

21. Child Abuse and Neglect

What It Is

The rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect incidents is determined by the number of child abuse and neglect reports that warrant an in-person investigation and are then substantiated. The rate is expressed per 1,000 children in the population ages 0 to 17.

Why It Is Important

Child abuse and neglect are found in families across the social spectrum, and cases are becoming more complex, with more entrenched risk factors. Social isolation, family disorganization, and financial stress and poverty, can also trigger abuse. Younger children are more likely to be victims than older children. Abused children experience higher rates of suicide, depression, substance abuse, difficulties in school, and other behavioral problems in later life. Abused children are also at greater risk of becoming delinquents, mistreating their own children, and becoming involved in violent partner relationships as teens and adults.

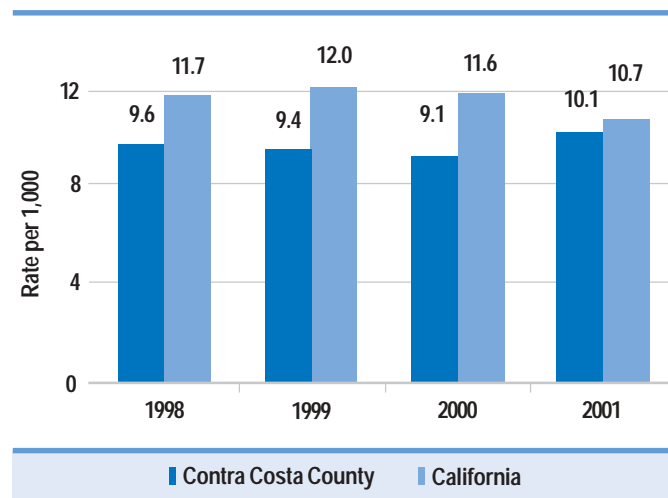
How We Are Doing

After declining for three years consecutively, substantiated child abuse and neglect increased to a four-year high in 2001 in Contra Costa County, even while it decreased statewide. Locally, the rate of substantiated child abuse increased from 9.6 children per 1,000 in 1998 to 10.1 in 2001. However, it still remains below the statewide rate, which decreased from 11.7 to 10.7 during the same time period. In Contra Costa County and throughout California, general neglect is the most common type of abuse/neglect, accounting for 36.4% of all substantiated abuse cases in Contra Costa County in 2001. Physical abuse is the second most common type of abuse accounting for 14.6% of abuse in the county. Caretaker absence or incapacity accounts for 12.4% of cases, followed by emotional abuse accounting for 9.2% and severe neglect accounting for 8.6%. Sexual abuse accounts for 5.3% of cases.

Three factors are thought to have led to the increased number of reports of child abuse: 1) the County completed and implemented its protocol for responding to domestic violence occurrences; 2) additional fiscal resources

provided the ability to substantiate more cases of domestic violence involving children than had been possible in previous years; and 3) the Board of Supervisors implemented a Zero Tolerance Policy Towards Domestic Violence Initiative.

Figure 21.1 — Rate of Substantiated Child Abuse Cases of Children Ages 0 to 17



Source: Needell, B. et al (2002). Child Welfare Services Reports for California.

Table 21.1 — Percentage of Substantiated Cases by Type of Abuse for Children Ages 0 to 17, 2001

Type of Abuse	Contra Costa County	California
General Neglect	36.4%	34.7%
Physical Abuse	14.6%	15.2%
Caretaker Absence / Incapacity	12.4%	10.9%
Sexual Abuse	5.3%	8.7%
Emotional Abuse	9.2%	13.3%
Severe Neglect	8.6%	5.0%
Other Abuse	13.5%	12.1%
Total Number of Substantiated Cases	2,458	115,158

Source: Needell, B. et al (2002). Child Welfare Services Reports for California.