

WHAT it will TAKE:

Investing in Wisconsin's future by keeping kids safe today

Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect in Wisconsin

Timely and accurate reporting of data has the potential to contribute to improving outcomes for children and families across many systems. Nowhere is this more compelling than in the child welfare system in which state and local agencies are held accountable for reporting data related to the safety and well-being of children. This brief, the last in the *What it Will Take* series, summarizes recent data on child abuse and neglect in Wisconsin.

In 2008, data from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families show that 56,934 referrals were made to Child Protective Services (CPS). Of those reports, 47 percent (26,700) were screened in for further investigation. Of those initial referrals, CPS substantiated 5,868 maltreatment allegations.

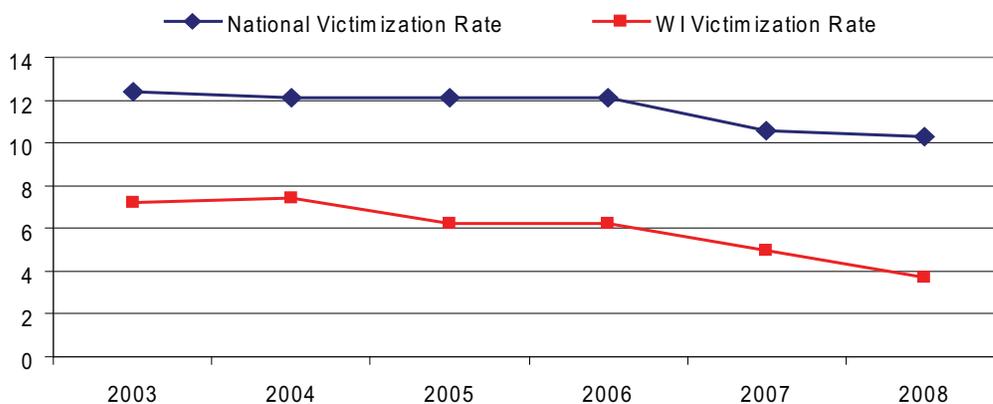
RATES OF VICTIMIZATION

One of the primary national datasets for maltreatment is the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). States collect information on official reports of maltreatment, the investigation of those reports and their outcomes, and report this information to the national database. Figure 1 displays both Wisconsin and national victimization rates. The victimization rate is the number of children found to be victims of maltreatment per 1,000 children.

From federal fiscal year (FFY) 2003 to FFY 2006, the national victimization rate remained steady between 12.0 and 12.2 per 1,000 children. From FFY 2006 to 2008, victimization rates decreased from 12.1 to 10.3 per 1,000 children, a 12 percent decrease.¹ In January 2010, the US Department of Health and Human Services released the *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect* (NIS-4). NIS-4, which collected data in 2005 and 2006, shows a decline in child abuse and neglect nationally, with small declines in emotional and physical abuse as well as significant declines in sexual abuse rates. The rates of child neglect remained virtually unchanged from 1993.²

Similar to the national trend, Wisconsin's victimization rates also decreased from (CY) 2003-2008. In addition to a general nationwide decrease, Wisconsin's rates were also impacted by a policy change in the Access and Initial Assessments Standards in 2006. This change in law makes it no longer mandatory for CPS workers to investigate non-caregiver abuse, which caused the victimization rates to decrease.^{3,4}

Figure 1: Child Victimization Rates: Trends in Wisconsin, 2003-2008

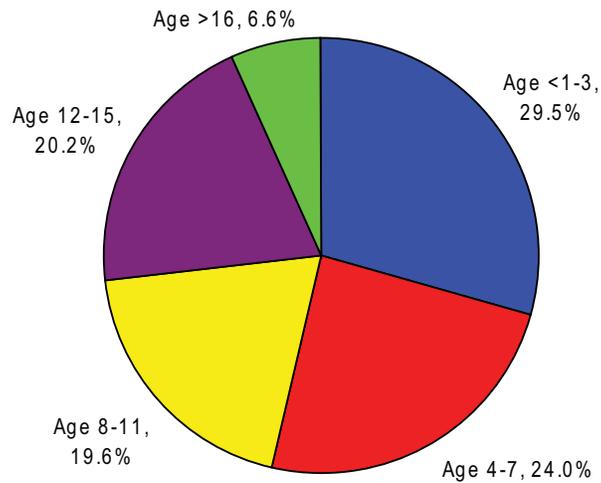


Sources: NCANDS, *Child Maltreatment*, 2008 and Wisconsin CAN Report, 2008

Background Brief #5
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In the US, the youngest children continue to have the highest rate of victimization. In FFY 2008, 32 percent of all victims of maltreatment were younger than 4 years old, and 12 percent of all victims were less than 1 year old.⁵ In general, rates of maltreatment tend to decline with age, although there are small, age-specific exceptions. Wisconsin mirrors the national data.⁶

Figure 2: Wisconsin Victims by Age, 2008



Source: Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Report, 2008

TYPE OF MALTREATMENT

Slightly over half of substantiated maltreatment of children in Wisconsin is neglect. In 2008, 52 percent of victims experienced neglect, 20 percent were physically abused, 27 percent were sexually abused, and less than 1 percent were emotionally abused. In general, maltreatment rates have declined since the 1990s, but neglect rates have declined at a slower rate than physical abuse rates.⁷



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RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

Children of color are overrepresented in the child welfare system in almost every state. Wisconsin has one of the largest disparities in the country between children of color (particularly African American children) and white children in the child welfare system.⁸

Figure 3:

Children in Wisconsin by race & Hispanic Origin, 2008

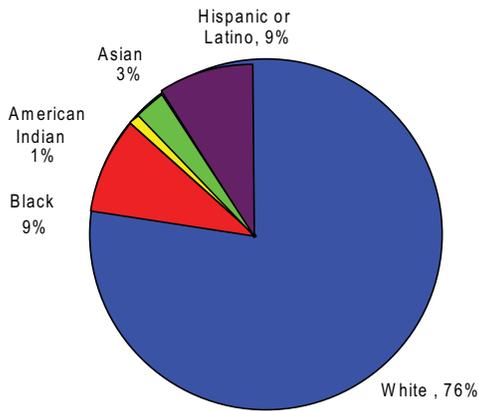
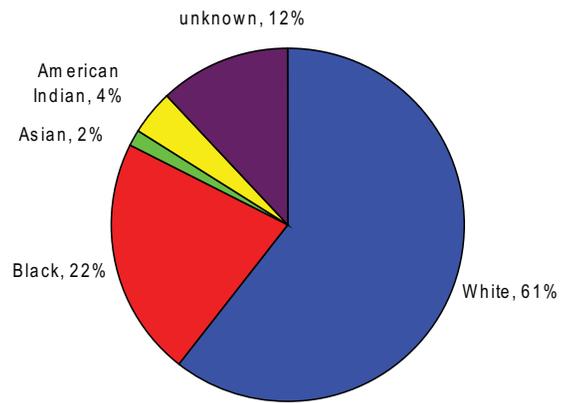


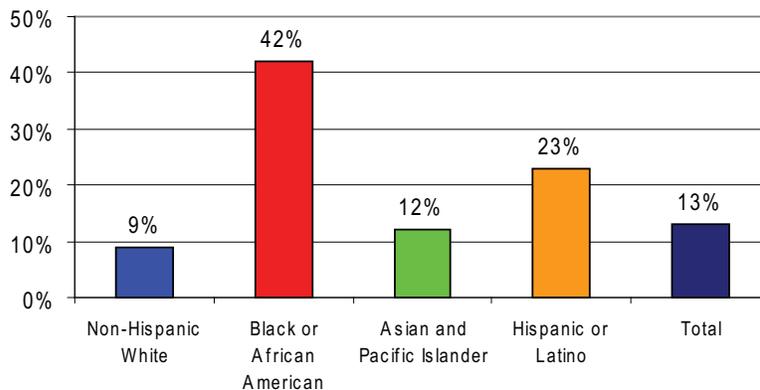
Figure 4:

Wisconsin victims by race, 2008



Race and poverty continue to be strongly correlated with maltreatment rates. Children and families of color are more likely to be reported to CPS. Data from 2008 indicate that black children are three times more likely to be found to be victims than white children.⁹ This may be due in part to the large volume of neglect reports that are related to poverty.¹⁰ Based on 2008 Census data black children in Wisconsin are four and a half times more likely to live in poverty than white children.¹¹ In a comparison of high-poverty counties to low-poverty counties, maltreatment rates are consistently higher in high-poverty counties for children of all ages, especially for infants.¹² This may be due to children from low-income families more frequently encountering mandatory reporters, such as law enforcement and social service personnel. These families are more likely to be screened in for investigation as well.

Figure 5: Children in Poverty in Wisconsin, 2008



Source: US Census Bureau

Finally, while rates of child abuse and neglect appear to be declining, it is unclear what the effect of the recent economic downturn will be on the children and families most at risk. Given that poverty is highly correlated with child maltreatment rates, it remains to be seen whether or not the slow recovery that we are experiencing will be enough of a protective factor for the most vulnerable families.

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Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2008). *Child Maltreatment*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ² Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4)*: Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
- ³ Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Child Maltreatment 2007. Accessed at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm07/index.htm>
- ⁴ Child abuse by non-caregivers is reported to, and investigated by, local law enforcement.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2008).
- ⁶ Data are from unpublished preliminary Wisconsin CAN report, 2008
- ⁷ Wulczyn, F. (2009). Epidemiological Perspectives on Maltreatment Prevention. *Future of Children*, 19(2), 39-66.
- ⁸ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2005). *Race Matters: Unequal Opportunity within the Child Welfare System*.
- ⁹ Data are from unpublished preliminary Wisconsin CAN report, 2008
- ¹⁰ Note: Preliminary 2008 data from Wisconsin indicate that black children are more likely to be substantiated as victims of neglect while white children are more likely found to be victims of sexual assault.
- ¹¹ US Census Bureau. (2008). American Community Survey. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov>
- ¹² Wulczyn et al., 2009.

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This report is one in a series published by the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), Wisconsin's state agency for the prevention of child maltreatment, and the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, a private, not-for-profit research and advocacy organization.

The series includes "Child maltreatment prevention: Where we stand and directions for the future" which summarizes research conducted by CTF, the state Department of Children & Families, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Social Work and the Institute for Research on Poverty; and five background briefs:

1. Child abuse and neglect prevention: What is it and how do we know when it works?
2. Best practices in child abuse and neglect prevention
3. Current trends in approaches to child abuse and neglect prevention
4. Risk and protective factors related to child abuse and neglect
5. Prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Wisconsin

All materials can be downloaded from www.wccf.org/what_it_will_take.php.

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Children's Trust Fund

