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UNH Researchers Release Child Maltreatment Report Showing Mixed Trends

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UNH Researchers Release Child Maltreatment Report Showing Mixed Trends

Thursday, February 18, 2021

(HTTPS://WWW.UNH.EDU/UNHTODAY/NEWS/2021/02/18/UNH-RESEARCHERS-RELEASE-CHILD-MALTREATMENT-REPORT-SHOWING-MIXED-TRENDS)

DURHAM, N.H.— A new report from the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC), using data collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, showed a marked increase in the share of child maltreatment cases resulting in fatalities but also declines in physical abuse and neglect in 2019.

The report, which highlights 2019 statistics from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), showed that fatalities rose 4%. The statistics gathered from child protection agencies in each state indicated that the uptick in child maltreatment fatalities was broadly distributed, with 25 states reporting an increase of 10% or more. This increase in fatalities continues an already upward trend to almost 11% since 2015. According to the report, the states with the largest increases in fatalities pointed to investigations with multiple deaths as well as increases in drownings, vehicle-related deaths and unsafe sleep deaths combined with substance abuse.

By contrast, cases of child physical abuse declined 5% and neglect declined 3%. The number of sexual abuse cases known to authorities was considered flat. Sexual abuse has been declining since the early 1990s, but then ticked up by 6% in 2018.

“We’re encouraged to see that the previous rise in sexual abuse cases that we saw in 2018 hasn’t continued,” said David Finkelhor, director of the CCRC. “The decline in cases of neglect is particularly heartening because it has remained low compared to other forms of maltreatment over the last 25 years.”

The report points out that there is not a strong consensus why there has been a long term decline in child sexual and physical abuse but it notes that the downward trend began during a time of economic improvement, increased law enforcement and child protection personnel, more aggressive prosecution, increased public awareness and expanded treatment options for family and mental health problems.

Finkelhor notes that the 2019 data does not reflect any influences from the pandemic and cautions that 2020 data may be difficult to interpret because changes in family dynamics and school attendance could both affect abuse and neglect rates as well as reporting activities.

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