



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS  
455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA  
94102-3688  
Tel 415-865-4200  
TDD 415-865-4272  
Fax 415-865-4205  
www.courtinfo.ca.gov

## FACT SHEET

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# Intersection Between Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency: Available Research

Much of the difficulty in establishing the scope of the relationship between juvenile dependency and delinquency arises from the lack of research and data in general and from methodological differences with the studies that do exist.<sup>1</sup> Several smaller scale studies have been done in the past, though much of the evidence was anecdotal until quite recently and continues to come from outside California. Yet the similar findings of the studies do allow for a relationship to be established between childhood abuse or neglect and delinquency. This alone does not determine that a child will become delinquent, but it is a significant risk factor. Several of the more promising studies from other states are reported below, along with general statistics on dependency and delinquency in California. Last, the results of an evaluation of dual-status children are reported.

### Highlights

- Multiple studies show that childhood maltreatment **increases the likelihood of juvenile arrest**, but does not determine delinquency (*see pages 2–3*).
- The **age** at which a child is abused or neglected affects how likely he or she is to be arrested; adolescents and those abused throughout both childhood and adolescence are most likely to be arrested (*see pages 2–3*).
- Children with a history of maltreatment are more likely to be arrested for a **violent crime**. The more severe or more frequent the abuse, the more likely an arrest and an arrest for a violent crime (*see pages 3–4*).
- Maltreated youth tend to **recidivate more frequently** than delinquent youth that were never abused or neglected as children (*see page 4*).
- Abused or neglected children also face **many other challenges**: an increased risk for substance abuse, mental health problems, lower academic performance, and teenage pregnancy (*see pages 5–6*).
- A study of **dual-status children** (those in both the dependency and delinquency systems) in Arizona found results similar to all the studies on how childhood maltreatment increases the likelihood of arrest and other difficulties (*see pages 7–8*).

### Prevalence of Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency

In 2003, there were 493,299 referrals to social services in California for child abuse or neglect, which is equivalent to a population-adjusted 52 referrals per 1,000 children ages 0 to 17.<sup>2</sup> Of those referrals, 110,570, or 22%, were substantiated after investigation by child welfare agencies. About 29% of the allegations substantiated by child welfare led to an original juvenile dependency court filing,<sup>3</sup> and 27,131 children entered foster care for the first time and stayed five days or more in 2003. On January 1, 2003 there were a total of 132,689 children in foster care in California.<sup>4</sup>

Also in 2003, there were 223,320 juvenile arrests, or 49 per 1,000 Californians ages 10 to 17,<sup>5</sup> of which about 1 in 4 were brought to juvenile court. In 2002, the state's juvenile probation caseload was 81,872, of which 80% were formal probation cases, 15% were informal probation cases, and 4% were non-ward probation cases. In addition, the probation department also oversees cases that are given a deferred entry of judgment and diversion cases, of which there were 3,922 and 16,185, respectively, in 2002.<sup>6</sup> In 2003, 1,229 youth were committed to the California Youth Authority (CYA).<sup>7</sup>

### Increased Risk of Arrest (and Self-Reported Delinquency)

Multiple studies, including those whose findings are summarized below, have established an increased risk that abused and neglected children will later commit or be further victims of violence.

### **The Causes and Correlates Studies<sup>8</sup>**

Beginning during the late 1990s, the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored separate longitudinal studies of youth that were conducted in Denver, Colorado,<sup>9</sup> Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Rochester, New York. Ages, races and ethnicities, and gender varied among the studies, but all used statistical weighting to represent a broader population of urban adolescents than the population in the neighborhoods with a high risk for delinquency from which the youth originated. The oldest subjects of the studies are now in their mid-to late-20s.

#### **Findings: Age of Maltreatment<sup>10</sup>**

Both the Rochester and the Pittsburgh studies found a higher risk for delinquency for children who were ever abused or neglected prior to age 18. The Rochester study, however, was able to differentiate between the age at which the child was maltreated and the relationship of that age to the likelihood of eventual delinquency. Children who were maltreated only before the age of 12 were not statistically more likely than those never abused to report delinquent behavior (53.8 to 49.6%, respectively), while those who

were maltreated only in adolescence had a significantly higher rate of self-reported delinquency—69.8%. Those who were persistently abused both in childhood and adolescence were even more likely to self-report delinquent behavior (71.4%). The same greater likelihood of actual arrest holds true for those abused in adolescence only or both in childhood and adolescence (50.7 and 50% respectively, compared to only 21.3% of those never maltreated and 23.5% of those maltreated in childhood only).

**Findings: Severity of Maltreatment<sup>11</sup>**

The Rochester study also found that the severity of the abuse or neglect, as well as the frequency, duration, and number of subtypes of maltreatment across all incidents increased the likelihood of arrest. The more severely maltreated victims were arrested almost twice as often as the less severely maltreated ones. The greater the level of maltreatment, the greater the likelihood of more serious or violent acts.

**Midwest Study<sup>12</sup>**

A study used the records of children abused or neglected about 25 years earlier (between 1967 and 1971) in a metropolitan county in the Midwest and matched these records with those of a control group of non-abused or neglected children. Both groups were approximately 33 years old when the study was done. All of the comparisons reported are statistically significant (at least at  $p < .01$ )

**Findings: Arrests**

The comparison indicated that 21.6% of the abused or neglected children were arrested for any crime, compared to only 13.9% of the control group, and were also much more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime (5.3% compared to 2.7%). The abused or neglected children were first arrested on average at a younger age (18.1 years versus 19.2 years) and they were typically arrested more often (6.9 times compared to 4.7 times). They also tended to recidivate (2 to 4 arrests) and became chronic offenders more often (5 or more arrests).

**Findings: Type of Abuse**

Children who were physically abused had the highest association with the likelihood of committing violent acts as teenagers, but a similar association was also present for neglected children. This relationship also continued into young adulthood, with 21% of those physically abused and 20% of those neglected arrested for a violent crime.

**Mecklenburg County, North Carolina<sup>13</sup>**

In 1993, this study compared a group of maltreated 15-year-olds with two samples of non-maltreated youth: one of local schoolchildren and one of impoverished

youth. The maltreated youth had more delinquency complaints (13.7% of the youth) than both of the comparison samples (9% of the schoolchildren and 5.3% of the impoverished youth).

#### **Northwest Study (Washington State)<sup>14</sup>**

Using the same techniques as those in the Midwest study, a similar study was done in an urban area of Washington State with cases of children who were abused or neglected between 1980 and 1985. The ethnicities of the children included Native Americans, Caucasians, and African Americans. These children had been removed from their homes at least once and their cases were substantiated. They were compared with a matched control group (based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, and similar family social class).

##### **Findings: Arrests**

The abused or neglected children were arrested 4.8 times more often than those in the control group (19.6% of the time compared to 4.1%). They were also more likely to be arrested for a violent crime (8.8% compared to 0.8%).

#### **Other Studies<sup>15</sup>**

Several other studies in other states or jurisdictions have also shown a link between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency, including one study done in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1991 (66% of male offenders and 39% of females had been maltreated as children). Another study of high-risk male juveniles in three states also found previous histories of alleged abuse (29% of the high-risk juveniles in Virginia, 45% in Colorado, and 53% in Nevada).

#### **Increased Risk of Recidivism**

In addition to the Midwest study's findings on recidivism and chronic offending mentioned above, studies by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency<sup>16</sup> in multiple states have established childhood maltreatment as an important risk factor in classifying juveniles on probation or parole as likely to commit further delinquent acts (study sites include Michigan, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Wisconsin). As an example, 71% of the Rhode Island maltreated youth on probation recidivated, compared to 46% of the non-maltreated youths.

The Rochester, NY<sup>17</sup> study also found an increased frequency of arrests and self-reported delinquent acts for maltreated youth when compared to non-maltreated youth (27% of maltreated children were arrested as juveniles and had an average of 3.0 arrests compared to 17% for non-maltreated children with an average of 2.4 arrests). This contrast also held true as adults (42% of maltreated children were arrested as adults and had an average of 5.7 arrests compared to 33% for non-maltreated children with an average of 4.2 arrests). Furthermore, this study found

that as the frequency and severity of the abuse increased, so did the frequency of subsequent arrests or self-reported acts.

#### Other Behavior Risks for Childhood Victims of Abuse or Neglect

Several recent studies have examined the relationship between childhood mistreatment and specific behavior risks later in life—as juveniles or adults.

#### **Risk of Alcohol or Substance Abuse and of Related Arrests**

One of the behavioral risks examined was the possibility of abuse of alcohol or other substances and of arrests related to these behaviors.

##### **Drug Abuse by Juveniles<sup>18</sup>**

Previous studies have often found inconclusive results for any relationship between substance abuse and childhood maltreatment. The Rochester study, with its longitudinal design and better access to a more-defined control group, used self-reported use of a variety of drugs to establish that maltreated youth are about one-third more likely to have used drugs (43% compared to 32%).

##### **Arrests<sup>19</sup>**

A study using children who were identified as victims of physical or sexual abuse or neglect between the years 1967 and 1971 and a similar control group examined whether childhood maltreatment was a predictor of increased risk for substance abuse or alcohol-related arrests as juveniles or as adults. Child maltreatment in this study was found to be a predictor of delinquency in general, but not of alcohol- or drug-related arrests when controlled for age, gender, and race. However, separating out for gender did show that males were more than 10 times as likely as females to be arrested for these offenses as a juvenile.

The researchers did find a statistically significant relationship for such adult arrests when controlling for all demographic characteristics as well as juvenile contact with the justice system, with maltreated children having a 39% greater chance of being arrested at least once for drug- or alcohol-related charges than those in the control group. Maltreated children who were arrested for other offenses as juveniles also seemed to follow an “indirect path” to a greater likelihood of being arrested for alcohol- or drug-related offenses as adults.

##### **Teenage Pregnancy<sup>20</sup>**

Studies have rarely considered the links between childhood maltreatment and teenage pregnancy, but many of the same risk factors for delinquency also

contribute to teenage pregnancy. The Rochester study examined this through multiple interviews with both the males and females at ages averaging 15.3 years and again when they were at the average age of 17.3 years. Though more research needs to be done on the relationship of childhood maltreatment and teenage fatherhood, an insufficient number of males reported being a father in the study. For the females, however, the pregnancy rate is much higher for girls with a history of childhood maltreatment than for those with no history (52 to 34%, respectively, or slightly more than twice as likely to have been pregnant).

### **Mental Health Problems<sup>21</sup>**

Research on the effects of child maltreatment on mental health development often uses a psychopathology method. A maltreated child may be at risk for increased anxiety, inattentiveness, impulsiveness, anger, depression, self-destructive and suicidal behavior, and unpopularity. The Rochester study used an abbreviated Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist in interviews with parents and asked them to report on their child's externalizing or internalizing behaviors. Though many adolescents exhibit occasional behaviors that fall on the checklist, the researchers found that maltreated children were more likely to exhibit significantly more of, or more extreme types of, these behaviors than children without a history of abuse (with 26% of maltreated teenagers reported as being in the top 10% of those exhibiting either externalizing or internalizing behaviors, compared to 15% of non-maltreated youth).

### **Lower Academic Performance<sup>22</sup>**

Much of the literature on the relationship between academic achievement and childhood maltreatment focuses on short-term effects rather than long term ones. Some of the effects may include learning problems and delays, lower test scores, problems with socialization to the school environment, school failure, and truancy. The Rochester study examined cumulative grade-point averages (GPAs) of children from middle school and junior high for differences between children with a history of maltreatment and those without. They found maltreated children's academic achievement to be significantly lower than that of non-maltreated children, with 33% of maltreated children having low academic performance (GPA lower than 2.0 or C average) compared to 23% of non-maltreated children.

### **Gender<sup>23</sup>**

From a study, mentioned above, done in a metropolitan county in the Midwest with the childhood maltreatment cases occurring between 1967 and 1971, researchers found that even though males commit more crimes than females, female victims of

childhood abuse and neglect were 73% more likely than control group females to be arrested for nonviolent offenses, such as drug, property, or status offenses. Maltreated females may also be at increased risk to commit violent offenses than non-maltreated females, while maltreated males are not significantly more at risk for violent crimes yet are more at risk for committing more crimes in general than non-maltreated males. These results were based on actual criminal records, and not arrests, which may explain results that differ from other studies.

#### Placement Instability and Delinquency<sup>24</sup>

A study in Chicago and surrounding suburbs in Cook County, Illinois, compared two cohorts: (1) children born between January 1, 1983 and December 31, 1984, with at least one substantiated maltreatment report and (2) youth with petitions filed in the juvenile court between the years of 1995 and 2000. Only 7% of the maltreated children that remained in the family home had at least one delinquency petition, while 16% of the children removed from the home to at least one placement had at least one petition. Placement instability (more than one placement) increases the risk of delinquency for males, but not for females.

#### Dual-Status Jurisdiction Research<sup>25,26</sup>

For youth who actually have active delinquency and dependency petitions at the same time (e.g., are defined as dual status), the results from the Arizona Dual Jurisdiction Study demonstrate what the research reported above shows about maltreated children's likelihood of becoming delinquent. That is, the dual-status youth, by definition, have already been arrested for a delinquent act and were maltreated as children. What is unique about this study, however, is that the youth were arrested while still in the foster care system.

#### **Findings: Computer Review**

In fiscal year 2002, the Arizona study used a computer tracking system to compare the court involvement of dual-status children, aged eight years or older, in four counties with that of children who were only in the delinquency system. The study reported the following findings:

- Dual-status youth were two times as likely to recidivate as delinquency-only youth.
- For delinquency-only youth, males were more likely to recidivate than females (33% compared to 23% for females). Females who are arrested with a history of maltreatment were almost equally as likely to recidivate as males (65% versus 61%).
- Older children (ages 14 to 17) who have been in the dependency system had higher rates of referral and petitioning for delinquent acts than younger children. They were also placed on probation and detained more often.

- Dual-status children became delinquent at a younger age, from arrest to detention and probation.
- Delinquency-only youth who were in placement at least part of the time committed more delinquent acts and more serious acts than dual-status children, but dual-status children were more likely to commit more, and more serious, acts than delinquency-only youth in the general probation population. A similar relationship held true for those committed to the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (similar to the California Youth Authority).

#### **Findings: Case File Review**

Further information on the dual-status children and their outcomes was found through reviewing both the legal (court case) files and the social case files in two of the Arizona counties. The file review process was done initially between June 2003 and February 2004, and a follow-up review was done between July and September 2004.

- The delinquency petition was usually filed prior to the dependency petition (62% of the time).
- The families of dual-status children frequently suffer from many other problems at the same time: parental substance abuse (78%), domestic violence (70%), and housing or financial problems (61%). A likelihood of parental incarceration has yet to be established.
- Dual-status youth also tend to experience many related problems: 80% reported difficulties with substance abuse, and 61% had been diagnosed with mental or emotional health problems. Sixty-one percent also reported taking psychotropic medications, and 27% had considered or attempted suicide. Thirty-nine percent had been sexually abused. Many also reported various types of educational problems (e.g. chronic truancy, severe academic deficiencies, special education needs, and learning disabilities). Females were much more likely to demonstrate these related difficulties than males.
- Almost all of the dual-status children were moved to multiple placements during the study period, with most experiencing six or more placements, and slightly less than half moving 11 or more times. Ninety percent spent at least some time in a group home or a residential treatment center, and 89% spent time in a juvenile detention center.
- After being on probation, the dual-status children were referred (for delinquency, status, or probation violation offenses) on average an additional 5.1 times and petitioned an additional 3.5 times. Ninety-two percent of the dual-status children were referred and 87% were petitioned for an offense at least once.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The methods used in the studies mentioned in this fact sheet vary. Please check original sources for exact parameters and limitations of the studies. In general, *statistically significant* is defined as the probability that the observed relationship will occur strictly by chance and varies in the studies and variables between less than 0.1 and 5% of the time (probability, or  $p < .001$  up to  $p < .05$ ).

<sup>2</sup> B. Needell, D. Webster, S. Cuccaro-Alamin, M. Armijo, S. Lee, A. Brookhart, B. Lery, T. Shaw, W. Dawson, W. Piccus, J. Magruder, and H. Kim. (2004). *Child welfare services reports for California*. Retrieved October 2004 from the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>.

<sup>3</sup> Lag time between substantiated allegations and court filings introduces slight error in this calculation.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* B. Needell et al.

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center, *California Criminal Justice Profiles 2001, 2002, and 2003*, Retrieved November 2004.

<sup>6</sup> California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center. *Juvenile Probation Caseloads, 1996–2002*. (2003).

<sup>7</sup> California Department of the Youth Authority, *CYA Annual Report 2003: Program Description and Statistical Summary 1941–2001*, (n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> T. Thornberry, D. D. Huizinga, and R. Loeber, “The Causes and Correlates Studies: Findings and Policy Implications” (2004) IX(1) *Juvenile Justice Journal* 1–13.

<sup>9</sup> The design of the Denver study did not allow for conclusions to be made on the relationship between childhood maltreatment and delinquency.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* T. Thornberry et. al.

<sup>11</sup> B. Tatem Kelly, T.P. Thornberry, and C.A. Smith, *In the Wake of Childhood Maltreatment*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Aug. 1997) 1–15.

<sup>12</sup> J. Wiig and C. Spatz Windom, with J.A. Tuell, *Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: From Research to Effective Program, Practice, and Systemic Solutions*, Washington D.C., Child Welfare League of America, Inc. (2003).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Preventing Delinquency Through Improved Child Protection Services* (July 2001), 1–19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* B. Tatem Kelly et. al., p.9.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Inst. of Justice, *Research Preview: Childhood Victimization and Risk for Alcohol and Drug Arrests* (Nov. 1995).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* B. Tatem Kelly et. al., p.8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* at p.10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Inst. of Justice, *Research in Brief: An Update on the “Cycle of Violence”* (Feb. 2001) pp. 1–8.

<sup>24</sup> J.P. Ryan, and M.F. Testa, “Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: Investigating the Role of Placement and Placement Instability” (2005) 27(3) *Children and Youth Services Review* 227–249.

<sup>25</sup> G.J. Halemba, G.C. Siegel, R.D. Lord, and S. Zawacki, *Arizona Dual Jurisdiction Study: Final Report*, National Center for Juvenile Justice (November 2004), pp. iii–xii.

<sup>26</sup> There is also a study forthcoming in fall 2005 on dual-status (Welf. & Inst. Code, § 241.1) children in Los Angeles, California, from California State University at Los Angeles.