

Rate of abuse in organizations serving youth

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The rate of abuse among children and adolescents by individuals in organizations that serve youth, including schools and recreational groups, was small compared with rates of abuse by family members and other adults, according to an article published online by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Child [abuse](#) in youth-serving organizations (YSOs) has gotten considerable attention because of news coverage of cases involving teachers, coaches, day care staff, clergy and scout leaders. Population surveys can be a source of developing information on the epidemiology of abuse in YSOs.

A study by David Finkelhor, Ph.D., of the University of New Hampshire, and coauthors combined data from three national population telephone surveys to create a sample of 13,052 children (from infants up to age 17) to calculate prevalence rates for YSO abuse and compare them with family and other nonfamily, non-YSO abuse. The sample included 105 YSO survivors of abuse and 12,947 non-YSO survivors.

The surveys collected children's exposure to violence and this analysis used only items representing physical assault, sexual abuse, verbal aggression and neglect.

Among 13,052 children and adolescents, the proportion exposed to any type of YSO [maltreatment](#) was 0.8 percent over their lifetime and 0.4 percent in the past year. That's compared with a rate of abuse by any family adult of 11.4 percent over a lifetime and 5.9 percent in the past year. The rate of abuse by a nonfamily, non-YSO adult was 5.9 percent

over a lifetime and 3.3 percent in the past year, according to the results.

Most of the YSO maltreatment (63.2 percent) was [verbal abuse](#) and 6.4 percent was any form of sexual violence or assault. Physical abuse was reported by 34.6 percent of YSO survivors and 0.8 percent reported neglect, the results show.

The authors note screening questions did not specifically ask about abuse by YSO staff and YSO abuse was identified using more general abuse questions.

"This analysis suggests that maltreatment of children and youth in YSOs is a problem, but not nearly as much as maltreatment in the family. It is important that publicity about cases that come to media attention not give an exaggerated sense of frequency that creates unnecessary anxiety or deters families from making the resources of these organizations available to their [children](#). It is also important that the statistics on [family](#) maltreatment be widely and regularly disseminated so that this reality is not obscured," the study concludes.

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