

Media Relations

Child Abuse Declines Nationally In Spite Of Economic Deterioration

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Child abuse declined nationally in 2008 compared to 2007, according to a new report by the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. Sexual abuse declined 6 percent, physical abuse 3 percent and neglect 2 percent.

The report also found that child maltreatment fatalities stayed stable from 2007 to 2008. These trends are noteworthy, according to the report's authors, because 2008 marked the first full year of the current recession, and economic downturns are generally thought to be associated with increased family stress and child maltreatment.

"This is good news, but we need to be very cautious," said lead author David Finkelhor, director of the center and professor of sociology. "It could be that discouragement and despair in families about their deteriorating economic situation take longer than a year to show their effects."

On the other hand, the report notes, the recent declines represent a continuation of a large downward trend for physical and sexual abuse that is now over 15 years in length.

"The long-improvement for sexual and physical abuse may be related to a generation-long effort to educate and respond more effectively and aggressively to the problem," Finkelhor said. "If successful prevention efforts are behind the declines, then the improvements may persist even in the face of social stressors like the recession."






The report was based on an analysis of data on substantiated child maltreatment cases submitted by state child protection agencies to the federal government.

Individual states may have trends quite different from the national trends, especially in the short run. For example, in New Hampshire, physical abuse was up 6 percent in 2008 over 2007 and neglect was up 35 percent, while sexual abuse declined 10 percent. Over the longer span, however, most states, including New Hampshire, show the nationally noted decline in physical and sexual abuse.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) aims to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy-makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. More information: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/>

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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Editors and Reporters: The full report, "Updated Trends in Child Maltreatment, 2008," can be downloaded at http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV203_Updated%20Trends%20in%20Child%20Maltreatment%202008_8-6-10.pdf.

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