



## New Child Maltreatment Statistics Show Continuing Decline

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Several forms of child maltreatment showed a marked decline nationwide, according to the most recent data released from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Rates of substantiated sexual abuse dropped by 6 percent in 2004 compared to the previous year, capping a 49 percent total decline since 1992. Rates of physical abuse declined by 11 percent from 2003 to 2004, making for a total 43 percent reduction since a peak in 1992. Neglect also declined 6 percent over the one year period.

"These are very encouraging," said David Finkelhor, professor of sociology and director of the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, who has been studying these declines.

"For several years people thought these declines were statistical flukes or they attributed them to changes in the way cases were being investigated or reported." But Finkelhor and his colleagues' investigation into the details of the declines, in addition to their breadth and durability, have convinced him that fewer children really are being maltreated.

He said other sources of data have shown parallel declines, and other related indicators like running away, delinquency, and teen suicide have also improved.

Particularly notable, according to Finkelhor, is the fact that the year-to-year declines in 2004 were the largest since 1999, and that neglect also went down. In the past, neglect did not decline along with other forms of maltreatment.

Finkelhor thinks that the declines are related to a variety of social changes that have occurred in the last generation. He cites more awareness about child maltreatment, improved parenting practices, and more effective treatment for family and mental health problems, including psychiatric medications.

The data showing the decline come from state child protection agencies and are aggregated by the federal government. They cover offenses against children committed primarily by parents and other caretakers. They do not cover most of the crimes against children committed by strangers and more distantly related individuals.

For example, Finkelhor notes that Internet crimes against children have probably been on the rise, but would not be reflected in the new child maltreatment statistics.

The new data are available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm04/index.htm>

For further information about child maltreatment declines please see: Finkelhor, D., & Jones, L.M. (2004). Explanations for the decline in child sexual abuse cases. Juvenile Justice Bulletin – NCJ199298 (pgs. 1-12). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.  
<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/199298.pdf>

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A table showing child maltreatment trends by state is available at:  
[http://www.unh.edu/news/img/cac/Decline\\_table.doc](http://www.unh.edu/news/img/cac/Decline_table.doc) and graphs of the trend are available at: [http://www.unh.edu/news/img/cac/US\\_Maltreatment\\_Trends.ppt](http://www.unh.edu/news/img/cac/US_Maltreatment_Trends.ppt).