

A communication periodical for our clients, staff & the community at large

# The Chronicle

A Paterson Counseling Center Newsletter

## Special points of interest:

- PCC Partners With Child Welfare Agencies
- Family Counseling Is A Mainstay At PCC
- PCC Pushes State For Additional Funding For Women & Children Services
- PCC Has A Special Waiting Area For Children At The Center

## Protecting Our Children: Child Abuse

It was not until the 19th century that children were granted the same legal status as domesticated animals with regard to protection against cruelty and/or neglect. In 1962, the term "battered child syndrome" became part of the medical vocabulary and by 1976 all of the states in the United States had adopted laws mandating the reporting of suspected child abuse.

### What is the scope of the child abuse problem?

Child abuse is a worldwide problem affecting children from birth to 18 years of age. The most recent U.S. data dates from 2005, during which 3.3 million reports of abuse and neglect were filed. About 60% of these reports warranted investigation with one-half of these allegations substantiated. These data indicate the incidence of child abuse and neglect to be 12.1 per 1,000 children; 1,460 children (four children/day) died in 2005 as a result of inflicted trauma with more than 77% of these deaths in children less than 4 years of age.

While "reports" of alleged child abuse are not always substantiated during the investigation process, most authorities believe that a large underreporting bias is inherent in the data. There is much more child abuse than gets reported.



### What age child is abused?

All ages of children suffer from child abuse and neglect. Research has shown, however, that risk factors exist making it more likely that certain children may be abused. These risk factors include age: 67% of abused children are less than 1 year old; 80% are less than 3 years old; past history of abuse: Repeated abuse has been shown to occur more than 50% of the time; repeatedly abused children have a 10% chance of sustaining a lethal event; children with learning disabilities, speech/language disorders and mental retardation; children with congenital anomalies (malformations) and chronic/recurrent conditions; and adopted and foster children.

Complicating the collection of data is the general underreporting of child abuse. Very young children are incapable of verbally communicating the harm inflicted on them. Other factors such as fear, guilt, or confusion about the abuser's erratic behavior may also hinder younger children from informing on their abuser.

### Are girls more often abused than boys?

Yes. Girls are somewhat more likely to be abused. According to statistics published in

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## STD: Gonorrhea A Profile Continued

1996, about 52% of victims of maltreatment were female and 48% were male. Data obtained in the federally funded 2005 study demonstrate no significant change in these values.

### Is the pattern of abuse different for girls and boys?

Studies have shown a consistent pattern regarding the abuse and neglect inflicted on children of different genders. Approximately 75% of sexual abuse is inflicted upon girls. Girls also are more likely to suffer from emotional abuse and neglect. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to experience physical trauma (other than sexual abuse). When focusing solely on cause of death, studies indicate fathers are more likely to kill their child via physical abuse, while mothers kill by neglect (for example, starvation).

### What is known about the perpetrators of child abuse?

Over 75% of inflicted abuse is a result of parental action. Parental risk factors include young or single parents, those who did not graduate from high school, and those who either were abused themselves as children or endured a severely dysfunctional home life. Adults using drugs, abusing alcohol, and those with psychiatric disease (for example, depression, impulse-control disorders) are more likely to abuse children. Females account for 61% of perpetrators.



A common theme when interviewing abusive individuals is an unrealistic expectation of infant or child behaviors. Often they expect developmental-milestone maturity beyond the age of the child (such as toilet training). Commonly, the child is incapable of providing what many parents anticipate to be unconditional love. The normally self-centered nature of childhood behavior clashes with the abusive adult's expectations with disastrous results.

### Is there an association between poverty and child abuse?

While children of families in all income levels suffer maltreatment, research suggests that family income is strongly related to incidence rates. Children from families with annual incomes below \$15,000 per year are more than 25 times more likely than children from families with annual income above \$30,000 to be harmed or endangered by abuse or neglect. Poverty clearly predisposes to child abuse. Currently, social scientists are questioning the previous interpretation of such data. Recently new research is challenging this belief. Some argue that poor families have increased contact with reporting agencies – social workers, police, etc. Some also argue that affluent families are more often given the "benefit of the doubt" by those who might be more suspicious of poorer means. In addition, wealthier families are felt to have a better access to legal counsel that, realistically or not, provide an "escape hatch" from investigation and prosecution.

### Who abuses children?

According to the statistics, the majority of perpetrators of child mistreatment (77%) are parents and another 11% are other relatives of the victim. People who are in other caretaking relationships to the victim (for example, child-care providers, foster parents, and facility staff) account for only 2% of the offenders. About 10% of all perpetrators are classified as non-caretakers or unknown. In many states, child abusers by definition must be in a caretaking role.

An estimated 81% of all offenders are under age 40. Overall, approximately 61% of perpetrators are female, although the gender of the abuser differs by the type of mistreatment. Neglect and medical neglect are most often attributed to female caretakers, while sexual abuse is most often associated with male offenders.

Source: Medicinenet.com