

Child Abuse and Neglect Definitions

The *North Dakota Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Study: 2005 Survey Results* focuses on perceptions of three types of child maltreatment: child neglect, child sexual abuse, and child physical abuse. There are other types of maltreatment (e.g., emotional/psychological) not covered in the scope of this study. The definitions of the three types of maltreatment used in the study are:

- **Child Neglect** - Failure to provide for the physical needs of a child under the age of 18 to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm to the child's health or safety.
- **Child Sexual Abuse** - Sexual activity that occurs before the age of 18 that was unwanted or involved another person five or more years older than the child.
- **Child Physical Abuse** - Physically harming the body of a child under the age of 18, by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare. This does not include accidents.

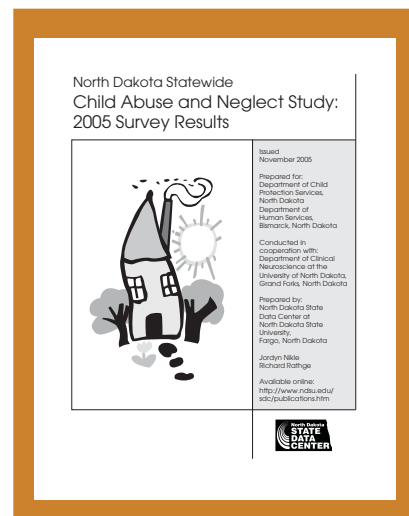
A summary of definitions of child abuse and neglect, with a link to a PDF with detailed definitions for North Dakota and other states, can be found on the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website at: nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal/statutes/define.cfm.

The full report and additional resources about child abuse and neglect in North Dakota can be found at:

www.ndkidscount.org/childabuseneglect/childabuseneglect.htm

Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect in North Dakota

During a typical 8-hour work day, an average of six children are involved in reports of suspected abuse and neglect in North Dakota. This equates to 18 children a day, or a total of 6,851 children in 2003 statewide. Gathering this number of children together would be more than the size of Valley City, North Dakota's 12th most populated city. One child can be a victim of more than one type of maltreatment. Therefore, in 2003, the number of suspected victims by type of maltreatment were: 3,505 of child neglect, 406 of sexual abuse, 1,589 of physical abuse, and 3,072 of psychological abuse (ND Department of Human Services).

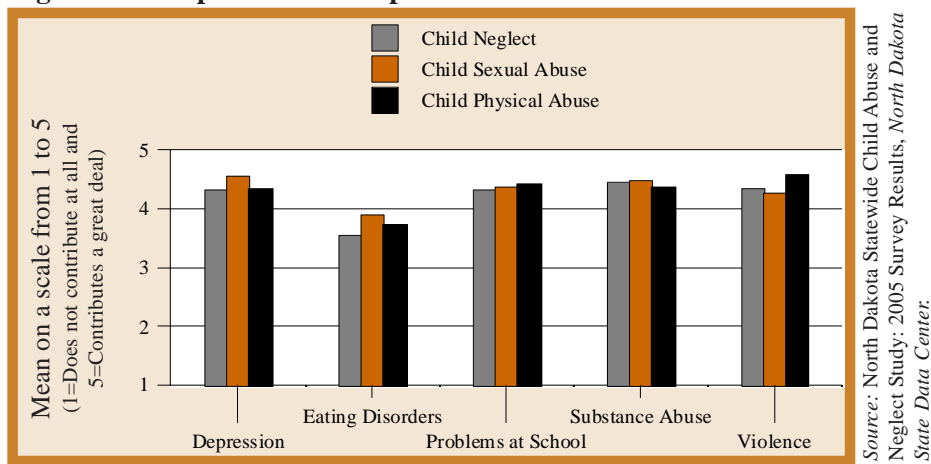


It's about protecting children.

The *North Dakota Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Study: 2005 Survey Results* examines North Dakota residents' perceptions regarding child abuse and neglect and provides a baseline for broadening awareness. Conducted by the North Dakota State Data Center, the study found that most North Dakota residents (approximately 70%) believe that child neglect, child sexual abuse, and child physical abuse are moderate or serious problems in North Dakota, including approximately 17% who believe that they are serious problems.

The study also found that North Dakota residents believe child abuse and neglect have devastating consequences to the victims. Residents believe that child neglect, child sexual abuse, and child physical abuse contribute substantially to various child behaviors, such as depression, problems at school, substance abuse, violence, and, to a lesser degree, eating disorders (Figure 1). The vast majority of North Dakota residents also believe that victims of child neglect, child sexual abuse, and child physical abuse are more likely than non-victims to abuse or neglect their own children or others. This suggests a belief in a perpetual cycle of abuse.

Figure 1. Perceptions of the impact of maltreatment on five child behaviors



Source: North Dakota Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Study: 2005 Survey Results, North Dakota State Data Center.

North Dakota Residents' Perceptions Regarding Social Norms

The study included several questions inquiring about North Dakota residents' perceptions of social norms regarding gender roles and parenting in order to gain insight into how people perceive abuse issues.

Statements with which most North Dakotans tended to **DISAGREE**:

- It is worse for a mother to abuse her child than for a father to abuse his child (83%).
- Children should be seen and not heard (82%).
- The mother's role in a child's upbringing is more important than the father's role (80%).
- If you praise children too much it may go to their head (75%).
- Parents who spare the rod will spoil the child (60% disagree; however, 20% agree).
- It is better if the father is the achiever outside the home and the mother takes care of the home and family (52% disagree; however, 31% agree).
- A preschool child is likely to be negatively impacted if his/her mother works (50% disagree; however, 26% agree).

Statements with which most North Dakotans tended to **AGREE**:

- Parents don't spend enough time with their children (78%).
- Parents often feel uncertain about what is the right thing to do in raising their children (70%).
- Women are more likely to notice abuse than men are (55% agree; however, 24% disagree).

"Views on child abuse do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, these views are interwoven with perspectives on parents, parenting, views of children, and knowledge of child development."

-Public Knowledge LLC report on *Discipline and Development*

The Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

The study also examined North Dakota residents' perceptions regarding the reporting of child abuse or neglect. It found that the majority of North Dakota residents (66%) would report a case of child abuse or neglect to authorities if they were aware of one, while one-fifth (19%) would talk directly to the parents. The study also indicates that one-fourth (26%) of North Dakota residents *definitely* know which steps to take to report a case of child abuse or neglect, and half the residents (49%) are *pretty sure* they know which steps to take.

For information on reporting procedures in North Dakota, please visit:

www.state.nd.us/humanservices/services/childfamily/cps

While it is encouraging that most North Dakotans will report a case of child abuse or neglect, and know what steps to take, the study also provides insight into reasons why some North Dakota residents would hesitate to report a case. Residents said they would hesitate for the following reasons:

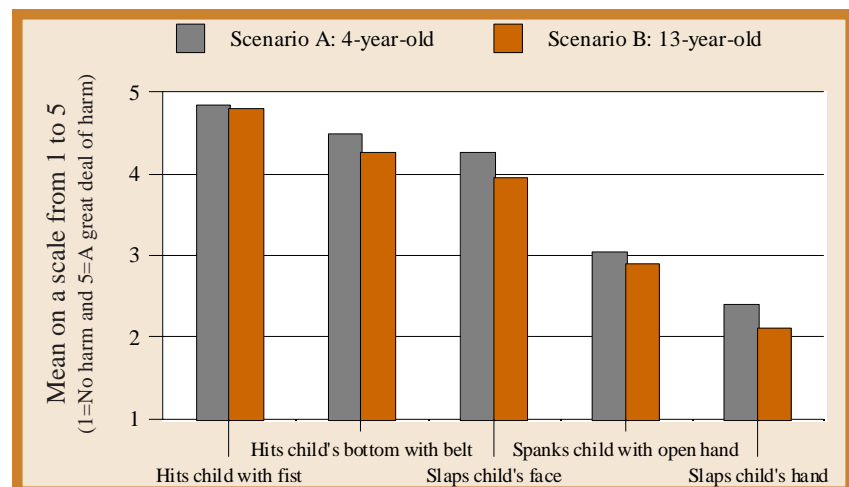
- They do not have enough information to follow up on the situation (63%).
- They do not know enough about the family to know if what they saw really is a problem (57%).
- The abuse doesn't seem quite severe enough to report (56%).
- They aren't sure whether the abuse was a one time thing (54%).
- They would be uncomfortable getting involved (32%).

This hesitancy to report child maltreatment is likely related to variation in the level of harm that different actions are perceived to have on a child. Perceptions of the level of harm differ based on the action taken as well as on the age of the child. Residents perceive the five actions in Figure 2 to cause different levels of harm. Hitting the child with a fist is perceived to clearly cause the child harm, while spanking the child with an open hand and slapping the child's hand are perceived to cause much less harm. In addition, the actions are perceived to be more harmful to the 4-year-old child in Scenario A than to the 13-year-old child in Scenario B.

Figure 2. Perception of Amount of Harm to Child Caused by Each of Five Responses by Parent in Scenario A and Scenario B

Scenario A: A parent repeatedly tries to give their 4-year-old child prescribed medication. After the child spits it out for the fourth time, the frustrated parent...

Scenario B: A 13-year-old child is caught sneaking back into the house for the second time this week. In response, the parent...



Source: North Dakota Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Study: 2005 Survey Results, North Dakota State Data Center.