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Child abuse and neglect Australia 1995–96

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and
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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
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Preface

This report was prepared by Anne Broadbent and Rebecca Bentley of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). It is the AIHW's sixth report on child abuse and neglect and the seventeenth in the Child Welfare Series.

Tables in this publication showing statistics for Australia only are available for individual States and Territories on request.

Numbers, rates and percentages shown in the tables may not add due to rounding. The numbers of male and female children may not add to total children as the sex of some children was not stated or unknown. Children whose age was not stated or unknown are included with children aged 0–16 years and 0–17 years as appropriate for the calculation of rates per 1,000 children.

It should be noted that the territory of Jervis Bay is included with the Australian Capital Territory in all the tables.

Rates per 1,000 population for children were calculated using an estimated population for 31 December 1995, based on projected ABS population data for 30 June 1995 and 30 June 1996. Population data for all children were obtained from projections of Australia's population, 1995–2051, Series A (ABS, unpublished data). Population data for Jervis Bay for all children at 31 March 1996 were obtained from the ABS. This was added to the population for the Australian Capital Territory.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population data were obtained from experimental projections, Medium Series, of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (ABS, unpublished data). Population estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children exclude Jervis Bay, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Symbols used in the tables

- nil or rounded to zero
- .. not applicable
- n.a. not available
- M males
- F females
- P persons

Summary

This report presents statistics on notifications of child abuse and neglect made to State and Territory community service departments in the 1995–96 financial year. It also provides data on finalised investigations and substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect and on children who were the subject of these finalised investigations and substantiations. It does not provide details about all child abuse and neglect in Australia as an unknown number of occurrences of abuse and neglect are not reported to community service departments. The main points to be noted from the statistics presented in this report are:

- In 1995–96 State and Territory community service departments recorded 91,734 notifications of child abuse and neglect, of which 74% were investigated and 14% were dealt with by means other than investigation (such as referral). The remaining 12% were not investigated or dealt with by any means; these include notifications where there was insufficient information to allow follow-up and notifications where action or investigation was not considered necessary.
- Of the 67,816 notifications that were investigated during the year, 61,383 (91%) were finalised by 31 August 1996. Of those finalised investigations 49% were substantiated, 47% were unsubstantiated and 4% had an outcome of 'child at risk'. The 29,833 substantiations consisted of 8,467 physical abuse substantiations (28%), 9,265 emotional abuse substantiations (31%), 4,802 sexual abuse substantiations (16%) and 7,299 neglect substantiations (25%).
- Overall, 53% of substantiations involved female children, although this varied across age groups and the types of abuse and neglect. Sexual abuse was far more likely to involve female children, particularly in the older age groups.
- Some children may be the subject of more than one notification, investigation or substantiation of child abuse or neglect in a year. In 1995–96, 71,766 children were the subject of a notification, 51,133 the subject of a finalised investigation and 25,558 the subject of a substantiation. This represents 16.3 children per 1,000 aged 0–16 years in the population who were the subject of a child abuse and neglect notification, 11.6 per 1,000 who were the subject of a finalised investigation and 5.8 per 1,000 who were the subject of a substantiation.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in the child abuse and neglect statistics in 1995–96. The rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in notifications was 42.3 per 1,000 children aged 0–16 years, compared to 15.5 per 1,000 for other children. Similarly, 34.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were involved in a finalised investigation and 18.0 per 1,000 were the subject of a substantiation. The respective rates for other children were 10.9 and 5.4 per 1,000. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are particularly over-represented in neglect substantiations.
- In 1995–96 the most common sources of notifications of abuse and neglect were friends/neighbours, parents/guardians, school personnel and the police. Notifications made by the police or the subject child were more likely to be substantiated than those from other sources. In particular a low proportion of notifications from anonymous sources were substantiated.
- Available data from the States and Territories indicate that in 71% of substantiations the person believed responsible for the abuse or neglect was the natural parent. This is not surprising given that the statistics on child abuse and neglect include only those incidences involving protective issues for the child (that is, where the child's parents or guardians have been responsible for the abuse or neglect, or unable or unwilling to protect the child from abuse or neglect).

- Where States and Territories could provide data on the type of family in which the child was residing, the statistics show that, in 1995–96, 40% of emotional abuse substantiations, 32% of sexual abuse substantiations and 51% of neglect substantiations involved a child from a single female parent family. Thirty-four per cent of physical abuse substantiations involved a child from a ‘two parent—natural’ family. In interpreting these figures it should be noted that 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.