

Part B: Analysis

9. Child abuse and neglect 1995–96

9.1 Overview

The following section provides details of child abuse and neglect for the 1995–96 financial year. The explanations of child abuse and neglect terms, processes and practices, outlined in the previous sections of this report, should be taken into consideration when interpreting the information.

9.2 Notifications

During 1995–96 there were 91,734 notifications of child abuse and neglect recorded by the eight State and Territory community service departments. Of these notifications, 67,816 (74%) were investigated, 12,649 (14%) were dealt with by means other than investigation (such as provision of advice or referral) and the remaining 11,269 (12%) were not dealt with by any means (due to lack of information to allow follow-up or because they were assessed as requiring no action by the community service department). In total, 61,383 investigations (91% of all investigations) were reported as finalised by 31 August 1996, with the remaining 6,433 investigations still in progress or still open at that time (Table 1 and Figure 1).

The differences in policies, practices and definition of terms across jurisdictions should be considered when comparing the proportions of notifications that were investigated, dealt with by other means or not dealt with by other means (no action/no investigation). For example, New South Wales had a very high proportion of notifications investigated compared to most other States and Territories. This can largely be explained by the fact that in New South Wales in 1995–96 the definition of an investigation was very broad, covering any action taken by the DCS in regard to a notification. Those States and Territories with the lowest proportion of notifications investigated (Victoria and Tasmania) had a relatively high proportion of notifications dealt with by other means (that is, notifications assessed as not requiring investigation but where another service may be provided). The Victorian figure for the proportion of notifications investigated appears low as a result of the way in which investigations are counted for that State in this collection. For the purposes of this report, in Victoria, only those investigations involving face-to-face contact with a child are counted as 'investigations'.

Table 1: Notifications of child abuse and neglect by type of action, 1995–96

	NSW ^(a)	Vic ^(b)	Qld ^(c)	WA ^(d)	SA ^(e)	Tas ^(f)	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
Investigation finalised	24,663	13,911	11,230	2,656	6,190	1,196	1,043	494	61,383
Investigation not finalised	2,653	368	1,586	124	976	591	135	–	6,433
<i>Total investigations</i>	<i>27,316</i>	<i>14,279</i>	<i>12,816</i>	<i>2,780</i>	<i>7,166</i>	<i>1,787</i>	<i>1,178</i>	<i>494</i>	<i>67,816</i>
Dealt with by other means	..	10,318	1,619	..	..	712	..	..	12,649
No investigation possible/No action	1,614	5,317	927	968	1,729	434	259	21	11,269
Total notifications	28,930	29,914	15,362	3,748	8,895	2,933	1,437	515	91,734
Percentage									
Investigation finalised	85	47	73	71	70	41	73	96	67
Investigation not finalised	9	1	10	3	11	20	9	–	7
<i>Total investigations</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>74</i>
Dealt with by other means	..	34	11	..	..	24	..	..	14
No investigation possible/No action	6	18	6	26	19	15	18	4	12
Total notifications	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) Includes child welfare concerns notified to the NSW DCS.

(b) Notifications investigated include only those involving face-to-face contact with the child or family. 'Notifications dealt with by other means' includes those dealt with through initial investigation (ie: through phone calls, file checks etc). 'No action/ investigation possible' includes notifications where there is considered to be no immediate issues of risk to the child.

(c) 'Notifications dealt with by other means' includes those classified as 'Protective Advice'.

(d) Under 'New Directions' which was phased in during 1995–96, only CMAs are included as notifications.

(e) The number of notifications has been derived by combining the number of child protection assessments made on individual children which met the criteria for investigation with the number which did not (1,729). Excludes 40 notifications classified as 'threat of abuse'.

(f) 'Dealt with by other means' in Tasmania refers to those notifications that were assessed but not found to warrant a full investigation or where a full investigation was not possible.

9.3 Finalised investigations

9.3.1 Finalised investigations by State and Territory

Of the 61,383 investigations of child abuse and neglect that were reported as finalised in Australia for 1995–96, 49% were substantiated, 4% had an outcome classified as 'child at risk' and the remaining 47% were found to be unsubstantiated (Table 2 and Figure 1).

New South Wales had the highest proportion of finalised investigations that were substantiated (57%), due to the broader definition of substantiation used by that State (see Section 8.3). Tasmania's very low level of substantiation can be explained by the lack of an agreed definition for substantiation across the State, with some regions using a much tighter definition than others. This also explains the high proportion of finalised investigations that were unsubstantiated in Tasmania in 1995–96 (64% compared to the national average of 48%). South Australia also had a relatively high rate of finalised investigations that were unsubstantiated (61%).

Table 2: Finalised investigations of child abuse and neglect by type of outcome, 1995–96

	NSW ^(a)	Vic ^(b)	Qld	WA ^(c)	SA ^(d)	Tas ^(e)	ACT	NT ^(f)	Total
Number									
Substantiated abuse or neglect	14,063	6,663	4,662	1,095	2,415	235	445	255	29,833
Child at risk	..	..	1,778	289	..	191	113	1	2,372
No abuse or neglect	10,600	7,248	4,790	1,272	3,775	770	485	238	29,178
Total finalised investigations	24,663	13,911	11,230	2,656	6,190	1,196	1,043	494	61,383
Percentage									
Substantiated abuse or neglect	57	48	42	41	39	20	43	52	49
Child at risk	..	..	16	11	..	16	11	–	4
No abuse or neglect	43	52	43	48	61	64	47	48	47
Total finalised investigations	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

- (a) In New South Wales in 1995–96, a notification was substantiated when the information about the notification was confirmed. As such the number of substantiated notifications includes substantiated general concerns about a child as well as child abuse and neglect.
- (b) Only direct investigations involving contact with a child and/or family are included. Data excludes 10,318 'initial investigations'.
- (c) 'New Directions' was phased in during 1995–96. As a result Western Australia's figures include a smaller number of notifications with outcomes classified as 'child at risk' than in previous years.
- (d) Figures exclude 40 substantiated notifications classified as 'threat of abuse'.
- (e) The relatively low number of substantiated notifications for Tasmania is partly due to the absence of a common definition of 'substantiated' across regions during the counting period.
- (f) One outcome from a finalised investigation was mis-coded as 'child at risk'.

9.3.2 Finalised investigations by age and sex of child

Just over half of the finalised investigations of abuse and neglect in 1995–96 involved a female child. This proportion did not differ greatly across the three outcome categories, with 53% of substantiations involving a female child compared to 51% of unsubstantiated notifications. Similarly 51% of finalised investigations with the outcome of 'child at risk' involved females (Table A1).

In 1995–96, 36% of finalised investigations involved children aged 4 years or under and only 5% of finalised investigations involved children aged over 15 years of age. The age distribution differed across investigation outcome categories with a higher proportion of substantiations than unsubstantiated notifications involving older children. In 1995–96, 62% of substantiated investigations involved a child aged under 10 years and 38% a child aged 10 years and over. In comparison, 72% of unsubstantiated investigations involved a child aged under 10 years and 28% a child aged 10 years and over (Table A2).

Finalised investigations involving older children involved a higher proportion of females than those where the subject was a younger child. This was the case across all investigation outcome categories. Almost 70% of finalised investigations involving 15–17 year olds involved female children, compared to only 49% of those involving children aged 0–4 (Tables A1, A2 and A3).

9.4 Substantiations

A notification of child abuse and neglect is substantiated on the basis of information gathered during an investigation. The notification is considered substantiated if, in the professional opinion of the officers concerned, there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused or neglected (see Section 8.3).

9.4.1 Type of abuse and neglect

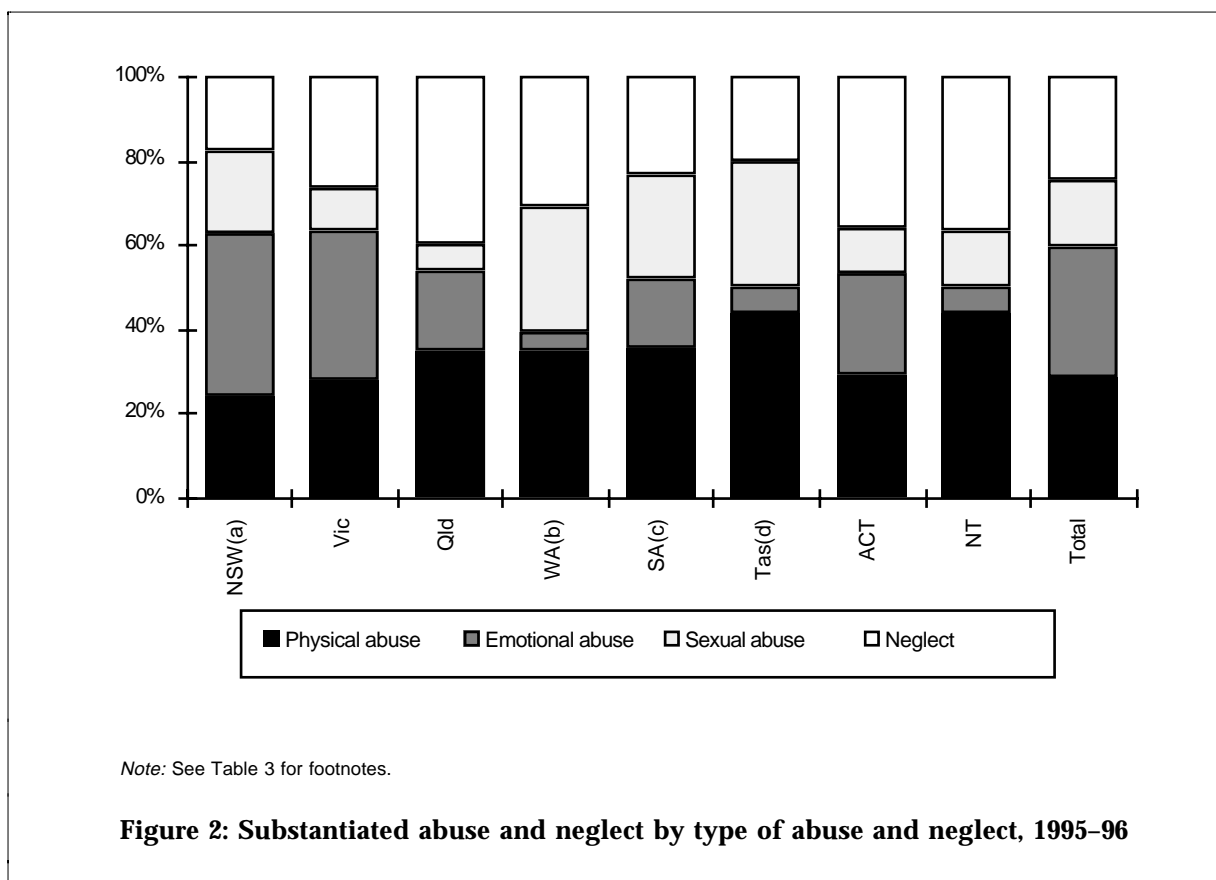


Table 3: Substantiated notifications of child abuse and neglect by type of abuse and neglect, 1995-96

Type of abuse and neglect	NSW(a)	Vic	Qld	WA(b)	SA(c)	Tas(d)	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
Physical abuse	3,422	1,847	1,620	383	852	103	129	111	8,467
Emotional abuse	5,388	2,393	896	46	404	14	107	17	9,265
Sexual abuse	2,776	644	301	328	600	70	49	34	4,802
Neglect	2,477	1,779	1,845	338	559	48	160	93	7,299
Total substantiations	14,063	6,663	4,662	1,095	2,415	235	445	255	29,833
Percentage									
Physical abuse	24	28	35	35	35	44	29	44	28
Emotional abuse	38	36	19	4	17	6	24	7	31
Sexual abuse	20	10	6	30	25	30	11	13	16
Neglect	18	27	40	31	23	20	36	36	24
Total substantiations	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

- (a) In New South Wales in 1995-96, a notification was substantiated when the information about the notification was confirmed. As such the number of substantiated notifications includes substantiated general concerns about a child as well as child abuse and neglect.
- (b) 'New Directions' was phased in during 1995-96.
- (c) Figures exclude 40 substantiated notifications classified as 'threat of abuse'.
- (d) The relatively low number of substantiated notifications for Tasmania is partly because of the lack of a common definition of 'substantiated' across regions during the counting period.

As discussed in Section 8.3.1 many children suffer more than one type of abuse or neglect. In this collection the type of abuse and neglect is recorded as the one most likely to be most severe in the short term, or most likely to place a child at risk in the short term, or the most obvious. Because of this, and because it is not always clear what type of abuse has occurred, the categorisation of substantiated abuse and neglect is in some cases subjective.

Of the 29,833 notifications of abuse and neglect that were reported as substantiated by the State and Territory community service departments in 1995–96, 28% were classified as physical abuse, 31% as emotional abuse, 16% as sexual abuse and 24% as neglect (Table 3 and Figure 2). This varied considerably across jurisdictions, depending on the legislation, policies and practices in each State and Territory. For example, Queensland had a relatively low proportion of sexual abuse substantiations because in this State sexual abuse by a person outside the family (where the parents act protectively) is dealt with as a police matter rather than a familial child protection matter and does not appear in these statistics.

9.4.2 Types of abuse and neglect by sex and age of child

The highest numbers of substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect were those involving children aged under 1 year (2,355). Substantiated notifications involving children under 1 year accounted for the highest number of emotional abuse substantiations (935) and neglect substantiations (850). The highest numbers of substantiated notifications of physical abuse and sexual abuse were those involving children aged 14 years (790 and 488 substantiations respectively) (Table A4).

Substantiations of physical abuse and neglect were slightly more likely to involve male children than female children while the reverse was true for emotional abuse. Sexual abuse was much more likely to involve female children, particularly in the older age groups (Tables A4 and A5).

The different patterns by age for male and female children involved in substantiated notifications of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect are shown in Figures 3 to 6. Substantiated physical abuse was more likely to involve male children than female children until the age of 13 years, as substantiations of physical abuse involving female children began to rise sharply after age 12 (Table A4 and Figure 3).

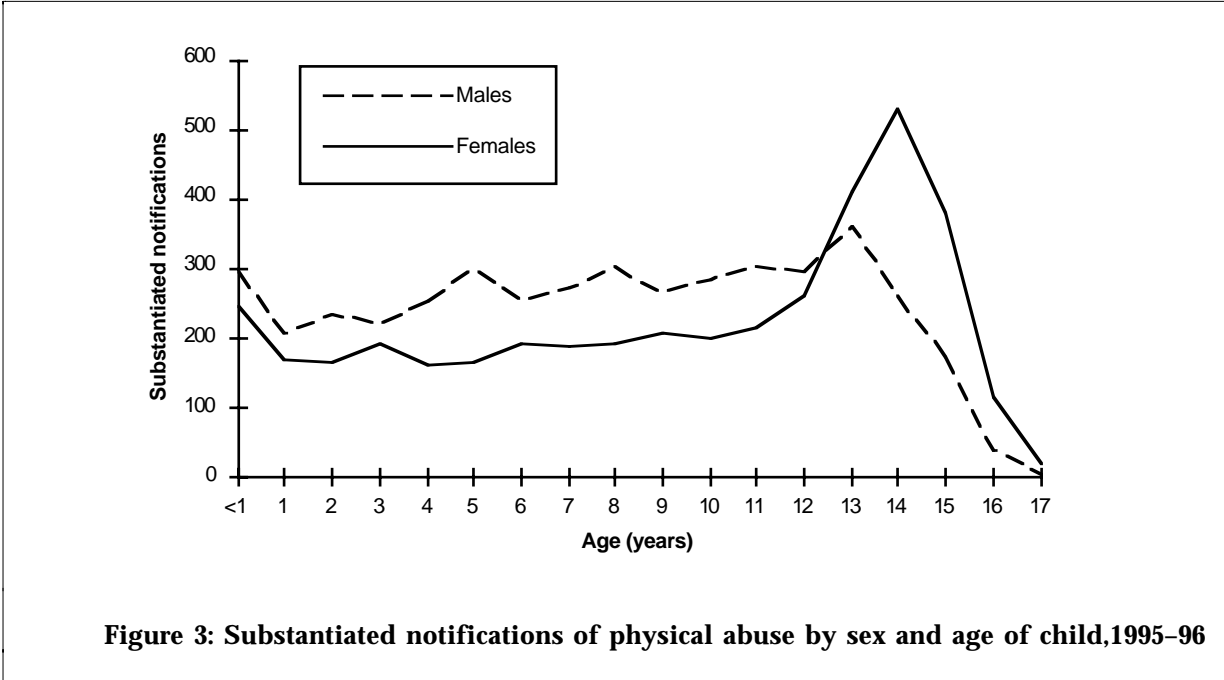


Figure 3: Substantiated notifications of physical abuse by sex and age of child, 1995-96

The patterns for substantiated notifications of emotional abuse involving male and female children are very similar until, once again, around 13 years of age, where the number of substantiations of emotional abuse involving females continued to rise sharply, while those involving males began to fall (Table A4 and Figure 4). The relatively high number of emotional abuse substantiations involving young children is apparent in this figure.

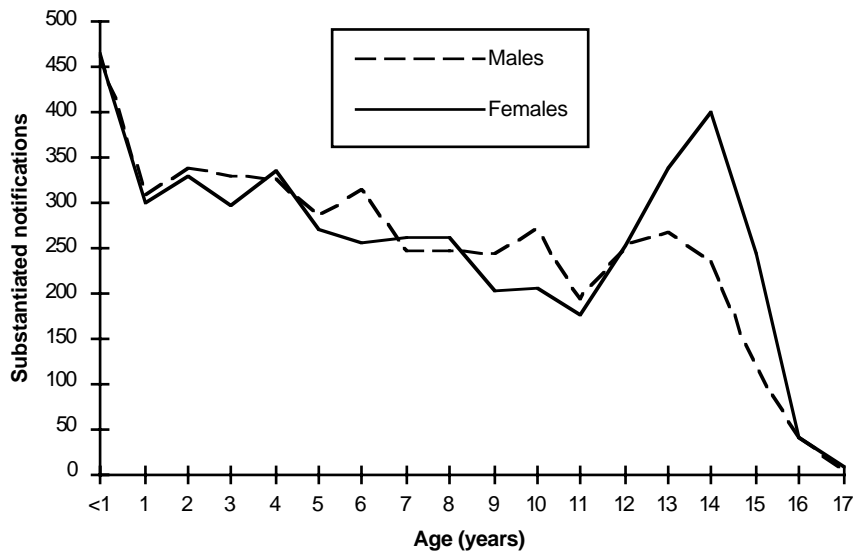


Figure 4: Substantiated notifications of emotional abuse by sex and age of child, 1995-96

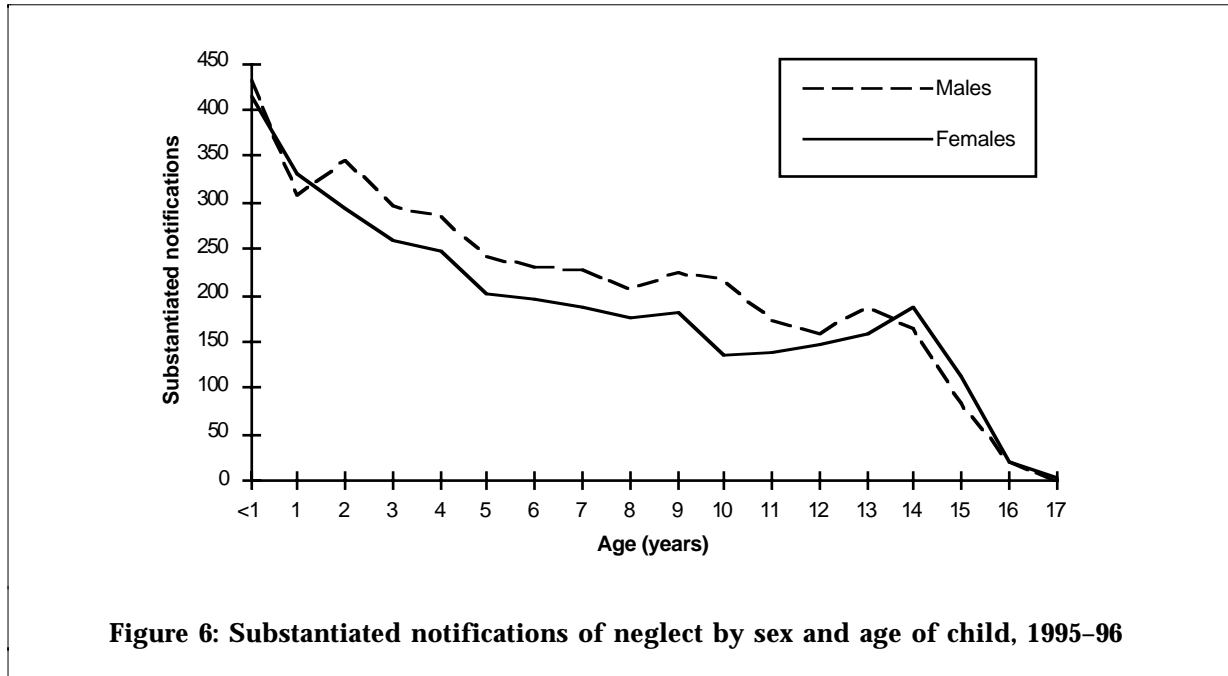


Figure 5: Substantiated notifications of sexual abuse by sex and age of child, 1995-96

As stated above, sexual abuse is far more likely to involve female children than male children. The pattern for sexual abuse substantiations involving male children peaked at around 5 and 6 years of age and then declined, while the pattern for those involving female

children had a small peak for girls aged 3 and 4 years and then a large peak for girls aged 14 years (Table A4 and Figure 5).

Substantiated neglect primarily involves young children, for both males and females. The patterns of involvement by children of different ages were very similar for both sexes (Table A4 and Figure 6).



9.4.3 Change over time

Several factors affect the trends in the number of substantiations reported in Australia by State and Territory community service departments, including changes in:

- State and Territory legislation, policies and practices;
- attitudes towards and beliefs about child abuse and neglect within Australia and also internationally (for example, what actions or inactions constitute child abuse and neglect);
- data collection methodologies and coding practices within each State and Territory and at the national level;
- the level of abuse and neglect;
- the extent to which abuse and neglect is reported, which will have been affected by the introduction of mandatory reporting in some jurisdictions; and
- the emphasis given to the protection of children in both the community and in government.

All these factors should be taken into consideration when examining the trends presented in Tables A6 and A7 and Figure 7.

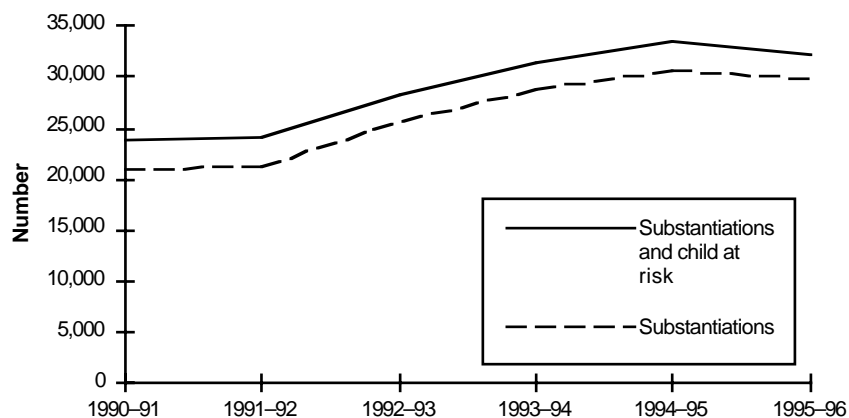


Figure 7: Substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect and finalised investigations with outcome of 'child at risk', 1990-91 to 1995-96

The number of substantiated notifications of child abuse and neglect increased from 18,816 in 1988-89 to 30,615 in 1994-95, but fell 3% to 29,833 in 1995-96. Most of the increase occurred between 1991-92 and 1992-93 (when there was a 20% increase in substantiations) and 1992-93 and 1993-94 (when there was a 12% increase). Much of the increase nationally during this time was due to large increases in the number of substantiations in Victoria² and South Australia during those years, although all other States and Territories except Queensland and Tasmania reported increased numbers of substantiations during these years. The fall in 1995-96 is due, at least in part, to changes in policies and practices in some States and Territories (such as Western Australia, with the introduction of 'New Directions', and Tasmania, which did not have a consistent definition for 'substantiated' across the regions in the State during the counting period).

There have been some changes in the five year period to 1995-96 in the type of substantiated abuse and neglect reported by State and Territory community service departments. The proportion of substantiated notifications classified as physical abuse increased to 30% in 1993-94 before falling to its current level of 28%; the proportion classified as emotional abuse increased from 25% in 1990-91 to 31% in 1995-96; the proportion classified as sexual abuse fell considerably over the same period from 24% to 16%, and the proportion classified as neglect changed little (Table 4). As with the overall trends, the factors influencing these changes are complex and should be considered when interpreting the data. These factors include changes in legislation and policies as well as changes in definitions and coding practices in each of the States and Territories.

² Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect was introduced in Victoria in this period (see Appendix 2). In addition, prior to 1993, the Victorian police were involved in receiving notifications of abuse and neglect along with the Victorian DHS, and these were not included in the statistics. Since 1992 all notifications in Victoria are made to DHS and are included in the data collection.

Table 4: Substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect, by type of abuse and neglect, 1990–91 to 1995–96

	Physical	Emotional	Sexual	Neglect	Total ^(a)
Number					
1990–91	5,479	5,123	5,072	5,194	20,868
1991–92	5,890	5,415	4,876	5,175	21,371
1992–93	7,342	6,485	5,979	5,812	25,630
1993–94	8,494	7,694	5,360	7,155	28,711
1994–95	9,000	8,597	4,924	8,084	30,615
1995–96	8,467	9,265	4,802	7,299	29,833
Percentage^(b)					
1990–91	26	25	24	25	100
1991–92	28	25	23	24	100
1992–93	29	25	23	23	100
1993–94	30	27	19	25	100
1994–95	29	28	16	26	100
1995–96	28	31	16	24	100

(a) Includes substantiations where type of abuse or neglect is unknown. As a result types of abuse and neglect may not add to the total.

(b) Percentage calculated as a proportion of substantiations where type of abuse or neglect is known.

9.5 Children who were the subject of notifications, finalised investigations and substantiations in 1995–96

Some children are the subject of more than one notification of abuse or neglect in a particular year. In 1995–96, the 91,734 notifications of abuse and neglect recorded by State and Territory community service departments involved 71,766 children, while the 61,383 finalised investigations involved 51,133 children (Table 5). For these children in finalised investigations, the outcome for 25,558 children (50%) was substantiated abuse or neglect, for 23,827 children (47%) the abuse or neglect was unsubstantiated and for the remaining 1,748 children (3%) the outcome was classified as ‘child at risk’ (Table A8).

In 1995–96, 47% of children in substantiated investigations, 49% of children in unsubstantiated investigations and 49% of ‘children at risk’ were male. Overall 48% of the children in finalised investigations were male (Table A8).

The distribution of children by State and Territory follows the pattern described earlier for notifications and finalised investigations (Section 9.3 and 9.4). The numbers of children by State and Territory are given in Table 5.

Of the 25,558 children in substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect, 7,489 (29%) were the subject of physical abuse, 7,762 (30%) emotional abuse, 4,478 (18%) sexual abuse and 5,829 (23%) neglect (Table 5 and A9). The patterns of abuse and neglect for children follow the same patterns by age and sex as described earlier for substantiations (see Section 9.4.2).

Table 5: Children aged 0–17 years who were the subject of a notification, finalised investigation and substantiated notification of child abuse and neglect, 1995–96

Type of abuse and neglect	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA ^(b)	SA ^(c)	Tas ^(d)	ACT	NT	Total
Physical abuse	2,917	1,796	1,330	368	752	103	118	105	7,489
Emotional abuse	4,361	2,306	644	27	316	13	80	15	7,762
Sexual abuse	2,590	622	257	316	549	65	47	32	4,478
Neglect	2,031	1,717	1,101	271	455	41	127	86	5,829
<i>Substantiated abuse or neglect</i>	<i>11,899</i>	<i>6,441</i>	<i>3,332</i>	<i>982</i>	<i>2,072</i>	<i>222</i>	<i>372</i>	<i>238</i>	<i>25,558</i>
Child at risk	..	..	1,315	238	..	120	74	1	1,748
No abuse or neglect	8,392	6,230	3,888	1,145	2,842	725	391	214	23,827
<i>Total finalised investigations</i>	<i>20,291</i>	<i>12,671</i>	<i>8,535</i>	<i>2,365</i>	<i>4,914</i>	<i>1,067</i>	<i>837</i>	<i>453</i>	<i>51,133</i>
Notifications	23,319	23,399	11,833	3,220	6,159	2,240	1,126	470	71,766

- (a) In New South Wales, in 1995–96, a notification was substantiated when the information about the notification was confirmed. As such the number of children in substantiated notifications includes those who were the subject of general concerns notified to DCS as well as those who suffered child abuse and neglect.
- (b) 'New Directions' was phased in during 1995–96.
- (c) Figures exclude children in substantiated notifications with outcomes classified as 'threat of abuse'.
- (d) The relatively low number of children who are the subject of substantiated notifications for Tasmania is partly due to the absence of a common definition of 'substantiated' across regions during the counting period.

Note: Children whose age was unknown or not stated are included as most of these would be aged 0–16 years of age.

9.5.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in the statistics on child abuse and neglect. While making up only an estimated 3% of the Australian population aged 0–17 years at 31 December 1995, 8% of the children who were the subject of notifications of abuse and neglect, 9% of the children in finalised investigations and 10% of the children in child abuse and neglect substantiations in 1995–96 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children made up 16% of children classified as 'at risk' and 8% of children who were the subject of a finalised investigation classified as 'unsubstantiated' (Table A10).

The pattern of substantiated abuse and neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children differed markedly from the pattern for other children. In 1995–96, 38% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiated notifications were the subject of neglect, compared to 21% of other children. Conversely, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiated notifications who were the subject of sexual abuse was lower than for other children (11% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiated notifications compared to 18% for other children) (Tables 6 and A11). However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a higher rate per 1,000 children across all types of abuse and neglect than other children (see Section 9.6.2).

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other children in notifications, finalised investigations and substantiations in each State and Territory is given in Table 6. Rates of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children in the population for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and all children are given in Section 9.6.

The reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are complex, involving social, psychological, economic and environmental factors. High rates of poverty and unemployment, poor living conditions for many families, the high incidence of single parent families, high incidences of alcoholism and other health problems among the population, greater association with the welfare system (both in the past and in the present), lack of access or ability to access appropriate parental support services and different child rearing practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people all contribute to the over-representation of these children in the child abuse and neglect statistics.

Table 6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years who were the subject of a notification, finalised investigation and substantiated notification of child abuse and neglect, 1995–96

Type of abuse and neglect	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA ^(b)	SA ^(c)	Tas ^(d)	ACT	NT	Total
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children									
Physical abuse	200	64	175	58	53	6	9	46	611
Emotional abuse	446	76	67	3	33	0	6	3	634
Sexual abuse	130	8	28	56	28	1	2	11	264
Neglect	284	121	269	91	89	5	24	57	940
<i>Substantiated abuse or neglect</i>	<i>1,060</i>	<i>269</i>	<i>539</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>2,449</i>
Child at risk	..	..	227	38	..	9	9	1	284
No abuse or neglect	643	246	454	243	215	33	23	85	1,942
<i>Total finalised investigations</i>	<i>1,703</i>	<i>515</i>	<i>1,220</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>418</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>4,675</i>
Notifications	1,943	758	1,511	618	507	125	90	208	5,760
Other children									
Physical abuse	2,717	1,732	1,155	310	699	97	109	59	6,878
Emotional abuse	3,915	2,230	577	24	283	13	74	12	7,128
Sexual abuse	2,460	614	229	260	521	64	45	21	4,214
Neglect	1,747	1,596	832	180	366	36	103	29	4,889
<i>Substantiated abuse or neglect</i>	<i>10,839</i>	<i>6,172</i>	<i>2,793</i>	<i>774</i>	<i>1,869</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>331</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>23,109</i>
Child at risk	..	..	1,088	200	..	111	65	..	1,464
No abuse or neglect	7,749	5,984	3,434	902	2,627	692	368	129	21,885
<i>Total finalised investigations</i>	<i>18,588</i>	<i>12,156</i>	<i>7,315</i>	<i>1,876</i>	<i>4,496</i>	<i>1,013</i>	<i>764</i>	<i>250</i>	<i>46,458</i>
Notifications	21,376	22,641	10,322	2,602	5,652	2,115	1,036	262	66,006

(a) In New South Wales, in 1995–96, a notification was substantiated when the information about the notification was confirmed. As such the number of children in substantiated notifications includes those who were the subject of general concerns notified to DCS as well as those who suffered child abuse and neglect.

(b) 'New Directions' was phased in during 1995–96.

(c) Figures exclude children in substantiated notifications with outcomes classified as 'threat of abuse'.

(d) The relatively low number of children who are the subject of substantiated notifications for Tasmania is partly due to the absence of a common definition of 'substantiated' across regions during the counting period.

Note: Children whose age was unknown or not stated are included as most of these would be aged 0–16 years of age.

9.6 Rates of abuse and neglect in the population

The previous section examined the number of children who were the subject of abuse and neglect notifications, investigations and substantiations in 1995–96. However, to make meaningful comparisons across States and Territories, age groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other children, it is necessary to place these numbers in perspective through the calculation of rates of notifications, investigations and substantiations per head of population. In this section the number of children subject to abuse and neglect per 1,000 children in the relevant age population cohort is used as a simple way of standardising the numbers across different groups. The rate for children as a whole is calculated as the number of children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a notification, finalised investigation or substantiation, divided by the population aged 0–16 years and multiplied by 1,000.

In 1995–96, 16.3 children per 1,000 aged 0–16 years were the subject of a notification of child abuse and neglect, 11.6 per 1,000 were the subject of a finalised investigations and 5.8 per 1,000 were the subject of a substantiation (Table 7). The rate for substantiations is slightly below the comparable 1994–95 rate of 6.1 children substantiated per 1,000 children aged 0–16 years. Prior to 1995–96, rates of substantiated abuse and neglect had been rising each year since 1990–91 (Table A12).

9.6.1 Rates across States and Territories

Table 7: Rates of children 0–16 years in notifications, finalised investigations and substantiated notifications of child abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, 1995–96

Type of abuse and neglect	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA ^(b)	SA ^(c)	Tas ^(d)	ACT	NT	Total
Physical abuse	2.0	1.7	1.6	0.8	2.2	0.9	1.6	1.9	1.7
Emotional abuse	3.0	2.2	0.8	0.1	0.9	0.1	1.1	0.3	1.8
Sexual abuse	1.7	0.6	0.3	0.7	1.6	0.5	0.6	0.6	1.0
Neglect	1.4	1.6	1.3	0.6	1.3	0.3	1.7	1.6	1.3
<i>Substantiated abuse or neglect</i>	<i>8.1</i>	<i>6.0</i>	<i>4.0</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>6.0</i>	<i>1.8</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>5.8</i>
Child at risk	..	..	1.6	0.5	..	1.0	1.0	–	0.4
No abuse or neglect	5.7	5.8	4.7	2.6	8.3	6.0	5.2	4.0	5.4
<i>Total finalised investigations</i>	<i>13.8</i>	<i>11.9</i>	<i>10.4</i>	<i>5.3</i>	<i>14.4</i>	<i>8.9</i>	<i>11.1</i>	<i>8.4</i>	<i>11.6</i>
Notifications	15.8	22.0	14.4	7.2	18.0	18.6	14.9	8.7	16.3

(a) Includes children notified to the DCS because of child concerns.

(b) 'New Directions' was phased in during 1995–96.

(c) Excludes children subject to substantiated notifications with outcomes classified as 'threat of abuse'.

(d) The relatively low rate for Tasmania is partly due to the absence of a common definition of 'substantiated' across regions during the counting period.

Notes

1. Rates are calculated by dividing the number of children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a notification, finalised investigation or substantiation by the estimated resident population aged 0–16 years at 31 December 1995, multiplied by 1,000.
2. Children whose age was unknown or not stated are included as most of these would be aged 0–16 years of age.

The rates of child abuse and neglect in the population varied considerably across States and Territories, with the rate for notification being highest for children in Victoria (22.0 per 1,000 children) and lowest for children in Western Australia (7.2 per 1,000 children). It should be noted that there are some differences in the definition of a 'notification' across States and Territories (see Section 8.1.1). South Australia had the highest rate for children in finalised investigations (14.4 per 1,000 children) and Western Australia the lowest (5.3 per 1,000). The situation was different for rates of children substantiated, with New South Wales having the highest rate (8.1 per 1,000) and Tasmania the lowest (1.8 per 1,000) (Table 7).

This is due to the broad definition of 'substantiated' used by NSW DCS and the lack of a consistent definition of 'substantiated' across the regions in Tasmania (see Section 8.3).

The rates for the four types of abuse and neglect also varied considerably across jurisdictions. Differences in policies, practices and definitions should be taken into account when interpreting differences in rates of abuse and neglect across the States and Territories.

9.6.2 Rates by age and sex

Overall, the rate of substantiated abuse and neglect for male children in Australia in 1995–96 was 5.3 per 1,000 children, slightly less than the rate for female children (6.3 per 1,000 children).

The highest rate of substantiated abuse and neglect per 1,000 children for Australia in 1995–96 was for girls aged 10–14 years (7.3 per 1,000 children) and the lowest rate was for boys aged 15–16 years (2.0 per 1,000 children) (Table 8 and Figure 8). The highest rates of physical and sexual abuse were experienced by girls aged 10–14 years (2.2 and 2.3 per 1,000 respectively), while young children of both sexes had the highest rates of emotional abuse and neglect (Table 8 and Figure 9).

Table 8: Rates of children 0–16 years in substantiated notifications of child abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, by sex and age of child and type of abuse and neglect, 1995–96

Age of child (years)	Physical			Emotional			Sexual			Neglect			Total		
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P
0–4	1.6	1.3	1.5	2.2	2.3	2.3	0.4	0.8	0.5	2.0	1.9	2.0	6.2	6.3	6.2
5–9	1.9	1.3	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.7	0.8	1.4	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.3	5.6	5.6	5.6
10–14	2.0	2.2	2.1	1.6	1.8	1.7	0.5	2.3	1.4	1.1	0.9	1.0	5.2	7.3	6.2
15–16	0.7	1.8	1.3	0.6	1.0	0.8	0.3	1.6	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.4	2.0	5.0	3.4
Total^(a)	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.8	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.3	5.3	6.3	5.8

(a) Children whose age was unknown or not stated are included as most of these would be aged 0–16 years of age.

Notes

1. Rates are calculated by dividing the number of children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a substantiation by the estimated resident population aged 0–16 years at 31 December 1995, multiplied by 1,000.
2. The person columns (P) include children whose sex was unknown or not stated.

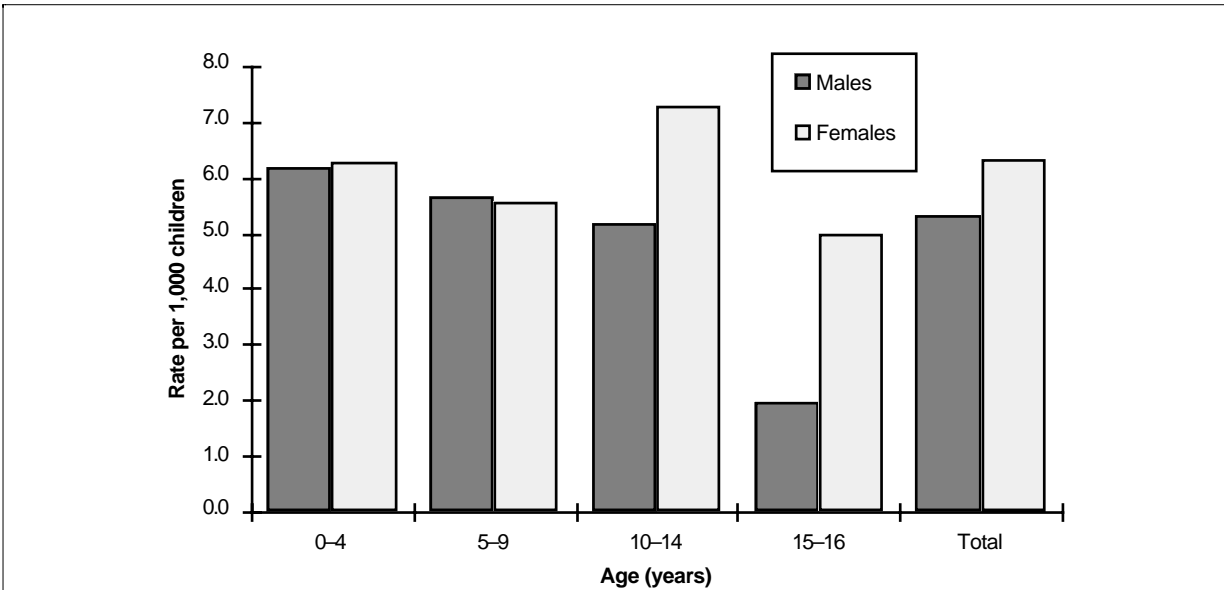


Figure 8: Rates of children in substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, by sex and age group, 1995-96

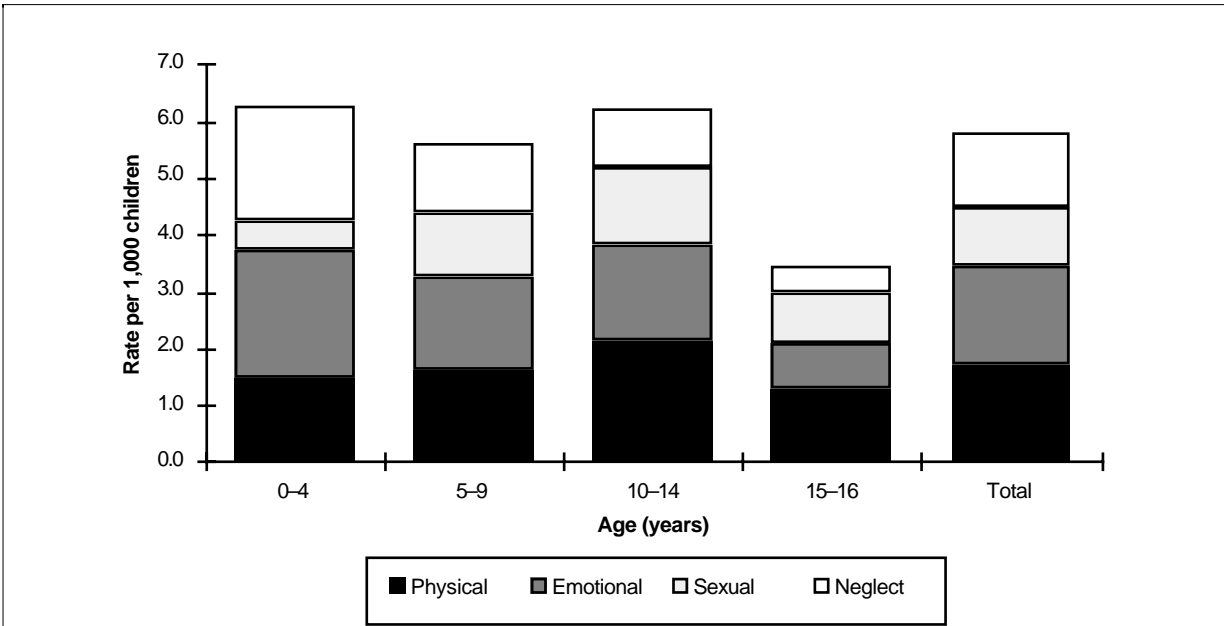


Figure 9: Rates of children in substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, by age group and type of abuse and neglect, 1995-96

Detailed rates by individual year of age and type of abuse and neglect are provided in Table A13 and the rates by age group for each State and Territory are provided in Table A14.

9.6.3 Rates of abuse and neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

As stated previously, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in child abuse and neglect statistics. Examination of the rates per head of population highlight this finding. Overall, the rate of notification of abuse and neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was 42.3 per 1,000 children, compared to 15.5 per 1,000 for other children. In 1995–96, 34.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were involved in finalised investigations of abuse and neglect, compared to 10.9 per 1,000 other children. The rate of substantiated abuse and neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in 1995–96 was 18.0 per 1,000 children, compared to 5.4 for other children (Tables 9, A15 and A16 and Figure 10) and 5.8 for all children (Table 8).

For other children, the rate of abuse and neglect for girls aged 10–14 years was higher than the rates for other age and sex groups, whereas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, rates for girls aged 10–14 years and for boys aged 0–4 years were very similar.

Unlike other children, the rates of substantiated neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were much higher than the rates of other types of abuse and neglect, particularly amongst young children. In 1995–96 the rate of substantiated neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was 6.9 per 1,000 children, compared to 4.5 for physical abuse, 4.7 for emotional abuse and 1.9 for sexual abuse. The comparative rates for other children were 1.1 for neglect, 1.6 for physical abuse, 1.7 for emotional abuse and 1.0 for sexual abuse (Table 9 and Figure 10).

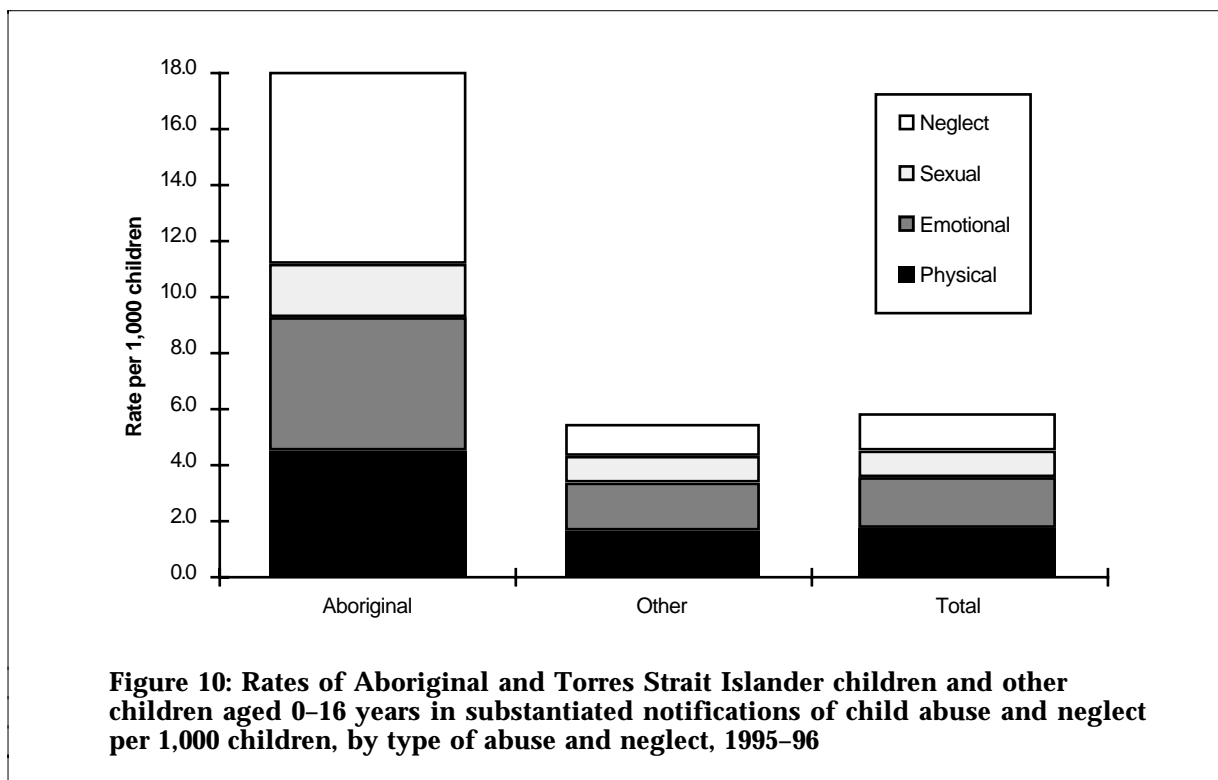
Table 9: Rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other children aged 0–16 years in substantiated notifications of child abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, by sex and age of child and type of abuse and neglect, 1995–96

Age of child (years)	Physical			Emotional			Sexual			Neglect			Total		
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children															
0–4	4.4	3.6	4.1	6.8	6.2	6.5	0.3	1.6	1.0	10.4	10.4	10.4	22.0	21.8	21.9
5–9	5.1	3.4	4.3	3.9	4.2	4.1	0.9	3.6	2.2	6.6	5.6	6.1	16.5	16.8	16.7
10–14	4.7	6.6	5.7	3.3	4.2	3.7	0.3	5.8	3.0	5.3	4.9	5.1	13.7	21.5	17.5
15–16	1.0	5.4	3.2	1.3	2.7	2.0	0.1	1.9	1.0	1.0	1.6	1.3	3.6	11.5	7.5
Total^(a)	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.8	4.7	0.5	3.4	1.9	7.1	6.8	6.9	16.6	19.5	18.0
Other children															
0–4	1.5	1.2	1.4	2.0	2.1	2.1	0.4	0.7	0.5	1.7	1.6	1.7	5.6	5.7	5.7
5–9	1.8	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	0.8	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.1	5.3	5.2	5.3
10–14	1.9	2.1	2.0	1.5	1.8	1.6	0.5	2.2	1.3	1.0	0.8	0.9	4.9	6.9	5.9
15–16	0.7	1.8	1.2	0.6	1.0	0.8	0.3	1.6	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.4	1.9	4.8	3.3
Total^(a)	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.1	4.9	5.9	5.4

(a) Children whose age was unknown or not stated are included as most of these would be aged 0–16 years of age.

Notes

1. Rates are calculated by dividing the number of children aged 0–16 years by the estimated resident population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–16 years at 31 December 1995, multiplied by 1,000.
2. The person columns (P) include children whose sex was unknown or not stated.



9.7 Source of notifications

9.7.1 For investigations that were finalised

Notifications of child abuse and neglect to community service departments come from a number of different sources, including those people or groups of people mandated to report, as discussed in Section 5.2. For finalised investigations in 1995–96, the most common sources of the notification were friends/neighbours (15% of finalised investigations), parent/guardian (14%), school personnel and the police (both 13%) (Table A17).

The outcome of finalised investigations varied according to the source of the notification, with some notifications from particular sources more likely to have an outcome of substantiated than others. While in total 49% of finalised investigations had an outcome of substantiated or child at risk, 63% of those notified by the police and 62% of those notified by the subject child resulted in a substantiation. Relatively high proportions of finalised investigations also had an outcome of substantiated or child at risk where notifications were from non-government organisations, hospital/health centres, medical practitioners and other health workers. In contrast, finalised investigations where the notifier was anonymous or a friend/neighbour had low proportions of notifications substantiated (23% and 33% of finalised investigations respectively) (Table 10).

Consequently, while the police were the source of notification in only 13% of finalised investigations, they were the source of 17% of substantiated notifications.

Friends/neighbours on the other hand were the source of notification in 15% of finalised investigations but in only 10% of substantiations (Tables A17 and A18).

It should be noted that an unknown number of incidences of child abuse and neglect are not reported to community service departments (Cashmore & Castell-McGregor 1996).

Table 10: Distribution of finalised investigations of abuse and neglect by broad type of outcome and source of notification, 1995–96

Source of notification	Substantiations	Child at risk ^(a)	Substantiations plus child at risk	No abuse or neglect	Finalised investigations
Percentage					
Subject child	62	8	70	30	100
Parent/guardian	48	4	52	48	100
Sibling	43	10	53	47	100
Other relative	38	5	43	57	100
Friend/neighbour	33	5	38	62	100
Medical practitioner	56	4	60	40	100
Other health worker	56	3	59	41	100
Hospital/health centre	59	4	63	37	100
Social worker	57	3	60	40	100
School personnel	53	2	55	45	100
Child care personnel	42	4	46	54	100
Police	63	2	65	35	100
Dept officer	53	4	57	43	100
Non-govt organisation	60	2	62	38	100
Anonymous	23	3	26	74	100
Maltreater ^(b)	76	9	85	15	100
Other	45	7	52	48	100
Not stated	45	1	46	54	100
Total	49	3	52	48	100

(a) Only Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory classified outcomes of finalised investigations to the 'child at risk' category in 1995–96.

(b) Only Queensland data are included in this category.

9.7.2 Source of notification by type of substantiated abuse and neglect

The type of substantiated abuse and neglect also varied according to the source of the notification. Physical abuse was found in 52% of substantiated notifications reported by siblings, 48% of substantiated notifications reported by the subject child, and 43% of substantiated notifications reported by school personnel. Emotional abuse was identified in 48% of substantiated notifications reported by 'other health' workers and 47% reported by non-government organisations. Of substantiated notifications reported by school personnel, 25% were classified as sexual abuse, as were 23% of substantiated notifications reported by parents and guardians. Of substantiated notifications reported anonymously, 44% were classified as neglect. Neglect was also identified in 40% of substantiated notifications made by friends and neighbours (Tables A18 and A19).

9.8 Person believed responsible—relationship to child

Data were collected from each State and Territory on the relationship to the child and the sex of the person believed responsible for substantiated abuse and neglect. However, some States and Territories had a large number of unknown values in their data on these items and most either could not report on the sex of the person believed responsible, or could not do so reliably. As a result the following analysis is restricted to those States and Territories that could provide relatively complete data on the relationship to the child of the person believed responsible for the abuse or neglect (Queensland, Western Australia, the Australian

Capital Territory and the Northern Territory). No data are provided for the sex of the person believed responsible.

The data that are available indicate that the person believed responsible in 71% of substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect was the natural parent. This is not surprising given that child abuse and neglect is a child protection issue and that the natural parent is the person most likely to have care of a child. Step-parents were reported as the person responsible in 10% of substantiated notifications and a parent's de facto partner in 7%. Parents were believed to be responsible for 66% of physical abuse substantiations, 77% of emotional abuse substantiations, 87% of neglect substantiations, but only 24% of sexual abuse substantiations. In 17% of sexual abuse substantiations, a step-parent (and in a further 7% a parent's de facto partner) was believed responsible. Other relatives, 'other' people, friends and neighbours and siblings were the other main categories of people believed to be responsible for sexual abuse and for neglect (Table 11).

Table 11: Substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect in Queensland, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, by type of abuse and neglect and relationship to child of person believed responsible, 1995–96

Person believed responsible	Physical	Emotional	Sexual	Neglect	Total
Number					
Natural parent	1,480	832	166	2,108	4,586
Step-parent	329	102	119	125	675
Parent's de facto partner	192	82	50	99	423
Foster parent	54	9	10	6	79
Guardian	19	7	3	22	51
Sibling	32	16	55	7	110
Other relative	68	15	89	39	211
Friend/neighbour	12	2	71	6	91
Other ^(a)	35	11	93	17	156
Not stated	22	3	43	7	75
Total	2,243	1,079	699	2,436	6,457
Percentage					
Natural parent	66	77	24	87	71
Step-parent	15	9	17	5	10
Parent's de facto partner	9	8	7	4	7
Foster parent	2	1	1	—	1
Guardian	1	1	—	1	1
Sibling	1	1	8	—	2
Other relative	3	1	13	2	3
Friend/neighbour	1	—	10	—	1
Other ^(a)	2	1	13	1	2
Not stated	1	—	6	—	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

(a) The Northern Territory includes in this category substantiations where the relationship of the person believed responsible was relative/kinship.

Note: Data for New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania are either not available or have large proportions of 'not stated' for 'person believed responsible'.

9.9 Type of family in which the child was residing

Not all States and Territories could provide data on the type of family in which the child was residing at the time of notification of the abuse or neglect. New South Wales and South Australia were unable to provide any data on this item; Victoria provided data on the type of family at the time of the investigation; Queensland could provide family of residence for substantiated notifications and 'child at risk' but not for all finalised investigations; and Tasmania and the Northern Territory provided data on the family type at the time the abuse or neglect was reported to have occurred. It should be noted that the person believed responsible may not reside with the child (for example, he or she could be a non-custodial parent) and that the type of family at the time of investigation may not be the same as that at the time of abuse or neglect. As a result the information presented in this section should be interpreted carefully.

In interpreting this data it should also be noted that, as discussed in Section 7, the factors associated with child abuse and neglect are complex and no single factor, such as the type of family structure in which a child lives, can fully explain why child abuse and neglect occurs.

In 1995–96, of finalised investigations in those States and Territories for which data were available (Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory), 40% involved children living in single female parent families and 31% living in 'two parent—natural' families. A further 15% of finalised investigations involved children from 'two parent—other' families (such as families where there is one natural parent and a de facto or a step-parent) (Tables A20 and A21). The distribution was the same for finalised investigations involving both male and female children.

For substantiated notifications the proportions were very similar to those for finalised investigations. However, for those finalised investigations with an outcome of 'child at risk', the distribution was slightly different with 41% involving children from single female parent families, 26% from 'two parent—natural' families and 18% from 'two parent—other' families.

Data for the family type of children in substantiated notifications are available for Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Analysis of these data highlight the differences in the child's type of family across the different categories of substantiated abuse and neglect. In these States and Territories in 1995–96, 31% of physical abuse substantiations, 40% of emotional abuse substantiations, 32% of sexual abuse substantiations and 51% of neglect substantiations involved children from single female parent families (Table A22). While only 18% of emotional abuse substantiations and 15% of neglect substantiations involved children from 'two parent—other' families, 26% of physical abuse and 26% of sexual abuse involved children from this family type (Table A22).

The most common types of substantiated abuse and neglect involving children from two parent—natural families and single male parent families were physical abuse and neglect (Tables A22 and A23, and Figure 11). Forty per cent of substantiated notifications involving children from 'two parent—other' families were classified as physical abuse, while 41% of substantiated notifications involving children from single female parent families were classified as neglect (Table A23 and Figure 11).

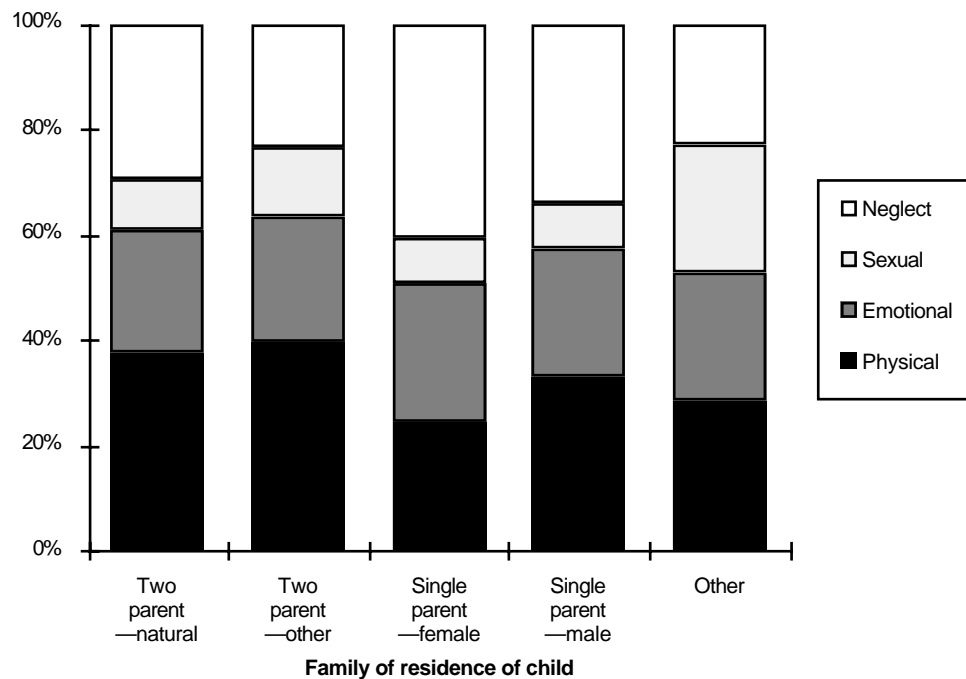


Figure 11: Substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect for Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, by type of abuse and neglect and the type of family in which the child was residing, 1995-96

9.10 Injury and harm

There are no national data available on the type of injury or harm sustained by children who were the subject of a child abuse and neglect substantiation in 1995-96. In addition, where States and Territories could provide data on this item, the categories of injury and harm vary. As a result, separate tables on the type of injury or harm sustained by children in substantiated notifications in 1995-96 are shown for New South Wales (Table A24), Victoria (Table A25), Queensland (Table A26) and Western Australia (Table A27), using each jurisdiction's own classifications. It should be noted that many of the differences reflect different policies and coding practices across the jurisdictions and these data should be interpreted carefully.

In New South Wales child abuse and neglect substantiations are classified according to the 'primary actual abuse'. The classification of injury and harm data is a mixture of items which describe actions responsible for injury and harm to children and resulting identifiable injury and harm sustained. Almost all of the physical abuse categories are types of injuries (burns, cuts, bruising etc.), although some are actions (threats, administration of alcohol). The categories used for emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect substantiations are actions. The most common 'primary actual abuse' in New South Wales in 1995-96 was 'other physical abuse' (1,437), 'emotional abuse due to exposure to domestic violence' (1,287 substantiated notifications), 'left without adequate supervision' (1,225), 'parent's alcohol/drug abuse leading to emotional harm' (1,169), 'sexual fondling' (1,121) and 'parent's emotional state threatens child' (1,097) (Table A24).

Victoria provided data on the most serious type of injury or harm sustained by children in substantiated notifications. This also includes some actions (such as kick/strike/punch). The most common type in 1995-96 were 'failure to ensure safety' (1,046 substantiated notifications), 'functioning affected by exposure to domestic violence/psychiatric illness'

(1,034), 'substantial emotional trauma' (967) and 'likelihood of significant physical harm' (857) (Table A25).

In Queensland the most serious types of injury or harm sustained were classified into the 'other' categories of physical and emotional abuse and neglect (743, 506 and 551 substantiated notifications respectively). Bruising accounted for 538 substantiated notifications (Table A26).

In Western Australia the most serious type of injury in substantiated notifications in 1995–96 was 'no identifiable injury', which relates to where there was no physical evidence of abuse or neglect but it has been stated to have occurred. Cuts, bruises, welts and bites accounted for a further 20% and identifiable emotional trauma for 18% of substantiated notifications in Western Australia (Table A27).