

Child Abuse

In 2010, 77,774 children were referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) in Washington State. This reflects an increase of 5,734 from the number of children referred in 2009 (72,040). This is the largest year to year increase in ten years and is the second highest number of referrals to CPS during the same ten years. The highest number of referrals occurred in 2004 (78,336)

According to Washington's Children's Administration, approximately 40 percent of the referrals for child abuse and neglect are screened out "because there is not sufficient information to locate the child, the alleged perpetrator is not a caretaker, the risk factor does not exist, or the allegation does not meet the legal and/or WAC definition." Thus, the number of confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in Washington State in 2010 is estimated to be approximately 31,110.

According to staff in Washington's Division of Children and Family Services, at least 50 percent of the families of victims of child abuse contained an adult with a substance abuse problem. In addition, research continues to document a link between domestic violence and substance abuse, and domestic violence and child abuse. According to the National Youth Law Center, in homes where domestic violence occurs there is a 30 to 60 percent likelihood that child abuse also is happening. Nationally, nearly one million children each year are confirmed by State agencies as abused and neglected, and over 1,200 children tragically die at the hands of caretaker. (Prevent Child Abuse America, September 2007)

Child abuse and neglect have known detrimental effects on the physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioral development of children (National Research Council 1993). These consequences range from minor to severe, and include physical injuries, brain damage, chronic low self-esteem, problems with bonding and forming relationships, developmental delays, learning disorders, and aggressive and anti-social behaviors. More recently, Vincent

¹¹ *The Causes and Correlates Studies: Findings and Policy Implications*; Thornberry, T.P., Huizinga, D., and Loeber, R.; Journal of the OJJDP, Volume IX, Number 1; September 2004.

Felitti, M.D. has demonstrated a connection between childhood abuse, particularly sexual abuse, and adult obesity, thus increasing weight-related health risks. Child maltreatment has been linked with long-term negative societal consequences. For example, studies link child maltreatment with increased risk of low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, generational child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality (Widom, 1992; Kelly, Thornberry, and Smith, 1997).

"Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States," written for Prevent Child Abuse America by Ching-Tung Wang, Ph.D. and John Holten, Ph.D., states, "It is well documented that children who have been abused or neglected are more likely to experience adverse outcomes throughout their life span in a number of areas" (summarized):

- Poor physical health
- Poor emotional and mental health
- Social difficulties
- Cognitive dysfunction
- High-risk health behavior
- Behavior problems

The authors go on to estimate the cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States in 2007 to be \$103.8 billion. This cost is based on the number of children who could be classified as being abused or neglected according to the Harm Standard in the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) and only the cost related to victims are included.

While the causes of child abuse and neglect are complex, research has identified risk factors that contribute to child maltreatment. These factors include: family history of abuse, parental substance abuse, mental illness or mental retardation, childhood disability, domestic violence, lack of parenting skills and knowledge, extreme poverty, social isolation, and life stress overload. Effective prevention programs identify family risk factors and develop service approaches that target these risk factors.

¹² *Risk Factors for Health and Behavior Problems, 1995*, Hawkins-Catalano; *Forty Developmental Assets, 1997*, Search Institute