



Child Abuse and Neglect in Vermont

2008 Report

 **VERMONT**
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Family Services Division

Annual Report for Calendar Year 2008.

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Message from the Commissioner

During 2008, Vermonters were vividly reminded of the horrors of child abuse with the sexual assault and murder of 12-year-old Brooke Bennett and the death of two infants as a result of abuse-related head trauma. These were three of the over 3,500 reports of child abuse and neglect accepted last year.

Although Vermont is one of the safest states in the nation for children, child maltreatment remains a significant problem. This report is issued annually to ensure Vermonters are aware of this serious issue and that we remain focused on continuously improving our response to child abuse and neglect.

Over the past two to three years, a number of changes have been made to Vermont's child protection system. This 2008 report begins to reflect the impact of three of those changes:

- ***Creation of a Centralized Intake Service***— concerned citizens and professionals now call one toll-free number to report suspected child abuse or neglect. This service began in September of 2008. During the last quarter of 2008, calls regarding child abuse and neglect rose by 10% over the same time period in 2007. The number of accepted reports rose by over 40% over the same period. This increase has impacted the annual numbers shown in this report.
- ***Increased Focus on Less Adversarial Interventions with Families*** – to protect children and prevent more serious issues down the road, we are increasing our use of early intervention strategies and focusing on new ways of engaging families and extended families. This approach may be reflected in the increased use of family assessments in response to reports alleging child abuse and neglect: more than twice as many family assessments were carried out in 2008 than in 2007.
- ***Increased Due Process around the Child Protection Registry***—in 2003, employers were first given access to the Child Protection Registry when screening potential employees who will work with children. Because of this increased access to the registry, new legislation was passed in 2007 adding additional due process requirements. This has improved the integrity of the registry. It may have also contributed to a reduction in formal substantiations in 2008. This issue will continue to be closely monitored over the coming years.

DCF takes very seriously its mandate to prevent child abuse and neglect. Over the next year, the department will engage with many partners to implement comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention efforts in response to Act 1 of the 2008 legislature. We are also working with the Vermont Department of Health; the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living; the Vermont Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; and Prevent Child Abuse Vermont in an effort to prevent abuse-related head trauma in infants.

These efforts are only part of the solution. Ultimately, every Vermont adult must take this issue on, including parents, family members, neighbors, and community members. Child protection truly is everyone's business.



Stephen R. Dale, Commissioner

Who is responsible for keeping children safe?

The Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) has a major role in protecting children and keeping them safe. We cannot, however, do it alone.

Working in partnership with family members, community organizations, other divisions within DCF, and other departments within the Agency of Human Services, Family Services:

- Responds to reports of child abuse and neglect;
- Provides child protective services;
- Oversees the out-of-home placement of children when necessary;
- Provides ongoing services to families at risk;
- Supports youth who are transitioning from foster care to independent living;
- Promotes permanent connections for children who cannot safely return home; and
- Provides post-adoption assistance to children with special needs.

Our ultimate goal is for children to live in safe, supportive, and healthy environments where they can grow and thrive.

Every year, Family Services works with approximately 3,000 of Vermont's most vulnerable children and families; about 1,100 are children in DCF custody. These families are struggling, and they need help to keep their children safe.

Our first responsibility is to plan for safety within the child's own family. When it is safe to do so, Family Services offers help to strengthen families so the children can be safe at home. These services are intended to improve parental capacities, and may include teaching parenting skills, teaching conflict resolution, and linking families to broad-based community resources.

When Family Services determines that it is not safe for a child to live with his or her family, the department asks the state's attorney to request a court hearing to determine whether the child is in need of care and supervision and out-of-home placement.

If the court determines that a child cannot safely remain at home, the child may be placed with relatives, family friends, or a foster family while the parents work on changes that will allow their child to return home safely.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an *abused or neglected child* as one whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. An *abused or neglected child* also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

Harm can occur by:

1. Abandonment;
2. Emotional maltreatment;
3. Neglect; or
4. Physical injury.

Risk of Harm means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse.

DEFINITIONS

Child: an individual under the age of majority: 18.

Person Responsible for a Child's Welfare: includes the child's parent; guardian; foster parent; any other adult residing in the child's home who serves in a parental role; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.

Emotional Maltreatment: a pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.

Neglect: failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.

Physical Injury: death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

Sexual Abuse: any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

Who must report child abuse and neglect?

Certain people are required by Vermont law (33 V.S.A. 49, §4913) to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

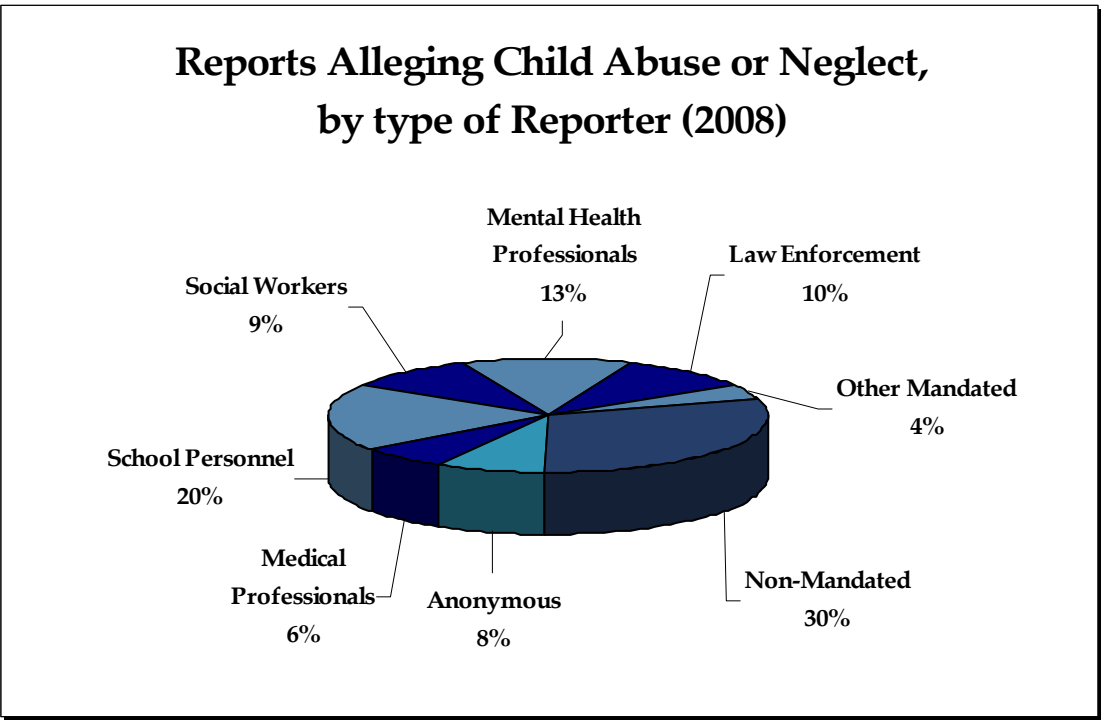
Called *mandated reporters*, these individuals are legally required to report their suspicions to the Family Services Division of DCF – within 24 hours.

In addition, any other person who has reason to believe that a child may have been abused or neglected may make a report to Family Services.

As adults, we all have a moral obligation to keep children safe and a civic duty to report suspected abuse.

The following chart shows the per cent of reports received alleging child abuse or neglect for 2008, by type of reporter.

- ### Mandated Reporters
- Chiropractors, dentists, emergency medical personnel (as defined in 2651(6) of Title 24), licensed practical nurses, medical examiners, mental health professionals, osteopaths, pharmacists, physicians, physicians' assistants, psychologists, registered nurses, surgeons, and any other health care providers;
 - Hospital administrators, interns, and resident physicians in any hospital in the state;
 - School guidance counselors, librarians, principals, superintendents, teachers, and any other individuals who are regularly employed by a school district, or contracted and paid by a school district to provide student services for five or more hours per week during the school year;
 - Childcare workers, police officers, probation officers, social workers, and members of the clergy;
 - Residential and non-residential camp administrators, counselors, and owners;
 - Employees, contractors, and grantees of the Agency of Human Services who have contact with clients.



What happens to the reports received?

Our 24-hour Child Protection Hotline (1-800-649-5285) is the central point of contact for all information regarding potential child abuse and neglect. Trained social workers are available to take your phone calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Here's what happens to reports alleging child abuse or neglect:

1. A Family Services supervisor reviews the reports — often the same day they are received.
2. For each report, a supervisor determines whether it alleges child abuse or neglect as defined by state law.
 - a. If it does, it is accepted for a child abuse/neglect investigation under Chapter 49 of the Vermont Statutes.
 - b. If it does not, the supervisor may have the option of initiating a family assessment (known as *Juvenile Proceedings or JPA Assessments*) to determine whether the child is in need of care and supervision.

Family assessments are typically initiated when there is a pattern of concerns that do not allege child abuse or neglect as defined by state statute, but is of sufficient concern to warrant some type of assessment and potential intervention.

As issues such as substance abuse have become more prevalent in Vermont, the use of *JPA Assessments* has become more frequent. They offer opportunities to intervene and support parents and their children in many circumstances, not the least of which is prenatal substance exposure.

Beginning on July 1, 2009, the Family Services Division may conduct an assessment for less severe allegations of child abuse and neglect. In an assessment, we are not required to make a substantiation decision. The focus is on the factors that interfere with the caregiver's appropriate care for the child – and on what the family needs to get back on track.

Family Services will still conduct a child abuse and neglect investigation when a report alleges:

1. An adult sexually abused a child.
2. The acts or omissions of a caregiver resulted in a child's death.
3. A caregiver:
 - a. Abandoned a child;
 - b. Maliciously punished a child;
 - c. Physically abused a child under the age of 3;
 - d. Physically abused a child of any age who is non-verbal or non-ambulatory;
 - e. Allowed a child to be exposed to methamphetamine production.

Additionally, the department may conduct an investigation of any report as deemed appropriate.

What are the trends statewide?

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Contacts Received Regarding Potential Child Abuse and Neglect	12,873	12,746	12,635	12,829	13,434
Reports Accepted for Child Abuse & Neglect Investigations ¹	2,631	2,371	2,528	2,633	2,896
Reports Accepted for Family Assessments ²	115	176	244	305	630
Total Reports Accepted	2,746	2,547	2,772	2,938	3,526

¹ We may receive more than one report about the same incident or child. Additionally, a report may be about more than one child in a family.

² The numbers of Reports Accepted for Family Assessments do not include those conducted because a child may be without or beyond the control of his/her parents, guardian, or other custodian or is habitually and without justification truant from school.



How many reports are accepted for investigation or assessment?

2008 Reports Accepted, by District				
Districts	Reports Accepted For Investigation		Reports Accepted For Family Assessment	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Barre	299	328	42	64
Bennington	147	191	20	34
Brattleboro	71	117	15	42
Burlington	599	619	63	127
Hartford	177	187	13	31
Middlebury	130	140	12	29
Morrisville	144	194	24	36
Newport	101	153	12	24
Rutland	230	306	23	68
Springfield	158	204	21	58
St. Albans	327	273	47	78
St. Johnsbury	215	147	12	36
Central Office	35	37	1	3
Statewide	2,633	2,896	305	630

How does Family Services determine whether a child has been abused or neglected?

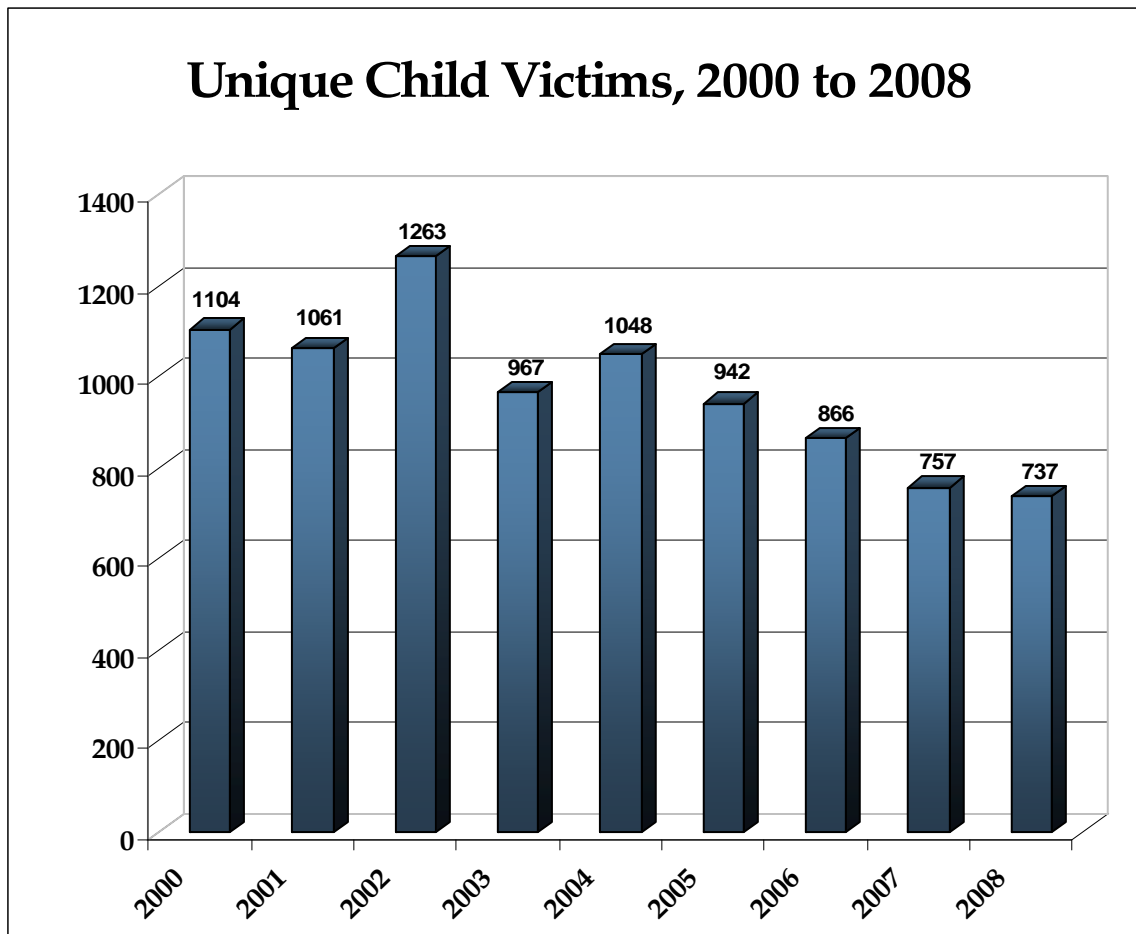
Once a report of child abuse or neglect is accepted for investigation, a social worker interviews or observes the child—typically within 72 hours. The worker also interviews the child’s caretaker and others who may know about the situation. At the conclusion of an investigation, a supervisor reviews the results of the investigation to determine whether the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child has been abused or neglected. If so, the report will be *substantiated*.

In 2008, Family Services conducted 2,896 child abuse or neglect investigations. Of those, 646 were substantiated for child abuse or neglect.

District	Child Abuse / Neglect Investigations		Substantiated Investigations		Unsubstantiated Investigations		Pending ³ Investigations	
	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008
Barre	299	328	77	86	217	228	5	14
Bennington	147	191	41	57	101	130	5	4
Brattleboro	71	117	24	24	45	91	2	2
Burlington	599	619	136	109	456	506	7	4
Hartford	177	187	63	55	114	126	0	6
Middlebury	130	140	48	42	82	98	0	0
Morrisville	144	194	26	49	116	142	2	3
Newport	101	153	22	25	78	123	1	5
Rutland	230	306	49	43	175	253	6	10
Springfield	158	204	49	48	103	152	6	4
St. Albans	327	273	91	54	233	219	3	0
St. Johnsbury	215	147	54	44	157	103	4	0
Central Office	35	37	7	10	24	26	4	1
Statewide	2,633	2,896	687	646	1,901	2,197	45	53

³ When the 2007 data was published, there were 45 investigations pending. At this time, there are 53 investigations pending. The tables that follow do not include information from the 53 investigations that are pending.

Who are the victims of child abuse and neglect?



* These tables do not include information from the 53 investigations that are pending.

Victims of Child Abuse/Neglect, by Age and Gender – 2008			
Age	# of Boys	# of Girls	Total Children
0-1	40	32	72
2-5	102	84	186
6-9	56	70	126
10-13	66	89	155
14-18	39	159	198
Total	303	434	737

What type of abuse did the children experience?

Incidents ⁴ of Child Abuse/Neglect, by Type of Abuse and District				
District	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Emotional/Neglect
Barre	19	34	58	2
Bennington	5	39	19	2
Brattleboro	9	8	16	2
Burlington	29	35	52	13
Hartford	12	22	31	4
Middlebury	9	21	27	2
Morrisville	12	19	34	9
Newport	6	10	15	2
Rutland	14	18	10	5
Springfield	6	25	24	6
St. Albans	11	33	17	3
St. Johnsbury	14	20	23	3
Central Office	2	8	1	0
Total Statewide	148	292	327	53

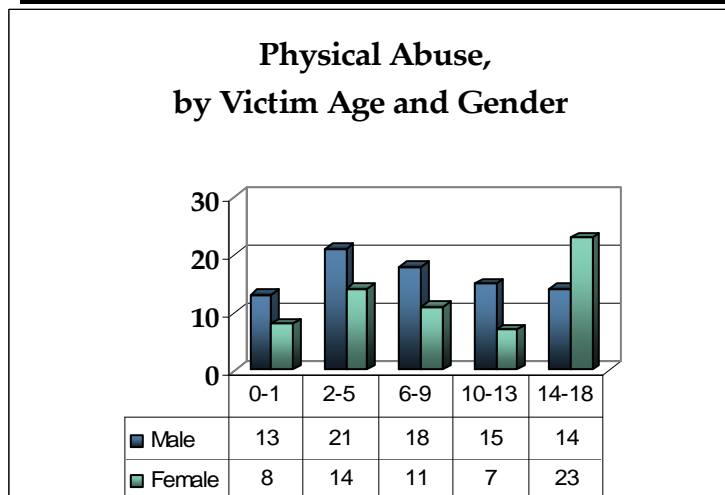
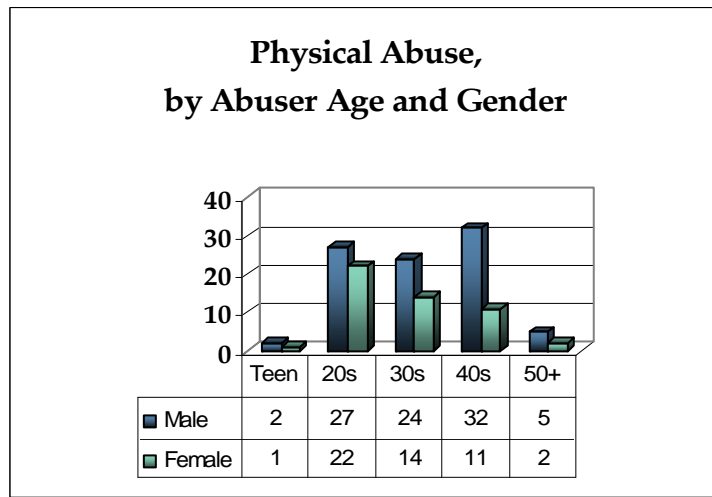
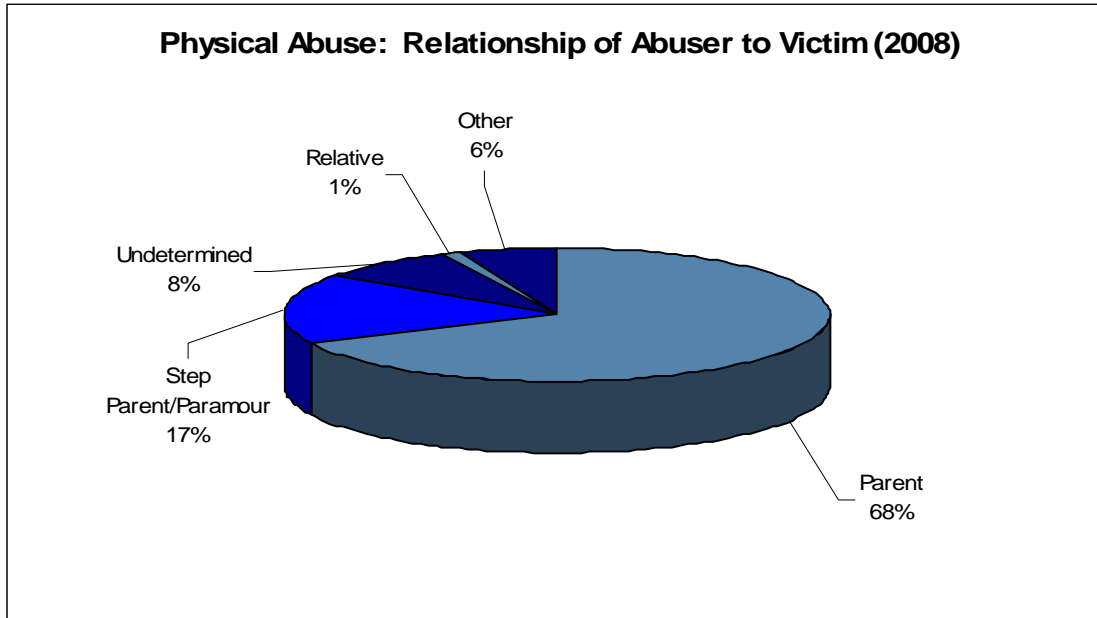
Notes about the Charts on Pages 12 to 15:

- Within each type of abuse, the number of abusers by age and gender is an unduplicated count. For example, someone who physically abused more than one child is counted only once in that category of abuse. Additionally, these numbers do not include information about any abusers whose age was not known.
- Within each type of abuse, the numbers of victims by age and gender is an unduplicated count.

⁴ Each type of abuse experienced by a victim in a substantiated report counts as one incident of child abuse/neglect. The number of incidents is larger than the number of victims because: 1) Children may have suffered more than one type of abuse; and 2) Children may have been involved in more than one substantiated report during the year. Additionally, this table does not include information from the 53 investigations that are pending.

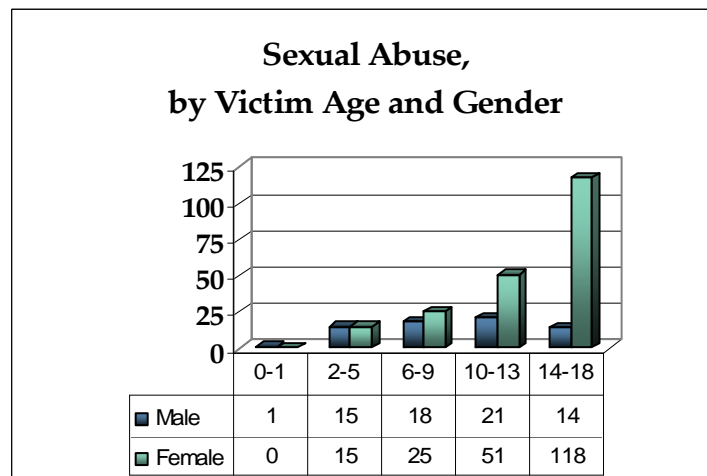
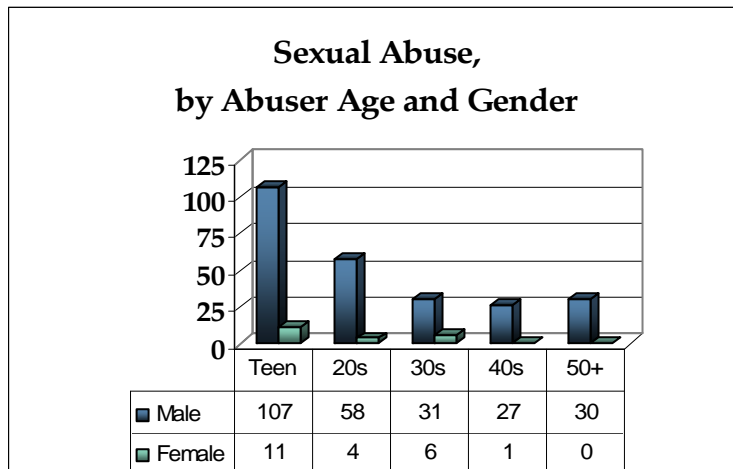
Physical Abuse

In 2008, there were 148 incidents of physical abuse. This number does not include any incidents from the 53 investigations that are pending.



Sexual Abuse

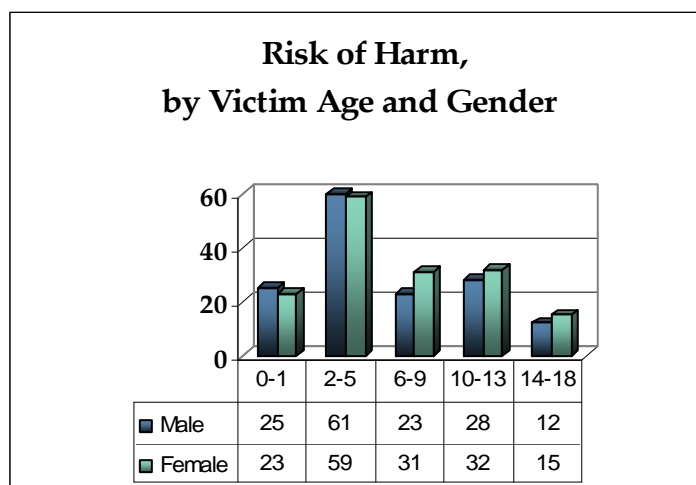
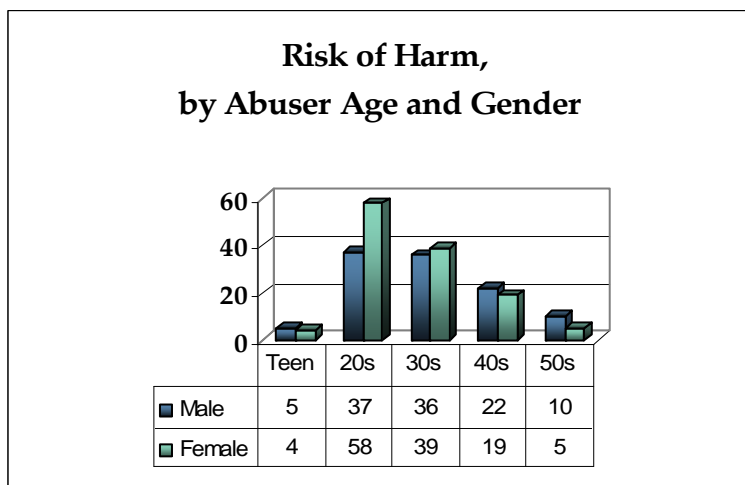
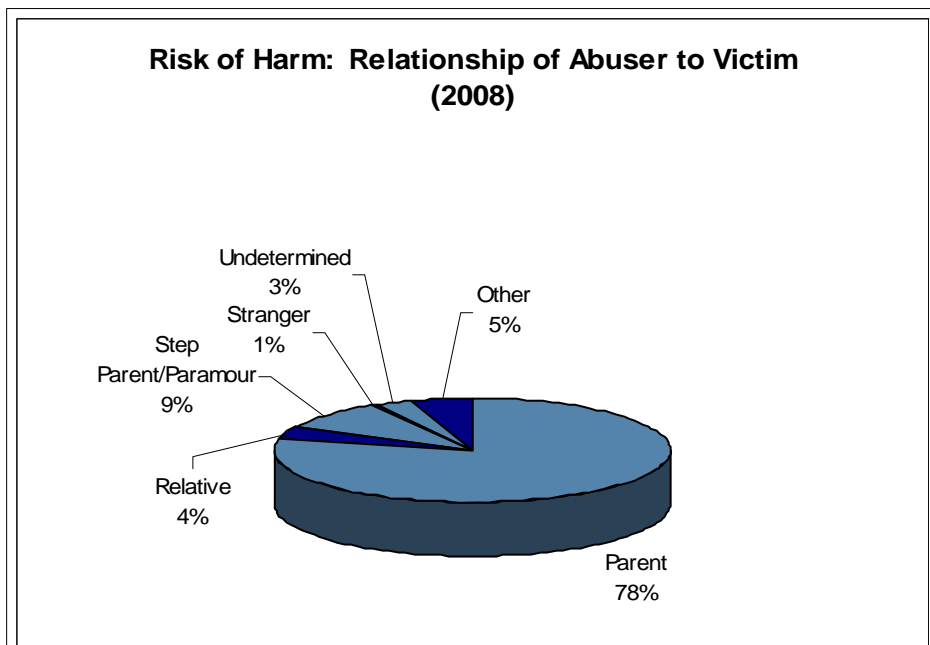
In 2008, there were 292 incidents of sexual abuse⁵. This number does not include any incidents from the 53 investigations that are pending.



⁵ In Vermont, DCF investigates accepted reports of child sexual abuse committed by *any person*.

Risk of Harm

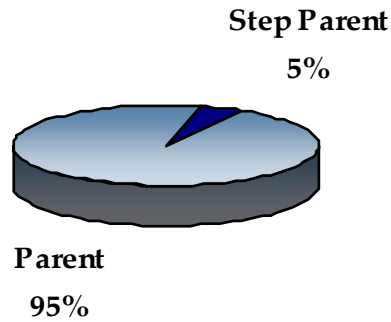
In 2008, there were 327 incidents of risk of harm. This number does not include any incidents from the 53 investigations that are pending.



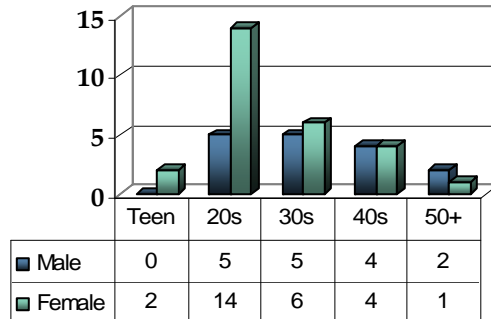
Neglect/Emotional Abuse

In 2008, there were 53 incidents of neglect and emotional abuse. This number does not include any incidents from the 53 investigations that are pending.

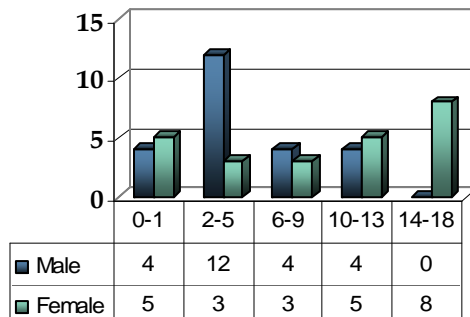
2008 Neglect: Relationship of Abuser to Victim



Neglect/Emotional Abuse, by Abuser Age and Gender



Neglect/Emotional Abuse, by Victim Age and Gender



How do I report child abuse and neglect?

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call 1-800-649-5285 to report it — 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- Mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to the Family Services Division of DCF—within 24 hours.
- Any other person who has reason to believe that a child may have been abused or neglected may make a report to Family Services.

What Information Should I Have On Hand?

Try to have as much information on hand as possible, including:

- The names of the child's parents/caretakers;
- The child's name, date of birth, school or childcare facility; and
- The nature and extent of the injuries or allegations of abuse.

What Happens When I Report?

A social worker will question you about the child's situation, record the information you provide, ask you to complete a written report and in some cases, ask you to gather more information.

What If I Am Not Sure That What I Suspect Is Abuse?

Please call us for advice if you are not sure whether a report is warranted. Remember, you do not have to prove that a child has been abused. That is our responsibility.

Can I Be Sued?

Vermont law provides you with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as your report was made in good faith.

What Information Will Be Shared With Me?

If you are a mandated reporter, we may share the following information with you:

- Whether your report was accepted as a valid allegation of abuse or neglect;
- If so, whether it was assigned for investigation or assessment;
- If an assessment was conducted, whether a need for services was found; and
- If an investigation was conducted, whether it was substantiated.

Other reporters may not find out the outcomes of their reports.

7 Steps to Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse

Step 1: Learn the facts. Understand the risks.

Become aware of the significant threat that children face from child sexual abuse. Make decisions for children based on the facts of child sexual abuse rather than on trust in others.

Step 2: Minimize opportunity.

If you eliminate or reduce one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your child.

Step 3: Talk about it.

Children often keep abuse a secret, but barriers can be broken down by talking openly about it.

Step 4: Stay alert.

Do not expect there to be obvious signs when a child is being sexually abused. Signs of sexual abuse are often present – but the signs are often emotional or behavioral, not physical or verbal. It takes an alert adult to recognize these signs.

Step 5: Make a plan.

Learn where to go, who to call, and how to react in the best interest of your child. Formulating plans in advance can be of significant benefit to your child should abuse occur.

Step 6: Act on suspicions.

Being a silent bystander to sexual abuse could contribute to a lifetime of psychological and emotional problems for a child victim.

Step 7: Get involved.

Volunteer and financially support organizations that fight the tragedy of child sexual abuse. Use your voice and your vote to make your community a safer place for our children.

© Darkness to Light

Need help finding help?

Dial 2-1-1 from anywhere in Vermont for confidential referral assistance—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

YOU CAN HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE.

If you suspect that a child is
being abused or neglected,
call Vermont's Child Protection Hotline to
report it — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1-800-649-5285

Preventing child abuse helps
ensure the safety, health, and
optimal development of our children.

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