likely to be abused by males (90% versus 15% and 80% versus 14%, respectively). For emotional abuse, the pattern is largely congruent with the overall abuse pattern. For physical abuse, the pattern is slightly different, with children more likely to be physically abused by their mothers than by their fathers (60% versus 48%), but much more likely to be abused by a male when the perpetrator was an other parent or parent-substitute (90% versus 19%), and somewhat more likely to be abused by a male when the perpetrator was related to them in some other way (57% versus 39%). For sexual abuse, however, the differences across the perpetrator categories are diminished, since males clearly predominate as perpetrators in that maltreatment category.

Table 6–4 presents an overview of the sex of the perpetrators as a function of their relationships to the children and the severity of the children's injuries or impairments. The bottom-most section of this table is identical to the bottom-most section of Table 6–3, showing that, overall, children tend to be maltreated by female perpetrators more often than by male perpetrators (65% versus 54%, respectively). Note, however, that there appears to be a progressive decline in the predominance of female perpetrators moving down the rows of the table, from those children who were fatally injured (78% by female perpetrators), to those seriously injured (75% by female perpetrators), to those moderately injured (66% by female perpetrators), to those with inferred injury or impairment (where only 30% were by female perpetrators). To a large extent, this pattern probably reflects both the fact that female perpetrators predominate in neglect, where greater proportions of the children are more seriously injured, and the fact that inferred injury or impairment is most often associated with sexual abuse, which is most often perpetrated by males.

Table 6–4. Distribution of Perpetrator's Sex by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Sex was . . . | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Male | Female | Unknown |
| FATAL | 100% | 1,500 | * | 78% | * |
| Natural Parents | 80% | 1,200 | * | * | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | * | * | * | * | * |
| Others | * | * | * | * | * |
| SERIOUS | 100% | 565,000 | 48% | 75% | * |
| Natural Parents | 87% | 490,000 | 43% | 81% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 8% | 43,000 | 77% | 49% | * |
| Others | 6% | 32,000 | 77% | * | * |
| MODERATE | 100% | 822,000 | 55% | 66% | * |
| Natural Parents | 80% | 653,700 | 48% | 72% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 16% | 128,000 | 87% | 47% | * |
| Others | 5% | 40,300 | 69% | 31% | * |
| INFERRED | 100% | 165,300 | 72% | 30% | * |
| Natural Parents | 38% | 63,300 | 45% | 65% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 24% | 40,000 | 86% | * | * |
| Others | 38% | 62,100 | 90% | * | * |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 100% | 1,553,800 | 54% | 65% | 1% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 46% | 75% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 85% | 41% | * |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 80% | 14% | 7% |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

One other aspect of this table deserves comment: the overall pattern of sex differences across the perpetrator categories appears to hold at each severity level. Overall, more of the children maltreated by their birth parents were maltreated by their mothers, whereas those maltreated by other parents and parent-substitutes or by other perpetrators were more often maltreated by males. From what can be determined, this appears to be true for children who suffered inferred injuries or impairments, those who suffered moderate injuries or impairments, and those who suffered serious injuries or impairments. The data were insufficient to allow this question to be addressed for children who suffered fatal injuries or impairments.

## 6.5 Perpetrator's Age as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child

The NIS-3 examined perpetrator age to determine whether perpetrators of specific ages were predominant as perpetrators of any specific type of maltreatment. Table 6-5 shows the distribution of children countable under the Harm Standard according to the age of the perpetrator for each type of maltreatment and category of perpetrator. The classification here was treated just as in Tables 6-3 and 6-4, in that children were counted under every age category that applied to the perpetrators who fit the classification constraints. As a consequence, the row percentages can sum to more than 100 percent. Thus, a child who was physically abused by two other parents and parent-substitutes of different age groups was counted in each applicable column, and a child was classified as maltreated by a perpetrator of unknown age only if age was unknown for all perpetrators under consideration. The bottom-most section of Table 6-5 indicates that the age of the perpetrator was entirely unknown for one-third of the countable children, which represents a substantial minority of the database. This proportion is even higher for the category of "other" perpetrators, which (as noted above) tended more often to include cases with missing information about various characteristics of the perpetrator. Given the prevalence of children maltreated by perpetrators of unknown age, other aspects of the patterns in this table (and in Table 6-6, which follows) must be read very cautiously, since they could easily be eradicated if all perpetrators' ages were known.

Two aspects of Table 6-5 are especially striking—and both of these concern the relative prevalence of perpetrators in the youngest age group. First, younger perpetrators (those under 26 years of age) are relatively more predominant among perpetrators of sexual abuse (maltreating 22% of all sexually abused children) than among perpetrators of any other specific type of maltreatment (where they maltreated between 3% and 19% of the children). Second, younger perpetrators are relatively more predominant as perpetrators of children maltreated by "other" perpetrators than among children maltreated by their parents or other parents and parent-substitutes. Note that a higher proportion of the children maltreated by "other" types of perpetrators were maltreated by a person in the youngest age group, and this pattern appears in connection with overall maltreatment (where they maltreated 40% of the other-maltreated children), abuse overall (where they maltreated 40% of the other-maltreated children), physical abuse (where they maltreated 35% of the other-maltreated children), and sexual abuse (where they maltreated 39% of the other-maltreated children).

Table 6–5. Distribution of Perpetrator's Age by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Age was . . . < 26 Years | 26 - 35 Years | > 35 Years | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABUSE: | 100% | 743,200 | 14% | 29% | 25% | 31% |
| Natural/Parents | 62% | 461,800 | 9% | 34% | 28% | 29% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 19% | 144,800 | 9% | 32% | 28% | 31% |
| Others | 18% | 136,600 | 40% | 8% | 13% | 39% |
| Physical Abuse | 100% | 381,700 | 13% | 34% | 24% | 29% |
| Natural/Parents | 72% | 273,200 | 10% | 38% | 26% | 26% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 21% | 78,700 | 11% | 28% | 26% | 35% |
| Others | 8% | 29,700 | 47% | * | * | 36% |
| Sexual Abuse | 100% | 217,700 | 22% | 21% | 26% | 31% |
| Natural/Parents | 29% | 63,300 | 10% | 25% | 41% | 24% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 25% | 53,800 | * | 38% | 29% | 28% |
| Others | 46% | 100,500 | 39% | 8% | 15% | 38% |
| Emotional Abuse | 100% | 204,500 | 7% | 28% | 24% | 41% |
| Natural/Parents | 81% | 166,500 | 7% | 31% | 25% | 37% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 13% | 27,400 | * | * | * | * |
| Others | 5% | 10,600 | * | * | * | * |
| NEGLECT: | 100% | 879,000 | 11% | 34% | 22% | 37% |
| Natural/Parents | 91% | 800,600 | 12% | 37% | 21% | 35% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 78,400 | * | * | 32% | 59% |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Physical Neglect | 100% | 338,900 | 19% | 37% | 18% | 32% |
| Natural/Parents | 95% | 320,400 | 20% | 39% | 16% | 33% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 5% | 18,400 | * | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Emotional Neglect | 100% | 212,800 | 3% | 32% | 31% | 36% |
| Natural/Parents | 91% | 194,600 | * | 35% | 30% | 35% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 18,200 | * | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Educational Neglect | 100% | 397,300 | 7% | 30% | 20% | 45% |
| Natural/Parents | 89% | 354,300 | * | 33% | 21% | 41% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 11% | 43,000 | * | * | * | 82% |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| ALL MALTREATMENT: | 100% | 1,553,800 | 13% | 32% | 23% | 34% |
| Natural/Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 11% | 36% | 23% | 33% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 7% | 22% | 30% | 41% |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 40% | 8% | 13% | 38% |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.
^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

Table 6–6 gives the distribution of children according to the ages of the perpetrators for each outcome severity and each perpetrator relationship. Most differences across the various rows and sections of this table are slight and probably inconsequential—especially in view of the relatively high proportions of children with perpetrators of unknown age. However, one aspect of the table is striking. Note that, again, the youngest perpetrators are relatively more predominant among "other" perpetrators of children than among parents or parent-substitutes.

Table 6–6. Distribution of Perpetrator's Age by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Age was . . . < 26 Years | 26 - 35 Years | > 35 Years | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FATAL | 100% | 1,500 | * | * | * | * |
| Natural Parents | 80% | 1,200 | * | * | * | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | * | 200 | * | * | * | * |
| Others | * | 100 | * | * | * | * |
| SERIOUS | 100% | 565,000 | 12% | 31% | 26% | 33% |
| Natural Parents | 87% | 490,000 | 11% | 34% | 25% | 32% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 8% | 43,000 | * | * | 47% | 36% |
| Others | 6% | 32,000 | 34% | * | * | 43% |
| MODERATE | 100% | 822,000 | 11% | 33% | 22% | 36% |
| Natural Parents | 80% | 653,700 | 11% | 37% | 22% | 34% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 16% | 128,000 | * | 21% | 27% | 46% |
| Others | 5% | 40,300 | 38% | * | 16% | 39% |
| INFERRED | 100% | 165,300 | 24% | 29% | 19% | 29% |
| Natural Parents | 38% | 63,300 | 10% | 43% | 25% | 22% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 24% | 40,000 | * | 37% | 20% | 31% |
| Others | 38% | 62,100 | 45% | * | 11% | 36% |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 100% | 1,553,800 | 13% | 32% | 23% | 34% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 11% | 36% | 23% | 33% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 7% | 22% | 30% | 41% |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 40% | 8% | 13% | 38% |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

## 6.6 Perpetrator's Employment Status as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child

Tables 6–7 and 6–8 present the distributions of the children who were countable under the Harm Standard according to the perpetrators' employment status for each type and severity of maltreatment and each perpetrator relationship. When more than one person had maltreated a child, the perpetrators' employment was classified in the first category that applied to any members in the group, reading from left to right across the employment columns. Multiple classifications were avoided. "Employed" included all those perpetrators who were employed full- or part-time or were on active duty for the military. "Unemployed" included those who were unemployed but currently looking for work. "Other" was a heterogeneous category. It included perpetrators who were unemployed but not technically in the active labor force (e.g., housewife, unemployed and not looking for work, disabled, receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children, on maternity leave, in hospital, in jail), and those with livelihoods that were criminal in nature and therefore did not fit legitimate employment categories (e.g., drug dealer, pimp, etc.). "Unknown" included those perpetrators whose employment status could not be determined.

As these tables show, the "Unknown" category is very prevalent, involving the perpetrators of over one-third of all maltreated children and all neglected children (38% and 36%, respectively), and of 40 percent of all abused children. Therefore, only tentative conclusions about the relation between the perpetrator's employment status and type of maltreatment and relationship can be made. With that proviso in mind, it can be seen in Table 6–7 that nearly one-half of all maltreated children (47%), all abused children (46%), and all neglected children (48%) were abused by a perpetrator who was employed. As Table 6–8 shows, of the children who sustained serious injury, the majority (54%) were maltreated by an employed perpetrator.

## 6.7 Child's Race as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child

The NIS–3 analyses explored whether the children's race was in any way systematically related to the type of maltreatment and the perpetrator's relationship to the child. Since perpetrator race was not known for perpetrators who had been reported to the study solely through non-CPS sources,

Table 6–7. Distribution of Perpetrator's Employment Status by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| *Category* | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Employment Status was . . . | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Employed | Unemployed | Other | Unknown |
| ABUSE: | 100% | 743,238 | 46% | 7% | 7% | 40% |
| Natural Parents | 62% | 461,825 | 52% | 9% | 8% | 31% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 19% | 144,850 | 37% | 4% | * | 52% |
| Others | 18% | 136,564 | 32% | * | * | 60% |
| Physical Abuse | 100% | 381,675 | 41% | 9% | 8% | 42% |
| Natural Parents | 72% | 273,244 | 46% | 10% | 9% | 35% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 21% | 78,741 | 36% | * | * | 51% |
| Others | 8% | 29,690 | * | * | * | 82% |
| Sexual Abuse | 100% | 217,655 | 43% | 4% | 5% | 48% |
| Natural Parents | 29% | 63,270 | 57% | 8% | * | 29% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 25% | 53,850 | 30% | * | * | 62% |
| Others | 46% | 100,535 | 40% | * | * | 53% |
| Emotional Abuse | 100% | 204,486 | 55% | 5% | 8% | 32% |
| Natural Parents | 81% | 166,518 | 59% | 7% | 7% | 28% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 13% | 27,389 | * | * | * | * |
| Others | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| NEGLECT: | 100% | 879,003 | 48% | 9% | 6% | 36% |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 800,565 | 50% | 10% | 6% | 34% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 78,438 | 30% | * | * | 62% |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Physical Neglect | 100% | 338,888 | 45% | 12% | 9% | 34% |
| Natural Parents | 95% | 320,450 | 46% | 13% | 8% | 33% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 5% | 18,440 | * | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Emotional Neglect | 100% | 212,844 | 61% | 7% | * | 27% |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 194,597 | 62% | * | * | 27% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 18,246 | 55% | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Educational Neglect | 100% | 397,324 | 46% | 8% | 4% | 43% |
| Natural Parents | 89% | 354,292 | 50% | 9% | 4% | 38% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 11% | 43,031 | * | * | * | 83% |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| ALL MALTREATMENT: | 100% | 1,553,786 | 47% | 8% | 6% | 38% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,144 | 51% | 10% | 7% | 32% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,179 | 35% | 3% | 6% | 56% |
| Others | 9% | 134,464 | 33% | * | * | 59% |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.
^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

Table 6–8. Distribution of Perpetrator's Employment Status by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Employment Status was . . . | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Employed | Unemployed | Other/ Unknown |
| FATAL | 100% | 1,500 | * | * | 82% |
| Natural Parents | 81% | 1,200 | * | * | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | * | 200 | * | * | * |
| Others | * | 100 | * | * | * |
| SERIOUS | 100% | 565,000 | 54% | 8% | 38% |
| Natural Parents | 87% | 490,000 | 57% | 9% | 34% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 8% | 43,000 | 42% | * | 53% |
| Others | 6% | 32,000 | * | * | 77% |
| MODERATE | 100% | 822,000 | 45% | 9% | 46% |
| Natural Parents | 80% | 653,700 | 48% | 11% | 41% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 16% | 128,000 | 36% | * | 61% |
| Others | 5% | 40,300 | 22% | * | 74% |
| INFERRED | 100% | 165,300 | 35% | 4% | 61% |
| Natural Parents | 38% | 63,300 | 32% | 7% | 62% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 24% | 40,000 | 23% | * | 73% |
| Others | 38% | 62,100 | 47% | * | 51% |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 100% | 1,553,800 | 47% | 8% | 44% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 51% | 10% | 39% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 35% | 3% | 62% |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 33% | * | 64% |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

child's race was used as the basis for this exploration. Table 6–9 presents the race distribution of the children within each perpetrator category for each type of maltreatment.

The predominance of birth parents as perpetrators of neglect makes it unfeasible to examine perpetrator differences in connection with neglect or any of its subcategories, as can be seen by the preponderance of cells with asterisks and carets in that section of the table. However, some interesting patterns are apparent in connection with abuse.

Table 6-9. Distribution of Child's Race by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Race/Ethnicity . . . White | Non-White | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABUSE: | 100% | 743,200 | 75% | 23% | 3% |
| Natural Parents | 62% | 461,800 | 77% | 21% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 19% | 144,900 | 79% | 17% | * |
| Others | 18% | 136,600 | 63% | 33% | * |
| Physical Abuse | 100% | 381,700 | 73% | 26% | * |
| Natural Parents | 72% | 273,200 | 72% | 27% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 21% | 78,700 | 80% | 18% | * |
| Others | 8% | 29,700 | 58% | 42% | * |
| Sexual Abuse | 100% | 217,700 | 77% | 19% | * |
| Natural Parents | 29% | 63,300 | 93% | 7% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 25% | 53,800 | 83% | 13% | * |
| Others | 46% | 100,500 | 64% | 31% | * |
| Emotional Abuse | 100% | 204,500 | 78% | 19% | * |
| Natural Parents | 81% | 166,500 | 79% | 19% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 13% | 27,400 | 79% | * | * |
| Others | 5% | 10,600 | * | * | * |
| ALL NEGLECT: | 100% | 879,000 | 71% | 28% | 2% |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 800,600 | 71% | 28% | 2% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 78,400 | 73% | 26% | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Physical Neglect | 100% | 338,900 | 72% | 27% | * |
| Natural Parents | 95% | 320,400 | 71% | 27% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 5% | 18,400 | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Emotional Neglect | 100% | 212,800 | 76% | 21% | * |
| Natural Parents | 91% | 194,600 | 76% | 21% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 9% | 18,200 | * | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| Educational Neglect | 100% | 397,300 | 68% | 31% | * |
| Natural Parents | 89% | 354,300 | 68% | 31% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 11% | 43,000 | 70% | * | * |
| Others | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ | ^ |
| ALL MALTREATMENT: | 100% | 1,553,800 | 72% | 26% | 2% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,100 | 73% | 26% | 2% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,200 | 77% | 20% | * |
| Others | 9% | 134,500 | 63% | 34% | * |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.
^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

First, for abuse overall, the distribution of children does not reflect any notable connection between the child's race and the perpetrator's relationship to the child. However, among the specific types of abuse, there do appear to be differences in the race distributions of the children who are maltreated by the different types of perpetrators. Of children who were physically abused, white children appear to account for a higher proportion of those physically abused by other parents and parent-substitutes (80%) than of those physically abused by their birth parents (72%) and of those physically abused by other types of perpetrators (58%). A different pattern appears in connection with sexual abuse, which is the maltreatment category with the greatest proportion of white children (77% overall). Among sexually abused children, white children make up a greater proportion of children who were sexually abused by their birth parents (93%) as compared to their representation among the children who were sexually abused by other parents and parent-substitutes (83%) or by others (64%). In contrast, non-white children account for a greater proportion of those who were physically abused or sexually abused by others (42% of those physically abused and 31% of those sexually abused, respectively) than of those who were maltreated by their birth parents or by other parents and parent-substitutes (27% and 18% of those physically abused and 7% and 13% of those sexually abused, respectively).

Table 6–10 presents the race distribution of the children with perpetrators in each relationship category for each level of injury or impairment. For the most part, there appear to be only trivial differences across the different perpetrator categories. However, two patterns are of interest. White children account for a greater proportion of those who suffered other-than-fatal injuries by other parents and parent-substitutes than of those who suffered fatal injuries by birth parents or by others. (That is, 81% of those who suffered serious injury, 79% of those who suffered moderate injury, and 67% of those who suffered inferred injury were injured by other parents and parent-substitutes.) In contrast, non-white children account for a greater proportion of those children who suffered serious injury by their birth parents than of those who suffered serious injury by other parents and parent-substitutes or by others (22% versus 16% and 19%, respectively). Non-white children account for a greater proportion of those who suffered moderate or inferred injury by others than of those who suffered moderate or inferred injury by birth parents or other parents and parent-substitutes (38% were moderately injured by others versus 28% by birth parents and 20% by other parents and parent-substitutes; 39% suffered inferred injury by others versus 32% by birth parents and 24% by other parents and parent-substitutes).

Table 6-10. Distribution of Child's Race by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

| Category | Percent Children in Maltreatment Category | Total Maltreated Children | Percent of Children in Row with Race . . . White | Non-White | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FATAL: | 100% | 1,500 | * | * | * |
| Natural Parents | 81% | 1,200 | * | * | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 200 | * | * | * |
| Others | 5% | 100 | * | * | * |
| SERIOUS: | 100% | 565,000 | 77% | 21% | * |
| Natural Parents | 87% | 490,000 | 76% | 22% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 8% | 43,000 | 81% | 16% | * |
| Others | 6% | 32,000 | 76% | 19% | * |
| MODERATE: | 100% | 822,000 | 72% | 27% | * |
| Natural Parents | 80% | 653,700 | 71% | 28% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 16% | 128,000 | 79% | 20% | * |
| Others | 5% | 40,300 | 62% | 38% | * |
| INFERRED: | 100% | 165,300 | 62% | 33% | 6% |
| Natural Parents | 38% | 63,300 | 64% | 32% | * |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 24% | 40,000 | 67% | 24% | * |
| Others | 38% | 62,100 | 56% | 39% | * |
| ALL MALTREATMENT: | 100% | 1,553,786 | 72% | 26% | 2% |
| Natural Parents | 78% | 1,208,144 | 73% | 26% | 2% |
| Other Parents and Parent/substitutes | 14% | 211,179 | 77% | 20% | * |
| Others | 9% | 134,464 | 63% | 34% | * |

*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

## 6.8 Implications of the Findings Regarding Perpetrator Relationships and Characteristics

In considering the findings reported here, one should continue to bear in mind the various assumptions on which these analyses were based. Perhaps most important, these analyses were designed to provide a child-based count, not a perpetrator-based count, so they reflect only the most closely related person or persons responsible for the maltreatment with the most serious outcome. This means that other perpetrators who are not described here also may have been involved in a child's maltreatment. A different series of analyses would be needed to describe these children's perpetrators comprehensively (i.e., they would need to categorize each child in connection with all involved perpetrators, regardless of

outcome severity or closeness of relationship to the child). Moreover, without very differently designed sample selection, data collection, and analysis approaches, the NIS cannot provide perpetrator-based counts and distributions.

In view of the fact that the NIS–3 focused on the kinds of abuse and neglect that would be in the purview of CPS, it is not surprising to see that the majority of countable children (74%) were maltreated by their in-home birth parents and that another 13.6 percent were maltreated by in-home other parents and parent-substitutes such as step-parents and foster parents. Thus, even though other persons also might have been involved in maltreating these children, their parents or parent-substitutes were directly involved in committing the maltreatment that had caused the children the most serious harm.

Key differences in perpetrators were found among the categories of abuse, where nearly one-half of the sexually abused children had been abused by persons other than parents or parent figures in contrast to only small fractions of those children who had been physically or emotionally abused by "other" perpetrators. However, sexually abused children appeared to be more likely to suffer fatal or serious injury or impairment[6] when they were sexually abused by their birth parent.

Consistent with the fact that mothers and mother-substitutes tend to be the primary caretakers, 87 percent of all neglected children and 93 percent of physically neglected children suffered their neglect at the hands of female perpetrators. In contrast, abused children in all categories were more often maltreated by males: 67 percent of all abused children, 89 percent of sexually abused children, 63 percent of emotionally abused children, and 58 percent of physically abused children were maltreated by males.

Due to the prevalence of cases where the perpetrators' age or employment status was unknown or "other," only tentative conclusions could be made about the relationship of these characteristics to maltreatment. However, it appears that sexually abused children were more often victimized by the younger perpetrators and that nearly one-half of all maltreated children were maltreated by a perpetrator who was employed.

[6] Fatal and serious injury categories were combined.

Finally, there appear to be differences in the racial distributions of the children who were maltreated by the different types of perpetrators. White children made up a higher proportion of those physically abused by other parents and parent-substitutes than of those physically abused by their birth parents or by others, whereas white children made up a greater proportion of those sexually abused by birth parents than of those sexually abused by other parents and parent-substitutes or other types of perpetrators. In contrast, non-white children accounted for a greater proportion of children who were physically or sexually abused by perpetrators who were related to them in some other way than of those who were physically or sexually abused by parents and parent-substitutes.

# 7. RECOGNIZING AND INVESTIGATING ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN

This chapter considers what community sources recognize maltreated children as abused or neglected and what percentage of maltreatment comes to the attention of CPS agencies. The chapter is divided into two major sections, addressing the following questions:

- What agency sources encountered and recognized these abused or neglected children? What changes have occurred in the number of maltreated children encountered and recognized at different agencies since the NIS–2 (and for children who were countable under the Harm Standard, since the NIS–1)?

- What percentage of the abused and neglected children had their maltreatment investigated by CPS agencies? How does this compare with the percentage who received CPS investigation in the NIS–2 (and for children under the Harm Standard, in the NIS–1)? How does the percentage who were investigated relate to the agency source that recognized the abuse or neglect? What community sources recognized the abuse or neglect of maltreated children who were and who were *not* investigated by CPS?

The chapter concludes with an overview of the key patterns identified in recognition and investigation patterns and a discussion of their implications. This last section also emphasizes an important limitation of the NIS: it cannot determine the reasons children were not investigated by CPS—whether it was because they were not reported to CPS or because CPS screened-out a report about them without an investigation.

## 7.1 Sources Recognizing Abused and Neglected Children

This section examines the distribution of the abused and neglected children according to the sources that recognized them as maltreated and identifies changes in this distribution since the earlier national incidence studies, the NIS–1 and the NIS–2. There are two main subsections, one considering the source distribution of the children who were maltreated as defined by the Harm Standard and the other focusing on the source distribution of children who were defined as maltreated under the Endangerment Standard. Throughout this section, our use of the term "recognition" subsumes both encountering maltreated children and identifying them as maltreated.

As was the case in Chapter 3, the estimates presented here are based on the unduplicated numbers of maltreated children in the United States who experienced the type of maltreatment in question (Harm Standard or Endangerment Standard); that is, the unit of measurement is the child, and each estimate counts each child only once. The estimates in the tables in this section are given both in terms of the estimated totals and in terms of the rates per 1,000 children in the U.S. population. Estimated totals reflect the number of children nationwide who were maltreated during the year in question, whereas the incidence rates indicate the number of children maltreated during the year per 1,000 children in the U.S. population. Comparisons across studies are based on the rate measures, in order to take account of any changes in the size of the U.S. child population across the time intervals.[1]

As described in Chapter 2, the NIS design involved collecting data about suspected cases of abused and neglected children from CPS agencies as well as from community professionals in a number of different agency categories. Children identified to the study were categorized according to their recognition source by considering: (1) the source(s) who had submitted the data form on the child to the NIS, or (2) the source(s) who had reported the child to CPS, for those children whose maltreatment had been investigated by CPS agencies. Thus, a child who had been submitted to the NIS by a sentinel in a hospital was classified as having been recognized at a hospital; a child who was submitted to the NIS by a participating CPS agency, who had been reported to the CPS agency by staff at a hospital, was also classified as having been recognized at a hospital. Children who had been recognized at more than one category of agency were assigned to one of their recognition sources by applying a hierarchical ordering of the sources. The hierarchy, which is described below, was identical to the one used in the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 for this purpose.

### 7.1.1 Sources Recognizing Children Maltreated under the Harm Standard

Children who met the criteria for maltreatment under the Harm Standard are listed in Table 7–1 according to their recognition source. Children who had been recognized by more than one of the sources listed were put into the first source listed, following the ordering given in the table, from top to bottom, with one proviso—sources of reports to CPS were given preference over sources that

[1] The estimates, together with their standard errors and upper and lower 95-percent confidence bounds, are given in Appendices A and B. The details of the significance tests for the cross-study comparisons are given in Appendix D.

Table 7–1. Sources Recognizing Maltreated Children Who Fit the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 (1993), and Comparisons with the Estimated Numbers from Different Sources in the NIS–2 (1986) and NIS–1 (1980).

| Source Recognizing the Maltreatment | Harm Standard Children Recognized by the Source in the.... | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **NIS–3: 1993** | | NIS–2: 1986 | | | NIS–1: 1980 | | |
| | **Total No. of Children** | ***Rate per 1,000 Children*** | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| *Investigatory Agencies:* | | | | | | | | |
| Juvenile Probation | **36,600** | ***0.5*** | 44,100 | *0.7* | ns | 41,600 | *0.7* | ns |
| Police/Sheriff | **111,500** | ***1.7*** | 76,100 | *1.2* | ns | 52,100 | *0.8* | * |
| Public Health | **27,500** | ***0.4*** | 26,100 | *0.4* | ns | 8,900 | *0.1* | * |
| Investigatory Agency Subtotal: | **175,600** | ***2.6*** | 146,300 | *2.3* | ns | 102,500 | *1.6* | * |
| *Other Study Agencies:* | | | | | | | | |
| Hospitals | **113,200** | ***1.7*** | 32,700 | *0.5* | * | 35,300 | *0.6* | * |
| Schools | **920,000** | ***13.7*** | 507,400 | *8.1* | * | 348,300 | *5.5* | * |
| Day-care Centers | **59,700** | ***0.9*** | 24,300 | *0.4* | ns | N/A | *N/A* | -- |
| Mental Health Agencies | **50,900** | ***0.8*** | 13,400 | *0.2* | m | 27,900 | *0.4* | ns |
| Social Service Agencies | **96,000** | ***1.4*** | 77,000 | *1.2* | ns | 21,500 | *0.3* | * |
| Other Study Agency Subtotal: | **1,239,800** | ***18.5*** | 654,700 | *10.4* | * | 433,100 | *6.8* | * |
| All Study Non-CPS Sources: | **1,415,400** | ***21.1*** | 801,000 | *12.7* | * | 535,600 | *8.4* | * |
| *Other Sources (only through CPS):* | | | | | | | | |
| DSS/Welfare Department | **15,000** | ***0.2*** | 16,700 | *0.3* | ns | 11,800 | *0.2* | ns |
| Other Professional or Agency | **7,000** | ***0.1*** | 9,300 | *0.1* | ns | 11,300 | *0.2* | a |
| All Other Sources | **116,400** | ***1.7*** | 104,100 | *1.7* | ns | 66,300 | *1.0* | * |
| Other (CPS-only ) Subtotal: | **138,400** | ***2.1*** | 130,000 | *2.1* | ns | 89,400 | *1.4* | * |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | **1,553,800** | ***23.1*** | 931,000 | *14.8* | * | 625,100 | *9.8* | * |

* The NIS–3 estimate is significantly higher than this earlier estimate (i.e., $p<.05$).

m The NIS–3 estimate is marginally higher than this earlier estimate (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

a The NIS–3 estimate is significantly lower than this earlier estimate (i.e., $p<.05$).

ns The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).

Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100; estimated rates are rounded to the nearest tenth.

were based solely on non-CPS sentinels in the NIS. Thus, a child submitted to the NIS by a police department and a CPS agency, who had been reported to CPS by a hospital, was classified as having been recognized at the hospital.[2] The hospital was identified as the recognition source because it was given preference as the source of the report to CPS. Alternatively, a child whose maltreatment had *not* been investigated by CPS, but who was submitted to the NIS by both a police department and a hospital, was classified as having been recognized at the police department. The police department was selected in this case because it comes first in the hierarchy given by the ordering of sources in Table 7–1.

This classification scheme first credits sources with recognizing those children whom they reported to CPS and who were accepted by CPS for investigation. For the not-reported children and for those who were reported but not investigated by CPS, the scheme assigns recognition credit to the source who submitted the child to the NIS.

Note that this hierarchy distinguishes investigatory agencies, those in the second tier of the "iceberg" model described in Chapter 2, from other study agencies, those in the third tier of the "iceberg," that are included in the NIS design. Also note that the hierarchy distinguishes between children who are known through a source that is represented in the NIS design through the sample of non-CPS sentinels, "All Study Non-CPS Sources," and children who come into the NIS solely through the CPS agencies "Other (CPS-only) Sources." This distinction is important because the NIS does not recruit special, non-CPS sentinels to obtain children whom "Other (CPS-only) Sources" see beyond those who are investigated by CPS.[3]

The NIS–3 estimates, given in the shaded section in bold text, indicate that, of the estimated total of 1,553,800 children who experienced some form of maltreatment countable under the Harm Standard in 1993, an estimated 175,600, or 11 percent, had been recognized by staff in investigatory agencies. Most of these were recognized in law enforcement agencies, municipal police or sheriffs' departments.

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[2] For this classification to apply, it was also necessary for this child's maltreatment to have been investigated by CPS and for the child to have been recognized as maltreated by the CPS agency. Operationally, this meant that either the child was an alleged or indicated victim or the CPS investigation record described his or her countable maltreatment. See the discussion in the subsequent section, 7.2, concerning CPS recognition of children's maltreatment.

[3] Readers should recall Figure 2–2, which showed that certain categories of reporters to CPS are not included in the non-CPS sentinels in the NIS (e.g., the general public, certain categories of professionals and agencies, such as physicians or therapists in private practice, and the county welfare department).

Four-fifths (80%) of the total (an estimated 1,239,800 children) were recognized at other, noninvestigatory agencies of the kind represented by the NIS sentinels—hospitals, schools, day-care centers, and mental health and social service agencies. Thus, the vast majority of children who were maltreated as defined by the Harm Standard were recognized by sources represented by NIS sentinels—a combined total of 1,415,400, or 91 percent of all children maltreated under the Harm Standard. Note that the single greatest source of children who fit the Harm Standard is professional staff in schools. Teachers, nurses, and counselors at public schools recognized by far the greatest proportion of children who fit the Harm Standard (an estimated 920,000 children nationwide). In their own right, school staff recognized nearly three-fifths of the children who fit the Harm Standard—59 percent. Bearing in mind that this categorization is hierarchical, it means that more children were recognized as abused or neglected by schools than are credited here. When schools recognized a child who was also recognized by a source higher in the hierarchy, or when a school sentinel recognized a child who had been reported to CPS by another source, the child was classified as having been recognized by that other source, rather than by the school sentinel. This means that 59 percent should be regarded as a minimum estimate of the recognition contribution made by school professionals.

Only 9 percent of the children maltreated according to the Harm Standard (an estimated 138,400 children) came into the NIS through sources that are reflected only among cases investigated by CPS. Most of these (116,400 children, or 7% of the Harm Standard total) had been reported to CPS by the general public, including neighbors, friends, family, the parents and children themselves, and anonymous callers.

**Changes since NIS–1 and NIS–2 in Recognition Sources of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.** In comparison to the NIS–2 estimates, the significant increase in the total of children whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard derived from significant increases in the recognition of these children at hospitals and at schools and a marginal increase in their recognition at mental health agencies.[4] Recognition of children maltreated according to the Harm Standard at hospitals more than tripled since the NIS–2, and recognition at schools was 69-percent higher in 1993, during the NIS–3, than it had been in 1986, when the NIS–2 was conducted. Mental health professionals quadrupled their recognition of these children since the NIS–2. However, mental health sources still account for a very

[4] Changes over time are best measured in terms of incidence rates (i.e., number per 1,000 children in the population) in order to take account of simultaneous changes in the overall size of the child population, so all between-study comparisons were done using the rate measures.

small proportion of the total (only 3%), and their estimates are comparatively less precise as a consequence of that fact, so this increase is statistically marginal, but not significant. Note that because all three of these sources, hospitals, schools, and mental health agencies, are in the category "Other Study Agencies" and in the larger sector "All Study Non-CPS Sources," significant increases in recognition in these larger categories were also observed.

Further insight into the nature of changes in the recognition of children who counted under the Harm Standard can be afforded by comparisons with the NIS–1 and by examining all three national studies in relation to each other. Comparing the recognition source estimates in the NIS–3 with those found in the NIS–1, there were significant increases in recognition at police/sheriffs' departments, public health departments, hospitals, schools, social service agencies, and "other sources" to CPS (i.e., the general public), but there was a significant *decrease* in the contribution from the CPS-only category of other professionals and agencies (i.e., beyond those who are represented through non-CPS sentinel groups in the NIS). Day-care centers had not been a specific category of sentinels in the NIS–1, so no comparison can be made in that category.[5]

Figure 7–1 presents the recognition patterns at investigatory agencies in the three national incidence studies. Recognition by juvenile probation departments has essentially remained stable over the 13-year period represented by these studies (i.e., there were no significant or marginal changes). There were significant increases between the NIS–1 and the NIS–3 in recognition by law enforcement and by public health departments, but the patterns of change over the course of the three studies differed. Law enforcement agencies have evidenced a steady rise in their recognition of children who were maltreated according to the Harm Standard, whereas the increase in recognition in public health all occurred during the early part of this period, between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2.

Recognition levels in other (noninvestigatory) study agencies are graphed in Figure 7–2. One of the most striking features of this figure is the overall predominance of schools as a recognition source in all three studies, overshadowing all other recognition sources. Schools are also the source that evidences the largest increases across the three national incidence studies. The recognition of children

[5] In the NIS–1, day-care centers had been included in the mixed category "social service agencies," rather than as a separate category. Comparisons with the NIS–1 estimates of the subtotals in Table 7–1 appropriately adjusted for the fact that day-care centers had not been independently represented in that study. (See Appendix D.)

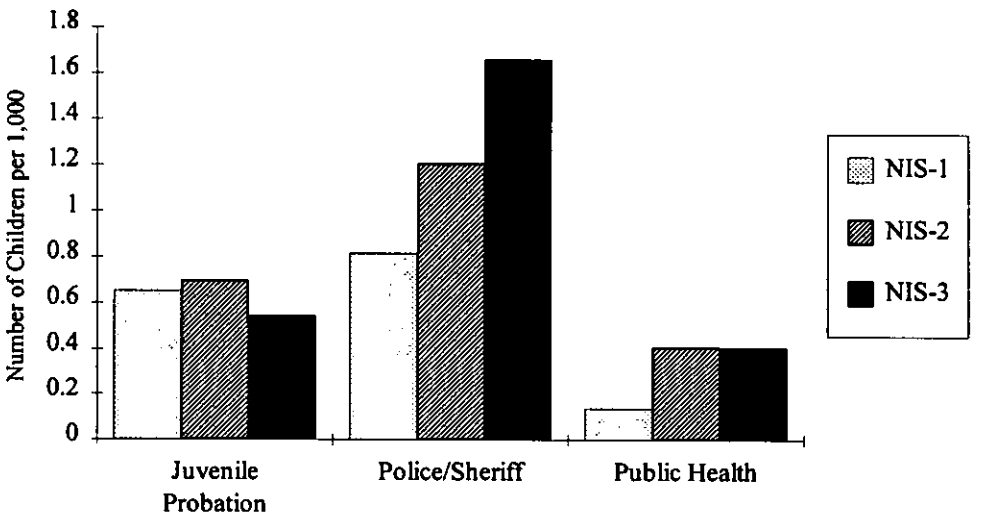


Figure 7–1. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Harm Standard in Investigatory Agencies in the Three National Incidence Studies.

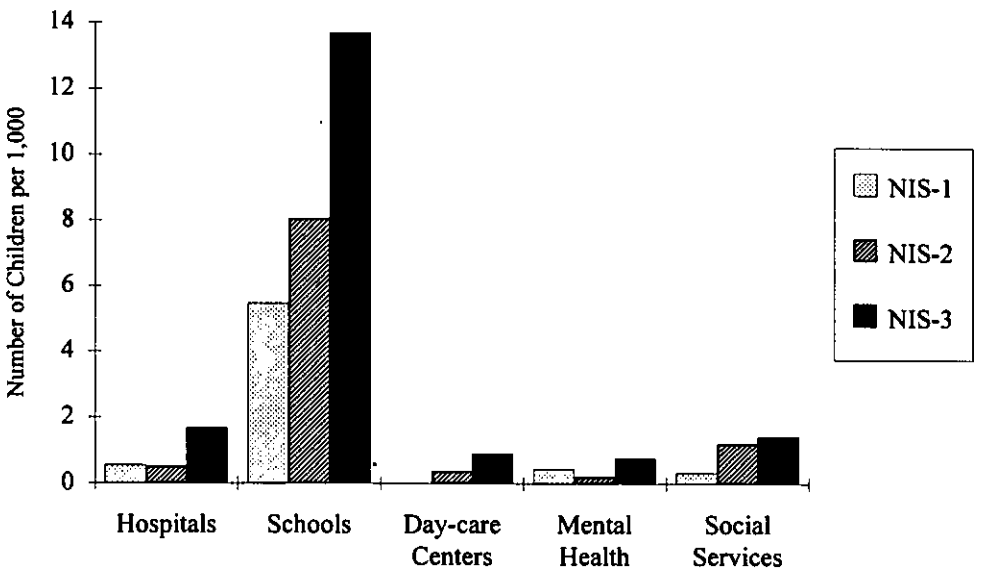


Figure 7–2. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Harm Standard in Other (Non-investigatory) Study Agencies in the Three National Incidence Studies.

whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard at schools in the NIS–3 was almost two and one-half times the NIS–1 level.

Figure 7–2 also shows that the increase in recognition at hospitals is a recent development, occurring since the time of the NIS–2, in contrast to the rise in recognition at social service agencies, which occurred during the early part of the 13-year period and has essentially not changed since the time of the NIS–2. Mental health agencies present an interesting pattern. Their recognition of children who counted under the Harm Standard actually *decreased* marginally between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2,[6] but then it increased marginally between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3, such that the net result was no significant change between the NIS–1 and the NIS–3 recognition levels in this agency sector.

Changes in recognition across sources that are only known through their reports to CPS are given in Figure 7–3. Across the three national incidence studies, there have been essentially no changes in recognition within the department of social services (i.e., referrals to CPS from AFDC, etc.). Other professionals or agencies (i.e., beyond the ones that are represented in the NIS via special sentinels) actually evidenced a significant *decline* between the NIS–1 and the NIS–3 in their recognition of children countable by the Harm Standard. These sources included physicians and therapists in private practice. This significant decline in their recognition of maltreated children counted by the Harm Standard occurred despite the fact that there were no significant or marginal shifts in recognition from the NIS–1 to the NIS–2 or from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 (i.e., the cumulative effect is nevertheless significant). Finally, note that the general public showed a significant increase in recognition between the NIS–1 and the NIS–2,[7] but there has been essentially no change in this level since the time of the NIS–2.

Figure 7–4 gives a visual overview of changes in the absolute and relative contributions to the Harm Standard estimates from the three main groupings—investigatory agencies, other non-CPS study agencies, and CPS-only sources of children who were counted under the Harm Standard. Overall, changes in recognition at investigatory agencies and in CPS-only sources had occurred between the

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[6] This finding emerged when a one-tailed test is used, in contrast to the more stringent two-tailed test, which was used as the basis of the results presented in the NIS–2 findings report. Because the more stringent test was applied in the NIS–2, that earlier report does not indicate a change between the NIS–1 and NIS–2 in recognition at mental health agencies.

[7] The change is significant when a one-tailed test is used; it was reported as marginal in the NIS–2 findings report, where a two-tailed test was used.

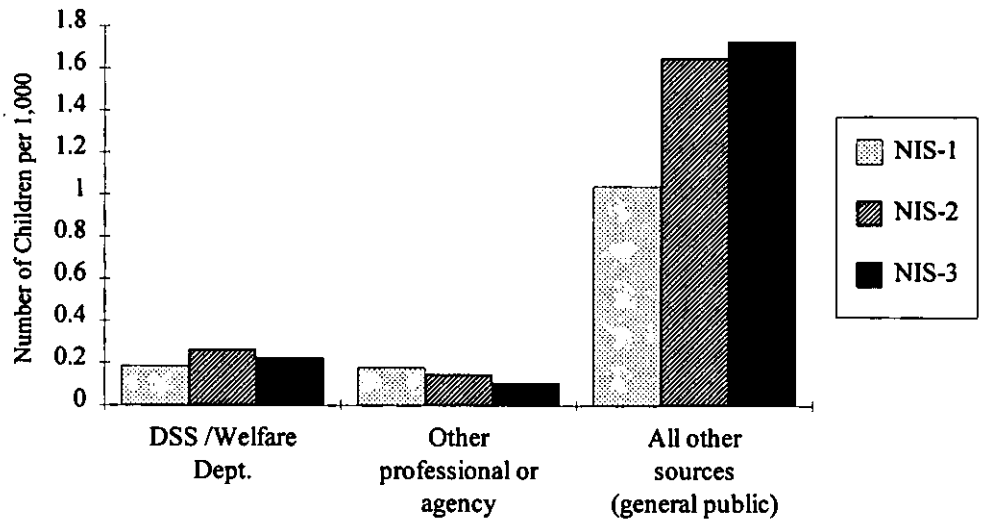


Figure 7–3. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Harm Standard in Other (CPS-only) Sources in the Three National Incidence Studies.

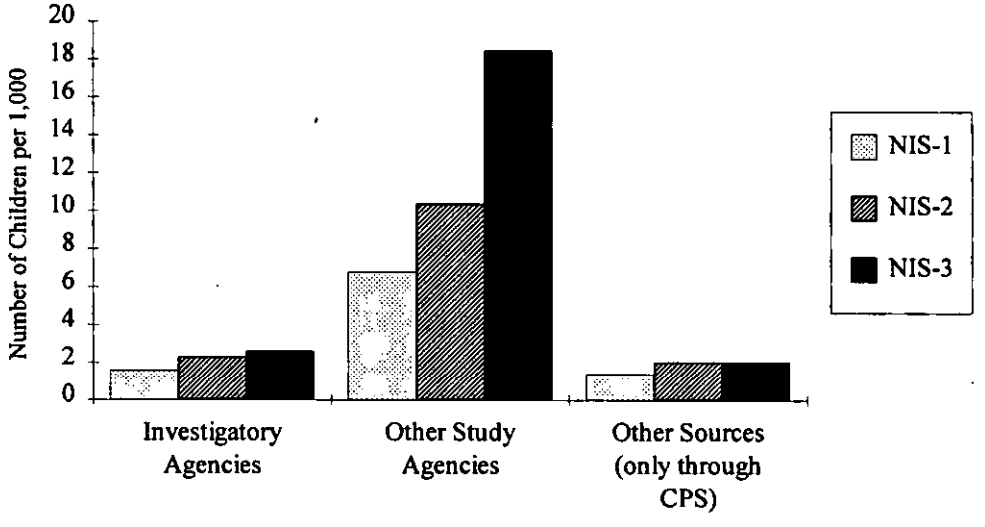


Figure 7–4. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Harm Standard across the Main Categories of Sources in the Three National Incidence Studies.

NIS–1 and the NIS–2, but there have been essentially no changes in recognition in these sectors since the time of the NIS–2.

The dramatic changes in recognition by other (noninvestigatory) study agencies seen in Figure 7–4 largely reflect the contributions to this sector by personnel at schools. (Also see Figure 7–2.) More than two-thirds (68%) of the increase since the NIS–2 in the incidence of abuse and neglect under the Harm Standard reflects additional children who were recognized at schools.

### 7.1.2 Sources Recognizing Children Maltreated under the Endangerment Standard

Table 7–2 provides a breakdown of the children who were countable under the Endangerment Standard according to their recognition source. This table follows the same structure as Table 7–1, described in the previous section, with children assigned to a recognition source based on the source who submitted them to the study or who reported them to CPS. (See the description above regarding children's classification by their recognition source.) The sum in Table 7–2 reiterates that an estimated total of 2,815,600 children experienced abuse or neglect according to the Endangerment Standard in 1993. (Also see Chapter 3.) An estimated 372,400 of these children, or 13 percent, were recognized by investigatory agency staff. Similar to the pattern that was seen in connection with recognition sources of maltreatment under the Harm Standard, these children had come predominantly from law enforcement agencies.

Other study agencies, without investigatory authority of any kind, accounted for three-fourths (75%) of the total (an estimated 2,102,500 children). Taken together, all sources represented by non-CPS sentinels recognized an estimated 2,474,800 children whose maltreatment fit the Endangerment Standard, or 88 percent of the total. Again, it is very apparent that schools are the strongest contributors, recognizing more than 1.5 million of these abused and neglected children (an estimated 1,510,700), or 54 percent of the Endangerment Standard total. This figure should be regarded as a minimum estimate of the total number of children counted under the Endangerment Standard who were actually recognized by school personnel, because some children recognized at schools were credited to agency sources that are higher in the assignment hierarchy. (See the discussion above on this issue in connection with schools' recognition of Harm Standard children.)

Table 7–2. Sources Recognizing Maltreated Children Who Fit the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–3 (1993), and Comparisons With Recognition Sources in the NIS–2 (1986).

| Source Recognizing the Maltreatment | Endangerment Standard Children Recognized in the.... | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | NIS–3: 1993 | | NIS–2: 1986 | | |
| | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| *Investigatory Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Juvenile Probation | 53,300 | *0.8* | 59,200 | *0.9* | ns |
| Police/Sheriff | 272,000 | *4.1* | 120,700 | *1.9* | * |
| Public Health | 47,000 | *0.7* | 41,900 | *0.7* | ns |
| Investigatory Agency Subtotal: | 372,400 | *5.5* | 221,800 | *3.5* | * |
| *Other Study Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Hospitals | 181,300 | *2.7* | 48,900 | *0.8* | * |
| Schools | 1,510,700 | *22.5* | 679,200 | *10.8* | * |
| Day-care Centers | 138,000 | *2.1* | 39,900 | *0.6* | m |
| Mental Health Agencies | 97,800 | *1.5* | 16,600 | *0.3* | * |
| Social Service Agencies | 174,600 | *2.6* | 107,900 | *1.7* | ns |
| Other Study Agency Subtotal: | 2,102,500 | *31.3* | 892,500 | *14.2* | * |
| All Study Non-CPS Sources: | 2,474,800 | *36.9* | 1,114,300 | *17.7* | * |
| *Other Sources (only through CPS):* | | | | | |
| DSS/Welfare Department | 32,200 | *0.5* | 43,300 | *0.7* | ns |
| Other Professional or Agency | 12,900 | *0.2* | 11,000 | *0.2* | ns |
| All Other Sources | 295,700 | *4.4* | 255,800 | *4.1* | ns |
| Other Sources Subtotal | 340,800 | *5.1* | 310,100 | *4.9* | ns |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 2,815,600 | *41.9* | 1,424,400 | *22.6* | * |

* The NIS–3 estimate is significantly higher than this estimate (i.e., $p<.05$).

m The NIS–3 estimate is marginally higher than this earlier estimate (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

ns The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).

Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100; estimated rates are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Twelve percent of the children counted under the Endangerment Standard (an estimated 340,800) were recognized by sources that are not represented in the NIS design except through their reports to CPS agencies—other branches of the county social services department, other professionals or agencies not recruited as sentinels in the NIS design (e.g., physicians in private practice), and the general public. The majority of these children (an estimated 295,700 children, or 11% of the Endangerment Standard total) were reported to CPS by the general public.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in Recognition Sources of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** The increase since the NIS–2 in the overall incidence of maltreated children who fit the Endangerment Standard criteria derived from significant increases in the recognition of these children in law enforcement agencies, hospitals, schools, and mental health agencies and a marginal increase in their recognition at day-care centers.

Figure 7–5 reveals that recognition by law enforcement of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard more than doubled since the NIS–2. Also evident here is the fact that essentially no change occurred in recognition at juvenile probation or public health departments.

Figure 7–6 illustrates the changes since the NIS–2 in the recognition of children whose maltreatment fit the Endangerment Standard by noninvestigatory study agencies. As was the case with the Harm Standard, recognition of Endangerment Standard maltreatment increased most dramatically in schools. Given that schools had recognized almost one-half (48%) of the Endangerment Standard children in the NIS–2, the magnitude of the increased recognition in schools dwarfs increases in other study sources. Although smaller in absolute magnitude, relative increases in other categories are notable: recognition in hospitals and day-care centers more than tripled, and it increased fivefold in mental health agencies.

An overview of the changes in patterns of recognition for Endangerment Standard maltreatment is offered in Figure 7–7. This graph reiterates the fact that there were no changes in the recognition patterns among those sources that contributed to the NIS estimates solely through their reports to CPS (e.g., private practice physicians, the general public, etc.). It also indicates the relative impact of changes in recognition in the investigatory and noninvestigatory sectors of the study agencies. The overwhelming influence of the increased recognition in schools is evident. In fact, at least 61 percent of the increase in incidence of children who were countable by the Endangerment Standard derives from children who were recognized as maltreated in schools.

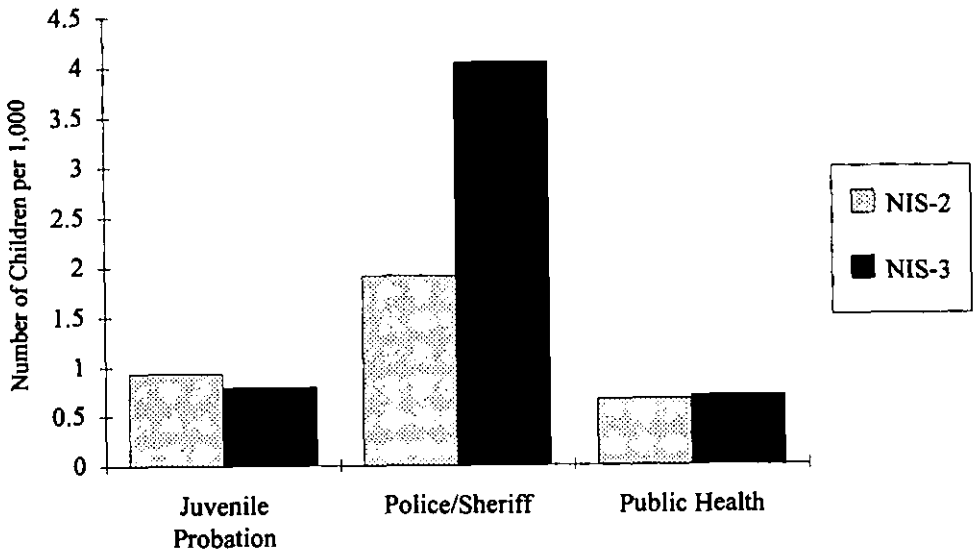


Figure 7–5. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Endangerment Standard in Investigatory Agencies in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

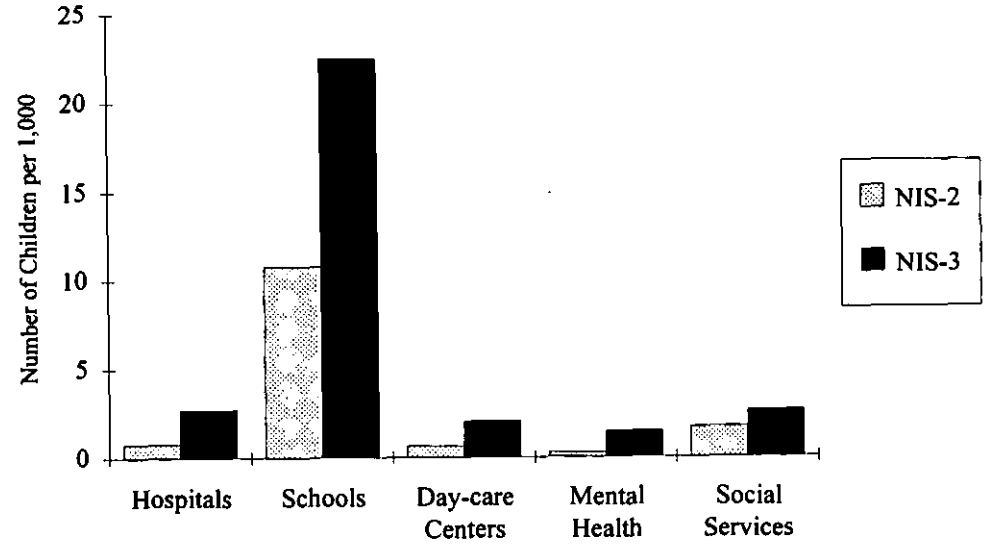


Figure 7–6. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Endangerment Standard in Other (Noninvestigatory) Study Agencies in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

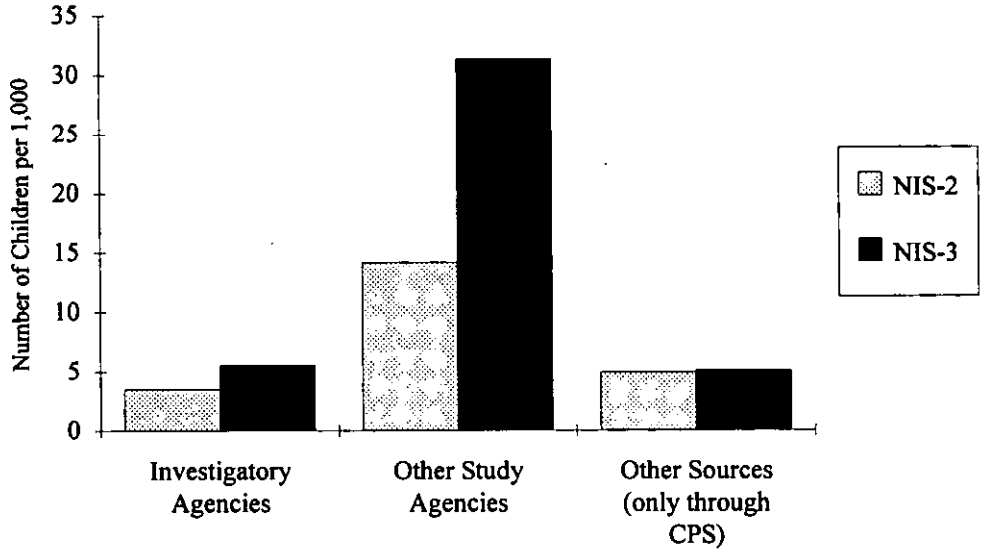


Figure 7–7. Recognition of Children Who Fit the Endangerment Standard across the Main Categories of Sources in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

## 7.2 CPS Investigation of Abused and Neglected Children

As described in Chapter 2, the NIS design makes it possible to discover which of the countable children reported to the study are among those whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS. Using that information, estimates can be made of the numbers and percentages of maltreated children whose maltreatment receives attention in a CPS investigation. This section reports these estimates for both the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard and examines changes since the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 in the distribution of the maltreated population who received CPS investigations.

For purposes of the analyses reported here, children who qualified as abused or neglected under either the Harm or Endangerment Standard were classified according to whether or not their maltreatment received attention in a CPS investigation. According to the criteria used here, the only children who were classified as *not* having received CPS investigation for their maltreatment were those who were clearly *not* alleged or indicated victims in CPS investigations—either because they were not listed at all in any CPS investigation or because, although they were listed, the investigation record

clearly omitted any mention of their countable maltreatment.[8] Note that this strategy takes the conservative approach of assuming that a child received CPS investigation for his or her maltreatment whenever complete information on this question was unavailable.[9]

Readers should bear in mind that children whose maltreatment does *not* receive CPS attention in an investigation represent an enigma to the study: it is not possible to determine the reason they were not investigated. That is, the NIS methodology only provides sufficient information to conclude that they were not among the children investigated by CPS (or that they were merely listed as uninvolved children during a CPS investigation of their family). *The information gathered for the study does not address whether a child was not investigated by CPS because no one reported the child as a suspected victim or because CPS screened out the child's case prior to investigation.* For this reason, this report does *not* use the phrase "reporting rate," but instead refers simply to "CPS investigation" of the children.[10] This ambiguity was the motivation for two of the special NIS–3 substudies, the results of which are described in independent reports, as mentioned in the concluding chapter.

### 7.2.1 CPS Investigation of Children Maltreated under the Harm Standard

Figure 7–8 graphs the overall incidence of children whose maltreatment fit the definitions under the Harm Standard in each of the three national incidence studies, showing the percentage of children in each study whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS.

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[8] Note that this classification rule was actually slightly more lenient than the rule used in the NIS–2. In order to classify a child as having received CPS investigation for maltreatment the NIS–2, it was necessary for a child to have been clearly an alleged or indicated victim or for the CPS investigation record to have described his or her countable maltreatment. In the NIS–3, in order to be classified as having received CPS investigation, whether or not a child who was listed in a CPS investigation was an indicated victim could be unknown. This slightly more lenient approach was taken because it made a slightly greater difference here in the NIS–3, where there were more cases missing information about indicated victim status, whereas its effect in the NIS–2 would have been so small as to be undetectable.

[9] Also note that this rule is broadly inclusive in that it classifies a child as having received CPS attention for countable maltreatment even in those cases where the investigation focused on a different maltreatment allegation and even when the maltreatment the investigation had focused on was concluded to be unfounded.

[10] The NIS–1 report did use the phrase "reporting rate," but that is misleading for the reasons discussed here. The NIS–2 reports attempted to clarify this by variously referring to "CPS awareness" of the children, or to children who were "officially known to CPS," but those labels could have been misinterpreted to refer to all reported cases, whether or not CPS accepted them for investigation. The current study preferred the phrase "CPS investigation" because it more clearly indicates that screened-out cases are not included, despite the fact that CPS had been made aware of them to some extent. Readers should note that, except for the slightly greater leniency of the NIS–3 approach as described in footnote 8, all of these phrases operationally mean the same thing in that they all refer to the conclusion of the same classification rule, described above (i.e., including alleged victims, indicated victims, and those children whose countable maltreatment was described in the CPS investigation record).

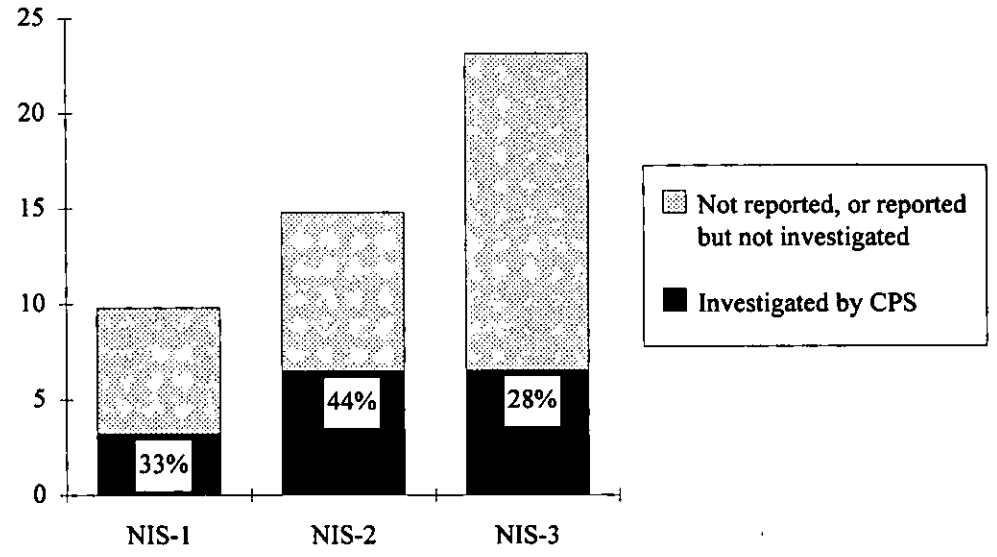


Figure 7–8. Changes across the Three National Incidence Studies in the Percentage of Children Who Fit the Harm Standard of Those Investigated by CPS.

The percentage of children maltreated under the Harm Standard who receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment has decreased from its level of 44 percent in the NIS–2 to 28 percent in the NIS–3. This decrease is statistically significant. Note that the subtotal of children who are investigated (given in this graph in terms of the total number per 1,000 children in the U.S. population) has remained at its NIS–2 level, while the total population of children who fit the Harm Standard has increased. Also, despite the fact that CPS now investigates considerably more of these children than it did in the NIS–1, the percentage of all children included under the Harm Standard who received CPS investigation has declined to below the NIS–1 level of 33 percent (although the difference between the NIS–1 and NIS–3 percentages is not statistically significant). Clearly, CPS investigation has not kept up with the rise in the total population of children who are maltreated as defined by the Harm Standard. Again, this could be due to nonreporting by sources who encounter these children or instead due to CPS screening out reports on these children without investigation. Both the low penetration of CPS investigation into this population and the enigma it represents to policymakers and service providers are issues that will be discussed in this chapter's conclusion.

**CPS Investigation Rates by Nature and Severity of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard**

Figure 7–9 subdivides the NIS–3 children who count under the Harm Standard based on the nature and severity of their maltreatment. As with the maltreatment tabulations and graphs given in earlier chapters, children are included in every maltreatment category that applied to them, but they are classified into only one level of harm, based on their most serious injury from their countable maltreatment. The figure excludes fatalities because their numbers were too small to be discerned on the graph. The absolute sizes of the bars in the figure reflect the total number of children per 1,000 who experienced the maltreatment or injury noted. The percentage written on the right end of each bar indicates the percentage of the bar that is situated on the right side of the graph, reflecting the percentage of children in the category whose maltreatment received attention in a CPS investigation.

In understanding this figure, readers should bear in mind that some of these children were maltreated in multiple ways and that these children are included in every category that applied to them. At the same time, the classification of children as having received CPS investigative attention was a general, child-level conclusion, not specifically associated with any one category of the maltreatment they experienced. This means, for example, that educationally neglected children who are classified as having had their maltreatment investigated by CPS may have been multiply maltreated, and the CPS investigation may have, in fact, focused on one of the other types of maltreatment they suffered, while ignoring their educational neglect. Thus, the extent of CPS investigation for each maltreatment type has been generously measured here, including children who received CPS investigation for something other than the specific maltreatment in question.[11]

Nevertheless, despite this overstatement of CPS investigation, it is notably low throughout all categories shown in the graph. As described above, among all children who experienced maltreatment under the Harm Standard, 28 percent had their maltreatment reported to and investigated by CPS. In *none* of the categories of maltreatment or levels of harm shown in Figure 7–9 had a majority of the children received CPS investigation. The only category in which a majority of the children did have their maltreatment investigated by CPS were the fatalities (not shown), where 76 percent of children maltreated as defined by the Harm Standard had their maltreatment reported to and investigated

[11] Moreover, the maltreatment that was the focus of the CPS investigation need not ever have been countable under the study definitions.

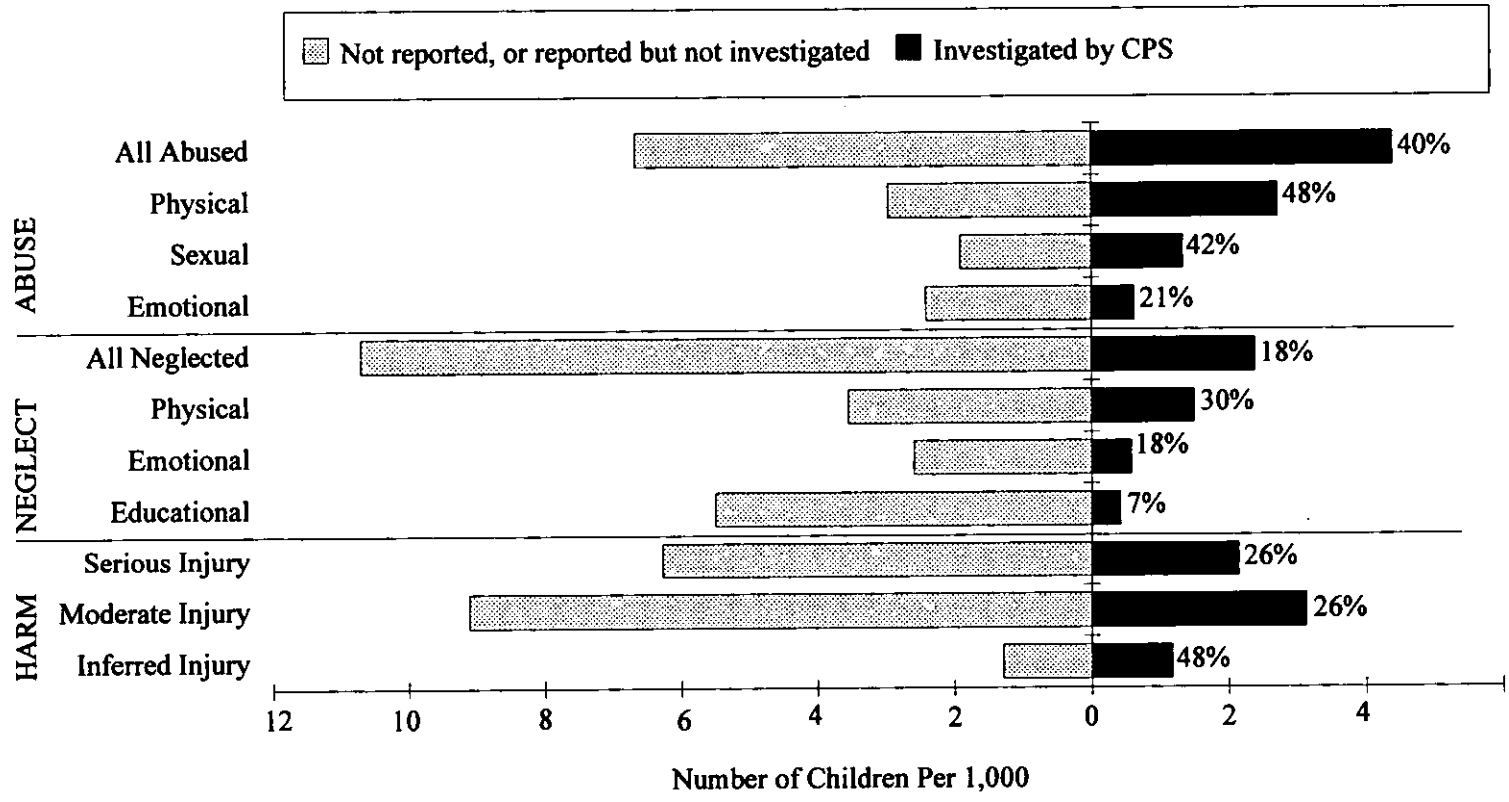


Figure 7–9. CPS Investigation of Children with Different Types of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard and Different Degrees of Injury or Harm.

by CPS. Those children who died as a result of Harm Standard maltreatment whom CPS did not investigate were essentially of three types. One type were children whose fatalities were not referred for CPS investigation by the police because there were no other children in their households. Since there were no remaining children left to protect, their deaths were treated solely as police matters, and they did not enter the CPS investigation caseload. A second type were cases where the police did not choose to involve the CPS investigation process, even though there were other surviving children in the household. In these cases, the remaining children were provided protective services through foster-care placement made directly by dependency court. The third type were children whose families were already involved with child welfare services in some manner. Some had had previous substantiated reports of maltreatment and were receiving in-home services at the time of the fatality. For all three types, there was no CPS investigation of the dead child's maltreatment. Together, the three types were 24 percent of the fatalities due to maltreatment that counted under the Harm Standard in the NIS–3 estimates.

Returning to Figure 7–9, it is not surprising to see that a larger percentage of the abused children than of the neglected children received CPS investigation (40% versus 18%). Also not surprising is the relatively low percentage of emotionally abused children whose maltreatment was investigated (21%) in comparison to those who had been physically abused (48%) or sexually abused (42%), and the extremely low percentage of educationally neglected children who received CPS investigation (7%).

It is remarkable, however, that only one-fourth of the children who were seriously harmed by maltreatment had their maltreatment investigated by CPS. Further analyses may help to clarify what type of maltreatment these children suffered and what sources recognized them as maltreated—factors that might contribute to their unreasonably low rate of CPS investigation.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in Rates of CPS Investigation for Different Categories of Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.** Table 7–3 compares the percentages of different maltreatment and outcome categories that were investigated by CPS in the NIS–3 with the analogous percentages found in the NIS–2. As noted above, the percentage who received CPS investigation of all children who counted under the Harm Standard was significantly lower in the NIS–3 (where it was 28%) than the NIS–2 level of 44 percent. Table 7–3 indicates that the decline in percentages of CPS investigations occurred primarily among children who were abused. In the NIS–2, CPS investigated a

Table 7–3. Changes since the NIS–2 in Percentages of Children Receiving CPS Investigation, by Maltreatment under the Harm Standard.

| Harm Standard Maltreatment Category | NIS–3 1993 | NIS–2 1986 | Significance of Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 28% | 44% | * |
| ABUSE: | | | |
| All Abuse | 40% | 60% | * |
| Physical Abuse | *48%* | *62%* | m |
| Sexual Abuse | *42%* | *72%* | * |
| Emotional Abuse | *21%* | *44%* | * |
| NEGLECT: | | | |
| All Neglect | 18% | 24% | ns |
| Physical Neglect | *30%* | *38%* | ns |
| Emotional Neglect | *18%* | *24%* | ns |
| Educational Neglect | *7%* | *15%* | m |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | |
| Fatal | *76%* | *70%* | ns |
| Serious | *26%* | *38%* | tr |
| Moderate | *26%* | *40%* | * |
| Inferred | *48%* | *73%* | m |

* The difference is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.

m The difference is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

tr The difference is not marginal, but there is a statistical trend ($.12>p>.10$).

ns The difference is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.12$).

clear majority (60%) of the children who had suffered some form of abuse under the Harm Standard, whereas at the time of the NIS–3, only 40 percent of the children who suffered abuse under the Harm Standard were receiving CPS investigation of their maltreatment. Physically abused children were marginally less likely to receive CPS investigation at the time of the NIS–3 (48%) than at the time of the NIS–2 (62%). CPS investigations of sexual abuse defined under the Harm Standard declined significantly from 72 percent in the NIS–2 to 42 percent in the NIS–3. Children who had experienced emotional abuse under the Harm Standard were also significantly less likely to receive CPS investigation

of their maltreatment in the NIS–3 (where 21% were investigated) than in the NIS–2 (where 44% had been investigated).

The only category of outcome severity where the decline in the percentage of CPS investigation was not statistically noteworthy was fatalities: children who had died as a result of maltreatment that counted under the Harm Standard. Table 7–3 shows that the decrease in the percentage of seriously injured children who were investigated by CPS is a statistical "trend," having just missed the cutoff that has been used throughout this report for being classified as "marginal." As seen earlier in Chapter 3, the incidence rate for seriously injured children essentially quadrupled since the NIS–2, rising from an estimated 2.2 children per 1,000 to 8.4 children per 1,000 in the intervening 7-year period. During the same interval, CPS investigation of seriously injured children also rose, from 0.9 children per 1,000 to 2.1 children per 1,000. However, the rise in CPS investigation was not sufficient to keep pace with the rise in the overall rate, so the percentage of seriously injured children who received CPS investigation of their serious injuries actually fell during this time interval, from 38 percent at the time of the NIS–2 to 26 percent when the NIS–3 was conducted. The decline in the percentage of moderately injured children, from 40 percent in the NIS–2 to 26 percent in the NIS–3 was statistically significant. The decrease in the percentage of children with inferred injuries under the Harm Standard definitions was substantial, though statistically only marginal, from 73 percent to 48 percent.

### CPS Investigation Rates by the Source Recognizing Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Children who qualified as abused or neglected as defined by the Harm Standard were classified according to the source that recognized their maltreatment, according to the system described in the previous section of this chapter. Table 7–4 provides the totals and rates per 1,000 in the population of children who fit the Harm Standard according to their recognition source and according to whether or not CPS investigated their maltreatment. The columns entitled "Investigated by CPS" and "Not Investigated by CPS" total to the entry given earlier in Table 7–1 for the total recognized in the NIS–3. Percentages of children countable by the Harm Standard whose maltreatment received attention during CPS investigations were computed for each recognition source. These are given in the last column in Table 7–4.

Table 7–4. CPS Investigation of NIS–3 (1993) Children Who Fit the Harm Standard, According to Their Recognition Source.

| Source Recognizing the Maltreatment | Investigated by CPS | | Not Investigated by CPS | | Percent Investigated by CPS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| *Investigatory Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Juvenile Probation | 6,300 | *0.1* | 30,300 | *0.5* | 17% |
| Police/Sheriff | 50,300 | *0.7* | 61,100 | *0.9* | 45% |
| Public Health | 700 | *0.0* | 26,900 | *0.4* | 3% |
| Investigatory Agency Subtotal: | 57,300 | *0.9* | 118,300 | *1.8* | 33% |
| *Other Study Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Hospitals | 45,600 | *0.7* | 67,600 | *1.0* | 40% |
| Schools | 149,900 | *2.2* | 770,000 | *11.5* | 16% |
| Day-care Centers | 2,400 | *0.0* | 57,300 | *0.9* | 4% |
| Mental Health Agencies | 19,700 | *0.3* | 31,200 | *0.5* | 39% |
| Social Service Agencies | 24,100 | *0.4* | 71,900 | *1.1* | 25% |
| Other Study Agency Subtotal: | 241,700 | *3.6* | 998,100 | *14.9* | 19% |
| All Study Non-CPS Sources: | 299,000 | *4.5* | 1,116,500 | *16.6* | 21% |
| *Other Sources (only through CPS):* | | | | | |
| DSS/Welfare Department | 15,000 | *0.2* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| Other Professional or Agency | 7,000 | *0.1* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| All Other Sources | 116,400 | *1.7* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| Other (CPS-only ) Subtotal: | 138,400 | *2.1* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 437,300 | *6.5* | 1,116,500 | *16.6* | 28% |

Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100; estimated rates are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Figure 7–10 depicts the pattern of CPS investigation rates across the three major categories of recognition sources given in Table 7–4. Across the group of children who were recognized as maltreated in investigatory agencies (juvenile probation, police/sheriffs' departments, public health departments), one-third of the children had their maltreatment investigated by CPS. These agencies have their own investigatory responsibilities that must sometimes be coordinated with those of CPS, a factor that may dispose them to maintain a closer relationship with CPS in general. Despite this, it is noteworthy that two-thirds of the children are not investigated by CPS among those whom they recognize as maltreated, whom they submit to the NIS because of this, and who are countable under the Harm Standard.

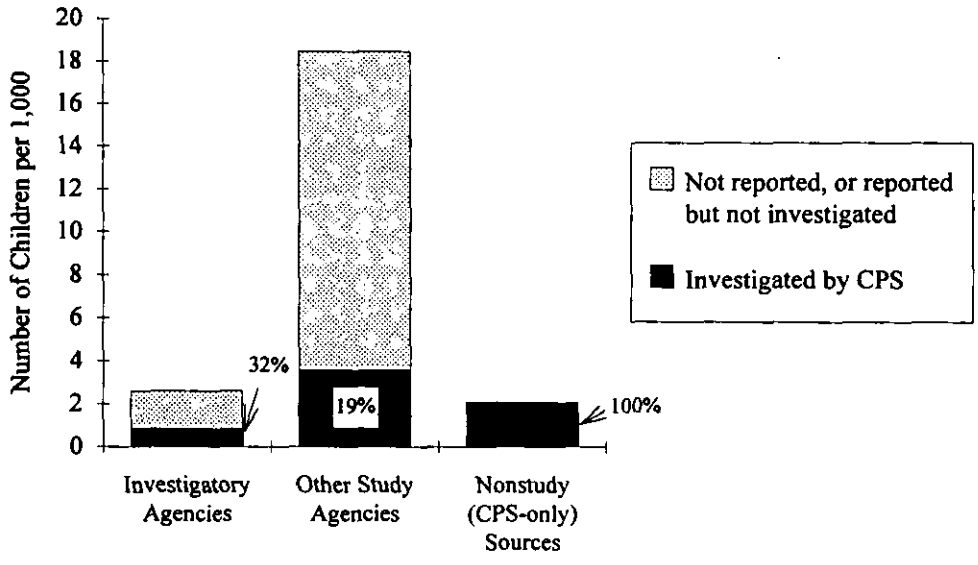


Figure 7–10. Percentages Investigated by CPS of Those Children Who Fit the Harm Standard, Classified by the Main Category of Their Recognition Source.

The second main category, termed "Other Study Agencies," comprises noninvestigatory agencies that are represented among the NIS sentinels (hospitals, schools, day-care centers, mental health agencies, and voluntary social service agencies). Less than one-fifth (19%) of the children whom they recognized as maltreated and who fit the Harm Standard received CPS investigation of their maltreatment. These services are, as a group, the predominant contributor to the recognition of children

counted in the Harm Standard in general, and this group also saw the vast majority of those who did not receive investigation by CPS, a point that will be revisited below.

Finally, the children recognized by "Nonstudy (CPS-only) Sources" universally received CPS attention for their maltreatment. This is true *by definition.* Children who were recognized by these sources could be found only in the CPS sector of the NIS–3 data, because the NIS did not recruit any special non-CPS sentinels to represent these sources. Thus, these sources could only contribute maltreated children to the study who were investigated by CPS. Note that the rates of CPS investigation presented in the preceding sections all included the children seen by these "CPS-only" sources. Because of that, these rates all are inflated so they overstate the rate of CPS investigation to some degree. Also note that a further implication of this is that the NIS estimates of the incidence of abused and neglected children in the United States are underestimates. There is yet another part of the "iceberg" of children not investigated by CPS who are not addressed in the NIS, and therefore not represented in any of the tables or figures presented in this report (i.e., children who are countable under the study definitions and are recognized by professionals in private practice or by the general public but who are *not* investigated by CPS).

Returning to Table 7–4 for more detailed information, observe the CPS investigation rates for children recognized by the different sources within the investigatory agency sector—juvenile probation, police/sheriffs', and public health departments. One of the surprising features is how low the percentages of CPS investigation were for children fitting the Harm Standard who were recognized by juvenile probation and public health departments (17% and 3%, respectively). It was only among children recognized at law enforcement agencies (municipal police and sheriffs' departments) that a substantial minority (45%) received official attention from CPS for their maltreatment.

The second section of Table 7–4 shows the percentages of children who received CPS investigation from among the total set of those who were recognized as maltreated at noninvestigatory agencies included in the NIS sentinel design whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard definition. Hospitals and mental health agencies had the highest rates of CPS investigation for the children they recognized (40% and 39%, respectively), but note that even in these source categories, only minorities of children received CPS investigative attention. Social service agencies ranked third in this sector, with one-fourth of the children maltreated under the Harm Standard whom they recognized investigated by CPS. Children who counted under the Harm Standard and who were recognized by staff at schools were very unlikely to receive CPS attention for their maltreatment (only 16% did so). However, given that

schools make such a substantial contribution to the recognition of children whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard, even this very low percentage reflected the largest group of CPS-investigated children from any single recognition source. (See below.) Finally, day-care centers had by far the lowest rate of CPS investigation for the children they recognized, only four percent of whom received CPS attention for their maltreatment.

Figure 7–11 shows the relative contributions of the different recognition sources to the set of children countable under the Harm Standard whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS. This is a graph of the breakdown shown earlier in Table 7–4 in the column entitled "Investigated by CPS." In contrast, Figure 7–12 shows the relative prevalence of children recognized by different sources among those who did not have their maltreatment investigated by CPS (i.e., the "Not Investigated by CPS" column in Table 7–4).

The predominance of schools as a recognition source of children countable under the Harm Standard is seen in both figures. Children recognized at schools account for about one-third of these countable children whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS, and more than two-thirds of these children who did not receive CPS investigation. The general public was a relatively large contributor to children who were investigated at CPS, accounting for 27 percent of the children countable by the Harm Standard who received that attention. Law enforcement agencies and hospitals contributed 12 percent and 10 percent, respectively, to the group whom CPS investigated. Social service and mental health agencies were the recognition sources for six percent and five percent of these children, respectively. Other recognition sources contributed three percent or less to the total of children countable under the Harm Standard who received CPS attention.

Considering the overwhelming predominance of schools as the source of recognition for children whose maltreatment was not investigated by CPS, contributions from all other sources appear meager by comparison. Hospitals and social service agencies each accounted for six percent of this group, with law enforcement agencies and day-care centers each recognizing five percent of these children. Other sources recognized three percent or less of the children in this category.

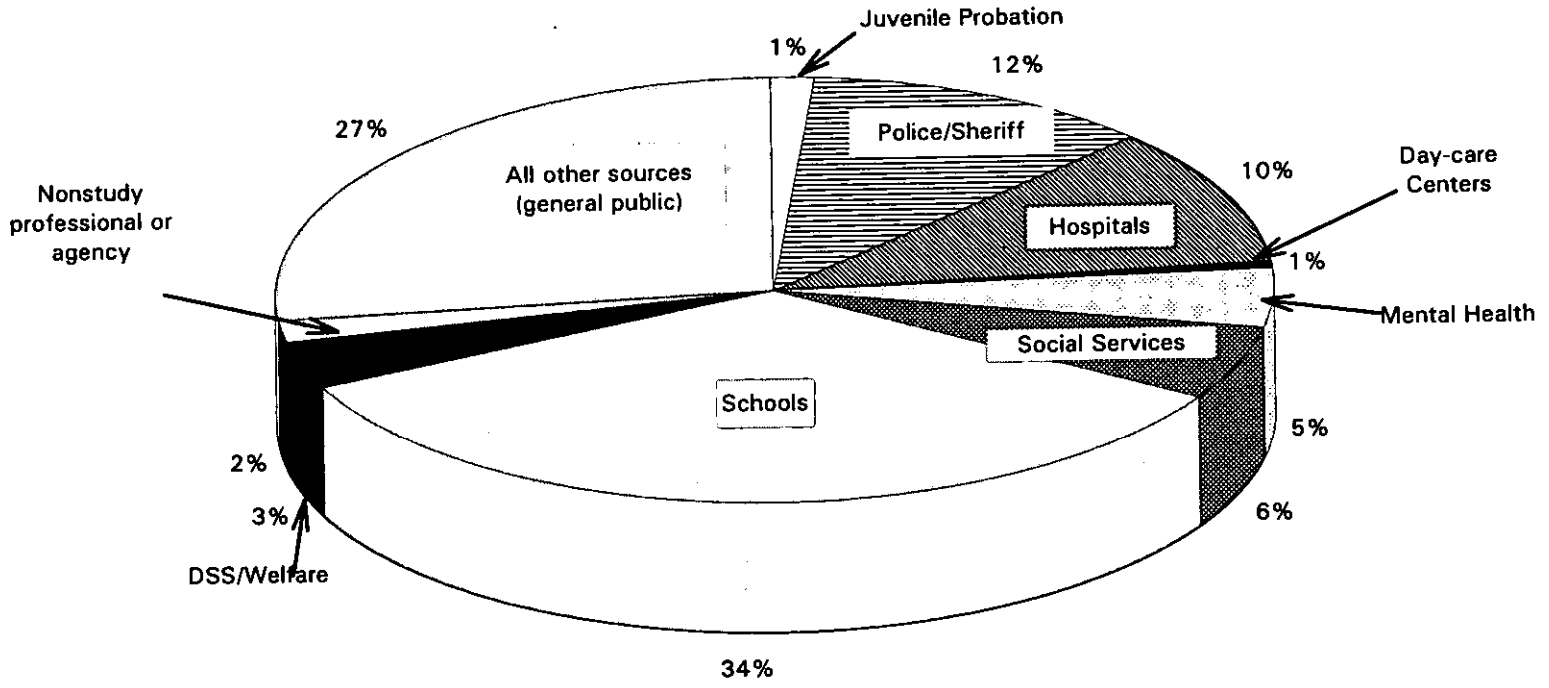


Figure 7–11. Recognition Sources of Children Who Were Maltreated under the Harm Standard Definitions Who Received CPS Investigation.

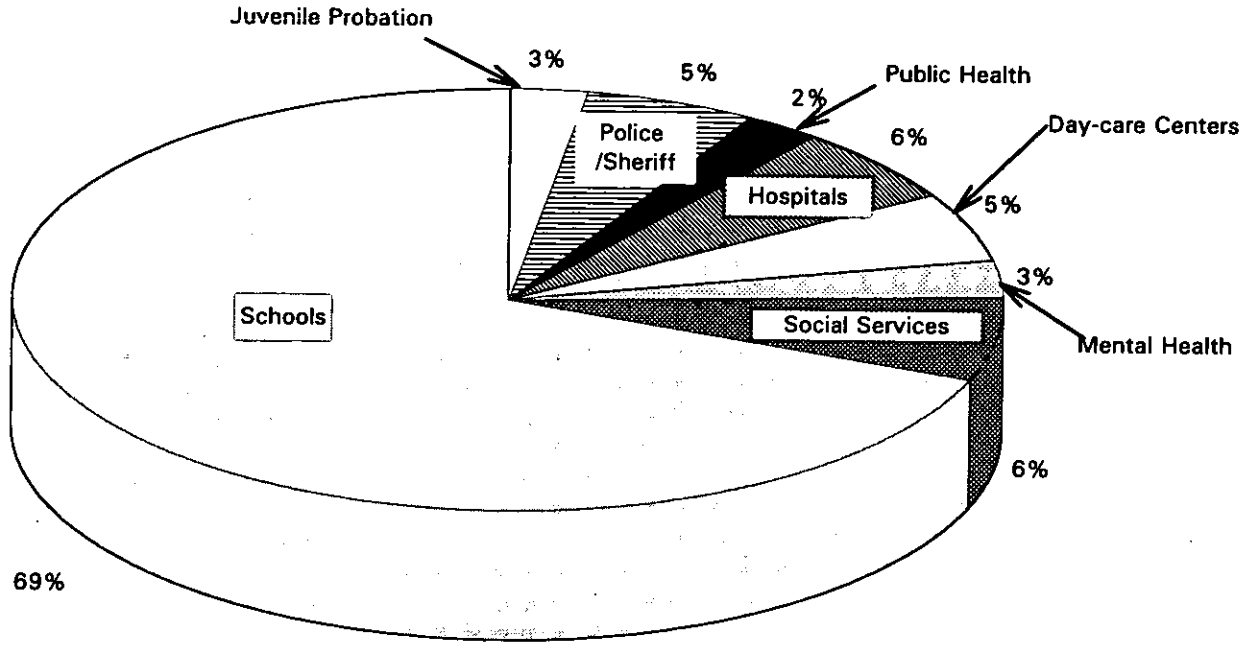


Figure 7-12. Recognition Sources of Children Who Were Maltreated under the Harm Standard Definitions Who Were Not Investigated by CPS.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in Rates of CPS Investigation of Children Who Fit the Harm Standard Recognized by Different Sources.** The percentages of children recognized by each source in the NIS–3 who fit the Harm Standard and were investigated by CPS were compared to the analogous percentages in the NIS–2 and the NIS–1. Note that these are the same NIS–3 percentages that are given above in Table 7–4.

Table 7–5 indicates that the significant drop since the NIS–2 in CPS investigation rates for overall maltreatment under the Harm Standard held true for both the main categories of "Investigatory Agencies" and "Other Study Agencies."[11] In the NIS–2, 52 percent of children who were recognized by investigatory agencies and fit the Harm Standard had their maltreatment investigated by CPS, whereas only 33 percent of this sector received CPS investigation in the NIS–3. The noninvestigatory agencies represented by NIS sentinels also evidenced a significant reduction in rates of CPS investigation, from 35 percent in the NIS–2 to 21 percent in the NIS–3.

Within these main agency categories, there was a decline in the rates of CPS investigation for the children recognized at every specific type of agency, but the decline was statistically reliable in only two specific agency types: police/sheriffs' departments and hospitals. In the NIS–2, children maltreated under the Harm Standard who were recognized at law enforcement agencies were very likely to receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment (78%), whereas in the NIS–3, only a minority of these children received CPS investigation (45%). The same was true for hospitals, where the CPS investigation rate dropped precipitously from 100 percent in the NIS–2 to 40 percent in the NIS–3.

The last column in Table 7–5 compares the NIS–3 rates of CPS investigation of the children countable under the Harm Standard with the analogous rates found in the NIS–1. One of the remarkable features of these comparisons is how little difference there is between the NIS–3 and the NIS–1 percentages. Statistically noteworthy differences emerged only for children recognized by public health departments and by hospitals—and in both cases the NIS–3 rates were *lower* than those in the NIS–1.

[11] Note that children recognized by sources in the "Other (CPS-only)" category are, by definition, always 100-percent investigated by CPS, as discussed earlier.

### 7.2.2 CPS Investigation of Children Maltreated under the Endangerment Standard

Figure 7–13 presents the overall incidence of children who were maltreated under the Endangerment Standard in the NIS–2 and the NIS–3, indicating the percentages of these children who had their maltreatment investigated by CPS.

Table 7–5. Changes since the NIS–2 and NIS–1 in Percentages of Children Countable under the Harm Standard Who Received CPS Investigation, by Their Recognition Source.

| Source Recognizing the Maltreatment | NIS–3 1993 | NIS–2 1986 | | NIS–1 1980 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Investigatory Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Juvenile Probation | 17% | 23% | ns | 24% | ns |
| Police/Sheriff | 45% | 78% | * | 42% | ns |
| Public Health | 3% | 26% | ns | 26% | * |
| Investigatory Agency Subtotal: | 33% | 52% | * | 33% | ns |
| *Other Study Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Hospitals | 40% | 100% | * | 56% | m |
| Schools | 16% | 26% | ns | 13% | ns |
| Day-care Centers | 4% | 17% | ns | | |
| Mental Health Agencies | 39% | 82% | ns | 31% | ns |
| Social Service Agencies | 25% | 29% | ns | 31% | ns |
| Other Study Agency Subtotal: | 19% | 31% | m | 19% | ns |
| All Study Non-CPS Sources: | 21% | 35% | * | 21% | ns |
| Other (CPS-only ) Subtotal: | 100% | 100% | ns | 100% | ns |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 28% | 44% | * | 33% | ns |

* The NIS–3 estimate differs significantly from this earlier estimate (i.e., $p<.05$).
m The NIS–3 estimate differs marginally from this earlier estimate (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).
ns The difference between this and the NIS–3 estimate is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.10$).

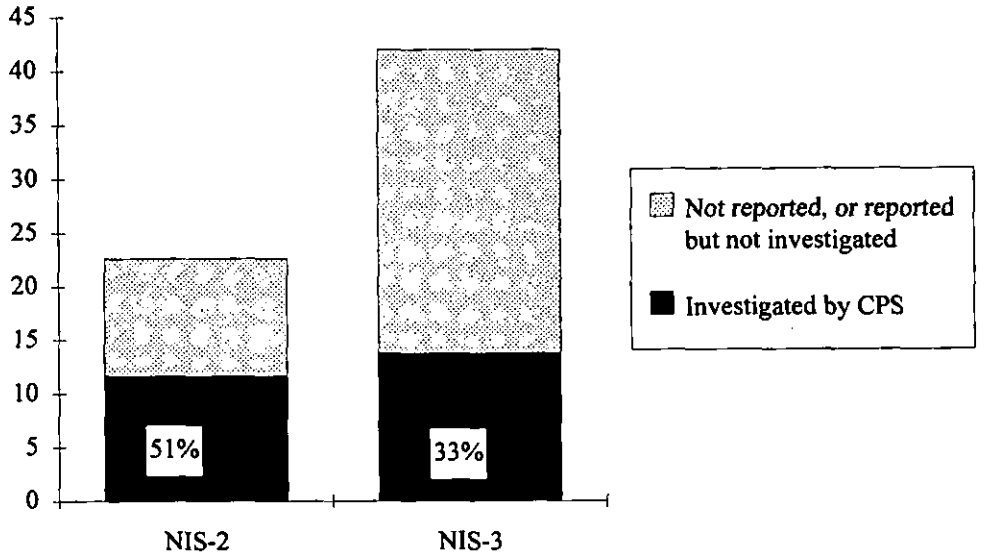


Figure 7–13. Changes from the NIS–2 to the NIS–3 in the Percentage of Children Investigated by CPS of Those Who Fit the Endangerment Standard.

The incidence of children whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS actually rose slightly, from 11.6 children per 1,000 to 13.7 children per 1,000, a statistically marginal increase. However, that increase was not sufficient to address the concomitant rise in the total numbers of children who were countable under the Endangerment Standard, so the percentage investigated in fact decreased. The decrease from 51 percent investigated in the NIS–2 to 33 percent investigated in the NIS–3 is statistically significant.

## CPS Investigation Rates by Nature and Severity of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

The children who experienced maltreatment at the time of the NIS–3 under the Endangerment Standard are charted in Figure 7–14 according to the nature and severity of their maltreatment and according to whether CPS investigated their maltreatment. As was the case with

Figure 7–9 above, fatalities are excluded here because the scale of this graph is too large to convey the size and component makeup of this group. Similar to Figure 7–9, the sizes of the bars in Figure 7–14 reflect the total number of children per 1,000 who experienced the maltreatment or injury in question, and the percentage written at the right end of each bar indicates the percentage of children in the category whose maltreatment received CPS investigation.

Again, one of the most striking aspects of the findings is the uniformly low rate of CPS investigation for all the abused and neglected children. Only among fatalities (excluded from the graph for the reason given above) did CPS investigate a majority of the children (77%). In each category graphed in Figure 7–14, CPS investigated the maltreatment of only a minority of the children.

As was the case with the Harm Standard, for the Endangerment Standard, the rate of investigation of the abused children is higher than that of the neglected children (39% versus 28%). Within the abused sector, children who experienced physical or sexual abuse were more likely to have their maltreatment investigated (45% and 44%, respectively) than those who were emotionally abused (28%). Among neglected children, those who were physically neglected were more likely to receive CPS investigation (35%) than those who were emotionally neglected (21%). The criteria for educational neglect is the same under both definitional standards, so the educationally neglected children graphed in Figure 7–14 are identical to those graphed earlier in Figure 7–9. Note that, in comparison to all the maltreated children under both standards, the educationally neglected children are the least likely to receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment (only 7% were among children whose maltreatment received CPS attention).

As described in Chapter 3, 99 percent of the seriously injured children under the Endangerment Standard were also countable as seriously injured under the Harm Standard. Thus, the discussion above concerning the low rates of CPS investigation for seriously injured children under the Harm Standard is applicable here as well and will not be repeated in this section.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in Rates of CPS Investigation for Different Categories of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.** In Table 7–6, the NIS–3 CPS investigation rates for different maltreatment categories are compared with those found in the earlier NIS–2. The first row in this table records the significant drop observed in Figure 7–13 above, from 51 percent to 33 percent, in the overall maltreatment category.

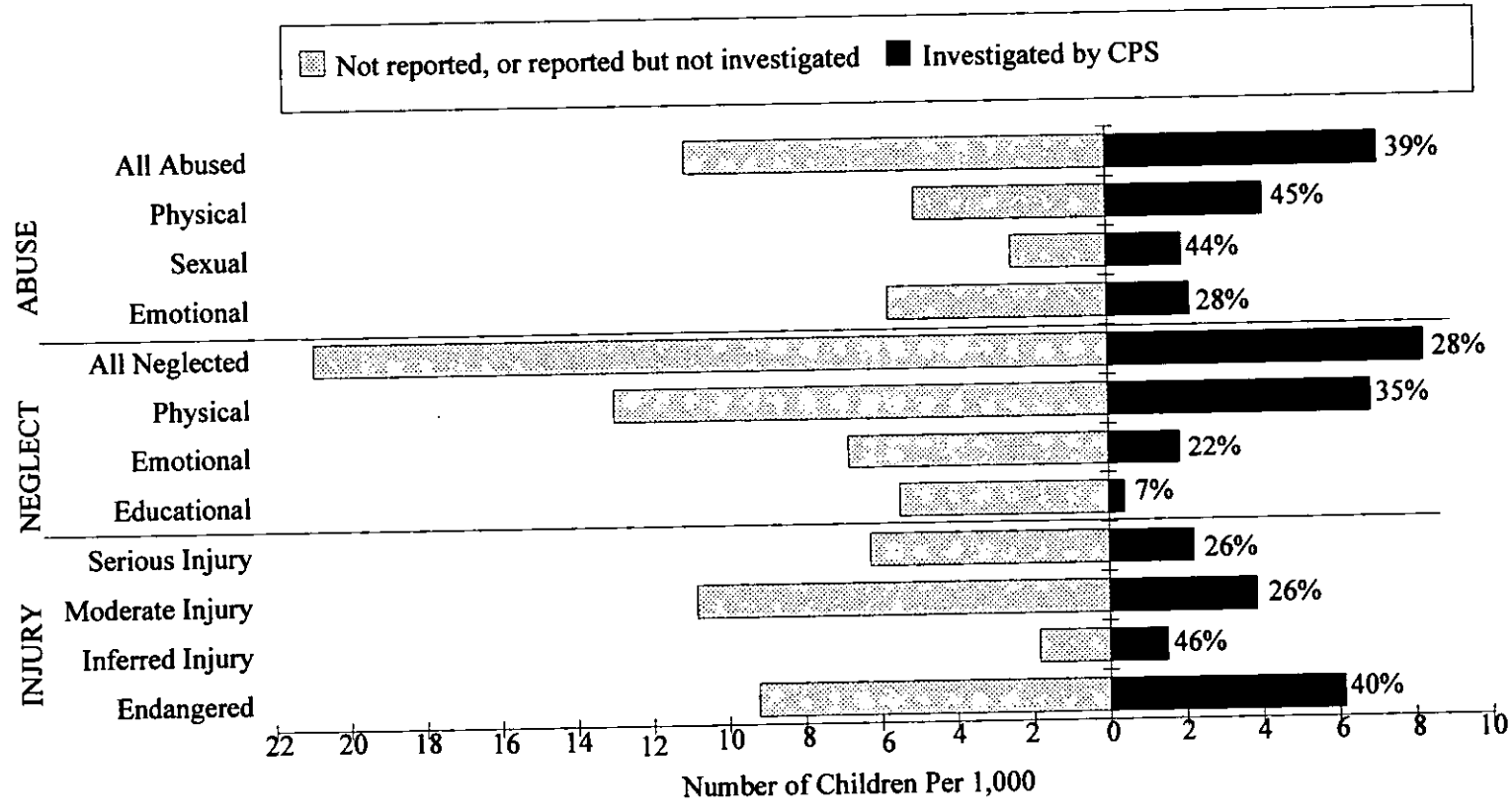


Figure 7–14. CPS Investigation of Children With Different Types of Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard and Different Degrees of Injury or Harm.

Table 7–6. Changes since the NIS–2 in Percentages of Children Receiving CPS Investigation by Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard.

| Endangerment Standard Maltreatment Category | NIS–3 1993 | NIS–2 1986 | Significance of Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| ALL MALTREATMENT | *33%* | *51%* | * |
| ABUSE: | | | |
| All Abuse | *39%* | *63%* | * |
| Physical Abuse | *45%* | *64%* | * |
| Sexual Abuse | *44%* | *75%* | * |
| Emotional Abuse | *28%* | *51%* | * |
| NEGLECT: | | | |
| All Neglect | *28%* | *44%* | * |
| Physical Neglect | *35%* | *57%* | * |
| Emotional Neglect | *22%* | *40%* | * |
| Educational Neglect | *7%* | *15%* | m |
| SEVERITY OF INJURY: | | | |
| Fatal | *77%* | *70%* | ns |
| Serious | *26%* | *40%* | m |
| Moderate | *26%* | *43%* | * |
| Inferred | *46%* | *65%* | m |
| Endangered | *40%* | *79%* | * |

* The difference is significant at or below the $p<.05$ level.

m The difference is statistically marginal (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

ns The difference is neither significant nor marginal ($p>.12$).

In contrast to the situation observed above in connection with the Harm Standard, where the decline in rates of CPS investigation was predominantly in the abuse categories, CPS investigation rates of children whose maltreatment fit the Endangerment Standard have dropped in all maltreatment categories and all levels of outcome except fatalities. In the NIS–2, CPS investigated a majority of the children in all categories of abuse, but in the NIS–3, there was no category of abused children where the majority received CPS investigation of their maltreatment. The rate of investigation of physically abused

children dropped by 19 percent, the CPS investigation rate of sexually abused children dropped by 31 percent, and the investigation rate of emotional abuse declined by 23 percent from its NIS–2 level.

Neglect had been relatively less likely than abuse to receive CPS investigation at the time of the NIS–2, but even there, CPS investigation rates decreased in all categories. There was a 22-percent drop in CPS investigation of physically neglected children. Emotionally neglected children saw a decline of 18 percent in their investigation rate. Even educational neglect, which had been extremely low to begin with, dropped even lower by eight percent—a difference that proved statistically marginal despite its relatively small size.

The category of fatal injuries stands out as a notable exception, even exhibiting an increase in its rate of investigation over the interim between studies, albeit not a statistically reliable increase because of the comparative lack of precision on such small estimates. Nevertheless, CPS investigation of seriously injured children declined by 14 percent. Moderately injured children saw a drop in their investigation rate of 17 percent. The rate of CPS investigation dropped by 19 percent for children whose maltreatment was sufficiently severe to warrant the inference that they must have been injured in some manner, and children who had been endangered but not yet harmed by maltreatment experienced a 39-percent reduction in their CPS investigation rate.

### CPS Investigation Rates by the Source Recognizing Maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard

Children who were defined as maltreated using the Endangerment Standard were categorized by both their recognition source and by whether or not CPS had investigated their maltreatment. The estimated totals and rates per 1,000 for these children are given in Table 7–7, according to both the source who recognized their maltreatment and according to whether or not CPS investigated their maltreatment. The columns reflecting totals and rates investigated and not investigated by CPS sum to the total of all children recognized by the source, given earlier in Table 7–2.

The rates of CPS investigation for the three main categories of recognition sources are given in Figure 7–15. Considering children whose maltreatment was recognized by staff in investigatory agencies (juvenile probation, police/sheriffs' departments, public health departments), 42 percent received CPS investigation. Among children recognized by noninvestigatory agencies represented in the

Table 7–7. CPS Investigation of NIS–3 (1993) Children Who Fit the Endangerment Standard, According to Their Recognition Source.

| Source Recognizing the Maltreatment | Investigated by CPS | | Not Investigated by CPS | | Percent Investigated by CPS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | Total No. of Children | *Rate per 1,000 Children* | |
| *Investigatory Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Juvenile Probation | 12,000 | *0.2* | 41,300 | *0.6* | 23% |
| Police/Sheriff | 140,900 | *2.1* | 131,100 | *2.0* | 52% |
| Public Health | 2,000 | *0.0* | 45,100 | *0.7* | 4% |
| Investigatory Agency Subtotal: | 154,900 | *2.3* | 217,500 | *3.2* | 42% |
| *Other Study Agencies:* | | | | | |
| Hospitals | 83,900 | *1.2* | 97,400 | *1.5* | 46% |
| Schools | 246,100 | *3.7* | 1,264,600 | *18.8* | 16% |
| Day-care Centers | 3,800 | *0.1* | 134,300 | *2.0* | 3% |
| Mental Health Agencies | 40,600 | *0.6* | 57,200 | *0.9* | 42% |
| Social Service Agencies | 57,000 | *0.8* | 117,600 | *1.8* | 33% |
| Other Study Agency Subtotal: | 431,400 | *6.4* | 1,671,100 | *24.9* | 21% |
| All Study Non-CPS Sources: | 586,300 | *8.7* | 1,888,600 | *28.1* | 24% |
| *Other Sources (only through CPS):* | | | | | |
| DSS/Welfare Department | 32,200 | *0.5* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| Other Professional or Agency | 12,900 | *0.2* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| All Other Sources | 295,700 | *4.4* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| Other (CPS-only ) Subtotal: | 340,800 | *5.1* | 0 | *0.0* | 100% |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 927,000 | *13.8* | 1,888,600 | *28.1* | 33% |

Note: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest 100; estimated rates are rounded to the nearest tenth.

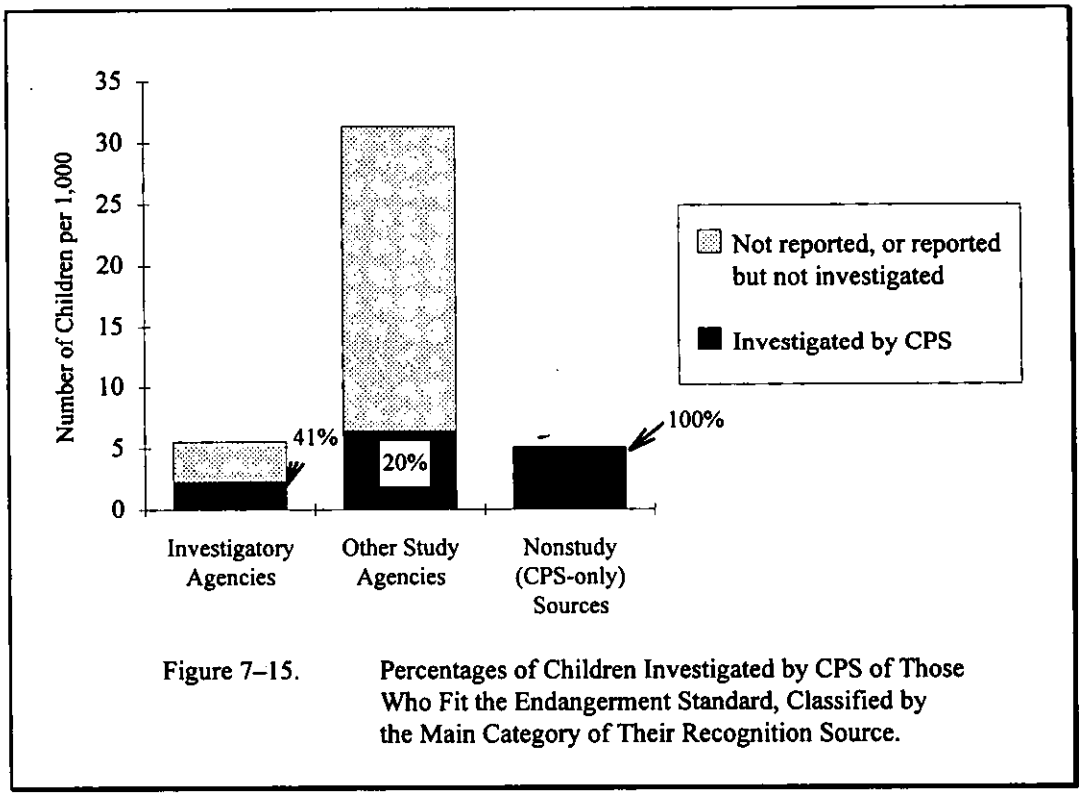


Figure 7–15. Percentages of Children Investigated by CPS of Those Who Fit the Endangerment Standard, Classified by the Main Category of Their Recognition Source.

NIS (hospitals, schools, day-care centers, mental health agencies, and voluntary social service agencies), just over one-fifth (21%) had their maltreatment investigated by CPS. As noted above, those children who came into the NIS through CPS-only sources were investigated by CPS by definition, so that group is shown with a 100-percent investigation rate. Also discussed above was the fact that the inclusion of this sector in the CPS investigation rates, overall and by maltreatment category, provides an overly positive picture of the extent of CPS investigation of countable maltreated children. Subsequent analyses should be undertaken with this group excluded, in order to provide a noninflated estimate of the rate of CPS investigation of the maltreated child population.

Among children maltreated under the Endangerment Standard who are recognized by sources in the investigatory agency sector, the group that comes to the attention of law enforcement agencies is the only group where the majority of the abused and neglected children (52%) receive CPS investigation for their maltreatment. Much lower rates of CPS investigation occur for those children recognized by juvenile probation and public health departments (23% and 4%, respectively), a fact that echoes the findings described above in connection with the Harm Standard children.

There is a relatively wide range in the rates of CPS investigation for those children whose maltreatment was recognized by sentinels at noninvestigatory study agencies, but in each category only a minority of the children received investigation. Mirroring the findings described above in connection with Harm Standard maltreatment, hospitals and mental health agencies had the highest rates of CPS investigation in this sector of recognition sources, 46 percent and 42 percent respectively, while social service agencies ranked third, with 33 percent of the children they recognized receiving CPS investigation of their maltreatment. Note that for children recognized at schools, exactly the same percentage received CPS investigation here (16%) as was observed for the children countable under the Harm Standard—despite the fact that school staff recognized 64 percent more children who counted under the Endangerment Standard than under the Harm Standard. Children recognized by day-care centers were very unlikely to receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment (only 3% here), another aspect of this pattern that follows the Harm Standard picture quite closely.

The relative contributions of the various recognition sources to the total of children countable by the Endangerment Standard who received CPS investigations are graphed in Figure 7–16. A comparable chart showing the recognition sources for those children who did *not* receive CPS investigation is given in Figure 7–17.

One of the most remarkable features of these figures is their close resemblance to Figures 7–11 and 7–12, given earlier, which depict the analagous distributions for children whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard. The crucial role of schools in recognizing both sets of children is evident. Children whose maltreatment was recognized at schools account for more than one-fourth (27%) of the children maltreated under the Endangerment Standard who are investigated by CPS and two-thirds (67%) of those who are not. The general public accounts for almost one-third (32%) of the set of children under the Endangerment Standard whose maltreatment received CPS attention. Law enforcement agencies and hospitals recognized 15 percent and 9 percent of the investigated children. Social service and mental health agencies were the sources of recognition for six percent and four percent, respectively, of the CPS-investigated children. Other types of sources (nonstudy professionals, other branches of the department of social services/welfare) each contributed only three percent or less to the children with CPS investigation.[13]

[13] Public health and day-care contribute so little that their percents would be indiscernible on this graph, so they have been excluded.

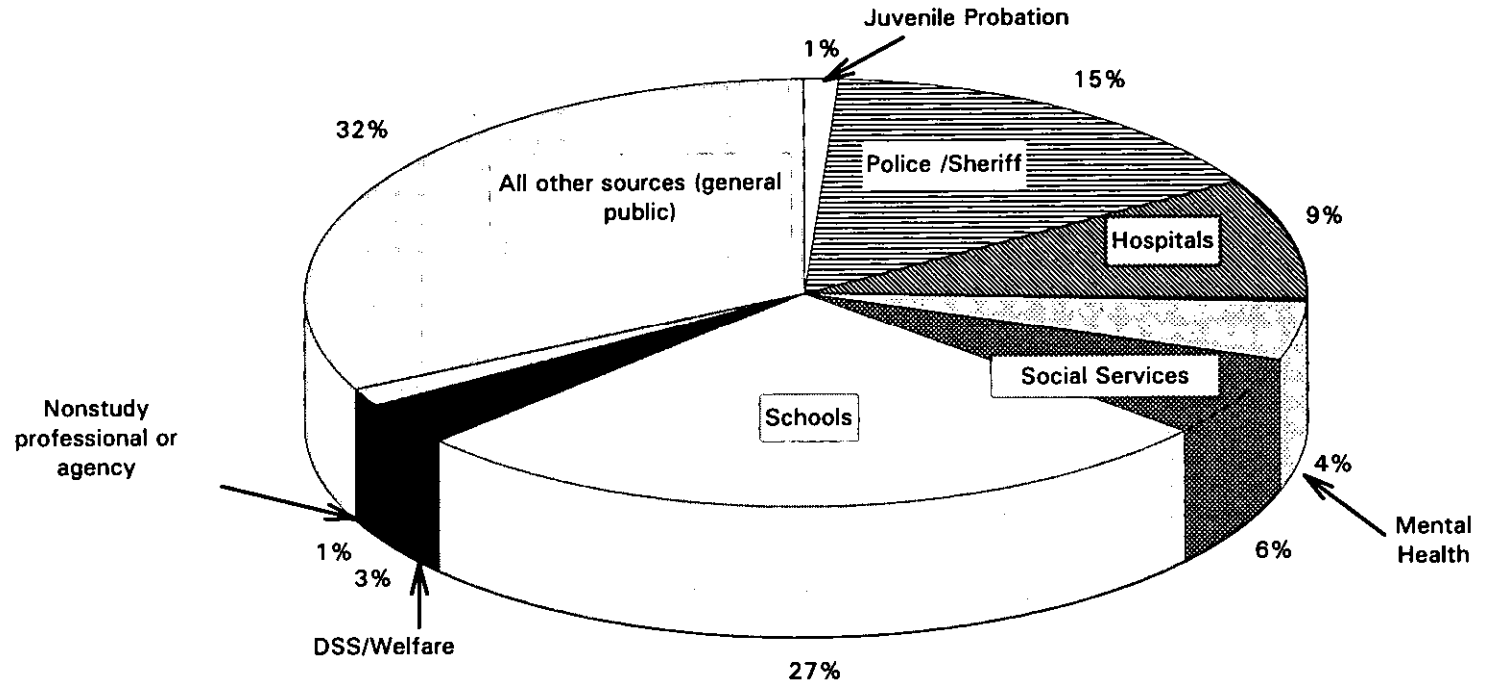


Figure 7–16. Recognition Sources of Children Who Were Maltreated under the Endangerment Standard Who Received CPS Investigation.

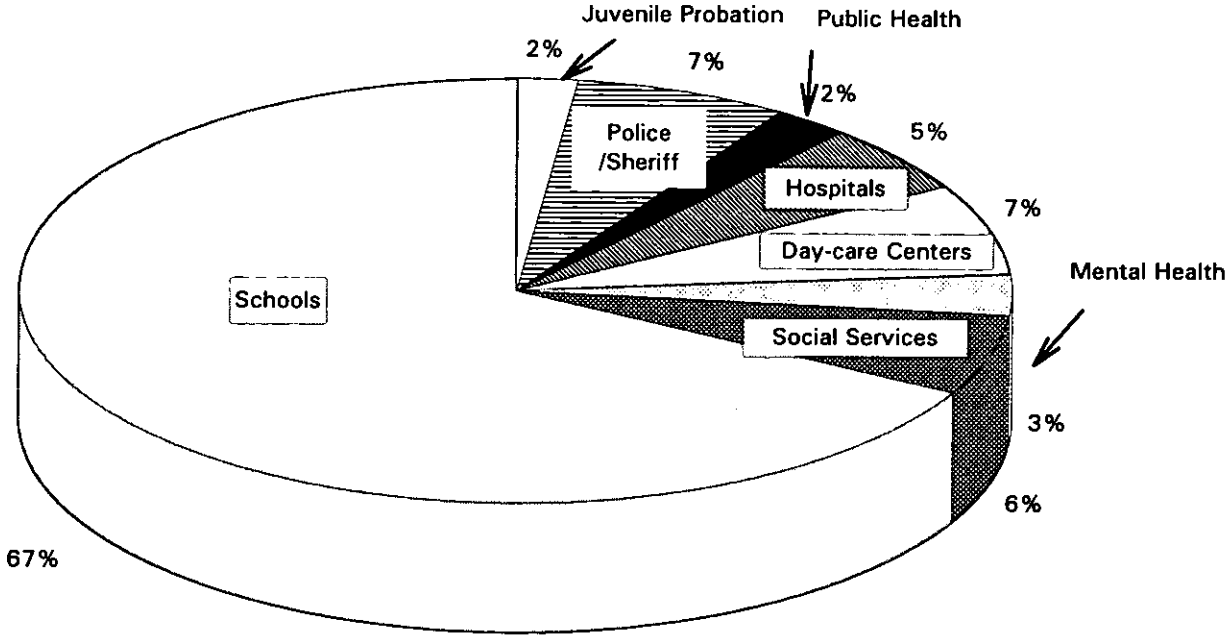


Figure 7-17. Recognition Sources of Children Who Were Maltreated under the Endangerment Standard Who Were Not Investigated by CPS.

In Figure 7–17, the involvement of community professionals at schools in recognizing the abused and neglected children dwarfs that of all other sources combined. School professionals see 67 percent of those children countable under the Endangerment Standard who do not receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment, which is more than twice the combined total of children seen by all other sources. Law enforcement and day-care center staff each account for seven percent of the uninvestigated children, voluntary social services provide six percent, and hospitals contribute five percent. Other sources (mental health agencies and juvenile probation departments) recognize three percent or less of the uninvestigated sector.

**Changes since the NIS–2 in Rates of CPS Investigation of Children Who Fit the Endangerment Standard Recognized by Different Sources**. In Table 7–8, the percentages of children maltreated under the Endangerment Standard recognized by each source whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS are compared to the corresponding percentages found in the earlier NIS–2. The overall patterns revealed in this table are very similar to those presented earlier in connection with children who were countable under the Harm Standard in Table 7–5. Decreases in the percentages of CPS investigation were found for all specific recognition sources, but only police and hospitals evidenced a significant drop in the percentage of CPS investigation of the children they recognized.

## 7.3 Key Findings and Implications of Patterns of Recognition and Investigation

One of the most striking features of the findings presented in this chapter is the overwhelming predominance of schools as a recognition source of maltreated children. School sentinels recognized 59 percent of the children who suffered maltreatment under the Harm Standard and 54 percent of the total counted under the Endangerment Standard. Other important sources of abused and neglected children were hospitals, police departments, social service agencies and the general public. For Endangerment Standard maltreatment, day-care centers also joined in the group of agency categories that encountered more than 100,000 abused and neglected children.

Table 7–8. Changes since the NIS–2 in Percentages of Children Countable under the Endangerment Standard Who Received CPS Investigation, by Their Recognition Source.

| Source Recognizing the Maltreatment | NIS–3 1993 | NIS–2 1986 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Investigatory Agencies:* | | | |
| Juvenile Probation | 23% | 26% | ns |
| Police/Sheriff | 52% | 96% | * |
| Public Health | 4% | 24% | ns |
| Investigatory Agency Subtotal: | 42% | 64% | * |
| *Other Study Agencies:* | | | |
| Hospitals | 46% | 100% | * |
| Schools | 16% | 25% | ns |
| Day-care Centers | 3% | 11% | ns |
| Mental Health Agencies | 42% | 80% | ns |
| Social Service Agencies | 33% | 35% | ns |
| Other Study Agency Subtotal: | 21% | 31% | ns |
| All Study Non-CPS Sources: | 24% | 38% | m |
| Other (CPS-only ) Subtotal: | 100% | 100% | ns |
| ALL MALTREATMENT | 33% | 51% | * |

* The NIS–2 and NIS–3 estimates differ significantly (i.e., $p<.05$).

m The NIS–2 and NIS–3 estimates differ marginally (i.e., $.10>p>.05$).

ns The NIS–2 and NIS–3 estimates do not differ ($p>.10$).

Changes since the earlier incidence studies in what are here called "recognition rates" may reflect changes in the rates at which maltreated children are identified or encountered. Using this terminology, one sees that hospitals more than tripled the rate at which they recognized maltreated children since the NIS–2. Mental health agencies quadrupled their rate of recognition of children whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard and increased their recognition fivefold of children who fit the Endangerment Standard. Schools more than doubled their rate of recognition of children countable by the Endangerment Standard, which included a 70-percent increase in their recognition rate for the sector who counted under the Harm Standard. Recognition of children maltreated under the Endangerment Standard more than doubled in law enforcement agencies. Interestingly, there were no changes in the contributions of sources that are only tapped in the NIS through their reports to CPS (e.g., private physicians, the general public). This last finding probably reflects the relatively stable level of CPS involvement with the abused and neglected children countable in the NIS over the time period, which is discussed below.

The relatively low percentages of abused and neglected children whose maltreatment receives CPS investigation are cause for serious concern. The NIS–3 found that only a minority of abused and neglected children, by either definitional standard, received CPS attention for their maltreatment. CPS investigated the maltreatment of only 28 percent of children who were countable under the Harm Standard and of only 33 percent of the children whose maltreatment fit the Endangerment Standard. Moreover, percentages reflected less than one-half of the maltreated children in all categories of maltreatment except fatalities, and very generally across nearly all sources of recognition (except that a majority of children who fit the Endangerment Standard and were recognized by police received CPS investigation). Especially remarkable was the finding that CPS investigation extended to only slightly more than one-fourth of the children who were seriously harmed or injured by abuse or neglect. As revisited in the next chapter, this fact raises questions about the need for better targeting, whether by reporters in referring children to CPS, by CPS screening practices in connection with reports, or by both.

Another important finding was that the percentages of maltreated children who receive CPS investigation have decreased significantly since the NIS–2. The percentage of children countable under the Harm Standard receiving CPS investigation dropped from 44 percent to 28 percent, while the percentage of CPS investigation of the children countable under the Endangerment Standard fell from 51 percent to 33 percent. The decline was significant in law enforcement agencies and hospitals, but it cut across every type of recognition source, and it affected abuse as defined by the Harm Standard, all

categories of maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard, and all levels of outcomes except fatalities. At the same time, the actual numbers of countable children investigated by CPS remained stable (when considering Harm Standard totals) or even slightly increased (considering the Endangerment Standard totals). Thus, as the total number of maltreated children has risen, it means that a larger percentage of these children have not had access to CPS investigation of their maltreatment. This picture suggests that the CPS system has reached its capacity to respond to the maltreated child population.

It is important to reiterate a point made earlier in this chapter about the limitations of the NIS information: the NIS data concerning CPS investigation speaks only to the end-result of a number of processes and do not reveal any details concerning these processes themselves. That is, the low percentages of CPS investigation might be due to low percentages of referral to CPS by the community professionals who recognize the children as abused or neglected, due to low percentages of acceptance for CPS investigation after a report is received, or due to some combination of both dynamics.

# 8. SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter summarizes the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–3). It gives a synopsis of the study's background and objectives, its design and methods, and its key findings and implications.

## 8.1 Background and Objectives

The National Incidence Study (NIS) is a congressionally mandated, periodic effort of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN). The first NIS (NIS–1), mandated under P.L. 93–247 (1974), was conducted in 1979 and 1980 and published in 1981. The second NIS (NIS–2), mandated under P.L. 98–457 (1984), was conducted in 1986 and 1987 and published in 1988. The third NIS (NIS–3) was mandated under P.L. 100–294 (as amended). The NIS–3 data were collected in 1993 and 1994, analyses conducted in 1995 and 1996, and these results published in 1996. A key objective of the NIS–3 was to provide updated estimates of the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the United States and measure changes in incidence from the earlier studies.

## 8.2 Design and Methods

The NIS–3 offers an important perspective on the scope of child abuse and neglect. The NIS includes children who were investigated by child protective service (CPS) agencies, but it also obtains data on children seen by community professionals who were not reported to CPS or who were screened out by CPS without investigation. This means that the NIS estimates provide a more comprehensive measure of the scope of child abuse and neglect known to community professionals, including both abused and neglected children who are in the official statistics and those who are not. The NIS follows a nationally representative design, which means that the estimates represent the numbers of abused and neglected children in the United States who come to the attention of community professionals. The fact that there have been three similar national incidence studies that have used comparable methods and definitions means that one can compare NIS–3 estimates with those from the earlier studies in order to identify any changes over time in the incidence and distribution of abused and neglected children.

The NIS–3 was conducted in a nationally representative sample of 42 counties. In every county, the CPS agency was a key participant, providing basic demographic data on all the children who were reported and accepted for investigation during the 3-month study data period, September 5 through December 4, 1993. Further details about the child's maltreatment and the outcome of the CPS investigation were obtained for a representative sample of these cases.

Like the NIS–1 and NIS–2 before it, the NIS–3 employed a sentinel survey methodology, in which community professionals serving children and families in various categories of non-CPS agencies were also recruited into the study. In each county, these sentinels were a representative sample of all professional staff who were likely to come into contact with maltreated children in police and sheriffs' departments, public schools, day-care centers, hospitals, voluntary social service agencies, mental health agencies, and the county juvenile probation and public health departments. The participating sentinels in the NIS–3 were 5,612 professionals in 800 non-CPS agencies who remained on the lookout for maltreated children during the study period. They were trained in the standard NIS definitions of abuse and neglect at the outset, and they submitted data forms on any children they encountered who were maltreated during the study data period. The NIS–3 collected a total of 50,729 data forms: 4,711 from non-CPS sentinels; 3,154 on the investigation outcomes and the abuse and neglect involved in cases sampled at participating CPS agencies; and 42,864 capturing the basic demographic data on all cases reported to participating CPS agencies during the study period.

Children who were submitted to the study by non-CPS sentinels and those who were investigated in the CPS sampled cases were evaluated according to standard study definitions of abuse and neglect, and only children who fit the standards were used in generating the national estimates. The definitional standards used in the NIS–3 were identical to those used in the NIS–2. These standards imposed a number of requirements, including the restriction that the abuse or neglect be within the jurisdiction of CPS (i.e., perpetrated or permitted by a parent or caretaker), and they applied uniform classification systems to index the type of maltreatment and the severity and type of injury or harm.

Two sets of definitional standards were applied: the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard. The Harm Standard was developed for the NIS–1, and it has been used in all three national incidence studies. It is relatively stringent in that it generally requires that an act or omission result in demonstrable harm in order to be classified as abuse or neglect. Exceptions are made in only a few categories where the nature of the maltreatment itself is so egregious that the standard permits harm to be inferred when direct evidence of it is not available. The chief advantage of the Harm Standard is that it

is strongly objective in character. Its principal disadvantage is that it is so stringent that it provides a view of abuse and neglect that is too narrow for many purposes, excluding even many children whose maltreatment is substantiated or indicated as abuse or neglect by CPS.

To meet the need to include the full set of substantiated/indicated children in the incidence statistics, the Endangerment Standard was developed as a definitional standard during the NIS–2 to supplement the perspective provided by the Harm Standard. *The Endangerment Standard includes all children who meet the Harm Standard but adds others as well.* The central feature of the Endangerment Standard is that it allows children who were not yet harmed by maltreatment to be counted in the abused and neglected estimates if a non-CPS sentinel considered them to be endangered by maltreatment or if their maltreatment was substantiated or indicated in a CPS investigation. In addition, the Endangerment Standard is slightly more lenient than the Harm Standard concerning the identity of allowable perpetrators in that it includes maltreatment by adult caretakers other than parents in certain categories as well as sexual abuse perpetrated by teenage caretakers. The Endangerment Standard was used in both the NIS–2 and the NIS–3.

Duplicate forms about the same child were identified and unduplicated, so that each child was included in the database only once. Finally, the data were weighted to represent the total number of children maltreated in the United States and annualized to transform the information from the 3-month data period into estimates reflecting a full year.

## 8.3 The National Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect

The findings of the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–3) show a sharp increase in the scope of the problem, whether maltreatment is defined using the Harm Standard or the Endangerment Standard.

**Estimated Incidence As Defined by the Harm Standard.** An estimated 1,553,800 children in the United States were abused or neglected under the Harm Standard in 1993. The NIS–3 total reflects a 67-percent increase since the NIS–2 estimate, which indicated that the total was 931,000 children in 1986, and it corresponds to a 149-percent increase since the NIS–1 estimate for 1980 of 625,100 children. Significant or close-to-significant increases were found in both abuse and neglect. The number of abused children who were countable under the Harm Standard rose by 46 percent from an

estimated 507,700 in the NIS–2 to 743,200 in the NIS–3. The number of neglected children who fit the Harm Standard increased significantly from 474,800 during the NIS–2 data collection in 1986 to 879,000 at the time of the NIS–3 data period in 1993. In the estimates given here and below, children are included in all categories that apply to them (i.e., those who were both abused and neglected are included in both estimates).

Considering specific types of abuse and neglect as defined by the Harm Standard, significant increases since the NIS–2 were found in the incidence of sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect, and a close-to-significant (i.e., statistically marginal) increase was observed in the incidence of physical abuse:

- The estimated number of sexually abused children under the Harm Standard rose from 119,200 in 1986 to 217,700 in 1993 (an 83% increase);
- The number of physically neglected children under the Harm Standard increased from an estimated 167,800 at the time of the NIS–2 to an estimated 338,900 in the NIS–3 (a 102% rise in incidence);
- There was a 333-percent increase in the estimated number of emotionally neglected children using the Harm Standard, from 49,200 in the NIS–2 to 212,800 in the NIS–3; and
- The estimated number of physically abused children under the Harm Standard was 269,700 at the time of the NIS–2, but it had increased to 381,700 during the NIS–3 (a 42% increase).

When these abused and neglected children were classified according to the injury or harm they suffered from maltreatment that fit the Harm Standard, there was a substantial and significant increase in the incidence of children who were seriously harmed and a statistically marginal increase in the number for whom injury could be inferred due to the severe nature of their maltreatment. The estimated number of seriously injured children essentially quadrupled from 141,700 to 565,000 in the intervening 7 years between the NIS–2 and the NIS–3 (a 299% increase). The number for whom injury could be inferred increased from an estimated 105,500 children in the NIS–2 to an estimated 165,300 children in the NIS–3 (a 57% increase).

**Estimated Incidence Using the Endangerment Standard.** Between 1986 and 1993, the total estimated number of abused and neglected children in the United States who fit the Endangerment Standard nearly doubled: in 1986, there were an estimated 1,424,400 abused and neglected children in the United States. The NIS–3 estimate of 2,815,600 reflects a 98-percent increase over the NIS–2 figure.

Significant increases were found in both abuse and neglect. The number of abused children more than doubled from an estimated 590,800 to 1,221,800 (a 107% increase), while the estimated number of neglected children also more than doubled from 917,200 to 1,961,300 (a 114% increase).

The increases were substantial and significant in all types of abuse and neglect except educational neglect:

- The estimated number of physically abused children rose from 311,500 to 614,100 (a 97% increase);
- The estimated number of sexually abused children increased from an estimated 133,600 children to 300,200 (a 125% increase);
- The more recent estimate of the number of emotionally abused children was 183 percent higher than the previous estimate (188,100 in 1986 versus 532,200 in 1993);
- The estimated number of physically neglected children increased from 507,700 to 1,335,100 (a 163% increase); and
- The estimated number of emotionally neglected children nearly tripled in the interval between the studies, rising from 203,000 in 1986 to 585,100 in 1993 (a 188% increase).

When the children whose abuse or neglect met the Endangerment Standard were classified according to the injury or harm they suffered, significant increases were evident in two categories. First, the 1993 estimate of the number of children who were endangered by their maltreatment (but not yet harmed) was more than four times the corresponding 1986 estimate. That is, the number of endangered children rose from an estimated 254,000 in 1986 to an estimated 1,032,000 in 1993 (a 306% increase). Second, the number of children who were seriously injured or harmed by abuse or neglect that fit the Endangerment Standard in 1993 was well over one-half million, which is nearly quadruple the 1986 estimate for this category. In 1986, an estimated 143,300 children had been seriously injured by abuse or neglect; in 1993, the figure was 569,900 children (a 298% increase). Note that nearly all (99%) of the children who counted as seriously injured here were also countable under the Harm Standard, so the near-quadrupling of their numbers since 1986 essentially reiterates what was reported above in connection with the Harm Standard.

## 8.4 Distribution of Child Abuse and Neglect by the Child's Characteristics

The child's sex and age were related to the rate of maltreatment, but race was *not.*

**Child's Sex.** Girls were sexually abused about three times more often than boys, under both the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard. This finding reiterates the NIS–2 result, so females' disproportionately greater risk of sexual abuse has been stable over time. This sex difference in incidence rates of sexual abuse leads to higher rates of abuse in general among girls. Also, because the definitional guidelines permit the inference that injury or harm occurred in connection with the more extreme forms of sexual abuse, girls' greater risk of sexual abuse also accounts for their higher incidence rates for inferred injury.

At the same time, boys had higher incidence rates than girls in some arenas, and boys' maltreatment risks also demonstrated some increases since the NIS–2. Boys were at somewhat greater risk of serious injury (24% higher than girls' risk under both definitional standards), and boys were significantly more likely to be emotionally neglected (boys' risk was 18% greater than girls'). Also, boys' rates of physical neglect defined by the Harm Standard and of emotional abuse using the Endangerment Standard increased more since the NIS–2 than girls' rates did. Moreover, trends in the incidence of fatal injuries from maltreatment moved in opposite directions for girls and boys—the incidence of fatally injured girls declined slightly since the NIS–2, while the incidence of fatally injured boys rose.

**Child's Age.** A consistent feature of the age differences in incidence rates within the NIS–3 was the lower incidence of maltreatment among the younger children under both definitional standards. In most cases, the differentiation was between the 0- to 2-year-olds and older children or between the 0- to 5-year-olds and older children. It is possible that the lower rates at these younger ages reflect undercoverage of these age groups. That is, prior to attaining school age, children are less observable to community professionals.

Another recurring theme in connection with age was that of disproportionate increases in the incidence of maltreatment among the younger children (under 12 years old) and especially among children in their middle-childhood years (ages 6 to 11). Note that as circumstances deteriorate and maltreatment becomes more prevalent and more severe, older children have greater opportunities for

escape. Also, older children are more able to defend themselves and/or retaliate. These factors may have moderated the increases in maltreatment that were observed among the older age groups.

The disproportionate increases during the younger and middle-childhood years meant that the overall profiles of age differences in maltreatment were different in the NIS–3 than they had been in the NIS–2. During the NIS–2, the risk of maltreatment generally increased with the age of the child in a close-to-linear fashion. With the lopsided increases among the younger children and among children in their middle-childhood years, the profile has changed toward a curvilinear configuration—where the middle-years of childhood are associated with the maximum risk of maltreatment—and toward a somewhat flatter distribution—where age differences are somewhat attenuated overall compared to their NIS–2 patterns.

One of the most striking findings was the age distribution of sexual abuse, which combined the general flattening of the age differences in incidence rates with a very low age transition in the distribution of incidence rates. The rate of sexual abuse as defined under the Endangerment Standard was very low for 0- to 2-year-olds, but then relatively constant for children ages 3 and older, indicating a very broad age range of vulnerability from preschool age on.

**Race.** The NIS–3 found *no* race differences in maltreatment incidence. The NIS–3 reiterates the findings of the earlier national incidence studies in this regard. That is, the NIS–1 and the NIS–2 also found *no significant race differences* in the incidence of maltreatment or maltreatment-related injuries.

Service providers may find these results somewhat surprising in view of the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare population and in the clientele of other public agencies. However, it should be recognized that the NIS methodology identifies a much broader range of children than those who come to the attention of any one type of service agency or the even smaller subset who receive child protective and other child welfare services. The NIS findings suggest that the different races receive differential attention somewhere during the process of referral, investigation, and service allocation, and that the differential representation of minorities in the child welfare population does not derive from inherent differences in the rates at which they are abused or neglected. It is also important to recognize that while there are no overall race differences in the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the NIS–3 findings, subsequent analyses that simultaneously

consider multiple characteristics may reveal race differences in maltreatment incidence among specific subsets of children (e.g., for children of certain ages, for one sex but not the other, etc.).

## 8.5 Distribution of Child Abuse and Neglect by Family Characteristics

The incidence of child maltreatment varied as a function of family income, family structure, family size, and the metropolitan status of the county.

**Family Structure.** Children of single parents were at higher risk of physical abuse and of all types of neglect and were overrepresented among seriously injured, moderately injured, and endangered children. Compared with their counterparts living with both parents, children in single-parent families had

- a 77-percent greater risk of being harmed by physical abuse (using the stringent Harm Standard) and a 63-percent greater risk of experiencing any countable physical abuse (using the Endangerment Standard);
- an 87-percent greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect and a 165-percent greater risk of experiencing any countable physical neglect;
- a 74-percent greater risk of being harmed by emotional neglect and a 64-percent greater risk of experiencing any countable emotional neglect;
- a 220-percent (or more than three times) greater risk of being educationally neglected;
- an approximately 80-percent greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from abuse or neglect;
- an approximately 90-percent greater risk of receiving moderate injury or harm as a result of child maltreatment; and
- a 120-percent (or more than two times) greater risk of being endangered by some type of child abuse or neglect.

Among children in single-parent households, those living with only their fathers were approximately one and two-thirds times more likely to be physically abused than those living with only their mothers.

Although parents are not necessarily, nor even most frequently, the perpetrators of maltreatment, the relationship between parent structure and maltreatment incidence is understandable, considering the added responsibilities and stresses of single-parenting together with the likelihood that surrounding social and practical support may be inadequate.

**Family Size.** The incidence of maltreatment was related to the number of dependent children in the family, especially in the categories of physical and educational neglect. For educational neglect, and for physical neglect according to the Harm Standard, the pattern was nonlinear: the incidence rates were highest for children in the largest families (those with four or more children), intermediate for "only" children, and lowest for children in families with two to three children. Children in the largest families were almost three times more likely to be educationally neglected, and nearly two and two-fifths times more likely to be physically neglected under the Harm Standard, compared to children in families with two or three children. Under the Endangerment Standard, the pattern was one of increasing incidence of physical neglect with greater numbers of children. Children in the largest families were physically neglected at nearly three times the rate of those who came from "only" child families.

Additional children in a household mean additional tasks and responsibilities, so it is understandable why incidence rates of child abuse and neglect may be higher when there are more children. Accounting for why "only" children have higher rates of educational neglect and of physical neglect under the Harm Standard than children in families with two or three children requires a different explanation. One possibility is that there may be too many expectations focused on "only" children, whereas expectations (and disappointments) are diffused over multiple children in the larger families. Another possibility is that many "only" child households represent the early stages in their families' development, since a number of these families will have additional children, in time. Thus, many "only" children are in families with relatively young and inexperienced parents and caretakers.

**County Metropolitan Status.** The incidence of children who had been moderately harmed by maltreatment was significantly lower among children in large urban counties than among children who lived in other urban counties. This was interpreted as reflecting a general undercoverage of moderately injured maltreated children in the large urban counties. It was not clear whether this was because the moderately injured children are less likely to be encountered by community professionals in the large urban centers, because community professionals in these locales are less likely to identify these

children as maltreated, or because the NIS information sources in these counties are less likely to submit data about these maltreated children.

**Family Income.** Despite the fact that only a rather gross index of family income was available, and despite a substantial percentage of cases with missing data on this factor, family income was significantly related to incidence rates in nearly every category of maltreatment. Compared to children whose families earned $30,000 per year or more, those in families with annual incomes below $15,000 per year were

- more than 22 times more likely to experience some form of maltreatment under the Harm Standard and over 25 times more likely to suffer maltreatment of some type using the Endangerment Standard;
- almost 14 times more likely to be harmed by some variety of abuse and nearly 15 times more likely to be abused using the Endangerment Standard criteria;
- more than 44 times more likely to be neglected, by either definitional standard;
- almost 16 times more likely to be a victim of physical abuse under the Harm Standard and nearly 12 times more likely to be a victim of physical abuse using the Endangerment Standard;
- almost 18 times more likely to be sexually abused by either definitional standard;
- thirteen times more likely to be emotionally abused under the Harm Standard criteria and more than 18 times more likely to be emotionally abused in a manner that fit Endangerment Standard requirements;
- forty times more likely to experience physical neglect under the Harm Standard and over 48 times more likely to be a victim of physical neglect using the Endangerment Standard;
- over 29 times more likely to be emotionally neglected under the Harm Standard definitions and over 27 times more likely to be emotionally neglected by Endangerment Standard criteria;
- nearly 56 times more likely to be educationally neglected, by either definitional standard;
- sixty times more likely to die from maltreatment of some type under the Harm Standard and over 22 times more likely to die from abuse or neglect using the Endangerment Standard;
- over 22 times more likely to be seriously injured by maltreatment under the Harm Standard and almost 22 times more likely to be seriously injured by maltreatment that fit the Endangerment Standard requirements;

- about 18 times more likely to be moderately injured by abuse or neglect under the Harm Standard and nearly 20 times more likely to have a moderate injury from maltreatment as defined by the Endangerment Standard;

- fifty-seven times more likely to be classified as having an inferred injury under the Harm Standard and 39 times more likely to meet the criteria for inferred injury as defined by the Endangerment Standard; and

- over 31 times more likely to be considered endangered, although not yet injured, by some type of abusive or neglectful treatment.

The NIS–3 findings on the correlation between family income and child maltreatment are entirely consistent with the earlier findings of the NIS–2. Moreover, they cannot be plausibly explained on the basis of the higher visibility of lower-income families to community professionals.

On the one hand, the NIS sentinels observe substantial numbers of children and families at the middle- and upper-income levels. The large majority of maltreated children were recognized by professionals likely to encounter children and families at all income levels, such as sentinels in hospitals, schools, day-care centers, mental health agencies, voluntary social service agencies; by professionals not represented by NIS sentinel categories; and by the general public. Sentinels in schools alone recognized the majority of the maltreated children. Although the NIS design includes only public schools, approximately 89 percent of the U.S. population of school-age children attend public schools, so children attending the public schools represent a broad spectrum of family income levels. Moreover, the private schools not reflected in the NIS include religiously affiliated schools, which have sliding scales for poorer children, so children who attend private schools are not necessarily from better economic circumstances than children enrolled in public schools.

On the other hand, if the income finding is interpreted as an artifact of selective observation of low-income families, then it would mean that there have to be enough undetected abused and neglected children in the middle- and upper-income brackets used here to equalize the incidence rates across different income categories. That would require an astounding number of still-undetected children in the nation who experience countable maltreatment. Specifically, it would mean that *an additional 2,138,700 children* suffered maltreatment according to the Harm Standard yet remained hidden to the NIS. Similarly, it would mean there were *an additional 4,500,700 children* in 1993 who experienced maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard but who escaped observation by community professionals. To add some perspective as to what this would entail, consider that almost seven percent of the total U.S. child population would be maltreated in countable ways yet entirely escape the attention

of the spectrum of community professionals who serve as NIS sentinels, and *all* of these additional children would have to be in families with incomes of $15,000 per year or more.

Considering the implications of the alternative, it appears more plausible to assume that the income-related differences in incidence found in the NIS reflect real differences in the extent to which children in different income levels are being abused or neglected. Note that there are a number of problems associated with poverty that may contribute to child maltreatment: more transient residence, poorer education, and higher rates of substance abuse and emotional disorders. Moreover, families at the lower socioeconomic levels have less adequate social support systems to assist parents in their child care responsibilities.

## 8.6 Distribution of Child Abuse and Neglect by Perpetrator Characteristics

Children who had been maltreated as defined by the Harm Standard were categorized according to their relationship to the most closely related perpetrator and according to this perpetrator's sex, age, and employment status; these categorizations were examined in relation to the type of maltreatment and the severity of the child's injury or harm. Perpetrators' relationships to the children also were examined in relation to the children's race. The findings represent only a preliminary exploration of perpetrator characteristics in the NIS–3 data, since they lack significance tests concerning potential relationships and substantial percentages of the children were missing information concerning certain of the perpetrator characteristics.

**Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child.** The majority of all children countable under the Harm Standard (78%) were maltreated by their birth parents, and this held true both for children who were abused (62% were maltreated by birth parents) and for those who were neglected (91% experienced neglect by birth parents).

Birth parents were the most closely related perpetrators for 72 percent of the physically abused children and for 81 percent of the emotionally abused children. The pattern was distinctly different for sexual abuse. Nearly one-half of the sexually abused children were sexually abused by someone other than a parent or parent-substitute, while just over one-fourth were sexually abused by a birth parent, and one-fourth were sexually abused by other than a birth parent or parent-substitute. In

addition, a sexually abused child was most likely to sustain a serious injury or impairment when a birth parent was the perpetrator.

**Perpetrator's Sex.** Children were somewhat more likely to be maltreated by female perpetrators than by males: 65 percent of the maltreated children had been maltreated by a female, whereas 54 percent had been maltreated by a male. Of children who were maltreated by their birth parents, the majority (75%) were maltreated by their mothers and a sizable minority (46%) were maltreated by their fathers (some children were maltreated by both parents). In contrast, children who were maltreated by other parents or parent-substitutes, or by other persons, were more likely to have been maltreated by a male than by a female (80 to 85% were maltreated by males; 14 to 41% by females).

Abused children presented a different pattern in connection with the sex of their perpetrators than did the neglected children. Children were more often neglected by female perpetrators (87% by females versus 43% by males). This finding is congruent with the fact that mothers and mother-substitutes tend to be the primary caretakers and are the primary persons held accountable for any omissions and/or failings in caretaking. In contrast, children were more often abused by males (67% were abused by males versus 40% by females). The prevalence of male perpetrators was strongest in the category of sexual abuse, where 89 percent of the children were abused by a male compared to only 12 percent by a female.

Among all abused children, those abused by their birth parents were about equally likely to have been abused by mothers as by fathers (50% and 58%, respectively), but those abused by other parents, parent-substitutes, or other, nonparental perpetrators were much more likely to be abused by males (80 to 90% by males versus 14 to 15% by females). This general pattern held for emotional abuse, but was slightly different in the area of physical abuse. Children who had been physically abused by their birth parents were more likely to have suffered at the hands of their mothers than their fathers (60% versus 48%), while those who had been physically abused by other parents or parent-substitutes were much more likely to have been abused by their fathers or father-substitutes (90% by their fathers versus 19% by their mothers). For sexual abuse, the child's relationship to the perpetrator made very little difference, since males clearly predominated as perpetrators, whatever their relationship to the child. Moreover, the severity of the injury or impairment that the child experienced as a result of maltreatment did not appear to bear any relationship to the sex of the perpetrator.

**Perpetrator's Age.** The perpetrator's age was entirely unknown for one-third of the children who were countable under the Harm Standard. Given the prevalence of children maltreated by perpetrators of unknown age, the findings here are tentative, since they could easily be eradicated if all perpetrators' ages were known.

Among all maltreated children, only a small percentage (13%) had been maltreated by a perpetrator in the youngest age bracket (under 26 years of age). However, younger perpetrators were slightly more predominant among children who had been sexually abused (where 22% had been sexually abused by a perpetrator under 26 years of age) and among children who had been maltreated in any way by someone who was *not* their parent or parent-substitute (among whom 40% had been maltreated by a perpetrator in the youngest age bracket).

A child's severity of injury or harm from maltreatment appeared not to be associated with the age of the perpetrator.

**Perpetrator's Employment Status.** Perpetrator's employment status was unknown for more than one-third of the maltreated children, limiting the value of the findings on this issue. Nearly one-half of all maltreated children were abused by a perpetrator who was employed, and this held true for both abuse and neglect. Of the children who sustained serious injury, the majority were maltreated by an employed perpetrator. In no category were the majority of children maltreated by a perpetrator who was unemployed.

**Child's Race and Relationship to the Perpetrator.** Because the perpetrator's race was not known for children submitted to the study solely through non-CPS sources, the child's race was examined in connection with the relationship to the perpetrator and with the nature and severity of the maltreatment.

For overall abuse, child's race reflected no notable connection to the relationship with the perpetrator. However, among sexually abused children, white children constituted a greater proportion of children who were sexually abused by their birth parents than of those sexually abused by other parents and parent-substitutes, and by others. Among physically abused children, white children were more prevalent among those who were physically abused by other parents and parent-substitutes than among those who were physically abused by their birth parents or among those physically abused by other types of perpetrators. Although non-white children were the minority of victims in all categories,

they were more prevalent among children who were physically or sexually abused by perpetrators other than parents or parent-substitutes.

White children are a larger majority of those who suffered serious injury, whereas non-white children's representation was strongest among those who experienced moderate injury and among those for whom injury could be inferred based on the severity of their maltreatment.

## 8.7 Sources of Recognition for Maltreated Children

School staff predominated as a source of recognition for maltreated children. School sentinels recognized 59 percent of the children who suffered maltreatment as defined by the Harm Standard and 54 percent of the Endangerment Standard total. Other important sources of abused and neglected children were hospitals, police departments, social service agencies, and the general public. For maltreatment defined under the Endangerment Standard, day-care centers also joined in the group of agency categories that encountered more than 100,000 abused and neglected children.

Changes since the earlier incidence studies in what are here called "recognition rates" may reflect changes in the rates at which maltreated children are identified or encountered. Using this terminology, one sees that hospitals more than tripled the rate at which they recognized maltreated children since the NIS–2. Mental health agencies quadrupled their rate of recognition of children whose maltreatment fit the Harm Standard and increased their recognition fivefold of children who fit the Endangerment Standard. Schools more than doubled their rate of recognition of children countable by the Endangerment Standard, which included a 70-percent increase in their recognition rate for the sector who counted under the Harm Standard. Recognition of children maltreated under the Endangerment Standard more than doubled in law enforcement agencies. Interestingly, there were no changes in the contributions of sources that are only tapped in the NIS through their reports to CPS (e.g., private physicians, the general public). This last finding probably reflects the relatively stable level of CPS involvement with the abused and neglected children countable in the NIS over the time period, which is discussed below.

## 8.8 Official Reporting of Maltreated Children and Their Investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS)

The NIS methodology provides information that speaks only to the end result of several processes, indicating whether or not a given maltreated child was or was not among the children whose maltreatment was investigated by CPS. Children who do not receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment represent an enigma to the study, as it cannot be determined whether this was because they were not reported to CPS or because CPS screened their reports out without an investigation.

Despite that limitation, the NIS–3 findings concerning the percentages of abused and neglected children whose maltreatment received CPS investigation are cause for serious concern. Only a minority of the children who were abused or neglected, by either definitional standard, received CPS attention for their maltreatment. CPS investigated the maltreatment of only 28 percent of children who were countable under the Harm Standard and of only 33 percent of those whose maltreatment fit the Endangerment Standard. Moreover, the percentages of those who received CPS investigation represented less than one-half of the maltreated children in all categories of maltreatment except fatalities, and across nearly all recognition sources. Especially remarkable was the finding that CPS investigation extended to only slightly more than one-fourth of the children who were seriously harmed or injured by abuse or neglect.

Another important finding was that the percentages of maltreated children who receive CPS investigation have decreased significantly since the NIS–2. The percentage of children receiving investigation among those who met the Harm Standard dropped from 44 percent to 28 percent, while the percentage of CPS investigation of children who met the Endangerment Standard fell from 51 percent to 33 percent. Although the decline was significant only among children recognized in law enforcement agencies and hospitals, it nevertheless cut across every type of recognition source. The decline in rates of CPS investigation affected abuse under the Harm Standard, all categories of maltreatment under the Endangerment Standard, and all levels of outcomes except fatalities.

At the same time, the actual numbers of countable children investigated by CPS remained stable (when considering Harm Standard totals) or even slightly increased (considering the Endangerment Standard totals). Thus, as the total number of maltreated children has risen, it means that a larger percentage of them have not had access to CPS investigation of their maltreatment. This picture suggests that the CPS system has reached its capacity to respond to the maltreated child population.

## 8.9 Implications

Are the observed increases in the incidence of child abuse and neglect, especially the quadrupling of the numbers of children who were seriously injured or endangered by maltreatment, real increases in the scope of the problem, or do they instead reflect improved recognition on the part of sentinels and other reporters to CPS? The fact that the increases occurred where they did—among children who were seriously injured and among children who were endangered—suggests that both of these dynamics contributed to the observed increases, each dynamic affecting a different sector of the abused and neglected population.

**More Children Are Now Being Abused and Neglected Than in 1986, and Their Injuries Are More Serious.** The rise in the number of seriously injured children probably reflects a real increase in child abuse and neglect, because it cannot plausibly be explained on the basis of heightened sensitivity. It is unreasonable to suppose that quadruple the number of seriously injured victims of abuse and neglect existed at the time of the NIS–2 and somehow escaped notice by community professionals. The fact that the seriously injured group has quadrupled during the 7 years since the NIS–2, and now comprises more than one-half million children, appears to herald a true rise in the scope and severity of child abuse and neglect in the United States.

Although the NIS does not address the causes of abuse and neglect, it was striking how often illicit drug use was noted in the narrative descriptions on the NIS data forms. The increase in illicit drug use since the fall of 1986 when the NIS–2 data were collected may have contributed to the rise in incidence observed in the NIS–3. Economics is another factor that may have enlarged the problem. Family income is the strongest correlate of incidence in nearly all categories of abuse and neglect, with the lowest income families evidencing the highest rates of maltreatment. Increases in incidence since 1986 may partially derive from decreased economic resources among the poorer families and the increase in the number of children living in poverty.

**Community Professionals Are Better at Recognizing Abused and Neglected Children, Especially Those Endangered but Not Yet Harmed by Maltreatment.** The rise in the number of endangered children probably stems from improved recognition of more subtle cues—those that indicate abusive and neglectful behaviors that have not yet resulted in harm or injury. It is quite plausible to suppose that some (even sizable) portion of the endangered children escaped attention in the NIS–2, but that by the time of the NIS–3, community professionals had learned to pay better attention to information

that might indicate endangering maltreatment. Note that this explanation also completes an account of consistent progression in recognition across the three national incidence studies. The NIS–2 demonstrated an increase in the number of moderately injured children. In interpreting that finding, it was considered likely to have derived from improved attentiveness to moderate-injury indicators of abuse and neglect. The NIS–3 found no statistical change in the numbers of moderately injured children, which suggests that professionals had reached close-to-maximum recognition rates for this category of children at the time of the NIS–2. The fourfold increase in the number of endangered children in the NIS–3 implies that the subsequent further improvements in recognition have now shifted toward even subtler cues: those associated with not-yet-injurious abusive actions and neglectful omissions.

**Better Targeting Is Needed To Ensure CPS Investigation for the Children Who Most Need It.** The number of NIS-countable children who are investigated by CPS has remained fairly stable, or risen slightly, since the last national incidence study in 1986. As a result, CPS investigation has not kept up with the dramatic rise in the incidence of these children, so the percentages who receive CPS investigation of their maltreatment have fallen significantly. The low rates of CPS investigation of the maltreated children, especially of those already seriously injured by maltreatment, warrant immediate attention.

These findings emphasize the need for better targeting, whether by reporters in referring children to CPS, by CPS screening practices in connection with reports, or by both. One possibility is that, although reporters now demonstrate considerable perceptiveness in identifying maltreated children, they have not reliably translated this into reports to CPS, or are unclear as to how to do so. Another possibility is that CPS, which has increasingly turned to screening cases in order to keep its workload manageably within the range of its resources, has not been using effective screening criteria or has been unclear or inconsistent about the criteria to be applied. Note that these are not independent dynamics, because the response of CPS to a report provides feedback that has consequences for future reporting behaviors. Information bearing on these issues is provided by reports on two of the NIS–3 special substudies: the *Sentinel Questionnaire Follow-up Study*, which asked school sentinels about their decisions to report cases to CPS, and the *CPS Screening Policy and Recordkeeping Study*, which examined the screening policies and practices of CPS agencies that participated in the NIS–3.

The main NIS–3 data can offer some guidance in targeting. Neglect warrants more attention. It affects the greatest number of maltreated children, and their injuries are often serious. Children from the poorest families are at the greatest risk of maltreatment, so these children may warrant

increased CPS attention as well. Children in single-parent families also experienced higher rates of maltreatment. A number of characteristics explored here are not unrelated to each other—for instance, single-parent families often have lower incomes. Further analyses of the NIS–3 data can address the independent contributions of different characteristics to better clarify risk factors that can guide CPS screening activities. Narratives on the NIS data forms can also be more systematically explored. The narratives often included spontaneous comments about illegal drug use, indicated whether the perpetrator had a history (sometimes a criminal record) of sexually or physically abusing/assaulting other children or adults, or noted that the incident described was not the first time the child had been abused or neglected.

As part of improving CPS targeting of the more serious cases, efforts should also focus on achieving better consensus about what types of cases should *not* receive CPS investigation. Very few of the educationally neglected children currently have their maltreatment investigated by CPS, and those who do may have been maltreated in multiple ways, with the CPS investigation focusing on abuse or other types of neglect. The current role of CPS in relation to educational neglect might be the centerpiece of an emerging consensus on what specific forms of abuse or neglect should not receive CPS investigation.

**Forging Working Relationships Between CPS Agencies and Schools.** The NIS has consistently demonstrated that professionals in schools play a central and critical role in identifying children who are abused and neglected. As policies are developed to address the burgeoning problem of child abuse and neglect, they should capitalize on the unique role of school professionals as front-line observers.



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