

Child Maltreatment in Indiana: From Silence to Solutions

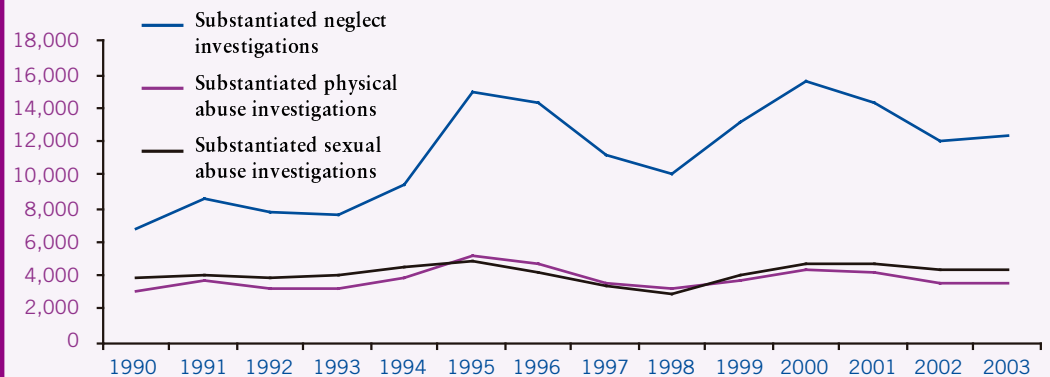
Briefly

Child maltreatment remains a dire problem in Indiana. Last year the state verified 12,308 cases of neglect and 8,060 cases of abuse.¹ More startling, an average of 54 Hoosier kids a year—more than one child a week—have died since 1996 as a result of abuse, most often at the hands of parents. First solutions rest in family stability and community support to protect children. Government plays a role by providing public safety for vulnerable youth. A state-appointed panel just concluded a review of Indiana's child welfare systems and released 32 recommendations for change.² National child advocates have contributed their suggestions and endorsed several "best practices" from around the country. The issue is urgent; information and ideas are plentiful; budgets are tight. The question: Now what?

What we know

Indiana has the 18th highest rate of substantiated cases of child maltreatment among 49 states reporting statistics. Abusers are rarely prosecuted here; fewer than one in five victims seeks relief in court.³ Ours is the only state that doesn't require an attorney or special advocate to represent a child in legal proceedings.⁴ Recent data portray a troubling picture. Among the facts we know about child abuse in the Hoosier state are:

Substantiated Child Maltreatment, Indiana: 1990-2003



Source: Indiana Department of Public Welfare, Annual Reports, FYs 1990, 1991; Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Family and Children, Annual Report, FY 1992; Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Family and Children, Demographic Trend Report, SFYs 1993-2002; Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, SFY 2003 ICWIS Year End Report.

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¹ Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, ICWIS Year End Report - 125 Report. These data count children in only one maltreatment category per investigation. The maltreatment category is reported by the hierarchy defined by the federal government: sexual abuse, physical abuse, then neglect. Using the federal hierarchy undercounts physical abuse and neglect cases, so most Indiana data reflect the number of maltreatment incidences rather than the federal hierarchy.

² Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families. "Putting Children First: Recommendations from the Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families." August 15, 2004.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (2004). Child Maltreatment 2002. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁴ Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families. "Putting Children First: Recommendations from the Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families." August 15, 2004

- In state fiscal year (SFY) 2003, a child’s natural parent was responsible for physical abuse in 64.7% of cases, for neglect in 83.4 % of cases, and for fatalities in 69.6% of cases.⁵
- Children under age 4 are more likely victims of neglect than any other age group.
- The incidence of sexual abuse increases with the age of the child, with females the targets in 76.7% of the cases substantiated in SFY 2003.
- Children between ages 7-12 are particularly vulnerable to all types of maltreatment—this age group accounted for 35.8% of physical abuse victims, 33.6% of sexual abuse victims and 28.6% of neglect victims in SFY 2003.
- White children make up the majority of maltreatment victims in Indiana, accounting for 75.3% of physical abuse cases, 82.4% of sexual abuse cases and 76.4% of neglect cases in SFY 2003.⁶

- Black children are overrepresented at every point in the child welfare system, including investigations, out-of-home care, and termination of parental rights. Researchers have found that children of color not only enter foster care at a higher rate, but they stay longer, leave at a slower rate than White children, and are less likely to be reunified with their families. These disparities exist despite evidence that there are “no differences in the incidence of child abuse and neglect according to racial group.”⁷
- Long-term effects of neglect and abuse vary, but research indicates that victims are at risk of suffering negative consequences well into adulthood. These consequences may include depression, low self-esteem, an inability to cope, and a heightened likelihood of abusing alcohol and drugs.⁸

Profile of Child Maltreatment Victims, Indiana: SFY 2003		
Demographics	Percent	Rate of Victimization (per 1,000)
Age		
0-3 years	25.4%	16.4
4-6 years	17.1%	14.7
7-12 years	30.8%	12.6
13-18 years	21.7%	9.0
Unknown	5.1%	N/A
Gender		
Female	54.2%	14.7
Male	45.5%	11.7
Unknown	0.3%	N/A
Race		
White	77.4%	11.9
Black	17.2%	21.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.3%	3.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.2%	53.9
More than one race	3.1%	20.7
Unknown	0.8%	N/A
<i>Source: Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, SFY 2003 ICWIS Year End Report; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2002 State Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin. Calculations by the Indiana Youth Institute.</i>		

⁵ Indiana Family and Social Services Administration. SFY 2003 ICWIS Year End Report, Table ARN 157_3/159; Indiana Family and Social Services Administration. “Child Abuse and Neglect SFY 2003 Annual Report.” Bureau of Family Protection and Preservation, Child Fatality Review Reports, December 2003: <http://www.in.gov/fssa/PDF/2003report.pdf>.

⁶ Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Bureau of Program Evaluation. “Demographic Characteristics of Children: Substantiated Cases of Abuse and Neglect, State Fiscal Year 2003.” SFY 2003 ICWIS Year End Report.

⁷ Green, M.Y. “Minorities as Majority: Disproportionality in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.” Children’s Voice Vol. 11, Nov/Dec 2002. As quoted in “Putting Children First: Recommendations from the Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families,” Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families, August 15, 2004.

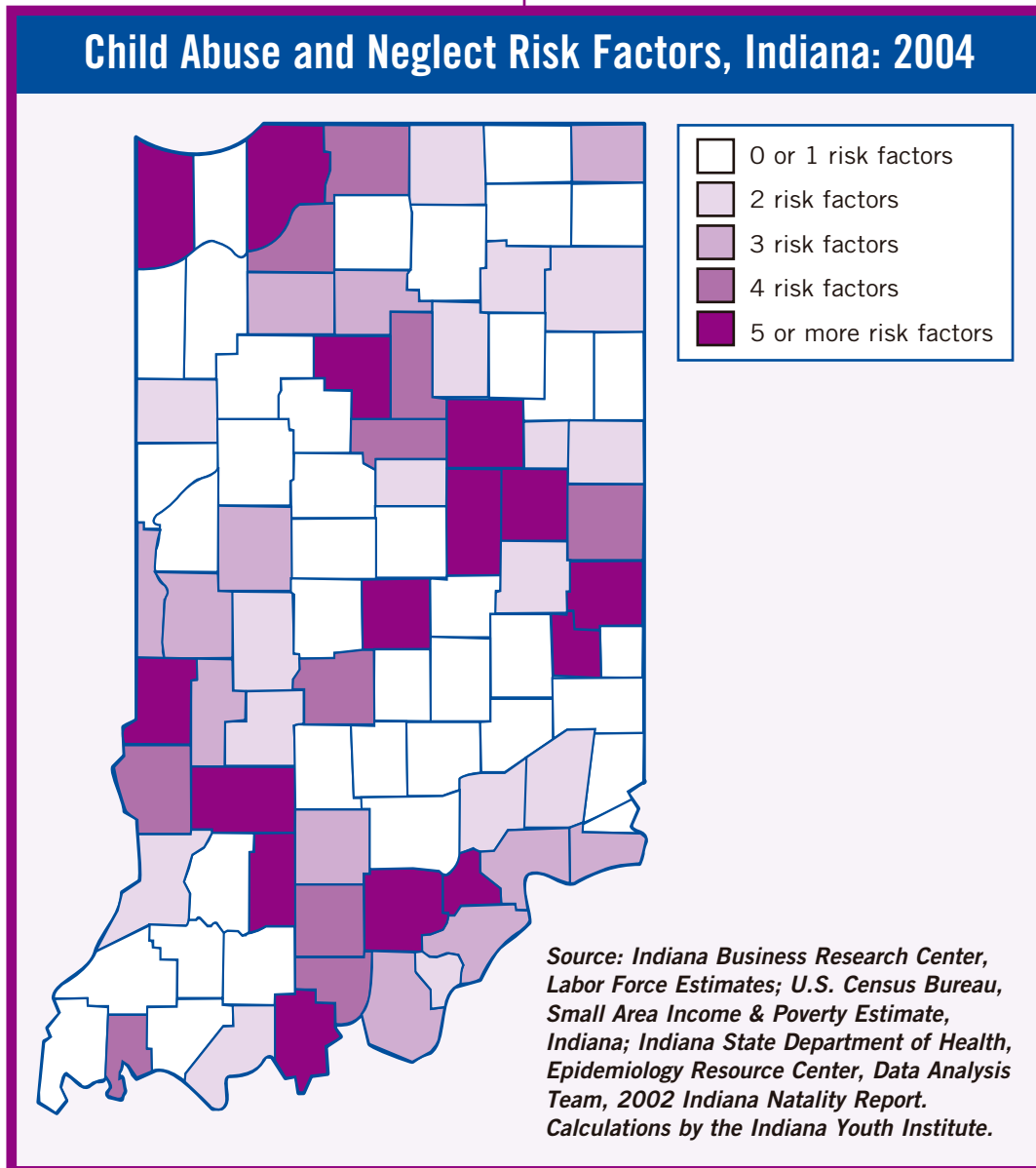
⁸ Chalk, R., Gibbons, A., and Scarupa, H.J. “The Multiple Dimensions of Child Abuse and Neglect: New Insights into an Old Problem.” Child Trends, May 2002; <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/ChildAbuseRB.pdf>.

Recognizing risk factors

Although neglect and abuse occur in all geographic areas and at all socioeconomic levels, at least six factors can contribute to an environment that puts children at risk. Multiple factors compound the risk and increase feelings of stress and social isolation. These factors include:

- Unemployment
- Poverty
- Births to mothers under age 20
- Births to unwed mothers
- Low birthweight
- Premature birth

In the map below, counties are shaded according to their cumulative risk factors based on whether each factor is above or below the state average. While this map does not provide definitive evidence as to why some counties have higher rates of child maltreatment than others, it offers information that counties may find helpful as they consider ways to support families at risk of child maltreatment.



Probing for solutions

The 26-member commission that recently studied Indiana's public and private child welfare systems considered 70 proposals for change, then trimmed the number to 32 recommendations that commissioners say will meet the short-term needs of the next five years. They ranked only the first three recommendations by priority. The state has since announced changes that responded at least partially to some of the report's proposals. The commission's priorities are listed below, with the state's responses indicated in italics.

1. Drastically reduce the caseloads of workers and supervisors within the Division of Family and Children (DFC). To meet standards set by the Child Welfare League of America, this means the state must double its current workforce of 800 caseworkers at a cost of \$39.4 million. *The state has announced the immediate addition of 60 caseworkers.*
2. Require family case managers and child welfare supervisors to have appropriate college degrees plus field experience at a child and family service agency.
3. Provide at least one fulltime child-welfare trainer for each of the state's seven DFC regions. Estimated cost is \$486,000. *The state has responded with a plan to add nine trainers, bringing the total to 11 and reducing the need to use contract consultants.*

Additional commission recommendations call for ongoing professional development for DFC staff members; improved communication among judges, prosecutors, doctors and other child-advocate professionals; stricter accountability at every level of the system; in-depth research into child abuse indicators, causes, prevention and intervention; and expansion of programs that give victims representation in court. To initiate and oversee efforts to halt abuse and implement change, the commission recommended the formation of PECCAN—a Permanent Executive Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect.

What's working

Child welfare systems across the country are facing the same challenges as Indiana. In response, many states have initiated creative strategies to reduce abuse and improve services to victims and families. Among the trends are stricter educational requirements with built-in incentives for caseworkers, the formation of partnerships within communities to address the needs of at-risk families, and a growing awareness that each case is unique and requires different combinations of services and supports. Efforts that many experts cite as promising include:

- New York City has created the first civil services positions designed specifically for child welfare workers. The jobs have tougher eligibility standards, carry higher salaries and adjust wages according to merit. Caseworkers hoping to advance to supervisory posts must pursue graduate degrees in social work, and the state maintains a scholarship program to provide tuition.⁹
- Utah now requires caseworkers to be licensed as social service workers, social workers, clinical therapists or clinical social workers. After earning their licenses, caseworkers must obtain 40 hours of training each year.¹⁰
- Two Illinois counties support QUEST, a program to help families with substantiated reports of abuse and neglect whose children still live at home. A team—family members, friends, community-based workers and others—develops an action plan to solve specific problems. A professional family advocate oversees the plan's implementation and ensures all services are coordinated.¹¹

⁹ New York Administration for Children's Services. "Six Years of Reform in Children's Services: 1996-2002 Reform Update." Administration for Children's Services Office of Communications, October 2002: http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/acs/pdf/reform_update.pdf.

¹⁰ Forsythe, N.D., and Forsythe, R. "Fiscal Year 2003 Annual Report: Services and Outcomes." Utah Division of Child and Family Services: <http://www.hsdscfs.utah.gov/pdf/Annual03.pdf>.

¹¹ National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. "Community Collaborations: A Growing Promise in Child Welfare." Best Practice/Next Practice Vol. 1 No. 2, Fall 2000: <http://www.cwresource.org/Online%20publications/Fall00.pdf>.

- Colorado’s El Paso County—noting that children in families earning less than \$15,000 annually are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than children in families with incomes of \$30,000—has integrated its child welfare and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies. Private contractors provide many child welfare services and are held accountable for results. Only the most serious cases involve juvenile court. Others are handled by assessing the family’s needs, designing an action plan and offering appropriate services. A community college provides training for all caregivers and welfare staff.
- Because cost is a universal concern, some states have looked for creative ways to meet goals without adding excessive debt. As an example, El Paso County maximized the flexibility of TANF funding to pay for the prevention and early intervention services and financial supports offered by its Kinship Care program.¹²

Action steps

In several states—Connecticut and New Jersey among them—the courts have intervened and forced government to overhaul their child welfare systems. To avoid the same kind of mandate, Indiana parents, communities and policy makers should consider the following action steps.

1. Organizations such as faith-based groups, community centers and schools should launch or expand efforts to teach and encourage good parenting practices. Families are the first line of support and defense for children. By looking for ways to bolster families, organizations can assume a proactive role in preventing child abuse rather than relying on state government’s reactive role of serving victims of abuse and neglect.

2. Because several states have faced similar problems, Indiana should consider tapping into the experience and wisdom of welfare administrators who have effectively redesigned their child-protection systems. Bringing in consultants from states such as New York and Utah might save valuable time and funds.
3. When designing solutions to a family’s child abuse and neglect problems, one size does not fit all. State agencies can explore a more tailored approach to the delivery of services, similar to the program in El Paso County, Colorado.

Additional Resources

- Child Welfare League of America:
<http://www.cwla.org>
- Prevent Child Abuse America:
<http://www.preventchildabuse.org>
- Prevent Child Abuse Indiana:
<http://www.pcain.org>
- Healthy Families America:
<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org>
- Healthy Families Indiana:
<http://www.in.gov/fssa/families/protection/dfchealthy.html>
- Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and Their Families:
<http://socialwork.iu.edu/site/indexer/903/content.htm>

¹² Hudson, R. Q. “A Vision for Eliminating Poverty and Family Violence: Transforming Child Welfare and TANF in El Paso County, Colorado.” Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2003: http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1043875845.58/El_Paso_report.pdf.

Indiana Youth Institute Resources

- IYI's Web Site, www.iyi.org, a growing source of reliable information to youth workers, visited by about 3,000 unique organizational users each month. The site contains information about IYI's programs, links to other sources, new reports on children, job information, Indiana county data that can be downloaded and manipulated into reports and graphs, and IYI's entire catalog of library materials, which can be borrowed online.
- Virginia Beall Ball Library, an outstanding collection of materials on healthy youth development, youth service delivery, nonprofit management and fund raising. All materials can be borrowed easily by youth workers throughout the state, either online, on-site, or through our toll-free main number. Custom research also is provided at no cost.
- On-the-Road Trainings, at substantial discounts, taught by outstanding instructors on topics most requested by youth workers, including fund raising, working with children, and parent involvement.
- Professional Development Grants, mini-grants of up to \$750 for qualified youth workers to attend their choice of courses, seminars, workshops, and conferences.
- Youth Service Help Line, 877-IYI-TIPS, a free telephone assistance service that provides quick answers from professional mentors about fund development, legal questions, and working with children and parents.
- IYI Assessment Team, which provides low-cost, customized program evaluation tools and professional evaluation to youth organizations.
- IYI Evaluation Associates, for organizations requiring more comprehensive, long-term professional evaluation, billed at low contract rates.
- TechWizards, a consulting program that provides youth organizations with technology assistance and planning.
- Youth Service Briefcase, which offers professional consultation on fund raising and nonprofit management issues such as strategic planning, board development, marketing, and volunteer recruitment and retention.

**For more services, visit www.iyi.org
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