



Evaluation of New Jersey Child Maltreatment Data Collection Systems

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Introduction

Accurate child maltreatment data is critical to understanding the scope of the problem, assessing the risk to children in the population, pinpointing key differences between different groups of children or regions of the state, and identifying trends over time in the fight against child abuse and neglect. But collecting accurate child maltreatment data and interpreting them wisely are not easy. Developing accurate statistics requires busy professionals to enter data consistently and carefully. They need to use data collection methods to protect the validity of the data through changes in software, policy, administrative procedures, and resources. This report profiles data systems on child maltreatment in New Jersey and discusses the implications for understanding the scope of the problem and improving the measurement of child abuse in the state. The New Jersey Children's Alliance commissioned the report in response to a recommendation of its Children's Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board.

Between 2014 and 2020, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families received 624,075 reports of child abuse and identified 46,692 victims of child maltreatment¹. During this period, New Jersey trial courts added 30,368 child abuse cases², and New Jersey Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) that were members of the National Children's Alliance (NCA) reported they served 19,343 children affected or potentially affected by maltreatment.³ Statistics are available for all New Jersey CACs (NCA members and other CACs) for 2019 and 2020: they show that CACs served almost 7,500 children in those years⁴. Each case could involve a child who was hurt and may continue to be victimized, whose current and long-term well-being and development may be harmed.

Child maltreatment can involve victims with multiple organizations including child protective services, Children's Advocacy Centers, victim advocate programs, health and mental health agencies, law enforcement, prosecutors' offices and the courts. Finkelhor, Cross and Cantor developed a conceptual model of this de facto, fragmented system that labels it the *juvenile victims justice system*⁵. Extensive involvement with the juvenile victims justice system is stressful for children, as they and their family may experience multiple investigative or court actions. They may undergo more family disruption too in connection with their contact with the

¹ Rutgers School of Social Work (n.d.) *NJ Child Welfare Data Hub*. <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/>

² New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts (n.d.) *Court Management States*. <https://www.njcourts.gov/public/stats.html>

³ National Children's Alliance (2022). *CAC Statistics*. <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/cac-statistics/>

⁴ The New Jersey Children's Alliance has calculated statistics for 2019 and 2020 for all New Jersey CACs, both member and non-members of the National Children's Alliance. New Jersey CACs served 4,150 new children in 2019 and 3,305 in 2020. Because of the Covid pandemic that started in 2020, 2019 is likely to be the more representative of those years. If we extrapolate 2019 to the years 2014 to 2018, this suggests that New Jersey CACs served as many as 24,000 children between 2014 and 2020.

⁵ Finkelhor, D., Cross, T. P., & Cantor, E. (2005). The justice system for juvenile victims: A comprehensive model of case flow. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 6, 83–102. Finkelhor, D., Cross, T.P. & Cantor, E. (2005). *How the justice system responds to juvenile victims: A comprehensive model*. OJJDP Crimes Against Children Series, Bulletin. (NCJ 210951). <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/210951.pdf>

system. But extensive contact may also help child victims access services and resources that they need.

One challenge in profiling child maltreatment in New Jersey is that different systems see different populations of victimized children. The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) investigates allegations of child maltreatment by a caregiver but refers allegations of child victimization by other perpetrators to law enforcement. The Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers only serve those children who are referred to them (usually by DCP&P or prosecutors' offices) because of a need for medical and/or mental health expertise. Police and prosecutors pursue criminal child victimization charges when the abuse violates state statutes but may not become involved in many child abuse and neglect cases that are unlikely to result in criminal charges. The criminal courts only become involved if child maltreatment is prosecuted and the civil courts if children are placed in resource care with a substitute caregiver.

Moreover, databases in each system differ in ways that make it difficult to compare child maltreatment populations across systems. Data systems define cases differently, measure different types of child maltreatment in various ways, include different data fields, record data at different timepoints in the case, and define cases differently.

In this report, we first review data systems across New Jersey stakeholder systems that collect data on child maltreatment. Second, we discuss issues that complicate comparison of data across systems. Third, we examine gaps in data collection. Fourth, we develop the best estimate that we can for the number of New Jersey child maltreatment cases in publicly available data, with the caveat that determining an accurate count at this time is impossible given current data systems. Fifth, using publicly available data, we look at trends in child maltreatment in the state over time. Sixth, we report our conclusions and present recommendations for improving the understanding of child maltreatment in New Jersey using data systems across stakeholders. We include an appendix that provides line graphs showing trends in New Jersey child maltreatment. To accompany this report, we are also providing an Excel file providing case numbers for key categories of child maltreatment in New Jersey. Most of the case numbers come from publicly available data. The Excel file has tabs providing separate worksheets for the following systems: DCP&P, CACs, Prosecutor Offices (presented separately for each year from 2017 to 2020 because of the volume of data per year), New Jersey Trial Courts, and the New Jersey Public Schools

Project Methods

Cross Associates gathered a wide array of information for this report. We reviewed data from the following organizations: the Division of Child Protection and Permanency of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, the New Jersey Children's Alliance, the National Children's Alliance, the Administrative Office of the New Jersey Courts, the New Jersey State Police, the Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers, the New Jersey Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and prosecutors' offices in 20 of the 21 counties in New Jersey (an official from one prosecutor's office reported that it did not produce a standard data table that

we used, which was produced by the other 20 counties). We accessed data online, were sent statistical results by representatives of these organizations, or obtained data by requests made through New Jersey's Open Public Records Act. We communicated by email, telephone and Zoom with representatives of several of these stakeholders. We talked to staff from all four Regional and Diagnostic Treatment Centers (RDTs), and from a fifth satellite RDT site. We also interviewed directors of seven Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). Four of these CACs were based in prosecutors' offices and three were based in independent non-profit organizations. These CACs represented a mix of urban/suburban and suburban/rural counties across the state. They are generally representative of CAC practice across the state, since cases from these five comprise 59% percent of the cases reported to the New Jersey Children's Alliance, the membership organization of New Jersey CACs.

New Jersey Child Maltreatment Data Systems

Each professional system responding to child abuse in New Jersey has its own method for tracking case data. Below we describe each system's method of collecting and reporting on child maltreatment cases and the data that are available.

New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Through its Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) has the statutory responsibility for receiving reports of abuse and neglect by caregivers and investigating and/or providing a service response to those reports that are screened in. DCP&P maintains the State Central Registry, a statewide centralized screening center for receiving and screening reports of abuse and neglect, designated as Child Protective Services Reports. The State Central Registry is sometimes referred to as the "hotline". Screened in cases are forwarded to field offices for investigation. DCP&P accepts reports of child abuse or neglect that meet the following criteria:

- 1) The alleged child victim is a born child, under 18 years of age
- 2) The alleged perpetrator(s) is the child's parent, guardian or other person in a caregiving role, who has custody or control of the child
- 3) The child victim(s) was harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm; meeting criteria specified in DCF's Allegation-Based System. (See CP&P-II-A-2-200.)
- 4) There is a specific incident or set of circumstances that suggest the harm or substantial risk of harm was caused by the child's parent, guardian or other person having custody or control of the child.

In addition, the registry takes calls that report child maltreatment but do not meet the above criteria. DCF has developed policies for responding to these other types of child maltreatment. According to DCF policy, a case in which a youth with sexual behavior problems victimizes another child is assigned for investigation, though the experience of several of the participants in this research raises questions about how often this occurs in practice⁶. These cases are

⁶ Consistent with most recent CAC practice, we are referring to these cases using the language of "youth with sexual behavior problems" rather than "child-on-child"

required to be referred to a Regional Diagnostic Treatment Center (see below). However, cases with youth with sexual behavior problems are designated as Child Welfare Services Assessments rather than as a child abuse and neglect report. Cases with youth with sexual behavior problems are not counted in the child sexual abuse numbers for child abuse and neglect reports. In 2021, the State Central Registry and the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (see below) started to track these cases, but results from this tracking are not yet available. When suspicions of child sexual abuse are reported in which the alleged perpetrator is not a caregiver (specifically, Criterion 2 above is not met), it is handled as a request for child welfare services and investigation is the province of law enforcement. DCP&P may also refer these cases to the county prosecutor's office.

The registry also takes reports when the caller is not reporting abuse or neglect, but instead requesting services for families who need assistance or expressing concern about families in need. These can be screened in as child welfare service (CWS) referrals and can lead to child welfare services provided by DCF field offices. Frequently, cases that are screened in as reports and investigated are referred for child welfare services following the investigation. DCP&P also has the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit, which investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect in out-of-home settings.

Caseworkers enter data on screened-in cases into the New Jersey Statewide Protective Investigation, Report and Information Tool (NJ SPIRIT). DCP&P uses NJ SPIRIT data for case and program management and for reporting data to the Federal government. DCP&P also makes selected results from NJ SPIRIT data available to the public through the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub, managed by the Rutgers University School of Social Work Institute of Families.⁷ The Hub is interactive. The public can use the Hub to generate a wide range of reports from NJ SPIRIT data. Data categories on the Hub include Hotline Referrals (from the State Central Registry), Children Served By CP&P, Maltreatment, Placement Stability & Permanency. Users can produce customized reports that break down the data by a number of different variables: event/outcome (e.g., report to DCP&P, investigation, disposition); region; and child, family and case characteristics. Data reports can be generated for both child abuse and neglect reports and CWS referrals. New Jersey contributes data from NJ SPIRIT to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), a national data set on child abuse and neglect cases seen in state child welfare systems, which is overseen by the federal Children's Bureau⁸.

The Data Hub provides data on both child abuse and neglect reports and child welfare referrals. For child abuse and neglect reports, type of child victimization is categorized based on the allegation in the abuse and neglect report. The following categories are reported on the Hub website: emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and multiple (that is, two or more of the preceding types are alleged). For each of these types of maltreatment, users can

⁷ Rutgers University School of Social Work Institute for Families (n.d.). *About the Data Hub*.

<https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/#about>

⁸ See Children's Bureau (2021) NCANDS <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/ncands> and Children's Bureau (n.d.) *Child Maltreatment*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>

obtain the number of cases *substantiated* and *established*. In substantiated cases, ‘the preponderance of the evidence indicates that a child is an “abused or neglected child”’⁹. Cases designated as established also have a preponderance of evidence indicating that a child is abused or neglected, but the aggravating and the mitigating factors in the case mean that a substantiated finding is not warranted. It is particularly meaningful to consider substantiated and established cases when we consider the relationship of child maltreatment data across systems. Medical and mental health assessments often occur in conjunction with child protection investigations and inform the substantiation decision. Moreover, other interventions such as filing criminal charges and trying cases in court mostly occur with substantiated cases.

The Data Hub also offers data on the number of child abuse investigations that are referred to prosecutors (note that the number of investigations does not equal the number of children involved in a child abuse and neglect report, since one perpetrator in an investigation could abuse multiple children). The Hub does not allow investigations to be disaggregated by type of child maltreatment; one challenge is that a single investigation could involve different types of child maltreatment, even different types of child maltreatment involving different children.

In addition, the Data Hub presents statistics on DCP&P interventions following investigations, particularly child placements in resource care (foster homes and other out-of-home placements). It presents a count of all children served by DCP&P, receiving both in-home and out of home services. It also offers counts of the number of children entering out-of-home placements in a given year, the number in placements in a given year (whether they had entered that year or previously), the number in a given year who had been in placements for more than 36 months, the number whose predominant placement was in congregate care (group homes, residential treatment centers and shelter care), and the number exiting out-of-home placement in a given year. Finally, it presents, for each year, the rate of children entering out-of-home placements out of the entire population of New Jersey children.

On its Kids Count Data Dashboard, the non-profit Advocates for Children of New Jersey repeats some of results from the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub.¹⁰ For example, viewers of the Kids Count Data Dashboard can see the number of children reported for child abuse and neglect by year and the number of children with substantiated/established findings of child abuse and neglect by year. Results can be viewed for the state as a whole and for individual counties.

Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers

Children who have been victimized often need medical and mental health diagnostic evaluation and care. One of the purposes of an effective medical response is to reassure abused children about their health and bodily integrity¹¹. As mandated by statute, New Jersey has a system of four Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers throughout the state to provide a rapid,

⁹ New Jersey Department of Children and Families New Jersey Department of Children and Families Policy Manual

¹⁰ Advocates for Children of New Jersey (2022). *Kids Count Data Dashboard*
<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/acnj/viz/NewJerseyKidsCountDashboard/CountyIndicatorTrends>

¹¹ See, e.g., Finkel, M. & Giardano, A. (2009). *Medical evaluation of child sexual abuse: A practical guide*. Elk Grove, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

specialized response to child maltreatment. RDTs are a program of major hospitals serving children¹². All RDTs conduct medical evaluations in cases of alleged sexual abuse or when there are medical questions in child physical abuse cases. They all conduct psychosocial evaluations in cases in which there are questions of maltreatment, or an extended evaluation is needed to respond to children's needs. RDTs also provide additional non-acute services for children affected by maltreatment. For example, some RDTs conduct medical assessments for children entering foster care or transitioning between foster care placements. Some RDTs also provide mental health services to child victims. Their function is to diagnose and treat, though they may also obtain information that can assist a child abuse investigation.

All RDTs collect case data but their data fields and methods for identifying types of abuse differ. Three RDTs count the number of cases referred for evaluation of sexual abuse and for evaluation of physical abuse, but do not calculate statistics on findings related to these types of victimization. Two RDTs, on the other hand, count the number of cases in which an evaluation leads to a diagnosis indicating sexual abuse or a diagnosis indicating physical abuse. The RDTs report data to DCP&P, but none of them produce public reports with statistics on their cases.

New Jersey Children's Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Teams

Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) are programs that coordinate the efforts of multiple disciplines, with the aim of enhancing the investigation and service response to child sexual abuse and other serious forms of child maltreatment¹³. At the heart of a CAC is the multidisciplinary team (MDT), with representation from child protective services, law enforcement, pediatric and children's mental health professionals, specially trained medical professionals, family advocates, forensic interviewers and other professionals. Nineteen New Jersey counties have a CAC with an MDT and two have stand-alone MDTs based in a prosecutor's office. In 18 counties, the CAC is a program of the prosecutor's office, and in 3 counties, the CAC is an independent non-profit organization in which the prosecutor's office and other systems participate.

As of 2021, twelve New Jersey CACs are accredited members of the National Children's Alliance (NCA), the national membership organization of CACs, and eight are associate or developing members of the NCA, and one is pending accreditation this year. These CACs report data to NCA annually, and the NCA has made data available from this subset of New Jersey CACs dating back to 2013¹⁴.

CACs perform a number of different specific functions. All CACs conduct forensic interviews – semi-structured interviews with children to gather information from them about the alleged abuse in a way that both meets the information needs of all professionals and stands up in

¹² See N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.99 through 9:6-8.102

¹³ Cross, T. P., Jones, L.J., Walsh, W., Simone, M., Kolko, D.J., Szczepanski, J. Lippert-Luikart, T., Davison, K., Cryns, A., Magnuson, S., Sosnowski, P. & Shadoin, A. (2008). *The Multi-Site Evaluation of Children's Advocacy Centers: Overview of the results and implications for practice*. OJJDP Crimes Against Children Series. Bulletin. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/218530.pdf> See also N.J.S.A 9:6-8.104 through N.J.S.A 9:6-8.111; See also Guidelines of Practice for Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT'S) in New Jersey (NJ Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, Protection Subcommittee, 2010).

¹⁴ National Children's Alliance (2022)., *ibid*.

court. CACs also convene multidisciplinary case review teams in which multiple professionals review all case information and develop a coordinated plan to investigate the allegations effectively and develop a comprehensive service plan for the child and family. In addition, CACs have victim/family advocates who provide support and care coordination for child victims and families. CACs facilitate mental health services for child victims. Three CACs have mental health professionals on-site full-time, and two have them on-site part-time through agreements with local mental health agencies. CACs also facilitate medical evaluation of child maltreatment through agreements with their Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers. One of the larger CACs provides a range of other services as well.

CACs in New Jersey work closely with DCP&P, the Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers, local police departments, prosecutors' offices, and other service organizations and professionals. Their caseload overlaps with the caseload of these other systems because CAC cases almost always involve intervention or assessment by multiple systems. But not every case is referred to the CAC. DCP&P, law enforcement, and prosecutors each have discretion over which cases they refer to the CAC and refer only those cases in which they think a CAC response is needed. Professionals may refer cases to the CAC only if they think that a forensic interview is needed, not considering the CACs' MDT case review resource or its ability to facilitate mental health intervention. Moreover, prosecutor-based CACs only see cases with law enforcement and/or DCP&P involvement; only the non-profit CACs can see cases that do not involve these two systems. According to the NJCA, prosecutor-based CACs are currently exploring ways to see cases that do not involve law enforcement or DCP&P.

Several CAC professionals we interviewed expressed frustration because they felt that there were children, they could help who were not being referred to the CAC (see the section below, Uncounted or Overlooked Cases). In one independent CAC, staff members recently met with their local prosecutor's office, and successfully advocated to have the office refer any child maltreatment case they are aware of to the MDT. The CAC director described what they asked the prosecutor's office: "please just refer it to the MDT and then if DCP&P is not involved, we'll close it out at that initial point, but at least we're aware of it". Some independent CACs receive referrals from other sources as well, such as the Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers (see above) and hospitals. Parents in families in which children may have experienced maltreatment can also contact some independent CACs for services for their child and family, such as mental health services.

In those counties in which the CAC or MDT is in the prosecutor's office, data for the CAC and the prosecutor's office are usually both maintained in the Infoshare software that is used by prosecutors' offices throughout New Jersey. Some CACs use a special CAC module that was developed by the company that provides Infoshare. Two independent CACs use NCAttrak, a software program for CAC data developed by the National Children's Alliance, and one independent CAC uses its own Excel spreadsheet that is developed to collect data.

In 2019, the New Jersey Children's Alliance (NJCA), the membership organization of New Jersey CACs began compiling data on all the cases seen by New Jersey CACs. This data set is somewhat more comprehensive than the data set for New Jersey from the National Children's Alliance. The NJCA files include a range of data on case characteristics, service delivery outcomes, and

prosecution actions and outcomes. To date, the NJCA has developed spreadsheets for 2019, 2020, and 2021 data.

Children's Advocacy Centers are unusual in collecting data on cases in which the alleged perpetrator is a youth with sexual behavior problems. A 2019 survey by the New Jersey Children's Alliance of all its member CAC and MDTs found 141 cases in which the alleged perpetrator was under age 13 and 337 cases in which the alleged perpetrator was age 13 to 17. The same survey in 2020 found 119 cases in which the alleged perpetrator was under age 13 and 212 cases in which the alleged perpetrator was age 13 to 17. In 2021, there were 222 cases in which the alleged perpetrator was under age 13 and 348 cases in which the alleged perpetrator was age 13 to 17. Data from those CACs that reported to the National Children's Alliance showed 300 or more cases of allegations involving youth with sexual behavior problems every year between 2013 to 2020 (see Figure 14 in the Appendix).

Collecting and reporting data can be a challenge for CACs. The data requested by NCA and NJCA mostly overlap, but NJCA asks for a few more data fields. So, CACs need to devote some time to reporting each separately. Most of the CACs also have DCP&P grants that have reporting requirements and may have other reporting requirements if they have other grants as well. Some of the data requested include cases that are not actually seen at the CAC, making it difficult to compile data about them, especially for independent CACs that do not have access to Infoshare. As one of our CAC interviewees explained, NCA defines a CAC case as one in which at least two members of the MDT are involved, regardless of whether the case crosses the threshold of the CAC facility. To count such cases, and record data about other CAC actions such as conducting a forensic interview, CAC staff are obliged to call a range of MDT colleagues and ask them to track down numbers.

New Jersey State Police

For many years, the New Jersey State Police collected data on crimes reported to law enforcement through the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) program¹⁵. Nationally, thousands of city, university and college, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies have contributed data on a wide range of crimes to the FBI's national UCR crime database¹⁶. UCR results include the number of rapes and assaults, which includes some crimes involving child sexual abuse and child physical abuse. However, most reports in these categories would pertain to crimes against adults, so these data have little utility for understanding criminal child abuse in the state.

The FBI has developed a more sophisticated crime database titled the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which requires law enforcement agencies to enter more data per case. NIBRS data include the age of the victim¹⁷, and NIBRS data have been used to analyze

¹⁵ State of New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (2007-2022). *Uniform Crime Reporting*. <https://www.njsp.org/ucr/current-crime-data.shtml>

¹⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation (n.d.). *Uniform Crime Reporting Program*. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr>

¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation (2021). *2021.1 National Incident-Based Reporting System User Manual*. Criminal Justice Information Services Division Uniform Crime Reporting Program. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/ucr/ucr-2019-1-nibrs-user-manua-093020.pdf/view>

child abuse cases¹⁸. Through 2020, New Jersey law enforcement agencies have participated in UCR but not NIBRS. As of January 1, 2021, the FBI discontinued the UCR program and now only accepts NIBRS data from law enforcement agencies¹⁹. New Jersey law enforcement agencies are in the process of implementing NIBRS. As of January 2022, roughly half of New Jersey's municipalities had completed the NIBRS training offered by the New Jersey State Police²⁰. Table 1 shows crime categories in NIBRS represent criminal child maltreatment²¹. Although no NIBRS crime category is specific to child maltreatment and each includes both child and adult victims, one can always identify the child maltreatment cases in NIBRS by specifying the age of the victim in the analysis. Indeed, NIBRS allows users to look at the number of child maltreatment offenses for specific age groups of children.

Table 1: NIBRS Crime Categories for Different Types of Child Maltreatment

Offense	Corresponding NIBRS crime category
Abduction	Human Trafficking or Kidnapping/Abduction
Assault, Minor	Assault Offenses (Simple Assault)
Child Abuse, Non-Violent	Family Offenses, Nonviolent
Child Cruelty, Non-Violent	
Child Abuse, Violent	Assault Offenses
Child Cruelty, Violent	
Cruelty to Children, Violent	
Child Neglect	Family Offenses, Nonviolent
Child Molesting	Sex Offenses (Fondling) or Human Trafficking (Commercial Sex Acts)
Commercialized Sex	Human Trafficking, Prostitution Offenses, Pornography/Obscene Material, or All Other Offenses
Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor	Human Trafficking or All Other Offenses (Other offenses may have been committed, e.g., Pornography/ Obscene Material, Prostitution, or Liquor Law Violations)
Cruelty to Children, Nonviolent	Assault Offenses (Intimidation), Family Offenses, Nonviolent, or All Other Offenses
Enticement	All Other Offenses, unless it is a part of another offense

¹⁸ e.g., Finkelhor, D. & Ormrod, R. (2001). *Child abuse reported to the police*. OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin. NCJ 187238. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/187238.pdf> Martin, K.H. (2021). *Sexual assaults recorded by law enforcement, 2019*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. NCJ 301236 <https://bjs.ojp.gov/nibrs/reports/sarble/sarble19>

¹⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation (2019). *Countdown to NIBRS' Richer Data: 01.01.2021*. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2018/resource-pages/countdown.pdf>

²⁰ Personal communication with NJ State Police UCR Analytical Unit, January 12, 2022

²¹ See Federal Bureau of Investigation (2021), *ibid*.

Some of these variables need additional explanation. Note that crime incidents that do not lead to an arrest can be entered into NIBRS - the arrest fields are not completed for these cases. Thus, one can compare cases in which an arrest was made to cases in which an arrest was not made. The *cleared exceptionally* variable is used when there is adequate probable cause to make an arrest, but something outside the control of the law enforcement agency prevents criminal charges from being filed. Exceptional clearance categories include prosecution declined for other reasons than lack of probable cause, and victim refused to cooperate, as well as some unusual circumstances such as death of the offender. Recent research suggests that exceptional clearance may be a common outcome for adult sexual assault cases in some jurisdictions²², but we do not know of any analysis of its use in child maltreatment cases.

In addition to the age of the victim, NIBRS contains several data elements of interest to those assessing child maltreatment. NIBRS variables of interest in assessing child maltreatment include the following:

- ☐ Crime cleared exceptionally
- ☐ Bias motivation involved in crime
- ☐ Type of weapon/force involved in crime
- ☐ Age of victim
- ☐ Race of victim
- ☐ Ethnicity of victim
- ☐ Relationship of victim to offender
- ☐ Age of offender
- ☐ Race of offender
- ☐ Ethnicity of offender
- ☐ Relationship of victim to offender
- ☐ UCR arrest offense code (type of arrest made on an offender if an arrest was made)
- ☐ Arrest date
- ☐ Type of arrest
- ☐ Age of arrestee
- ☐ Sex of arrestee
- ☐ Race of arrestee
- ☐ Ethnicity of arrestee
- ☐ Disposition of Arrestee Under 18
- ☐ Ethnicity of arrestee
- ☐ Disposition of Arrestee Under 18

Software programs have been developed to facilitate the entry and analysis of NIBRS data. Some software programs enable agencies to produce case counts in key categories from NIBRS data in a matter of minutes. Note that it is possible with NIBRS to count different types of cases

²² Pattavina, A., Morabito, M., & Williams, L. M. (2016). Examining connections between the police and prosecution in sexual assault case processing: Does the use of exceptional clearance facilitate a downstream orientation? *Victims & Offenders*, 11(2), 315-334. Spohn, C., & Tellis, K. (2010). Justice denied: The exceptional clearance of rape cases in Los Angeles. *Albany Law Review*, 74, 1379.

in which both the victim and the offender are minors, by doing an analysis considering a) the type of offense, b) the age of the victim, and c) the age of the offender.

Prosecutors' Offices

The prosecutor's offices in each of the 21 counties in the state use the Infoshare software package to maintain data on cases referred to it. Their population of child maltreatment cases comprises allegedly criminal child abuse cases that are reported to the prosecutors' offices. These offices can count the number of cases in which arrests are made and/or criminal charges are filed regarding a violation of one or more of the statutes related to child abuse neglect and can examine their dispositions. Each county prosecutor's office files an annual report with the Office of the Attorney General. Most prosecutor annual reports include statistics on charging outcomes for defendants with indictments/accusations for child physical abuse/child endangerment. However, outcomes for sexual assault against child and adult victims are included in one category, so one cannot see the outcome of prosecution of child sexual abuse (which include guilty plea to a lesser included offense, trial verdict or imposition of mandatory parole disqualifiers for Aggravated Sexual Assault or Sexual Assault²³).

Prosecutor's offices in the following counties have posted their annual reports online: Atlantic, Cape May, Essex and Union, though the Essex report includes no statistics. However, most prosecutor offices do not post their annual report online. If a prosecutor's office does not post their annual report online, individuals can obtain copies of them by filing a request through the New Jersey Open Public Records Act. In February and March 2022, Cross Associates downloaded publicly available reports. It also filed OPRA requests to obtain the four most recent annual reports for every New Jersey prosecutor's office that did not post theirs online. Data were obtained for 20 out of 21 counties, either through reports available online, or through OPRA requests; one county reported that it did not have the data table that all 20 of the other counties had). For a few counties, follow up requests were needed, because the prosecutor's office had the necessary standardized data table but had not included it in its annual report.

Administrative Office of the Courts

New Jersey's Administrative Office of the Courts maintains a court management data system on cases seen in judiciary courts and produces an annual statistical report²⁴. The report presents statistics for three different divisions of the court system: the criminal division, the civil division,

²³ See Aggravated Sexual Assault N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2a as to the 25 year parole disqualifier for Aggravated Sexual Assault (commonly referred to as the "Jessica Lundsford Act"), N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2a and the parallel guilty plea parole disqualifier of 15 years for Aggravated Sexual Assault, N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2d; see also, Mandatory Service of 85 Percent of Sentence for Certain Offenses, N.J.S.A. 2C:43-7.2 as to the 85 percent parole disqualifier for Aggravated Sexual Assault, N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2a and Sexual Assault, N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2b & 2C:14-2c(1); A 2012 legislative fiscal estimate of the Jessica Lundsford Act indicated that the N.J. Attorney General's Office reported 53 convictions for Aggravated Sexual Assault across a five year period in the 21 counties. See General Assembly no. 2027, 2012-2013, Office of Legislative Services Estimate, Fiscal Analysis, October 18, 2012, Administrative Offices of the Court, re: Jessica Lundsford Act.

²⁴ New Jersey Courts (2022). *Administrative Office of the Courts - Court Management Statistics*. <https://www.njcourts.gov/public/stats.html>

and the family division. Cases involving child abuse and neglect are a small minority of cases in criminal and civil courts, and statistics are not presented separately for child abuse and neglect cases in these courts.

The family courts, on the other hand, deal continually with child abuse and neglect. The courts make decisions when DCP&P seeks custody of some child victims of abuse and neglect to protect their safety. In New Jersey, this is sometimes referred to as a Dodd removal. Most of these cases involve placement of child maltreatment victims in resource care. Family courts also deal with other decisions related to caring for these children and returning them to permanent homes. The preferred permanency option is reunification with birthparents, but when that is not possible, other permanency choices are made, usually adoption or guardianship.

Statistics are reported for several different family court functions related to child maltreatment: custody decisions made because of child abuse and neglect, reviews of child placements in resource care, decisions to give kin custody of children, and termination of parental rights (which is necessary in cases in which the decision is made that it is not safe for children ever to return home, but instead should go to permanent homes with adoptive parents). The following statistics are reported for each of these functions:

- ☐ the number of cases added in a year,
- ☐ the number of cases resolved in a year (that includes cases added in previous years; this includes cases cleared and cases terminated)
- ☐ the number and percent of cases cleared (that is, the case was completed, and a disposition reached)
- ☐ the number and percent of cases in inventory (i.e., “active pending cases within generally accepted narrative case-processing times frames”)
- ☐ the number and percent in backlog (i.e., “active pending cases not within generally accepted normative case processing time frames”)
- ☐ the number of active pending cases
- ☐ the backlog per 100 monthly filings.

In the reports available on the website, statistics are presented for the entire state and for each county. These statistics profile the number of child abuse and neglect cases coming into the courts and their case flow through the courts.

New Jersey Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board

The New Jersey Comprehensive Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CCAPTA) established a multidisciplinary board to review child deaths and near deaths in the state, ascertain their causes, examine how state agencies were involved in these cases, and recommend methods of preventing deaths in the future²⁵. Several stakeholder organizations report cases for review by the Board: The State Central Registry, the Office of the State Medical Examiner, law enforcement agencies, and, upon request, the Department of Health. The New Jersey

²⁵ Department of Children and Families (2022). *Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board*. <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/providers/boards/fatality/>

Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board produces an annual report analyzing data on the child deaths in the state that year²⁶. It produces statistics on so-called “CCAPTA fatalities and near-fatalities”, which are child deaths that are the result of child abuse or neglect, whether or not the family was involved with CP&P at the time of the incident. It also reports statistics on child homicide due to abuse or neglect. Statistics are broken out by demographic characteristics, by type of death, and by case status in DCP&P (e.g., open cases, closed within 12 months, closed more than 12 months ago). Each annual report includes recommendations to prevent child deaths, sometimes including recommendations specifically directed to the Department of Children and Families.

The Board does not review every child fatality or near fatality in New Jersey, only those that meet certain criteria. The most recently published set of criteria that qualify a case to be reviewed include the following that clearly relate to child abuse and neglect if they occur²⁷:

- ☐ Homicide due to child abuse or neglect
- ☐ Child abuse or neglect may have been a contributing factor
- ☐ Sexual Abuse
- ☐ Children whose families were under the supervision of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) at the time of the fatal or near fatal incident or within twelve (12) months immediately preceding the fatal or near fatal incident

Other criteria for review could also relate to child abuse and neglect in some cases, including malnutrition, head trauma, suffocation, burns without obvious innocent reason, drowning, and sudden unexpected infant death.

The Board’s most recent annual report explains the assistance it hopes to provide DCP&P in individual cases:

The State Board invites CP&P staff, including front-line workers, to our monthly meetings to gather more information about the case, and to fully understand CP&P’s involvement and their experience working with the family. We always begin the review by asking CP&P staff for their views on what could have been done to prevent the fatality/near fatality. We explain that the Board is not looking to cast blame, but instead is looking for ways to improve the responses of New Jersey’s systems to prevent such incidents from happening to other children. We look for challenges or barriers to CP&P doing their work and whether current protocols and procedures should be modified or if new resources are needed. We also ask about challenges erected by other systems in which the family was involved. These systems touch upon a variety of disciplinary fields, including physical health, mental health, substance use, law enforcement and education.

²⁶ Department of Children and Families (2022). *Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board (CFNFRB) Annual Reports* https://www.nj.gov/dcf/news/reportsnewsletters/taskforce/fatality_reports.html

²⁷ See New Jersey Child Fatality & Near Fatality Review Board (2019). *Child Fatality & Near Fatality Review Board 2019 Annual Report*. https://www.nj.gov/dcf/documents/about/commissions/fatality/CFNFRB.Report_2019.pdf, p. 4

Our goal is to learn from the caseworkers and the materials provided, identify ways to make improvements to the systems, and then suggest recommendations to those systems to address any barriers or challenges that exist. We look for patterns, emerging trends, or problems that repeat over time²⁸.

A review of the Board reports reveals that the criteria for selecting a case for review have changed over time. It was beyond the scope of the current project to ascertain exactly how cases were selected each year and how that has changed over time. For these reasons, we omitted data from the Board from the analysis of trends in the Appendix and from the Excel file accompanying this report. Interested readers can access each year's report and make comparisons across time. The caveat is that it will not always be clear to what extent differences reflect changes in the incidence of different types of child fatality versus changes in case referral to the Board and the Board's method of selecting cases for review.

Comparing Data Across Systems

Developing a comprehensive understanding of the data on child maltreatment requires us to understand how data are similar across systems and how they differ. We discuss below two key dimensions on which they differ: data availability; and identifying, defining and reporting types of child maltreatment

Variation in Data Availability

One of the challenges for understanding data on child maltreatment in New Jersey is the variation across agencies in the availability of data. We can describe three different levels of data availability across the systems we discuss here (see Table 2). At the highest level are agencies who provide an online interface that enables users to produce individualized data reports by counties or by certain characteristics of the population. Just below that level are agencies that provide statistical reports on their webpages, but users cannot interact with the data files and produce individualized reports. At the lowest level are agencies that produce data reports that are not available publicly.

Table 2 Levels of Availability of Data on Child Maltreatment

Level of Availability	System
Public data interface	☐ New Jersey Department of Children and Families ☐ New Jersey State Police
Data reports are publicly available	☐ Some Prosecutors' Offices ☐ Children's Advocacy Centers affiliated with the National Children's Alliance ☐ Administrative Office of the Courts
Data reports are not publicly available	☐ Most Prosecutors' Offices ☐ Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers

²⁸ New Jersey Child Fatality & Near Fatality Review Board (2019), *ibid*, p. 5

At the highest level is the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, because the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub allows users on the Internet to download aggregated data and produce customized reports. We are also placing the New Jersey State Police at the highest level, because historically they provide crime data by county that users can download as Excel files. On the second level is the Administrative Office of the Courts, which annually posts a report on the Internet on case flow for actions in child abuse and neglect cases in family courts. Prosecutors' offices vary in data availability; some are on the second level and some on the lowest level. As we have discussed, a few post their annual reports with statistics, but most annual reports are only available through OPRA requests. Other agencies are on the lowest level. RDTs produce reports and make them available to DCP&P, but do not produce public reports. CACs are at both the second and lowest level. Some New Jersey CACs and MDT report statistical data to the National Children's Alliance and all to the New Jersey Children's Alliance, and the NCA makes these statistics for New Jersey available on its website.

The higher that New Jersey stakeholder agencies are on the continuum of data availability, the easier it will be for each agency and the public to gather, assess and understand data on child maltreatment in the state. We believe that moving stakeholders higher on the continuum of availability will facilitate better use of child maltreatment data and a better understanding of child abuse and neglect in the state. It seems to us relatively straightforward for systems to post on the Internet a statistical report that is already available internally. Professionals in these systems that use Microsoft Excel to do their calculations for their statistical reports are at a starting point to provide Excel files for public download. Such downloadable files usually give members of the public an opportunity to analyze questions of interest to them, if only to look at the statistics for their county or community. This requires extra work by the data specialist in a system, though structuring data entry by county or community might facilitate producing downloadable Excel files.

[Variation in Identifying, Defining and Reporting Types of Child Maltreatment](#)

Child maltreatment encompasses a wide variety of mistreatment of children. Different forms of child maltreatment typically require different methods of assessment and service and legal intervention. Consequently, it is valuable to be able to distinguish child neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and so forth, and count cases in these categories across systems. However, different systems handle categorization of child maltreatment in different ways. DCC&P, CACs/MDTs, and RDTs compute statistics by type of maltreatment and differentiate cases of child neglect, child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, and other types of child maltreatment. Prosecutors' offices report statistics for child physical abuse/child endangerment, but child sexual abuse cases are counted together with adult sexual assault cases, making it impossible to obtain case counts on child sexual abuse cases referred to prosecutors. Therefore, one cannot determine statistics on trial outcomes for criminal child sexual abuse, child physical abuse and child neglect.

Even though several systems measure each type of maltreatment, they use dissimilar methods for defining a case for each type of maltreatment. This makes it difficult to compare and combine case counts across systems. A fundamental distinction involves defining type of maltreatment based on *referral* versus defining it based on the *result of an assessment*. When a child maltreatment case is referred to a child-serving system, there typically is a suspicion that some form or forms of maltreatment has been perpetrated. A data field for type of maltreatment could be based on this suspicion. But a data field for type of maltreatment could instead be based on the result of an assessment. Professionals could do an investigation or an evaluation and then make a judgment about whether the suspicion of maltreatment is accurate.

In theory, each child-serving system could record and report both type of maltreatment at the time of referral and type of maltreatment as determined by that system's method of assessment. In practice, however, systems handle this differently. DCP&P collects data based both on suspicion and assessment and makes these data available on the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. The number of reports for different types of maltreatment represents the number of cases in which each type was suspected, while the number of substantiated and established cases represents counts of the number of cases in which each type of maltreatment was determined through an investigation.

RDTCS vary in whether they report type of maltreatment based on referral or based on assessment. Some RDTCS count the number of referrals they receive for sexual abuse and physical abuse assessments—categorization into sexual abuse and physical abuse is based on the suspicion. But they do not count the number of sexual abuse and physical abuse cases based on the assessments they conduct. One RDTCS, on the other hand, counts the number of diagnoses of sexual abuse and physical abuse in its statistics.

CACs collect data on the maltreatment type of the allegations in the cases referred to them. In 2019 and 2020 data they reported to the NJCA, they also report the number of cases in which the allegation of maltreatment was founded or there was reason to believe there was abuse. However, in its current reporting structure to NJCA, this count is not broken out by type of child maltreatment.

Uncounted or Overlooked Cases

We focus in this section on child maltreatment cases that have been reported to authorities but may not be counted in the data sets of stakeholder organizations. We need to acknowledge, however, the unfortunate reality that it is likely that most cases of child maltreatment are not counted because, for these child victims, the maltreatment remains a secret. Many children do not disclose the maltreatment they suffer or cannot because they are preverbal. Cases go undetected. Data from adults retrospectively reporting that they were abused or neglected as children suggests that many children who are victimized never tell anyone²⁹. Even when professionals become aware of child abuse and neglect, they often do not report it to child

²⁹ McGuire, K., & London, K. (2020). A retrospective approach to examining child abuse disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 99, 104263.

protective services or law enforcement.³⁰ The MDT Coordinators we interviewed, who all believe that child abuse is underreported, suggested that immigrant and Spanish-speaking communities are less likely to report abuse to officials for fear that it would jeopardize their ability to stay in this country. As much as New Jersey can improve the tracking of cases that are reported, we need to be aware that there are likely to be many victims of child maltreatment in the state that we never become aware of.

Even when child maltreatment is reported and there is at least some response, there are gaps in data collection and overlooked cases. We can identify several categories of child survivors who are not systematically counted in publicly available data or might be overlooked in a statistical analysis of the prevalence of child maltreatment in the state. It would be possible to develop a better estimate of the number of child survivors in New Jersey if methods could be developed to count these cases more effectively.

Cases involving youth with sexual behavior problems.

DCP&P only investigates child sexual abuse allegations against caregivers, not child sexual abuse involving other perpetrators³¹. Law enforcement investigates criminal child sexual abuse, which typically involves adult offenders. However, hundreds of children are sexually victimized by other minors. Several of the systems discussed in this report deal with cases with youth with sexual behavior problems, but there is not yet an established, comprehensive approach to collecting data on these cases.

Some systems have collected data on cases involving youth with sexual behavior problems for a number of years. New Jersey's Children Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Teams evaluate cases of youth with sexual behavior problems and develop a service response, as we discuss above (see also Figure 14 in the Appendix). CACs and MDTs have reported counts of the number of cases involving victimization by youth with sexual behavior problems. The New Jersey Department of Education produces an annual report on violence in New Jersey schools and counts the number of sexual offenses that come to the attention of school authorities³².

DCP&P receives referrals on cases in which minors sexually abuse other minors but does not handle these as child abuse cases. Instead, these cases are treated as referrals for services ("CWS referrals"). The New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub does not provide data on cases in which the alleged perpetrator is a youth with sexual behavior problems. However, DCP&P started collecting data on these cases in 2021 through the State Central Registry and the

³⁰ See, e.g., Alvarez, K. M., Kenny, M. C., Donohue, B., Carpin, K. M. (2004). Why are professionals failing to initiate mandated reports of child maltreatment, and are there any empirically based training programs to assist professionals in the reporting process? *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, 9(5), 563–578. Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

³¹ See *N.J. Dept. of Child Protection & Permanency v. B.H.*, 460 N.J. Super. 212 (App. Div. 2019) where the court imposed a restrictive reading on Title 9 that excluded temporary caregivers.

³² New Jersey Department of Education (2022). *Student Safety and Discipline in New Jersey Schools: The Commissioner's Annual Report to the State Legislature*. <https://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/vandy/>

Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit³³. We anticipate that DCP&P will report data on these cases in the foreseeable future.

Interviews with RDTC staff indicate that these Centers conduct assessments in these cases -- one RDTC director told us that 40% of their caseload involves a youth with sexual behavior problems. RDTCs have begun to track these cases, but they have not yet reported on the number of cases of youth with these issues³⁴. We anticipate that they will do so soon.

As mentioned above, victimization perpetrated by youth with sexual behavior problems that is reported to law enforcement could be counted through NIBRS, by conducting analyses that consider the specific crime, and the age of the victim and of the alleged perpetrator. It seems likely, however, that many such cases are not reported to law enforcement, either because the maltreatment would not necessarily be treated as a crime and/or the family and professionals involved would not want to involve the criminal justice system.

Adolescent sexual assault victims

Adolescent girls are at considerable risk for sexual assault. One national study estimated the lifetime prevalence of sexual abuse and assault among 17-year-olds as 26.6%³⁵. Though adolescents are often omitted from discussion of child abuse and neglect, they have needs at their developmental level that are different from the needs of adult sexual assault survivors, needs that may require the expertise of programs specially designed for juvenile victims. A 2017 report from authors at the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University described violence against adolescent girls as "falling through the cracks" because it does not fit neatly within the categories of violence against children or against women³⁶.

Adolescent sexual abuse is not reportable to DCP&P unless it is committed by a caregiver; such cases are a small proportion of all adolescent sexual assault cases. Adolescent sexual assault may lead to a forensic medical examination in a hospital or other medical facility. Survivors presenting for medical examinations are also offered the services of an advocate from a sexual assault service. The assault can be reported to law enforcement, usually by the victim, but studies suggest that this happens in only 8–13% of adolescent sexual assault cases³⁷. Some of these cases lead to arrests and/or referral to prosecutors. Law enforcement agencies may also *unfound* allegations of sexual assault against adolescents, judging them either false or baseless.

³³ Personal communication, New Jersey Children's Alliance, May 16, 2022.

³⁴ Personal communication, New Jersey Children's Alliance, May 16, 2022.

³⁵ Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H., & Hamby, S. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and assault assessed in late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 55*, 329–333

³⁶ Ellsberg, M., Vyas, A., Madrid, B., Quintanilla, M., & Zelaya, J. (2017). *Violence Against Adolescent Girls: Falling Through the Cracks?* Background paper. Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.

https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs1356/f/downloads/Falling%20through%20the%20Cracks_Background%20Paper%20%281%29.pdf

³⁷ Campbell, R., Greeson, M. R., Bybee, D., & Fehler-Cabral, G. (2012). Adolescent sexual assault victims and the legal system: Building community relationships to increase prosecution rates. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 50*, 141–154.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, a baseless case “does not meet the elements of a crime or was improperly coded as a sexual assault”³⁸. In a study of sexual assault cases seen in emergency departments in Massachusetts hospitals, Cross and Schmitt found that 34.4% of cases of alleged sexual assault against youth aged 12 to 15 were unfounded, as were 32.6% of cases of alleged sexual assault against youth aged 16 to 17. Most Children’s Advocacy Centers in New Jersey are not referred adolescent sexual assault cases, so they cannot be counted through CAC data systems in these jurisdictions.³⁹

The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) coordinates services for victims of sexual assault across the state⁴⁰. Each of New Jersey’s 21 counties has a NJCASA support service for victims of sexual violence (labelled on another New Jersey website as rape crisis centers⁴¹), and a program is also offered at the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. NJCASA programs provide Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates (CSVAs) who provide support to victims who present to police and hospital emergency rooms and can activate multidisciplinary Sexual Assault Response Teams to provide a coordinated response to the needs of sexual assault victims. They serve both adult and adolescent victims. NJCASA programs also provide counseling for survivors of sexual assaults. Because of the juvenile status of adolescent victims, this can be considered another source of uncounted cases of child maltreatment. We are not aware of data on the age of users of CSVAs services, but there are data available on counseling of adolescents in NJCASA programs. A 2019 statewide study found that approximately 900 adolescents received counseling services from NJCASA programs in 2019, 10% or more of the NJCASA clients who received counseling that year⁴².

Other child sexual abuse cases.

As noted elsewhere, DCP&P does not investigate child sexual abuse cases in which the alleged perpetrator is not a relative. This includes cases in which a child is sexually abused by a non-caregiving relative such as an uncle; by a teacher, coach, minister, or youth group leader; or by an adult acquaintance or stranger. All the CAC MDT Coordinators interviewed expressed concern about this policy, predicting that this approach is one that will lead to undercounting child abuse numbers. One CAC interviewee described the kind of situation that can arise:

³⁸ International Association of Chiefs of Police (n.d.). Sexual assault incident Reports: investigative strategies. Alexandria, VA: IACP. Retrieved from <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/s/SexualAssaultGuidelines.pdf>. page 2

³⁹ Cross, T.P. & Schmitt, T. (2019). Forensic medical results and law enforcement actions following sexual assault: A comparison of child, adolescent and adult cases. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 93, 103-110.

⁴⁰ NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault (2022). *NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault*. <https://njcasa.org/>

⁴¹ State of New Jersey, Office of the Attorney General, Victims of Crime Compensation Office (2022) *Rape crisis centers*. <https://www.state.nj.us/lps/njvictims/pages/rapectrs.htm>

⁴² New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (2020). *Who are we serving? A statewide review of sexual violence services in 2019*. <https://njcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Statewide-Review-of-Sexual-Violence-Services-in-2019.pdf>. This review reports that NJCASA programs provided counseling for 7,763 clients. It does not report the exact number of these clients who were under age 19 but presents a bar graph that depicts the distribution of counseling clients. From this bar graph, we estimated that approximately 900 adolescent clients received counseling services from NJCASA programs in 2019.

...it depends on what DCP&P deems as a caregiver. For example, we just had a case where an uncle was sexually abusing his niece, and I called it into the hotline and they said, "Well, was he in a supervisory role?" And I said, "Yes, the girl was dropped off at his house." "Oh, well, but was there another adult there? Because if there was another adult there, then he wasn't necessarily supervising her." And I'm like, "Okay. But he also has kids of his own that he has contact with and previous charges for child abuse. So why don't you want to take this case?" But he was alone with the child, so we could say it was within a supervisory role, so they had to take it because it meets those parameters.

Law enforcement agencies may investigate these cases. However, there are situations in which families and professionals may not report these cases to law enforcement, even if a treatment professional is dealing with the abuse in a therapeutic intervention. One CAC professional described what can happen when a call about such a case comes into the State Central Registry and suggested an alternative way of handling it:

They would just be saying this is not something we are going to go out on but here's a number, here you call this or call local PD. What families are going to call local PD after they just called? Not many. So, the challenge because of that is, there's not a mechanism put in place to notify the CAC that this case exists. It might not meet their criteria which okay, that's fine but to have them say "Hey [name of CAC], here's a case that called in, you know, please do some outreach to this family in case they don't call you. Like something like that would be more efficient so we don't lose those families that have called. It is very hard to navigate when you have complex traumas like we're seeing and just in general trauma. How many families want to make a million different calls to different agencies?

As we discuss above, cases reported to law enforcement have been included in Uniform Crime Reports but cannot be counted separately from cases against adult victims, because UCR did not collect data on victim age. The NIBRS system that New Jersey is now implementing collects data on victim age, but, as we discuss elsewhere in this report, special analysis of NIBRS data will be required to identify child maltreatment victims from NIBRS.

Peer Physical Assault and Emotional Abuse.

The terms child physical abuse and child emotional abuse have been reserved for victimization perpetrated by adults, but a child physically or emotionally assaulted by a peer may also suffer and need help just as much as a child victimized by an adult⁴³, so it is worth considering peer physical and emotional assault in this report. The New Jersey Department of Education annual report on violence in New Jersey schools and presents counts of number of incidents of violence; harassment, intimidation and bullying; and weapons⁴⁴. The reports also break out violent incidents by type, including sexual offenses as a type. The chief limitation of the report is that statistics are reported by incident, not by child, and the number of children who are victimized is likely to differ from the number of incidents. Some children could be the victim of

⁴³ Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Ormrod, R. (2006). Kid's stuff: The nature and impact of peer and sibling violence on younger and older children. *Child abuse & neglect*, 30(12), 1401-1421.

⁴⁴ New Jersey Department of Education (2022), *ibid*.

multiple incidents of violence, harassment, intimidation and bullying; and some incidents affect multiple child victims. Though this form of victimization would not usually be considered child abuse and neglect, we felt that it was worthwhile to include results from this report in the Excel file of publicly available data that accompanies this report.

Estimating the Number of Child Maltreatment Cases in Publicly Available Data.

Child maltreatment affects thousands of children in New Jersey. The problem is larger than we can assess from reports of maltreatment, because research suggests that most child maltreatment goes unreported. Nevertheless, regularly counting the number of survivors of child maltreatment gives us some indication of the scope of the problem and the professional response to it and would enable us to identify trends over time. Unfortunately, current data systems do not count key segments of the population of child survivors in New Jersey, and we cannot currently even estimate the number of child survivors seen by professionals. Below we estimate the number of child survivors counted in publicly available data, using a method that minimizes double counting of children who are served by multiple systems. But we also explain why this number cannot be construed as a count of the child survivors in New Jersey, even of those identified by professionals, and we discuss the gaps in data systems that prevent us from achieving an accurate count.

As discussed in previous sections, several systems provide publicly available data on the number of child survivors they serve. However, we cannot simply total the number of cases reported by each to derive a grand total, because individual child survivors often interact with multiple systems. The best way to develop a count would be to focus on the two systems that intake official reports of child maltreatment: child protection and law enforcement. Thousands of reports of suspected child maltreatment by caregivers are made to the DCP&P every year. Reports of child maltreatment perpetrated by non-caregivers are made to law enforcement. As we have discussed, counts of reports to DCP&P are available from the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub, and we will use Hub data below. It is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of child maltreatment cases seen in other systems such as RDTs have also had contact with either DCP&P and/or law enforcement. The majority of children and youth seen in these systems were either referred to these systems by DCP&P or law enforcement, or these other systems reported these children and youth to DCP&P and/or law enforcement, because of these systems' reporting responsibilities.

Data on child abuse are not currently available from New Jersey law enforcement agencies, however. As mentioned above, the New Jersey State Police has collected crime data from law enforcement agencies through its Uniform Crime Reports Program, but only now, with the implementation of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in 2021 will there be data by victim age. As a proxy for law enforcement agency data on child maltreatment, we are using Children's Advocacy Center data. We recognize that we lose cases by using CAC data, because some proportion of the cases that law enforcement agencies investigate, and prosecutors evaluate are not referred to CACs. As we discuss below, we recommend that law

enforcement agencies and prosecutor report all cases that they deal with to the CAC in their county.

New Jersey CAC data for 2019 and 2020 are available from the New Jersey Children's Alliance. The NJCA data include the number of new cases reviewed by the CAC's MDT. This number is better to use than the number of forensic interviews, which does not include children who do not receive forensic interviews because they are pre-verbal or for other reasons. The number seen by the MDT is also better than the number of children served, because CACs may be providing therapeutic services to children who were not referred to prosecutors—these may also be represented in the DCP&P data discussed below and using this number risks double-counting.

CACs include both cases in which DCP&P was involved and those in which DCP&P was not involved. We can add to that the estimated number of reports to DCP&P in which referral was NOT made to the prosecutor (focusing on these DCP&P cases enables us to avoid double-counting reports involving BOTH a CAC and DCP&P). The New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub provides data on the number of investigations of child abuse and neglect reports that were referred to prosecutors. We are making the working assumption that CAC cases would involve a referral to the prosecutors, since 18 of the 21 CACs are based in prosecutors' office and the other three have close ties to prosecutors, and CAC cases typically involve serious child maltreatment in which a prosecutor assessment of the case is justified.

Two pitfalls should be noted here. One pitfall stems from using data on investigations from the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub, since one investigation can involve multiple children. But we are making the working assumption that most investigations referred to prosecutors involve one child. Another pitfall is that some DCP&P cases that were not referred to prosecutors may nevertheless have been seen in CAC or MDTs. Despite these pitfalls, we will proceed with this estimation while acknowledging its limitations.

For 2019, the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub reported that 96,060 children were involved in child abuse and neglect reports, and 3,797 investigations of these reports were referred to prosecutors. We therefore calculate: $96,060 - 3,797 = 92,263$, which is an estimate of the number of child abuse and neglect reports to DCP&P that did NOT involve CACs. In 2019, there were also 3,574 MDT cases seen in CACs. Adding the DCP&P-without-referral-to-prosecutors number to the CAC number leads to this calculation: $92,263 + 3,574 = 95,837$. This is our best estimate of the number of reports of child abuse and neglect in 2019 that we can track through publicly available data. We conducted the same operation with data from 2020, during most of which the Covid pandemic was active (except that we were missing MDT data from Hunterdon County, so we used 2019 data to estimate this). This leads to an estimate of 73,742 cases of child abuse and neglect in 2020 that we can track through publicly available data. Table 3 below shows the numbers. These totals are likely to be underestimates, even of cases that have been reported. But this is the best we can do at present.

Table 3 Partial summary of child maltreatment cases in New Jersey 2019 & 2020

Year	DCPP reports NOT referred to prosecutors	MDT cases in CACs	Total
2019	92,263 ^a	3,574	95,837
2020	71,123 ^b	2,619	73,742

^a 96,060 reports in total - 3797 investigations referred to prosecutors = 92,263; ^b 73,726 reports in total - 3797 investigations referred to prosecutors = 71,123

Trends in New Jersey Child Maltreatment Data

In the Appendix, we present figures derived from much of the data we accessed for this report, the vast majority of which is publicly available. We were somewhat selective in what data we used to construct line graphs because of the sheer volume of the data in the Excel file accompanying this report; readers can construct additional graphs using either Microsoft Word or Excel from the data in the Excel file. The figures show trends in child maltreatment over time. The most noticeable finding from these line graphs is not surprising: most every figure shows a decrease in 2020, and when data are available, in 2021. This is consistent with national data showing decreased child abuse reporting during the pandemic years, attributable in part to decreased reporting from schools.⁴⁵ School personnel are the most frequent reports of child maltreatment but had limited contact with children during the pandemic years because of the extensive use of remote instruction. Note that we included data from the New Jersey Department of Education in the Excel file, but do not present any figures on trends from this source, nor do we discuss trends in education data. We declined to do so because these data are complex—for example, the measurement of different variables changed in multiple ways over the years that data are collected. Dealing with the complexity of these data was beyond the scope of the current project.

DCP&P.

Figure 1 through Figure 3 show the number of cases entering DCP&P through hotline calls and maltreatment reports. Hotline calls were fairly level from 2015 to 2019, ranging from 160,053 to 164,407, and dropped substantially in 2020, the first Covid pandemic year, to 139,594 (see Figure 1). Some hotline calls are screened out and some are screened in. Screened in hotline calls are recorded as reports. Reports increased somewhat from 2014 and 2019, from 90,135 to 96,060, and then dropped substantially in the first pandemic year, to 73,726. As Figure 3 shows, most of the increase in reports from 2014 to 2019 is due to an increase in reports of child neglect.

⁴⁵ Weiner, D., Heaton, L., Stiehl, M., Chor, B., Kim, K., Heisler, K., Foltz, R., & Farrell, A. (2020). *Chapin Hall issue brief: COVID-19 and child welfare: Using data to understand trends in maltreatment and response*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. See also Stewart, N. (June 8, 2020). Child abuse cases drop 51 percent. The authorities are very worried. *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/nyregion/corona-virus-nyc-child-abuse.html>

As Figure 4 show, the trend is very different for the number of *substantiated* cases. There has been a trend toward a substantial decrease in the number of substantiated cases, even before the pandemic year of 2020. Figure 5 shows that most of this decrease stems from the decrease in the number of substantiated child neglect cases. As Figure 6 and Figure 7 show, the trends for *established* cases parallel those for substantiated cases: the number of established cases decreased since 2014, with most of the decrease driven by the decrease in child neglect cases. Similarly, DCP&P data on the number of victims overall, the number of maltreatment victims who suffered from repeated maltreatment, the number who experienced repeated maltreatment following reunification, the number victimized in foster care, and the number of children served by DCP&P all declined (Figure 8 to Figure 12).

CACs.

Figure 13 through Figure 15 present trends in statistical data that New Jersey Children's Advocacy Centers report to the National Children's Alliance, the national membership organization of CACs. As of 2021, all New Jersey CACs are either full or associate members of the NCA. The line graphs for data reported to the NCA do not show clear trends, but there are challenges in interpreting these. Which New Jersey CACs are members of the NCA has changed over time, and this in itself may influence case count totals reported to NCA. Moreover, there is not a common definition of the number of children served at a CAC, and this will vary based on how each CAC defines the variable. On the other hand, one clear strength of the CAC data is its provision of data on cases in which the perpetrator is a youth with sexual behavior problems issues. Figure 14 shows that New Jersey CACs consistently showed 300 or more cases in which the offender was a minor over all the years studied. The New Jersey Children's Alliance has begun in recent years to collect data on all the state's CACs and MDTs. More time will be needed to assess trends over time from this data source, particularly given the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 through 2022.

Prosecutors' Offices.

Figure 16 depicts the number of child physical abuse and child endangerment cases prosecuted in 20 out of the 21 New Jersey counties from 2017 to 2020, and the percentage of these cases with different dispositions. It was not possible to show data on child sexual abuse cases, because statistics are not calculated separately for cases with child and adult victims. These 20 counties maintained statistical tables on dispositions, which were obtained either because the tables were posted publicly in annual reports or because Cross Associates obtained them through requests made through New Jersey's Open Public Record Act. An official from the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office reported to Cross Associates that their office did not maintain these data. In Essex County, the 2017 data table was missing; to estimate the 2017 dispositions from this county, we averaged the numbers from the 2018 and 2019 data tables (we omitted the 2020 table from the calculation because of the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic that year).

As the top of Figure 16 shows, the total number of cases reaching disposition in these 20 counties was consistently near 600 from 2017 to 2019, and then dropped to 407 in 2020. The percentage of these cases that ended in a guilty plea to the most serious offense fell from

56.1% to 41.3% across these four years, while the percentage leading to guilty plea to a lesser offense increased from 16.2% to 22.6%. The percentage of cases in which the defendant was accepted into a diversion program as an alternative to prosecution increased from 22.2% to 30.0%, while the percentage of cases that were dismissed was consistently around 5%. Trials were rare (only 19 across all four years; less than 1% of these cases); the few trials that took place usually ended in conviction (17 out of 19).

New Jersey Trial Courts

The Quantitative Research Unit of the Administrative Office of the New Jersey Courts publish statistics annually on case flow in different New Jersey Trial Courts. One set of statistics pertains to child/abuse neglect cases seen in Family Court. These involve cases in which DCF places seeks to place children in resource homes to protect their safety, and the courts consider whether DCF should have custody of children for this purpose. In this report, we will refer to these as child protection cases to distinguish them from criminal child abuse and neglect cases, which are discussed in the section on prosecutors' office. Figure 17 shows the trend in the number of child protection cases being added to New Jersey Trial Courts across fiscal years. We see a noticeable increase in fiscal years 2012 to 2016, with the number of cases then returning to pre-2012 levels in fiscal years 2017 through 2019. Note that the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 occurred only four months before the end of the 2020 fiscal year, so most of the first year of the pandemic took place in fiscal year 2021. Not surprisingly given the pandemic, the number of child abuse and neglect cases added to the trial courts were dramatically lower in fiscal years 2020 and 2021 than in previous years. One other change depicted in Figure 17 deserve further attention: formerly, the number of pending cases exceeded the number of resolved cases; in recent years, this gap has been eliminated, and a lower proportion of cases are pending.

Interpretation of Trends

It is beyond the scope of this study to do the analysis necessary to interpret all these trends. Nevertheless, there are some tentative inferences we can make based on the information currently available to us. First, we see in several trend analyses a decrease in cases in 2020 that is likely to reflect the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mandated reporters had less contact with children during the period, and the necessity of isolation due to the pandemic made it difficult to handle these cases in prosecutor offices and the courts. This seems a plausible explanation of drops in the calls to the hotline, in the number of child maltreatment reports, the number of cases prosecuted by prosecutors' offices, and the number of cases added to the family courts. It also probably contributed to decreases in the number of substantiated and established cases (measured in some of the figures presented as the number of child victims).

A DCFS administrator who was part of the team overseeing the current study offered information to help interpret the trends in DCP&P data reported in this study. One factor that was a likely contributor to the decrease in the number of substantiated victim was New Jersey's 2013 decision to move from a two-tier system of findings in which cases were either substantiated or unfounded, to a four-tier system with four different possible outcomes (substantiated/established/not established/unfounded). With the new four-tier method, some

cases that might previously have been deemed to be substantiated were likely to be categorized as established or not established.

Another factor is changes in New Jersey case law that now define child abuse and neglect more narrowly. These changes have made the definition of a caregiver more restrictive and decreased the ability to substantiate cases in which it is clear child maltreatment has occurred, but it cannot be connected to a specific perpetrator. Cases in which judges have rejected investigative findings of neglect may have led DCP&P to be more conservative about substantiating neglect. Finally, decreases in substantiation may be related to national declines in the rate of victimization. Further research will be needed to explore how such factors affect both reporting and investigation decision-making, both of which affect the number of victims of child maltreatment identified in New Jersey.

The changes related to child protection cases in the family court likely follow from the changes in DCP&P. Reduction in DCP&P cases probably explain the reductions in family court cases and events that are depicted in Figure 17. The reduction of the proportion of pending cases versus resolved cases may also be a function of the lower number of cases, which may enable more cases to be resolved that might previously have languished.

Discussion

Stakeholder agencies in New Jersey collect a wealth of data on child abuse and neglect in the state. The New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub is particularly notable. It is perhaps the most sophisticated and useful public data interface from a state child protection agency in the United States. The New Jersey Children's Alliance has undertaken a comprehensive statistical profile of all CACs through membership surveys in 2019 through 2021. Additional useful data on New Jersey CACs is available through reports on New Jersey from the National Children's Alliance. The Administrative Office of the Courts collects and reports sophisticated case flow information on child abuse and neglect cases through its annual reports. The New Jersey State Police have taken a major step forward by adopting the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which will, for the first time, enable them to count crimes against children and youth. The New Jersey Department of Education has data on violence and victimization in the New Jersey public schools that deserves further exploration.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, there are gaps and disconnections in data collection that make it difficult to measure child maltreatment in New Jersey. These gaps and disconnections preclude the development of an accurate count of reported child maltreatment victims in the state, and systematically limit the counts of entire categories of child victims. Given its strengths in data collection and history of multidisciplinary coordination, New Jersey can make significant progress in measuring child maltreatment more accurately and translating better data into a more effective response.

Tracking Case Activity among Stakeholders

It is currently difficult to track case activity among stakeholders in the child abuse response community in New Jersey. Someone interested, for example, in understanding criminal justice outcomes for children seen at Children's Advocacy Centers cannot look at law enforcement, prosecutor or court statistics and understand the implication of these systems' statistics for children seen at CACs. The populations of child abuse and neglect cases in different systems only overlap partially, data linkage by case is very limited, and different systems aggregate data in different time frames. In developing their data systems, each system is responding to the needs and standards of its own system and/or other systems to which it is accountable. The decisions each system makes responds to its own particular needs and may make sense within its operational environment. Thus, for example, it may make sense for some systems to aggregate data by calendar year to provide a clearer picture to the public and align their data with national statistics, while other systems may benefit from using the fiscal year because of its link to appropriations. While advocates for more comprehensible data on child abuse and neglect in New Jersey may seek to change the standard data analysis and reporting practices of individual systems, they are likely to encounter resistance based on the institutional norms that led to different data practices in the first place. Expanding access to and use of Infoshare will help (see recommendations about Infoshare elsewhere in this report), but it is unlikely to be sufficient. It is not likely to be practical for every system with child abuse data to have access to Infoshare. Moreover, expanded access to Infoshare does not solve problems such as varying definitions of abuse and different systems collecting data for different time periods (e.g., calendar year vs. fiscal year).

In addition to enhanced use of Infoshare, it would be useful for data specialists from different systems to collaborate on a special project to answer specific questions of interest across systems. This group could, for example, collaborate to estimate the total number of allegations of child abuse and neglect reported in the state during a given time and profile the investigative and service response to those cases. The data specialists could collaboratively identify a sample of cases they want to track across systems. The data specialists could then share confidential identifying information across systems, perhaps under the guidance of a university Institutional Review Board. They each could find the data in their own systems for each case in the sample and contribute these data to a common confidential data file that could be shared across systems. The sample could be large enough to enable statistical results to have a reasonable margin of error (e.g., a margin of error of 5% to 10% on a percentage that is being reported, or a standard error that is a small fraction of a mean being reported), But the sample could be small enough that the task of finding data for each case is not too onerous. Even individual law enforcement agencies could be asked to provide data if there are small numbers of cases per jurisdiction. This special project could also enter data on the history of each case from intake to final disposition, to produce case flow and outcome statistics for this special sample.

Tracking Long-Term Outcomes

Intervention by the stakeholder systems in child maltreatment aims to ensure children's safety and promote their well-being, and to hold offenders accountable and prevent them from continuing to abuse and neglect children. The negative effects of child maltreatment extend

into adulthood, but effective trauma-informed mental health treatment improves outcomes for survivors of child maltreatment. The stakeholder systems can take steps to track long-term outcomes, which will increase the likelihood of increasing both children's well-being and offender accountability.

Receiving Mental Health Services.

One key outcome is whether child victims receive the mental health services they need. Stakeholder systems could take several steps to track this outcome better. CACs in New Jersey already report data on the number of children who received mental health services, on-site at the CAC and off-site. DCF maintains data on service plans and referrals for children who receive child welfare services. For those cases that start as reports and continue in DCF as child welfare cases, DCF could link data from child welfare services with data on reports. These data could be forwarded to the Child Welfare Data Hub, and the Hub could be modified to identify whether children involved in reports received mental health services. Some Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers already collect data on the number of child victims they provide mental health services, and some prosecutors' offices collect data on victim advocacy services. Methods could be developed for each RDTC and prosecutor office to collect standardized data on providing mental health services or referring children to mental health services. If each system recorded which of the other systems a child was involved with, as we discuss elsewhere in this report, then they could disaggregate their count of mental health services provided or facilitated by systems involved. This would facilitate the development of an overall count of the number of child maltreatment victims receiving mental health services. In developing this count, stakeholder will need to recognize the limitations of this outcome variable. Many families of child maltreatment victims who are referred for mental health services never follow through on them or discontinue them prematurely.⁴⁶

Repetition of Maltreatment.

Children who are abused and neglected are at risk of being maltreated again, particularly if they remain in the care of those who have maltreated them, and intervention is not successful in changing the perpetrator's behavior. A repetition of maltreatment is a horrible outcome in itself, but also increases substantially the negative impact of maltreatment on children's well-being. The New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub reports the number of children with an initial substantiated maltreatment finding who were then involved in a maltreatment report again within 6 months and 12 months of the initial report. The Data Hub reports this separately for children who are in the home, child who were removed from the home but reunified with their family, and children in foster care, and so one must aggregate across categories to estimate the number of children overall who experience a re-report of maltreatment.

It is possible that children maltreated by non-caregivers and involved in reports to law enforcement will be maltreated again, but this is much less likely, because the major risk factor for a repetition of maltreatment is living with a maltreating caregiver. Almost all if not all cases with a maltreating caregiver would involve DCP&P, so we would expect a limited number of cases of repeated maltreatment outside of DCP&P cases. CACs do not currently collect data

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Lippert, T., Favre, T., Alexander, C. & Cross, T.P. (2008). Families who begin and decline therapy for children who are sexually abused. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32, 859-868

that they report to NJCA or to NCA on the number of children who have experienced re-victimization, but this is a field that could be added to CAC data reports.

Offender Accountability.

The standard method for holding offenders who commit child maltreatment accountable is to prosecute them in criminal court, which can lead to conviction and subsequent incarceration and/or other punishment. As discussed above, prosecutors publish data in their annual reports on the prosecution outcomes of those child physical abuse/child endangerment cases that were criminally charged. They do not separate victims of child sexual abuse cases from adult sexual assault cases in their statistics, so it difficult to assess offender accountability for child sexual abuse. Improving measurement of different types of maltreatment in prosecutor data files will facilitate the evaluation of offender accountability for perpetrating child maltreatment.

Child Well-Being

Child abuse can cause both short-term and long-term harm to children's well-being in many areas of their life, including their physical and mental health, their relationships and their ability to learn and function⁴⁷. Adverse childhood experiences such as child abuse affect individuals behavioral and physical health into adulthood⁴⁸. One serious outcome of child abuse is an increased risk of suicidal behavior⁴⁹, which is especially concerning given recent increases in adolescent suicide nationally⁵⁰. Stakeholder systems could better use their contact with children who are abused, to track their well-being over time. DCF provides behavioral health services to youth with emotional and behavioral challenges through its Children's System of Care and tracks their needs through its use of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) measure⁵¹. Assessment of physical and behavioral health is central to the work of RDTCs, and a part of the mental health response that CACs facilitate. These systems could share this information with other stakeholder systems during case review in multidisciplinary teams, enabling these systems to track children's well-being over time. For those children and youth who are not connected to the System of Care, victim and family advocates in CACs, Prosecutors' Offices and other system could contact families and administer brief screening measures at

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Aber, J.L., & Allen, J.P. (1987). The effects of maltreatment on young children's socioemotional development: An attachment theory perspective. *Developmental Psychology*, 23, 406–414. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). *Understanding the effects of maltreatment on brain development*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/brain-development/>; Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/long_term_consequences.pdf

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, Williamson DF, Spitz AM, Edwards V, Koss MP, et al. (1998). The relationship of adult health status to childhood abuse and household dysfunction. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14, 245–258.

⁴⁹ Angelakis, I., Austin, J.L. & Gooding, P. (2020). Association of childhood maltreatment with suicide behavioral among young people: A systematic Review and meta-analysis. *JAMA network open*, 3(8), e2012563.

⁵⁰ Curtin, S. (2020). State suicide rates among adolescents and young adults aged 10–24: United States, 2000–2018, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 69, 11. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr69/nvsr-69-11-508.pdf>

⁵¹ Department of Children and Families (2022). *Children's System of Care*. <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/dcsc/>

periodic intervals over time. This work could be coordinated through multidisciplinary teams to avoid duplication of effort. This assessment could provide additional outcome data for each system and identify and provide a service response to those children and youth who continue to suffer the effects of child abuse even after the investigation and child protection and criminal justice interventions have taken place.

Responding to New Jersey Law Enforcement Agencies' Transition to NIBRS

As discussed above, New Jersey law enforcement agencies are transitioning to the NIBRS data system, which includes recording the age of the victim in data on a crime incident. Research has used NIBRS data to study child victimization, both in universities⁵² and federal agencies⁵³. However, it has been rarely if ever used by stakeholder agencies within a state to provide data on child victimization in their state. This is a missed opportunity. We recommend that stakeholder agencies in child maltreatment professional reach out to the New Jersey State Police, which collects and reports on crime data in New Jersey, and explore opportunities to collaborate around NIBRS data.

Recommendations for Specific Changes by Stakeholder Systems

Our analysis suggests that each stakeholder can make changes to improve the availability and consistency of valid data on child maltreatment in New Jersey. It is beyond our scope to assess how much effort and cost would be involved in making these changes, but we recommend the stakeholder systems collaborate to assess what would be required and each system invest in making improvements. Our recommendations are as follows (some have also been mentioned above):

1. DCF could record data on the types of maltreatment reported to the hotline and make these data available on the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub
2. DCF could link data on receiving services through CWS to data on DCP&P maltreatment to help assess the number of child victims receiving services. These data could be made available on the Child Welfare Data Hub.
3. DCF could make data on cases of youth with sexual behavior problems available on the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub
4. CACs could collect data on the number of children who have experienced re-victimization and report these data to NJCA
5. CACs and MDTs could utilize data analyzed in the Child Fatality Review Board Annual Report to better understand investigative practices in need of immediate improvement
6. Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers could develop a common format for collecting and reporting data and provide annual reports to the public
7. RDTs and prosecutor offices could collect standardized data on providing mental health services or referring children to mental health services.

⁵² Finkelhor, D. & Ormrod, R. (2004). *Prostitution of Juveniles: Patterns from NIBRS*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin-NCJ203945 (pp. 1-12). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

<https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=ccrc>

⁵³ Snyder, H. (2000). *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics*. NIBRS Statistical Report. NCJ 182990 Bureau of Justice Statistics Clearinghouse, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED446834.pdf>

8. Children's Advocacy Centers could record data on the types of maltreatment both at referral and as determined by investigation and assessment by the multidisciplinary team.
9. CAC/MDTs can request that all cases flowing through the prosecutor's office be reported to the MDT coordinator, including those that do not result in a forensic interview. One CAC has already successfully established this practice, thereby enabling them to 1) be aware of families that may need their help; 2) collect maltreatment data that more closely aligns with their partner agencies.
10. All prosecutors' offices could make their annual reports available online and include statistical tables on charging and disposition in these reports
11. Prosecutors' offices could include statistics on investigation and outcomes of prosecution of different types of child abuse. If this cannot be achieved, the New Jersey Children's Alliance may be able to develop a protocol for obtaining data from prosecutors' office annually. Statistics for child sexual abuse cases could be presented separately from statistics of adult victims of sexual assault. Statistics should be presented on final outcomes and not just charging outcomes
12. The Governor's fiscal 2022-2023 budget should increase staffing resources at the New Jersey State Police so that all municipalities have been trained in NIBRS use by December 31, 2023.
13. Law enforcement agencies could regularly report their child maltreatment cases to their county's CAC in conjunction with doing their regular NIBRS reports
14. MDT meetings could include monthly data reports from key partners that might help reduce the burden of gathering these numbers bi-annually for their required reporting.
15. Infoshare's CAC module has proven itself of value to users in the field. It would be ideal to standardize this module and implement its use in every CAC. Non-profit as well as prosecutor-based CACs should have access to Infoshare
16. The Administrative Office of the Courts could present trial statistics separately for child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, and child endangerment cases, in family courts, criminal courts and civil courts
17. The New Jersey State Police could report results on different types of child abuse and neglect crimes from NIBRS. We recommend that the New Jersey Children's Alliance reach out to the Uniform Crime Reporting Unit of the State Police to explore options for collaborating.
18. The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault could collect and report statistics on use of its hotline and Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate services by adolescents. We recommend that the New Jersey Children's Alliance reach out to the NJCASA to explore options for collaborating.
19. The New Jersey Children's Alliance and other stakeholder organization could reach out to the New Jersey Department of Education to learn more about victimization being measured in the New Jersey public schools, particularly sexual offenses
20. Each child-serving system could record and report both type of maltreatment at the time of referral and type of maltreatment as determined by that system's method of assessment

21. In any follow-up work from the current project, we recommend adding the New Jersey State Police, The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the New Jersey Department of Education, and the Child Fatality Review Board to the seven stakeholder organizations enumerated in the Request for Proposals for this project, and work on methods of sharing data
22. Data specialists from different stakeholders could collaborate on a one-time project to profile accurately the population of child maltreatment victims in New Jersey
23. The stakeholder systems could implement procedures to track outcomes, which will increase the likelihood of increasing both children's well-being and offender accountability. A range of child outcomes could be tracked, including suicidal ideation and behavior

Appendix

Figure 1 Hotline Activity- Total calls to screener

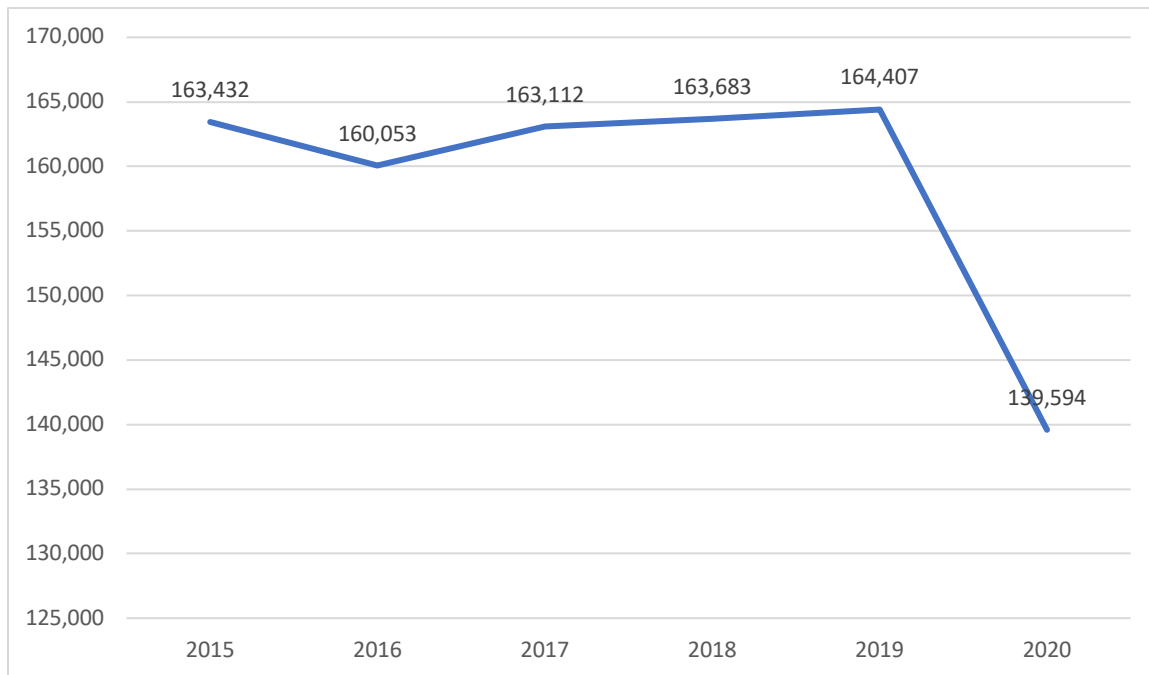


Figure 2 Number of child maltreatment reports

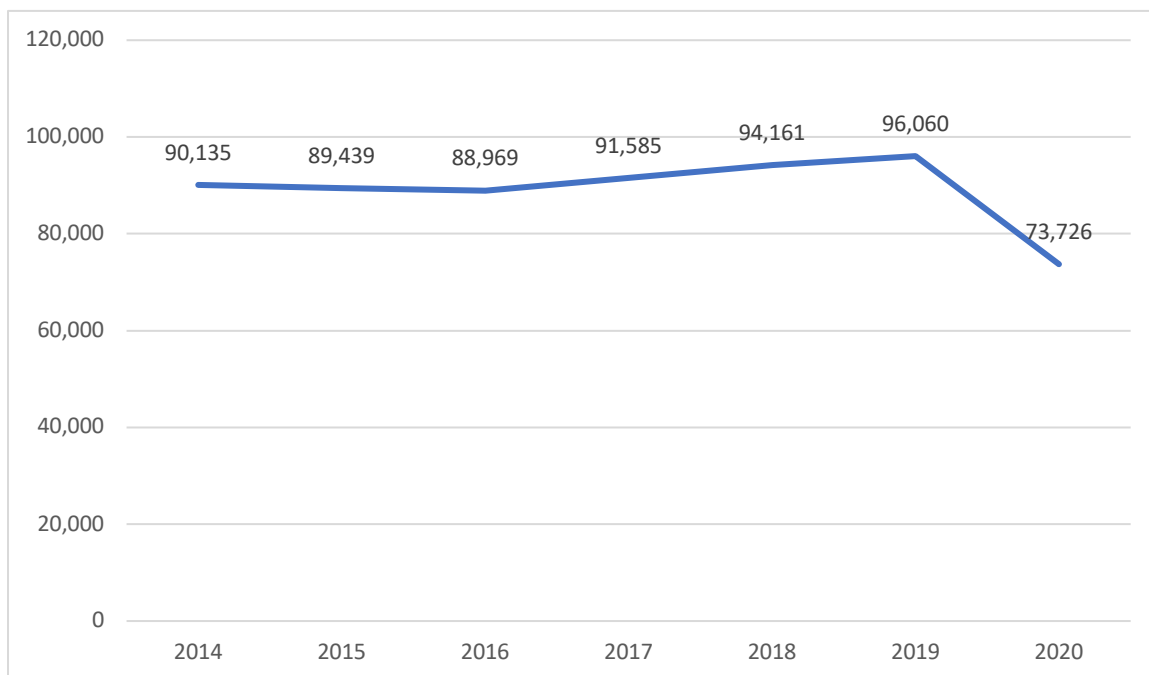


Figure 3 Number of child maltreatment reports by type of maltreatment

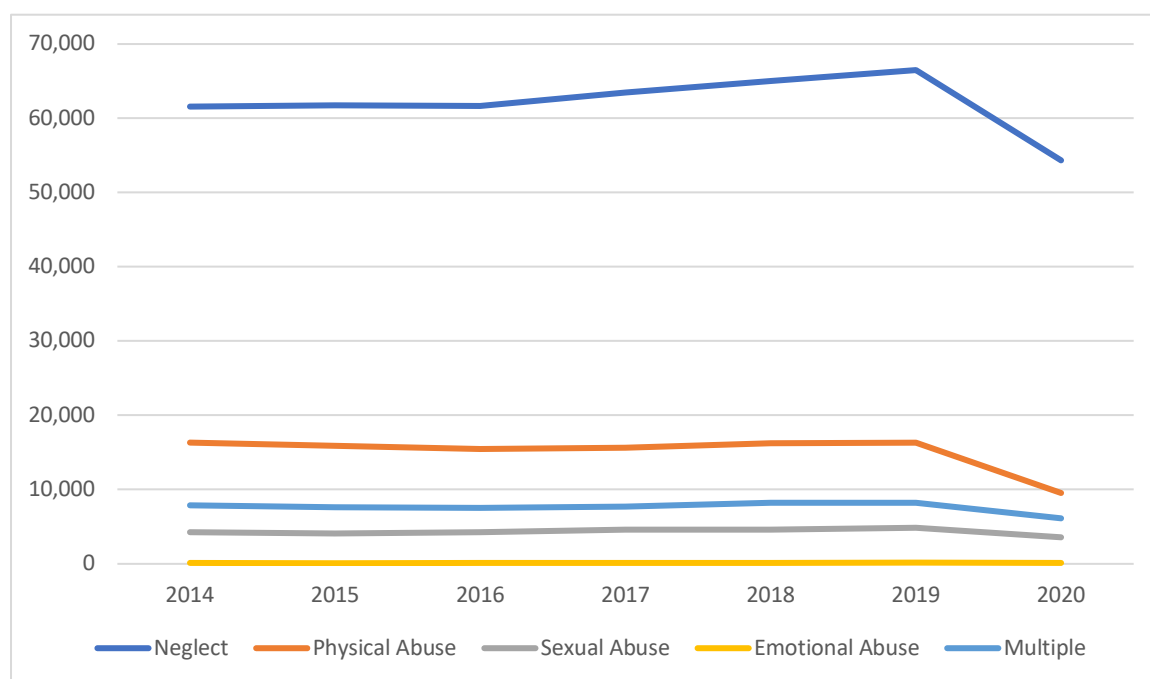


Figure 4 Number of substantiated child maltreatment reports

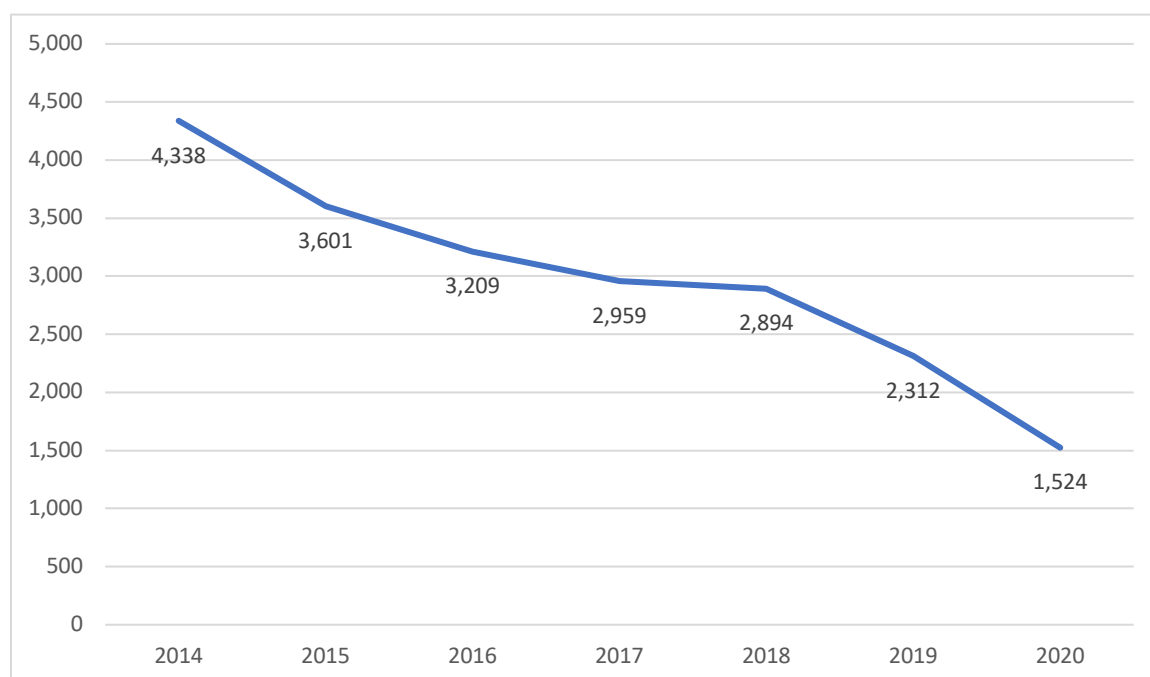


Figure 5 Number of substantiated child maltreatment reports by type of maltreatment

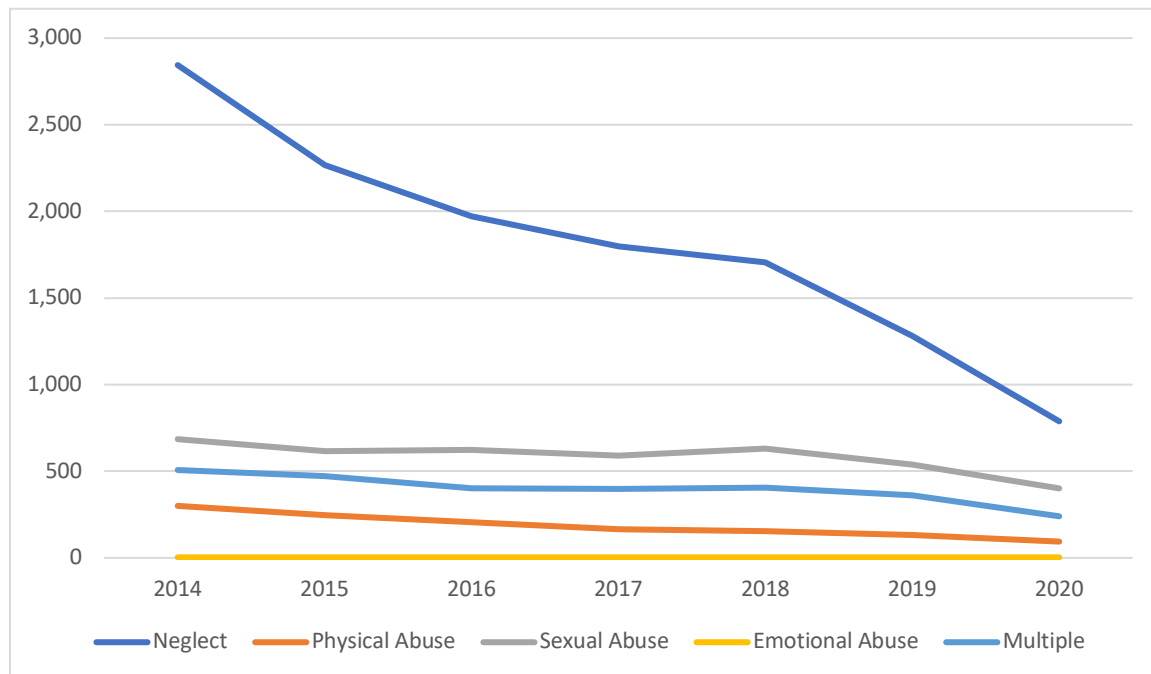


Figure 6 Number of established child maltreatment reports

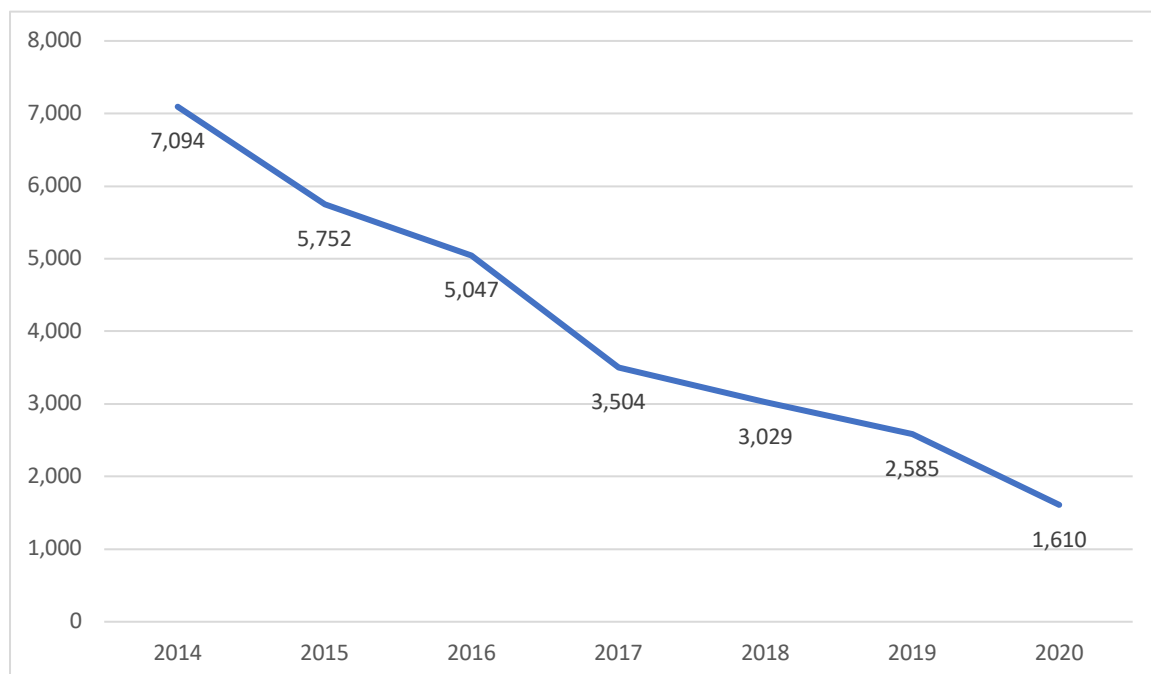


Figure 7 Number of established child maltreatment reports by type of maltreatment

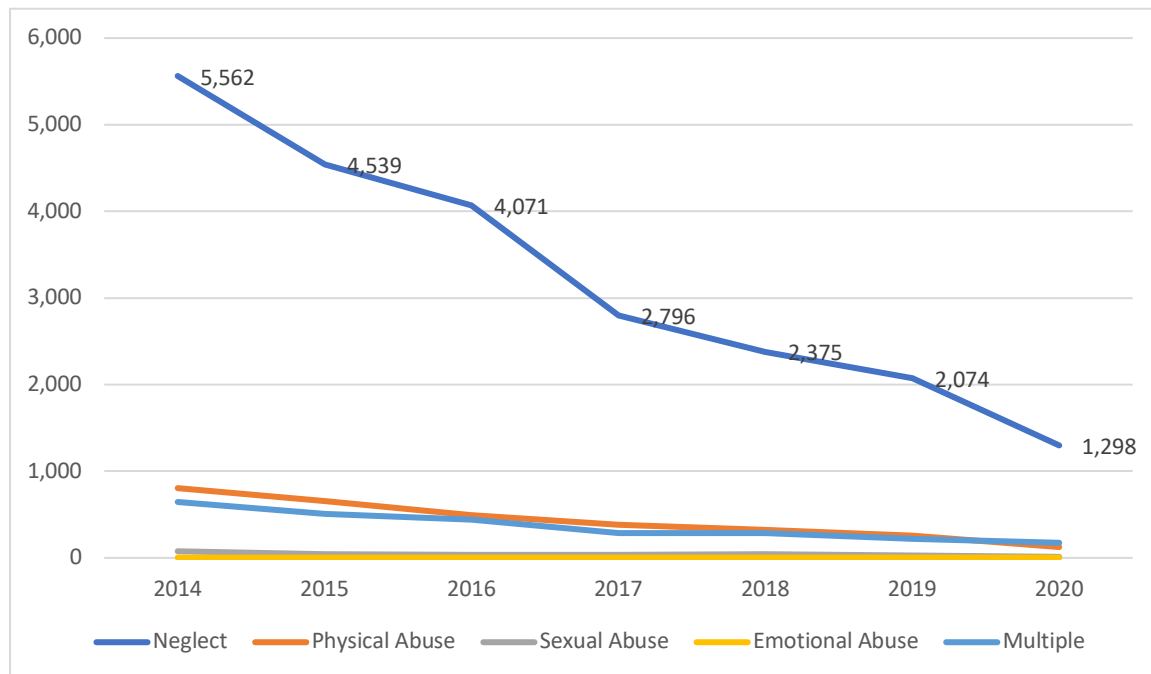


Figure 8 Number of child maltreatment victims

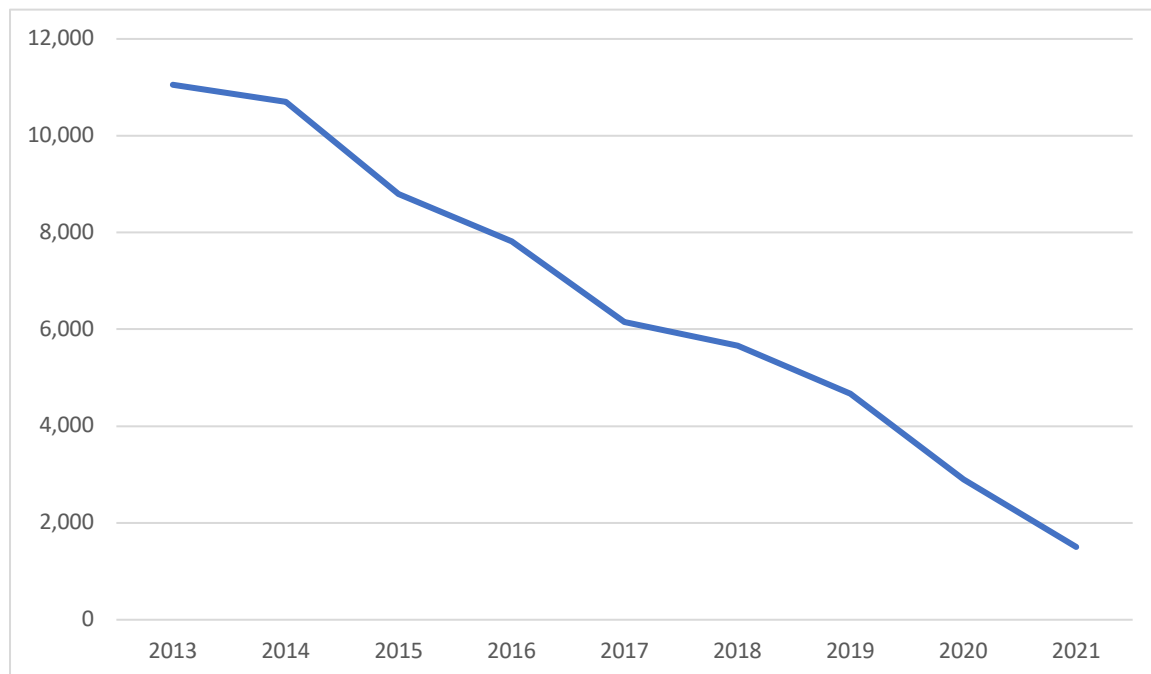


Figure 9 Repeated maltreatment of child maltreatment victims who remained in the home

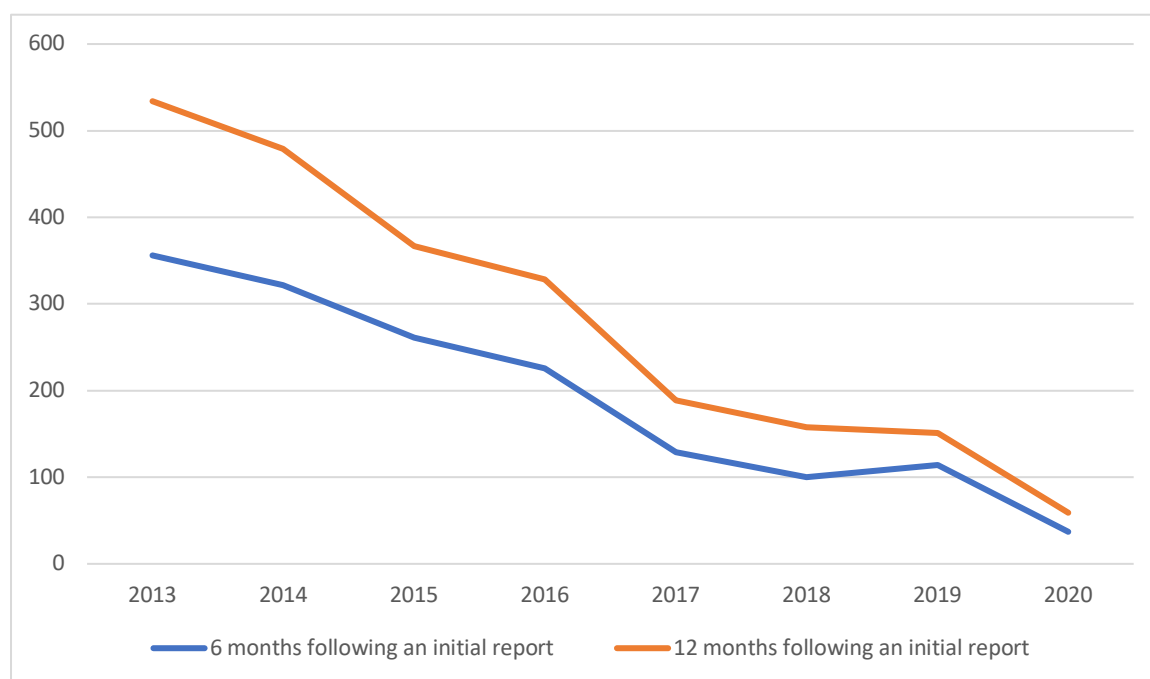


Figure 10 Repeated maltreatment of child maltreatment victims who were reunified.

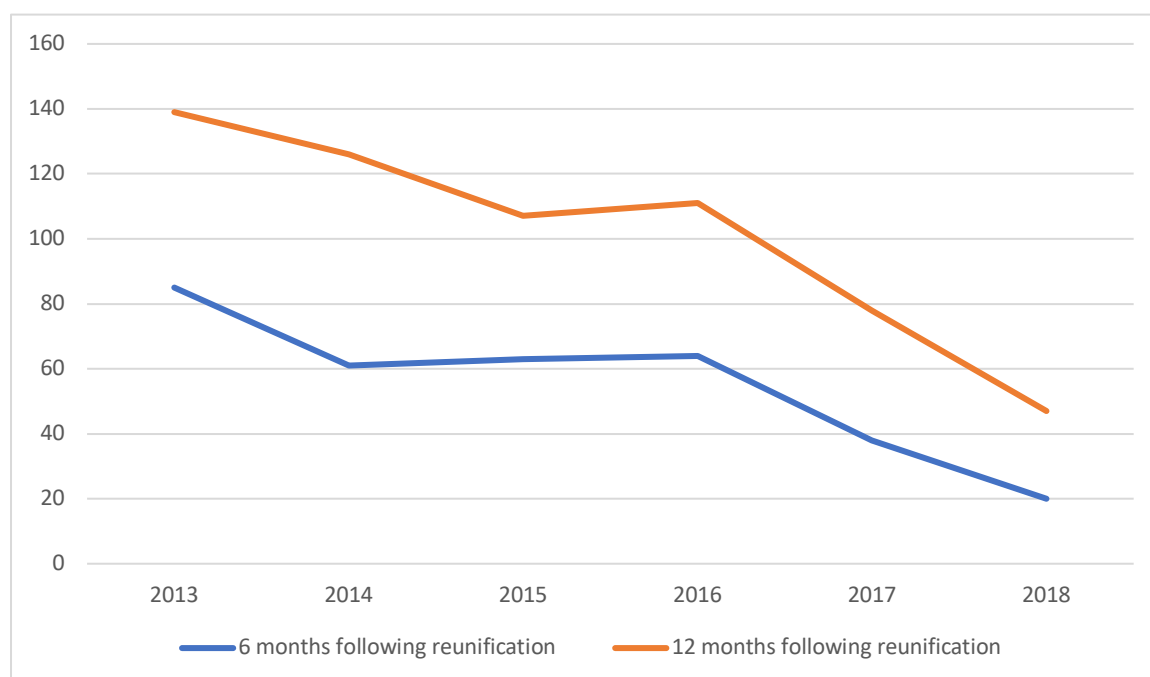


Figure 11 Number of children with reports of child maltreatment while they were in foster care.

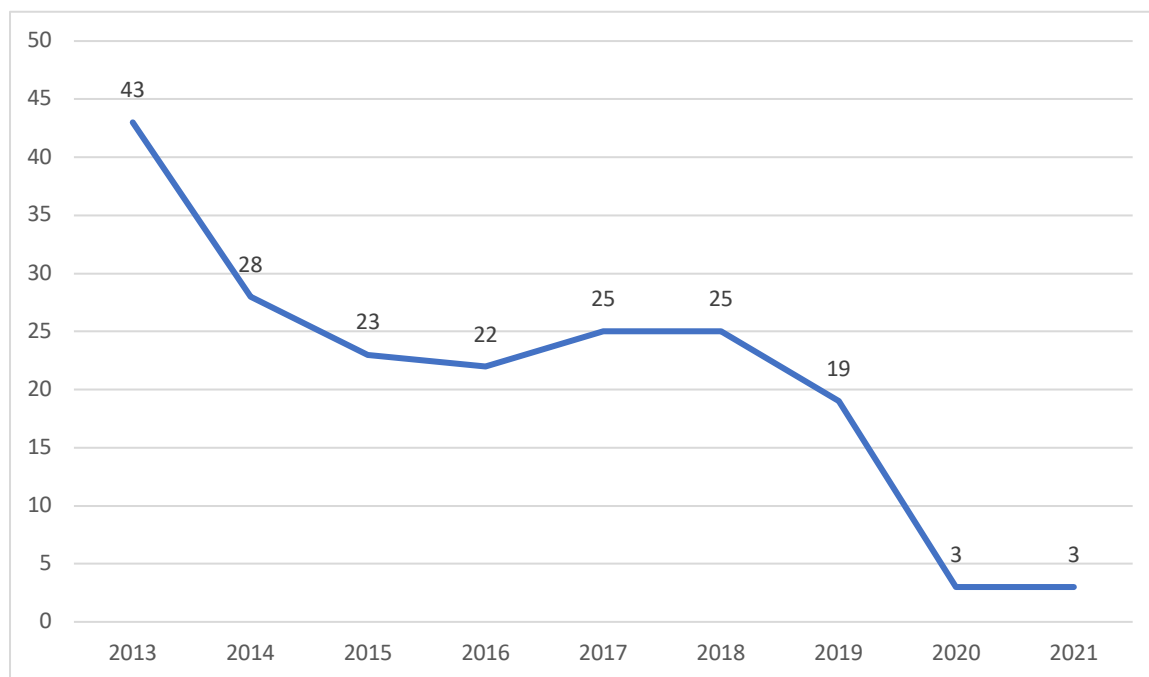


Figure 12 Children served by DCP&P

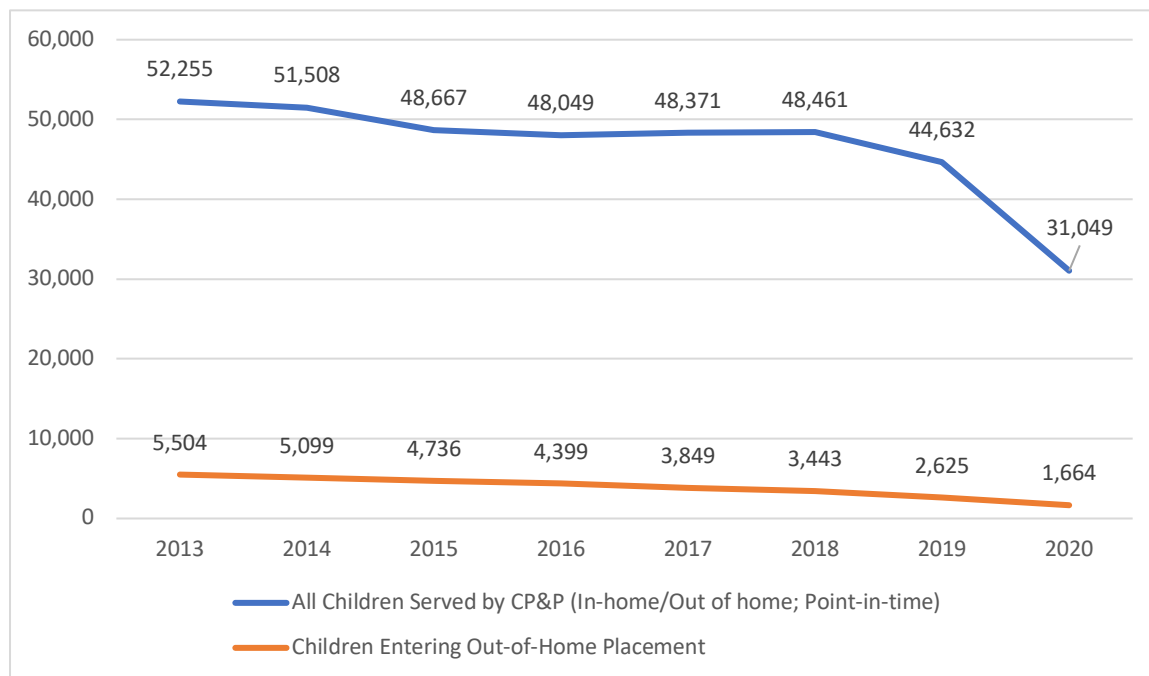


Figure 13 Number of children served by CACs affiliated with the National Children's Alliance

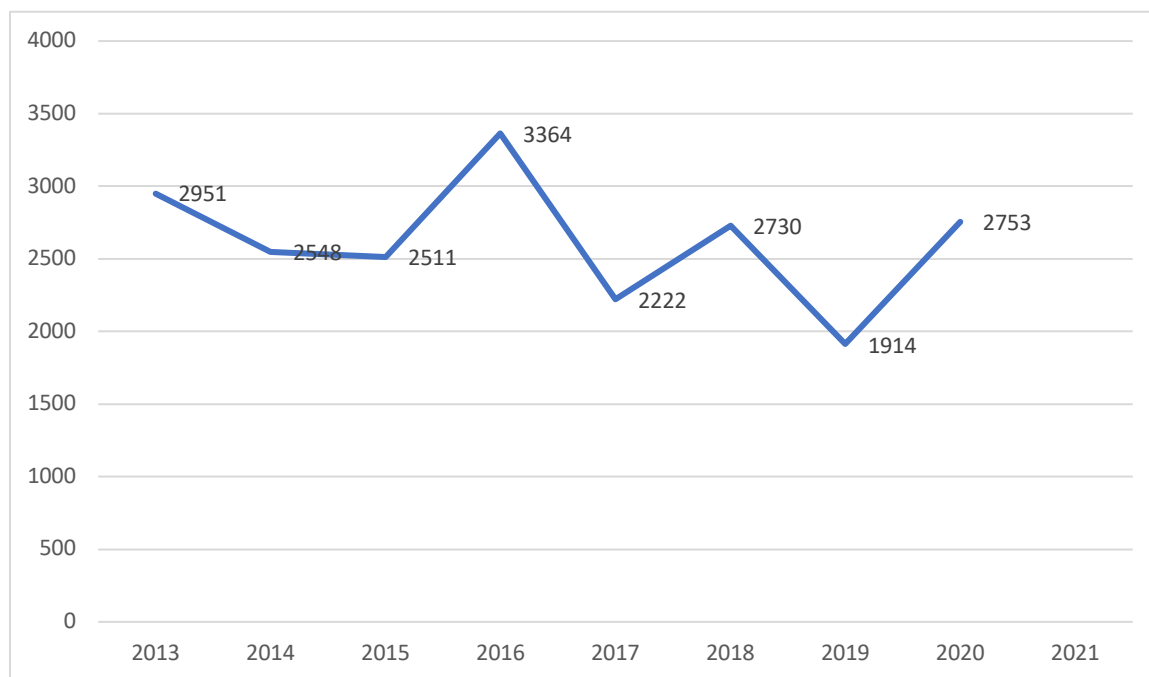


Figure 14 Types of child victimization seen at CACs affiliated with the National Children's Alliance

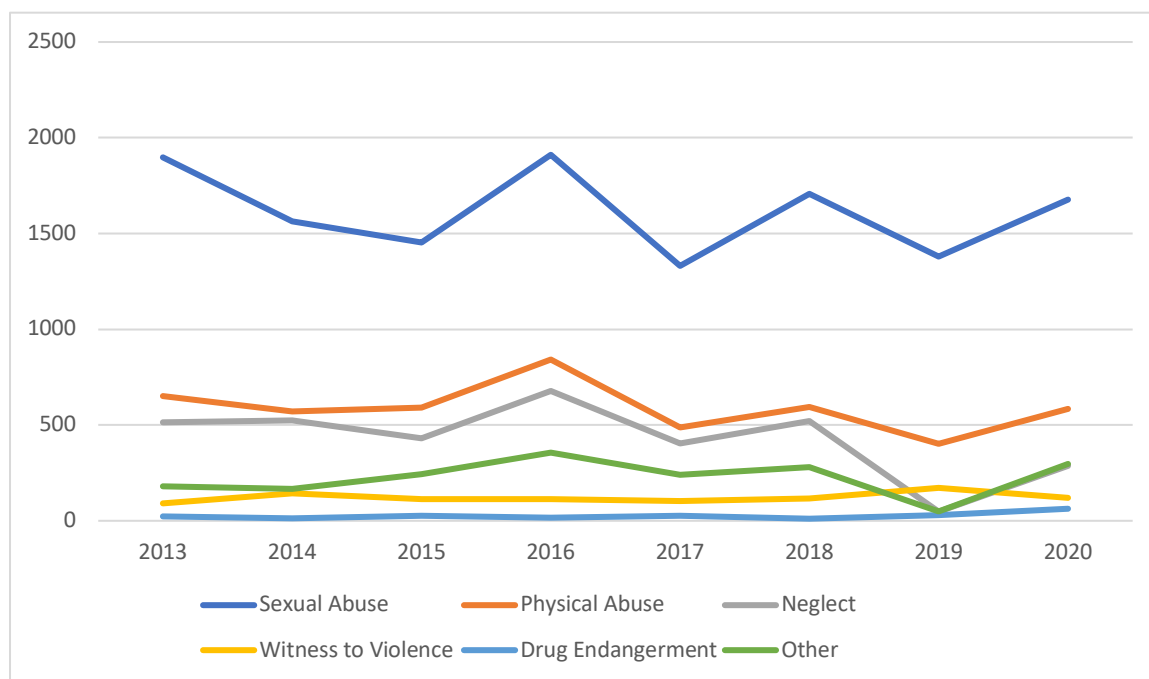


Figure 15 Cases in which the alleged abuser is a minor, seen at CACs affiliated with the National Children's Alliance

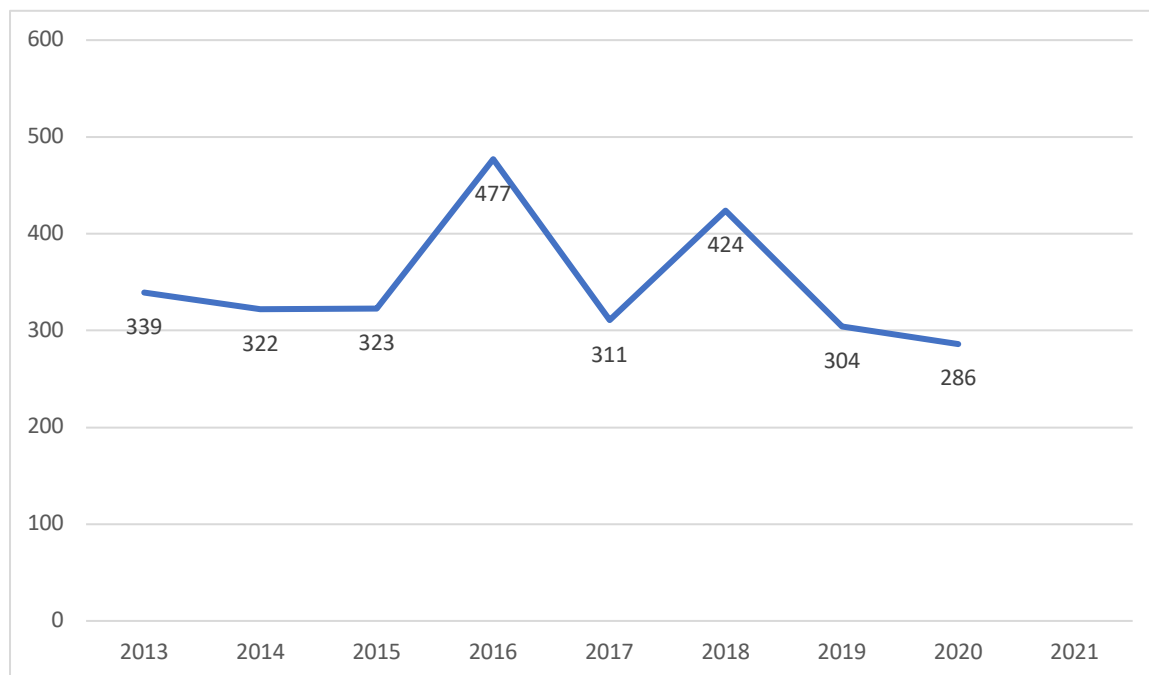


Figure 16 Number of child physical abuse/child endangerment cases and percentage by disposition at 20 NJ Prosecutor's offices

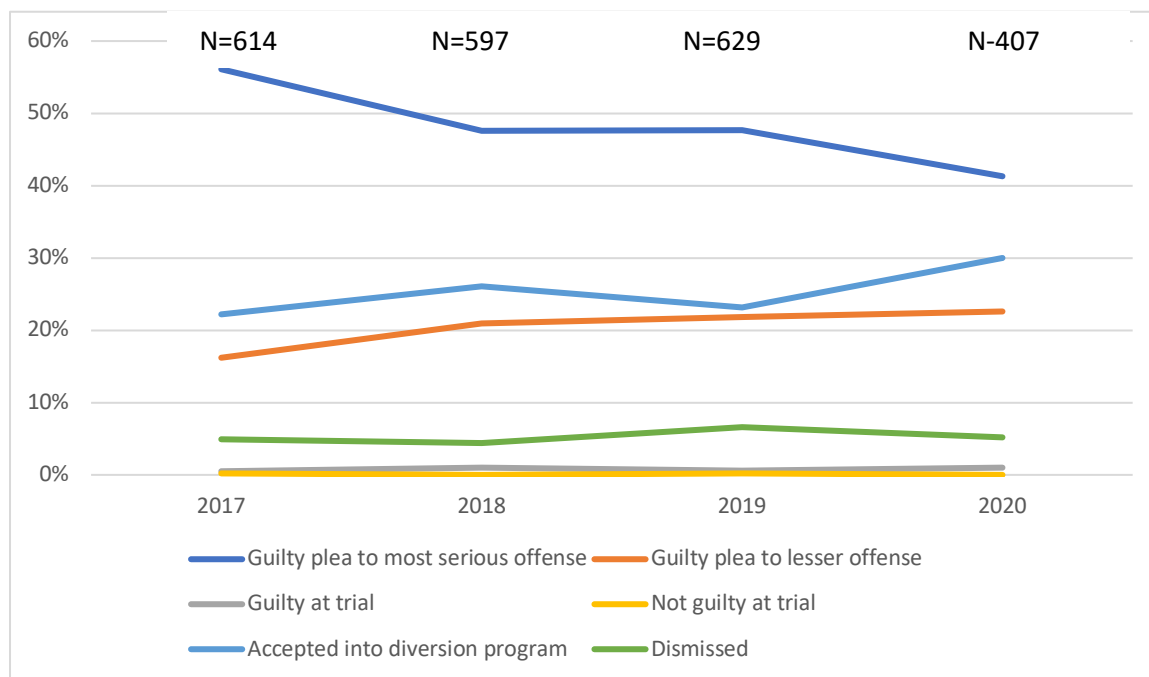


Figure 17 Child abuse and neglect cases in New Jersey Family Courts by fiscal year.

