



National Hispanic and Latino

PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Understanding And Preventing Child Abuse

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Introduction

This mini e-book was developed to provide information and resources to prevention professionals, providers, and community members on child abuse, types of abuse, warning signs, the impact on Hispanic/Latino families and immigrants, and more.

At the end of the document, you will find resources from trusted sources and action and prevention tips to better support our communities on the issue.

We hope this resource is useful for you, and we hope you can share the information with your family, friends, and colleagues.

Inclusivity Statement

The National Hispanic and Latino PTTC understands that there is a lot of important discussion focusing on the terminology individuals choose to use for racial, ethnic, heritage, and cultural identification. Different terms, such as Latinos, Latinas, Hispanics, Latinx, Latine, Chicano, and others, are all equally valuable. We advocate for self-identification for every person. For purposes of this resource and additional materials, our Center will be using the term Latina and Hispanic.



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INTRODUCTION

In recognition of National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April, let us acknowledge that child abuse is 100% preventable. This is primarily through transformative justice measures that put a greater emphasis on prevention in conjunction with the response.¹

In the year 2020 alone, the government reported 3.9 million referrals of child abuse/maltreatment to Child Protective Services (CPS). This factsheet is intended to provide more information on what abuse is, the different kinds of child abuse, how the Hispanic/Latino populations and the BIPOC populations are affected by child abuse, and finally, the measures that you can take to prevent child abuse in your own communities.¹

WHAT IS ABUSE?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines abuse as improper or excessive use of force, use of language, and/or the use of physical maltreatment to willfully injure or damage. When such maltreatment is done towards a child, it is termed child abuse.^{1,2}

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

Child Trends reports that even with so many differences in legal criteria among each state, almost all states have encountered various forms of child abuse. Common forms of abuse include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.^{3,4}



Physical abuse is the excessive use of physical force on a child. Physical abuse is often defined as an “object” being used to physically injure the child. Objects can include the perpetrator’s body parts like fists, feet, legs, etc., or other inanimate objects like shoes, belts, and any other objects that can cause such harm.⁴



Sexual abuse refers to a child being sexually victimized. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines sexual abuse of a child as “any completed or attempted (non-completed) sexual act, sexual contact with, or exploitation (i.e., noncontact sexual interaction) of a child by a caregiver.” Sexual victimization/abuse can include but is not limited to untoward gestures, penetrative sexual acts, and oral sex received from or performed on a child. Sexual abuse also includes taking pictures or videos of a child in a vulnerable/sexual position.⁴



Neglect is a form of abuse referring to the caretakers’ inability to provide for the child and can often be exacerbated by conditions of capitalism. Neglect is further classified by the CDC as physical, emotional, medical, and educational neglect. Physical neglect is reflective of the caregiver’s inability to provide for hygiene, housing, food, and clothing. Emotional neglect is when the caregiver ignores the child and does not provide necessary emotional support or mental health care. Medical neglect is when the caregiver is unable to provide medical, dental, or vision care for the child. Finally, educational neglect is when the caregiver fails to meet the child’s educational needs.⁴



Finally, **psychological** or **emotional abuse** of a child is inflicted through caregiver behaviors and language. Intimidation, guilt-tripping, gaslighting, needless blaming, belittling, terrorizing, and isolating a child create a lasting psychological impact. An example of coercion of a child can be seen in demands like “I will die if you don’t do this for me.” This and other phrases can then be used to emotionally manipulate the relationship between the child and caregiver.⁴



CHILD ABUSE BY AGE

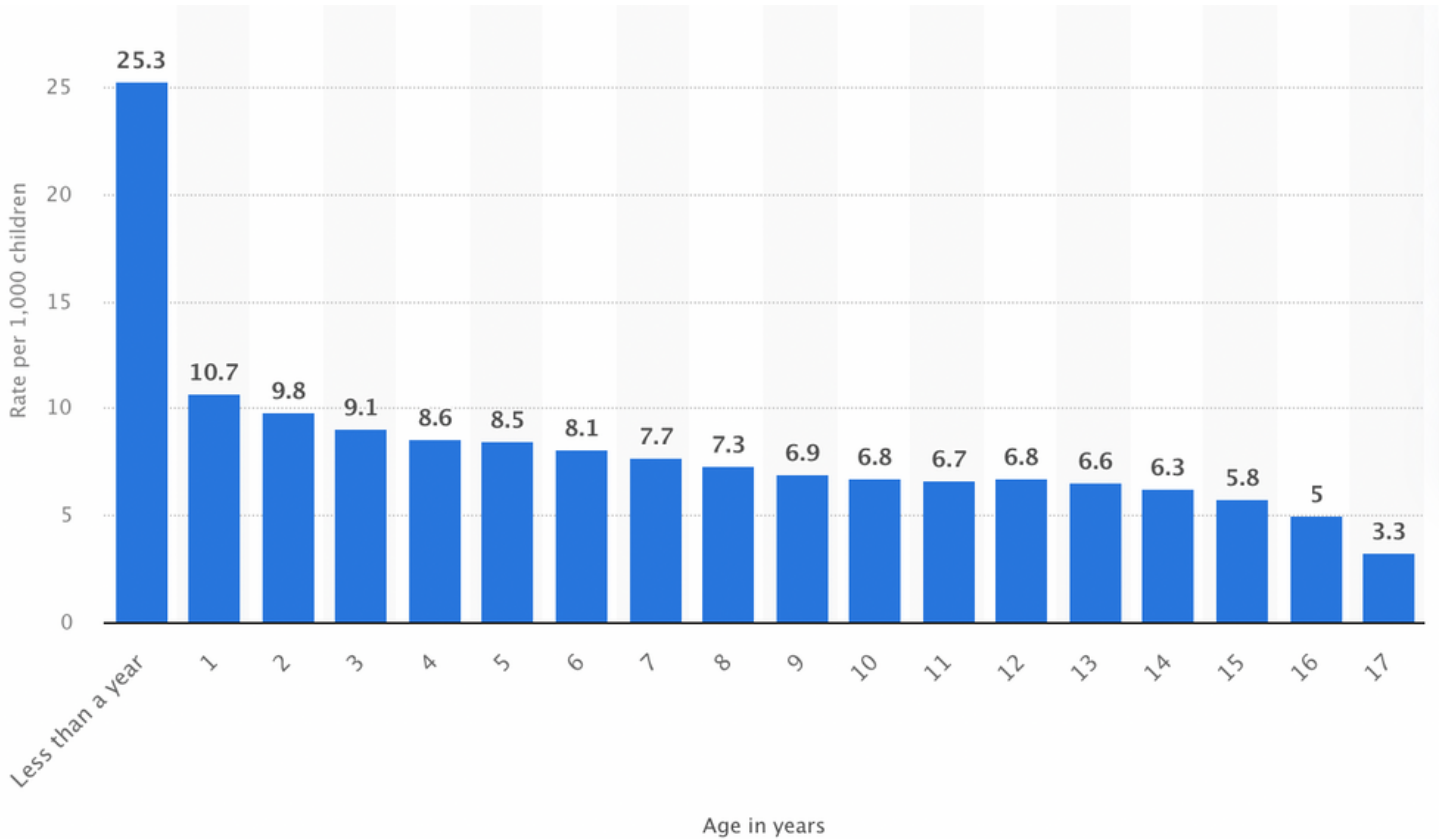


Table 1: In 2021, the abuse rate for infants (children under the age of 1) was 25.3 out of every 1,000 infants in the United States. This was the highest rate of child abuse among all age groups in that year.⁶

A 2021 study released by Statista showed that America has some of the highest rates of child abuse globally. The findings of this study highlighted who often perpetrates child abuse and the children who are most at risk.⁶

The study displayed that across the general population, the most common perpetrators of the abuse were biological mothers or immediate caregivers, including stepparents, especially stepfathers or non-biologically related males who live in the home (Zuckerman & Pedersen, 2017). Demographics show that binary gender (male and female children) does not differentiate rates of experienced child abuse.^{3,5}

However, male victims often had higher rates of mortality due to abuse. Data from a national child welfare study indicates that children under five were at a higher risk of being abused than older children. Study findings showed that the highest rate of abuse was experienced by children under the age of 1.^{3,6}



CHILD ABUSE BY RACE/ETHNICITY

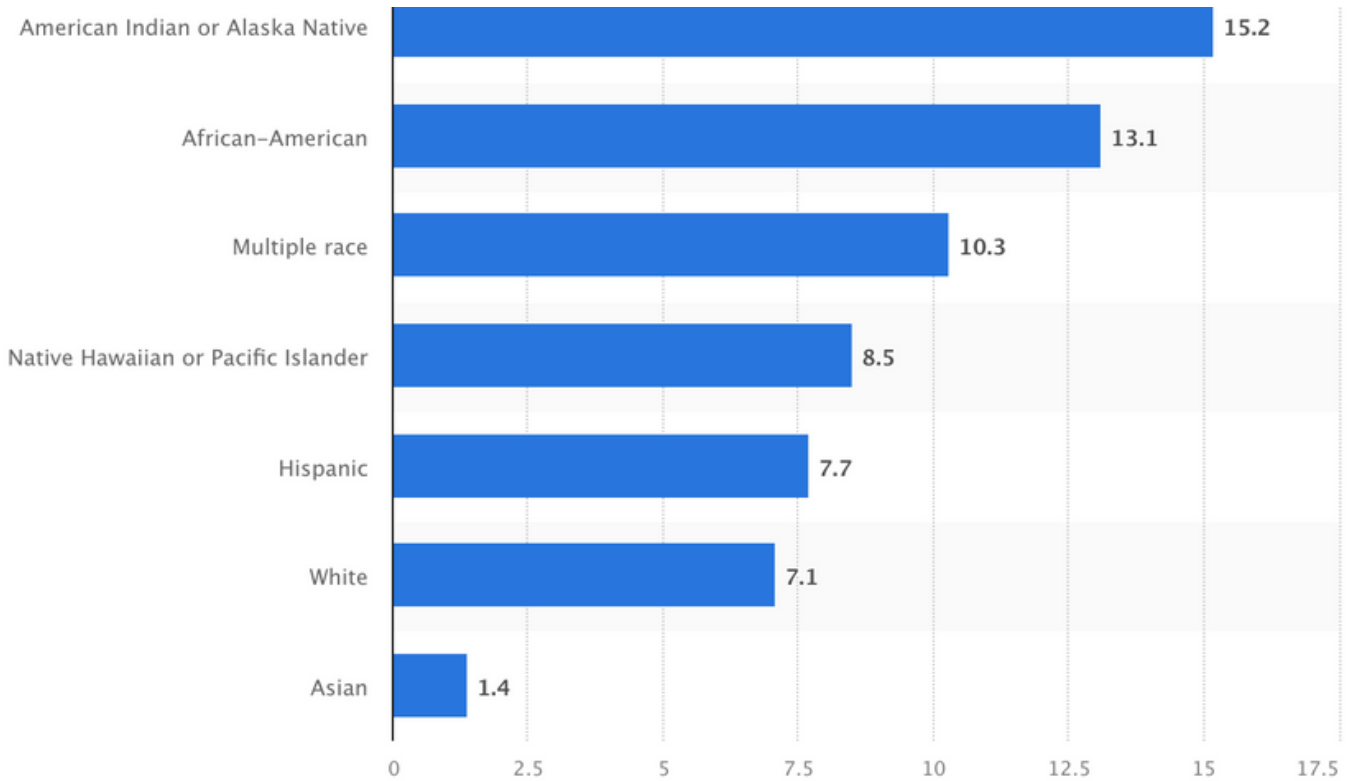


Table 2: Child abuse rate in the U.S. by ethnicity/race.⁷

Statista’s report showed that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) children were the highest category of subgroups to experience abuse. This report also claims that in many of the cases, the perpetrator of the abuse was an immediate caregiver of the child.⁷

Additionally, results display that for every 1,000 children, 7.8 of those children were Hispanic/Latino. The preceding numbers also indicate that among BIPOC children, 15.5 children out of 1,000 experience abuse. Further, children who are American Indian or Alaskan Native experience the highest rates of abuse.⁷

WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

As outlined above, immediate caregivers are often perpetrators of abuse. This does not mean that children cannot be abused by others. Unfortunately, abuse takes other forms, such as peer-to-peer, which can look like bullying, sexual and physical abuse perpetrated by other children.¹



WHAT HAPPENS WITH CONTINUED CHILD ABUSE?

Studies have shown that child abuse and neglect can have long-term and intergenerational effects on a child. Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect can include physical health, psychological, behavioral, and societal consequences. It is possible for these consequences to be independent of one another, but they can also be interconnected, which increases risks and other adverse health outcomes. In many cases, continued abuse has led to the death of children.¹¹



Physical Health Consequences

In some cases, long-term physical effects of abuse or neglect can be detected immediately, but others may take months or years to emerge. Abused children are at a higher risk of stunted growth, impaired motor development, and chronic debilitating diseases like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, and lung disease in adulthood.⁸

Certain physical health conditions can be associated with specific types of maltreatment a child experiences. Neglected children are more likely to develop diabetes, poor lung function, vision problems, and dental problems. Children who experience physical abuse have increased risky sexual behaviors leading to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV.^{9,10}



Psychological Consequences

Various psychological problems can occur in children who have been abused or neglected. Several psychological outcomes have been associated with abuse and neglect, including a higher risk of developing attachment disorders, difficulty with emotional regulation, difficulties with peer relations, dissociation, which increases resistance to psychological treatment, a higher rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as increased suicide attempts during adolescence and adulthood.¹¹



Behavioral Consequences

Even after child abuse or neglect ends, the effects often persist in children, including the tendency for aggressive behavior, the high rates of delinquency and violence, the tendency to initiate sexual activity at an early age, and the high rates of alcoholism and abuse among women.¹¹



Societal Consequences

While abuse and neglect have significant physical, psychological, and behavioral consequences for children, their impact does not end there. As adults, those who have been abused and neglected during childhood often have lower levels of education, employment, and earnings. According to research reports, child abuse, and neglect cost society an estimated 80.2 billion dollars annually.¹¹

HOW DOES IT AFFECT HISPANIC CHILDREN?

Hispanic and Latino children represent the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the U.S., accounting for a growing proportion of child maltreatment victims and survivors. However, actual abuse is often unreported since high abuse rates occur against children under the age of 3. Children are developmentally unable to process or disclose what has happened during this developmental stage.^{12,13}

Other factors, such as societal pressure, poverty, and documentation status also impact the lack of disclosure. Immigrant parents of children who have been abused may also experience increased cultural shame/guilt around reporting, or they face discrimination from those they report the abuse to. Another study's results showed that children underreport sexual abuse out of fear of repercussions and not being believed.^{13,14}

Researchers at the University of Windsor found that many fathers understood the behaviors and actions that constitute child abuse and neglect due to a study entitled "Immigrant Latino Fathers Perception of Child Abuse and Neglect."¹⁵



In some cases, however, parents believed that the "Latino way" of parenting involved hitting and punching their children with their hands and using objects. They reported that they had been severely disciplined growing up in their native countries and that it was an effective method of discipline.¹⁵

This belief emphasizes the long-term intergenerational effects of child abuse and maltreatment that can be difficult to undo. To help Hispanic and Latino parents better integrate into their communities in the U.S., the fathers in this study recommend that professionals provide culturally responsive parenting groups, family therapy, and discipline strategies.¹⁵

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

When a child starts to display considerably distressing changes in behavior, it may be time to have a conversation regarding abuse. Unlike physical abuse, sexual and emotional abuse does not always leave visible marks on the body and may instead manifest in other ways such as behavioral change.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides additional ways to recognize signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect. The following is a list of signs of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.¹⁶

Signs of Physical Abuse

- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Cries or protests when the time to go home comes, appear to be afraid of their parents
- Shrinks at the approach of adults¹⁶



Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change to the gym or participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under the age of 14¹⁶

Signs of Neglect

- Frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather¹⁶

Signs of Emotional Abuse

- Extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Delayed physical or emotional development
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent¹⁶



RESOURCES

Toll-Free Crisis Hotline Numbers¹⁷

Child Abuse

Childhelp®

Phone: 800.4.A.CHILD (800.422.4453)

People They Help: Child abuse victims, parents, concerned individuals

Child Sexual Abuse

Darkness to Light

Phone: 866.FOR.LIGHT (866.367.5444)

People They Help: Children and adults needing local information or resources about sexual abuse.

Suicide Prevention

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Phone: 800.273.TALK (800.273.8255)

TTY: 800.799.4TTY (800.799.4889)

People They Help: Families, concerned individuals

Family Violence

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Phone: 800.799.SAFE (800.799.7233)

TTY: 800.787.3224

Video Phone Only for Deaf Callers: 206.518.9361

People They Help: Children, parents, friends, offenders

Help for Parents

National Parent Helpline®

Phone: 855.4APARENT (855.427.2736) (10 AM - 7 PM PST, weekdays)

People They Help: Parents and caregivers needing emotional support and links to resources



RESOURCES

Toll-Free Crisis Hotline Numbers¹⁷

Human Trafficking

National Human Trafficking Hotline

Phone: 888.373.7888

People They Help: Victims of human trafficking and those reporting potential trafficking situations

Mental Illness

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Phone: 800.950.NAMI (800.950.6264) (10 AM - 6 PM ET, weekdays)

People They Help: Individuals, families, professional

Rape/Incest

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)

Phone: 800.656.HOPE (800.656.4673)

People They Help: Rape and incest victims, media, policymakers, concerned individuals

Youth in Trouble/Runaways

National Runaway Switchboard

Phone: 800.RUNAWAY (800.786.2929)

People They Help: Runaway and homeless youth, families

Missing/Abducted Children

Child Find of America

Phone: 800.I.AM.LOST (800.426.5678)

People They Help: Parents reporting lost or abducted children, including parental abductions



RESOURCES

Toll-Free Crisis Hotline Numbers¹⁷

Missing/Abducted Children

Child Find of America—Mediation

Phone: 800.A.WAY.OUT (800.292.9688)

People They Help: Parents (abduction, prevention, child custody issues)

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Phone: 800.THE.LOST (800.843.5678)

TTY: 800.826.7653

People They Help: Families and professionals (social services, law enforcement)

Substance Abuse

National Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Information Center

Phone: 800.784.6776

People They Help: Families, professionals, media, policymakers, concerned individuals



RESOURCES

Additional Resources

You can visit the following websites for additional support and information.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20857

Toll-free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Email: samhsainfo@samhsa.hhs.gov

SAMHSA Store: <https://store.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: dtac@samhsa.hhs.gov

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

SAMHSA Disaster Mobile App

Website: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhsa-disaster>

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-free talk or text: 1-800-985-5990

Español: Llama o envía un mensaje de texto

1-800-985-5990 presiona "2".

American Sign Language (ASL): Click on the "ASL Now" button on the website or call 1-800-985-5990 from your videophone.

Website: <https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>



RESOURCES

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988

Chat: 988lifeline.org

(Español) Línea de Prevención del Suicidio y Crisis: 988

For TTY users: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 and then 988.

Website: <https://988lifeline.org>

Website (español): <https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol>

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) (24/7/365 treatment referral information service in English and español)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

REFERENCES

1. [Child Maltreatment 2020](#)
2. [Merriam-Webster - Abuse](#)
3. [Child Maltreatment Databank Indicator](#)
4. [Child Maltreatment Surveillance Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements](#)
5. [Child Abuse and Father Figures: Which Kind of Families Are Safest to Grow Up In?](#)
6. [Statista - Child Abuse Rate in the United States in 2021, By Age of the Victim](#)
7. [Statista - Child Abuse Rate in the United States In 2021, By Race/Ethnicity of the Victim](#)
8. [Childhood Maltreatment and Health Impact: The Examples of Cardiovascular Disease and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in Adults](#)
9. [A Prospective Investigation of Physical Health Outcomes in Abused and Neglected Children: New Findings From a 30-Year Follow-Up](#)
10. [Trajectories of Childhood Sexual Abuse and Early Adolescent HIV/AIDS Risk Behaviors: The Role of Other Maltreatment, Witnessed Violence, and Child Gender](#)
11. [Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
12. [Child maltreatment dynamics among immigrant and U.S.-born Latino Children: Findings from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being \(NSCAW\)](#)
13. [Child Sexual Abuse](#)
14. [Disclosing Unwanted Sexual Experiences: Results from A National Sample of Adolescent Women](#)
15. [Immigrant Latino Fathers' Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
16. [Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms](#)
17. [Toll-Free Crisis Hotline Numbers](#)



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