

3.18 Abuse or neglect: substantiations

Why this measure is included

National and international research consistently refers to the profound impact abuse and neglect can have on children and young people both in the short term and in adulthood. The consequences of experiencing child abuse and neglect can include poor physical health, secure attachment problems, learning and developmental problems, substance abuse, mental illness, criminality, homelessness, later parenting issues and suicide.²⁴⁵

A range of factors may impact on the way a child or young person is affected by abuse or neglect. These include the age at which the abuse is experienced, the severity, nature, frequency and duration of the abuse, and the relationship between the child and the abuser. Impacts may also vary according to the presence of risk or protective factors, which can contribute to children or young people's vulnerability or resilience.²⁴⁶

Table 3.62: Children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications: rate per 1,000 population 0 to 17 years, Western Australia and Australia, 2005–06 to 2011–12

	WA (a) (b)	Australia
2005–06	1.9	7.2
2006–07	2.3	6.9
2007–08	2.7	6.5
2008–09	2.8	6.5
2009–10	2.9	6.1
2010–11	3.4	6.1
2011–12(c)	4.7	7.4

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child Protection Australia, 2007–12* [series]

- (a) 2009–10 data for Western Australia is not comparable with other years due to the introduction of a new client information system in March 2010. Proxy data was provided for that year.
- (b) For 2010–11, Western Australia was unable to report a child's characteristics based on their first substantiation. As a result, a small number of children may be double-counted in this table where they have more than one substantiation and the notifications had differing characteristics such as age or abuse type.
- (c) The ABS has improved the methodology used to obtain estimates of the resident population which has caused a downward revision of the 2011–12 estimates based on the 2011 Census. Due to these changes, comparisons of rates over time should be interpreted with caution.

Table 3.63: Children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications: number and in per cent, by type of abuse or neglect, Western Australia and Australia, 2011–12

	WA		Australia	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Physical abuse	475	18.4	7,980	21.1
Sexual abuse	570	22.1	4,801	12.7
Emotional abuse	797	30.9	14,024	37.2
Neglect	741	28.7	10,936	29.0
Total	2,583	100.0	37,781 (a)	100.0

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

(a) The abuse type for some substantiations was recorded as 'not stated' and could not be mapped to physical, sexual, emotional or neglect. These substantiations are included in the total: as such, the total does not equal the sum of the categories.

Table 3.64: Children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications: number and rate per 1,000 population, by Aboriginal status, Western Australia and Australia, 2011–12

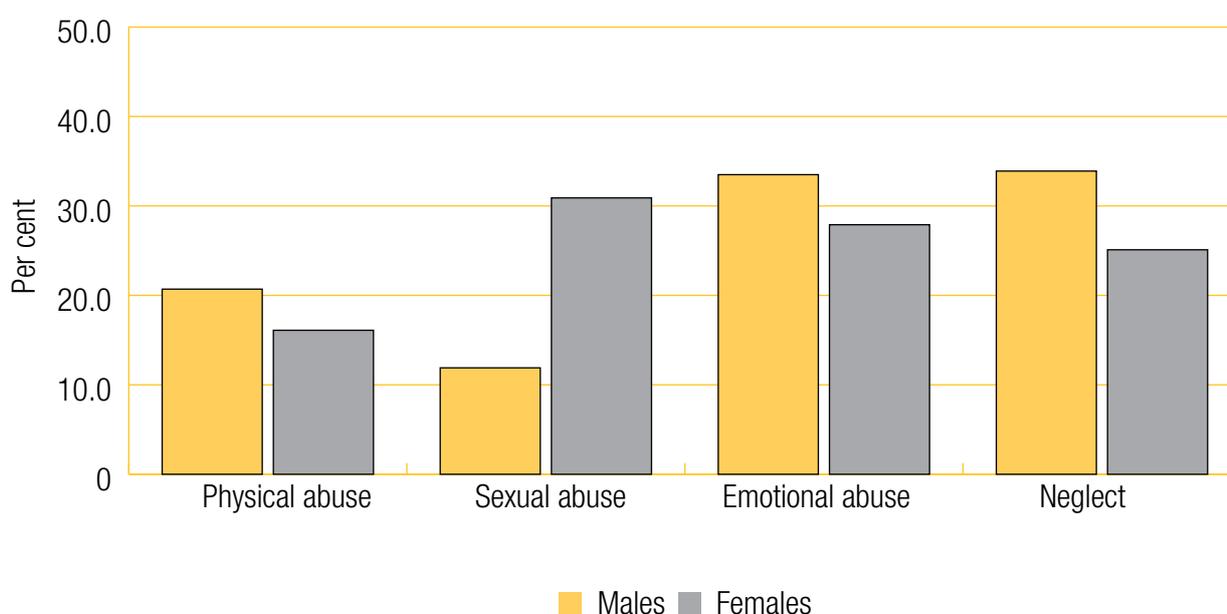
		Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Unknown	All children and young people	Rate ratio Aboriginal / non-Aboriginal
WA (a) (b)	Number	763	944	876	2,583	n/a
	Rate	24.4	1.8	n/a	4.7	13.4
Australia	Number	10,058	26,183	1,540	37,781	n/a
	Rate	41.9	5.4	n/a	7.4	7.8

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

(a) Western Australia is currently unable to report a child's characteristics based on their first substantiation. As a result, a small number of children may be double-counted in this table where they have more than one substantiation and the notifications had differing characteristics such as age or abuse type.

(b) In Western Australia, the proportion of substantiations for children with an unknown Aboriginal status affects the reliability of this data. Rate ratios should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Figure 3.20: Children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications: in per cent, by type of abuse or neglect and gender, Western Australia, 2011–12



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

What is this measure?

This measure considers the number of children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications of abuse or neglect. Substantiations of notifications refer to child protection notifications made to relevant authorities that were investigated and it was concluded there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had been, was being, or was likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed.²⁴⁷

All data for this measure is drawn from state and territory child protection administrative data sets that are collated, analysed and published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in their annual publication *Child Protection Australia*.

Data for 2009–10 for Western Australia is not comparable with other years due to the introduction of a new client information system in March 2010. Proxy data was provided for that year. In addition, differences between states and territories in jurisdictional policy, practice, legislation and data systems must be taken into consideration when interpreting the data for this measure.²⁴⁸

It is also important to note that national child protection data is based only on those cases reported to departments responsible for child protection. Notifications made to other organisations, such as the police or non-government welfare agencies, are only included if they were also referred to departments responsible for child protection.²⁴⁹ The data is likely to understate the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect across Australia.

On 1 January 2009, WA introduced the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse by certain professionals. Doctors, nurses, midwives, police officers and teachers are required to make a report to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support if they form a reasonable belief, in the course of their work, that a child has been the subject of sexual abuse or is the subject of ongoing sexual abuse.²⁵⁰ Other Australian jurisdictions have mandatory reporting of all or some forms of child abuse and neglect.²⁵¹

Commentary

During 2011–12, 13,745 notifications of abuse or neglect of a child or young person were received by the relevant authorities in WA. Three-quarters (74.7%) of these notifications were further investigated, while the remaining one-quarter were dealt with by other means, such as referral to a support service.²⁵²

Fewer than one-third (31.4%) of the 8,780 finalised investigations for 2011–12 resulted in a substantiated notification. With this result, WA recorded the lowest proportion of substantiated investigations of all jurisdictions (Tasmania recorded the highest with 68.3%). The national proportion was 45.4 per cent.²⁵³

In WA during 2011–12, 4.7 children per 1,000 were the subject of a substantiated notification of abuse or neglect. This is the lowest rate of all jurisdictions, however the highest rate recorded for WA since 2005. Equally, the national rate of 7.4 per 1,000 is also the highest recorded since 2005 (Table 3.62).

It is important to note that comparisons of rates over time should be interpreted with caution due to adjustments to population estimates.²⁵⁴

Across all jurisdictions in 2011–12, Aboriginal children and young people were more likely to be the subject of a substantiated notification than non-Aboriginal children and young people.²⁵⁵ In WA, the rate for Aboriginal children who were the subject of a substantiated notification was 24.4 per 1,000 children – that is more than 13 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children. Nationally, the rate was 41.9 per 1,000 which is nearly eight times the rate for non-Aboriginal children (Table 3.64).

Compared to the data in edition one of this report, the rate for Aboriginal children and young people who were the subject of a substantiated notification in WA has increased from 20.7 in 2010 to 24.4 in 2012, while the rate ratio between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children increased from 12.7 to 13.4²⁵⁶ (Table 3.64).

In WA, the most common type of substantiated abuse was emotional abuse (30.9%) followed by neglect (28.7%). This represents a significant shift from the data reported in edition one of this report where neglect was the most common form of substantiated abuse (38%), followed by emotional abuse (21%).

WA's data now reflects the Australian averages where emotional abuse followed by neglect were the most common forms of substantiated abuse during 2011–12, although the Australian average for emotional abuse was higher (37.2%) than WA's.

Table 3.63 also shows that WA has a significantly higher percentage of substantiations of sexual abuse notifications compared to the Australian average (22.1% compared to 12.7%).

When a gender split is applied, sexual abuse emerges as the most common type of substantiated abuse for female children in WA (30.9%), while neglect and emotional abuse are the most common types of substantiated abuse for male children (33.9% and 33.5% respectively) (Figure 3.20).

Strategies

Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Government of Western Australia

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support has a number of strategies and programs for responding to child abuse and neglect.

1. Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework Second Edition 2011

This framework uses practice tools and processes where professionals and family members can together address situations of child abuse and neglect to determine:

- what supports are needed for families to care for their children
- whether there is sufficient safety for the child to stay within the family
- whether the situation is so dangerous that the child must be removed
- whether there is enough safety for a child in the care system to return home.

2. Child Sexual Abuse Policy 2009

3. Policy on Neglect 2012

Further information is available at www.cdfs.wa.gov.au

Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Abuse, Government of Western Australia (released 2009)

On 1 January 2009, mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse came into effect under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*. Doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers and police officers are required to make a report to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support if they form a reasonable belief that a child has been sexually abused or is the subject of ongoing child sexual abuse. Further information is available at www.mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx

Working with Children Checks, Government of Western Australia (released 2006)

In January 2006, Working with Children Checks commenced in WA. Certain people wanting to volunteer or work with children in 'child related work' are required to have this stringent criminal record check and comply with other requirements of the *Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004*. The scheme is administered by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. Further information is available at www.checkwwc.wa.gov.au/checkwwc

Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020, Council of Australian Governments

This framework comprises a series of high-level, three-year plans to deliver and monitor strategies to sustain a substantial reduction in child abuse and neglect. Further information is available at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business

Want to know more?

Data on child protection

A national child protection report that provides across-jurisdictional data is produced annually and is available on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) website at www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129542755

Research, reports and articles

Research and related articles on child protection are available from

- Child Family Community Australia, www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/
- Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection
- Australia Catholic University – Institute of Child Protection Studies www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/faculties,_institutes_and_centres/centres/institute_of_child_protection_studies
- Australian Institute of Criminology www.aic.gov.au/
- Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth www.aracy.org.au/

Other information

Information on effective prevention strategies and programs is available from the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) on their website at <http://napcan.org.au/>

The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) annual report on the National Framework for protecting Australia's Children and the annual Report on Government Services (ROGS) both include relevant information this topic. The COAG report is available at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business/protecting-children-is-everyone-s-business-national-framework-for-protecting-australia-s-children-2009-2020-annual-report-2011-12

The ROGS 2014 is available at www.pc.gov.au/gsp/rogs

Additional tables

Table 3.65: Children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications: Rate per 1,000 population, by age group, Western Australia and Australia, 2011–12

	WA (a) (b)		Australia	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Under 1 year (c)	234	9.1	3,862	10.2
1 to 4 years	642	24.9	9,908	26.2
5 to 9 years	745	28.8	10,380	27.5
10 to 14 years	715	27.7	9,381	24.8
15 to 17 years	186	7.2	2,771	7.3
Total (d)	2,583	100.0	37,781	100.0

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child protection Australia: 2011–12*



- (a) Western Australia is currently unable to report a child's characteristics based on their first substantiation. As a result, a small number of children may be double-counted in this table where they have more than one substantiation and the notifications had differing characteristics such as age or abuse type.
- (b) In Western Australia, the proportion of substantiations for children with an unknown Aboriginal status affects the reliability of these data.
- (c) The 'Under 1 year' category excludes unborn children. These children are included in the totals.
- (d) Totals include children of unknown age and unborn children.

Table 3.66: Children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications: rate per 1,000 population 0 to 17 years, states and territories, 2005–06 to 2011–12

	WA (c)(d)	NSW (a)	Vic	Qld (b)	SA (e)	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
2005–06	1.9	8.0	6.3	10.4	4.2	5.6	11.4	7.8	7.2
2006–07	2.3	8.5	5.6	8.7	5.0	6.8	7.4	8.8	6.9
2007–08	2.7	8.2	5.1	7.1	5.2	7.9	7.1	11.4	6.5
2008–09	2.8	8.7	5.0	6.3	5.4	9.1	7.8	12.3	6.5
2009–10	2.9	8.0	5.2	5.7	4.2	7.4	7.0	16.6	6.1
2010–11	3.4	7.0	5.9	5.4	5.1	9.5	5.8	22.8	6.1
2011–12(f)	4.7	9.0	7.1	6.5	5.1	8.1(g)	6.9	24.4	7.4

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child protection Australia, 2007-12* [series]

- (a) New South Wales figures are not comparable with those of other jurisdictions. New South Wales has a differential investigation response whereby an investigation can be undertaken over two stages (stage 1 – information gathering; stage 2 – assessment). Only the more serious cases that receive the higher level response may lead to a recorded substantiation outcome. Following the New South Wales Keep Them Safe reforms, the 2010–11 data reflect the first full year of reporting under legislative changes to the New South Wales *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, proclaimed on 24 January 2010. This includes raising the reporting threshold from 'risk of harm' to the new 'risk of significant harm'.
- (b) During 2011–12, additional staff focused on investigations and assessments were deployed across Queensland. This resulted in a decrease in the number of investigations not yet finalised, and an increase in the number of investigations with a finalised outcome of substantiated, unsubstantiated or no investigation and assessment outcome.
- (c) Western Australian data for 2009–10 are not comparable with other years due to the introduction of a new client information system in March 2010. Proxy data were provided for that year.
- (d) For 2010–11, Western Australia was unable to report a child's characteristics based on their first substantiation. As a result, a small number of children may be double-counted in this table where they have more than one substantiation and the notifications had differing characteristics such as age or abuse type.
- (e) During 2009–10, South Australia implemented a new client information system and this was accompanied by policy and practice changes. Therefore, data for this year are not fully comparable with previous years' data.
- (f) The ABS has improved the methodology used to obtain estimates of the resident population, which has caused a downward revision of the 2011–12 estimates based on the 2011 Census. Due to these changes, comparisons of rates over time should be interpreted with caution.
- (g) Rates for 2012 for Tasmania should not be compared with previous years due to the change in methodology used to obtain estimates of the resident population.