



Latest Nationwide Child Maltreatment Statistics Show Continuing Decline

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April 3, 2007, DURHAM, N.H. -- Several forms of child maltreatment decreased from 2004 to 2005, adding to more than a decade's worth of declines, according to University of New Hampshire researchers who analyzed the latest data released Monday from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Rates of substantiated sexual abuse dropped by 2 percent in 2005 compared to the previous year, capping a 51 percent total decline since 1991. Rates of physical abuse declined by 5 percent from 2004 to 2005, making for a total 46 percent reduction since a peak in 1992. Neglect, however, did not decline either in the most recent year or over the longer term.

"These are very encouraging," said Lisa Jones, research professor at the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, who along with UNH sociology professor, David Finkelhor, 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," Jones said. But, according to the UNH researchers studying these trends, the details of the declines, in addition to their breadth and durability, have built the case for a true reduction in incidence.

For example, data from other sources have shown parallel declines, and other related indicators such as running away, delinquency and teen suicide also have improved.

The researchers believe the declines are related to a variety of factors. They cite economic improvements, greater numbers of child protective workers and police, more awareness about child maltreatment, improved parenting practices, and more effective treatment for family and mental health problems, including the increased use of psychiatric medications.

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