



# *ASPE*

## *RESEARCH SUMMARY*

### **MALE PERPETRATORS OF CHILD MALTREATMENT:**

#### **FINDINGS FROM NCANDS**

##### **BACKGROUND**

Successful service delivery requires a good understanding of one's client population and interventions tailored to those clients' needs. With respect to services that prevent or ameliorate child maltreatment, agencies serve children in the context of their families. But in practice, services are most often delivered to mothers. The distribution and characteristics of male perpetrators are among the least studied aspects of child maltreatment. The intent of the analyses presented below was to look more closely at male perpetrators in order to better understand their characteristics and patterns of maltreatment. By understanding more clearly who these men are and whether they are similar to or different from traditional child welfare clients (i.e. mothers), we may better design prevention and intervention approaches that meet their needs and protect their children and others in their care.

This paper used a unique multi-State data set of nearly 200,000 child maltreatment perpetrators to better understand the characteristics of male perpetrators, their maltreatment patterns, and the outcomes associated with their maltreatments. The influence of a mother coperpetrator on the circumstances surrounding the maltreatment or the outcomes was also investigated.

##### **RESEARCH TOPICS**

The key research questions for this study were the following:

1. What are the characteristics of male perpetrators of child maltreatment? Specifically, these analyses examined the age, race, and role of perpetrators.
2. What specific patterns of child maltreatment are associated with male perpetrators? The circumstances surrounding the maltreatment were examined for several categories of perpetrators. These included characteristics of the child victims such as age, race, and sex, as well as the number of child victims and the type of maltreatment.
3. What outcomes are associated with male perpetrators of child maltreatment? Of interest for

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this research question were events that occurred after the finding of maltreatment, such as, whether services were provided, whether the victims were placed in foster care, and whether there were any subsequent determinations of maltreatment by the same perpetrator.

4. How does the presence of a mother co-perpetrator influence circumstances surrounding the child maltreatment or the outcomes? This line of analysis compared male perpetrators who acted alone with those who acted with the victim's mother.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Case-level data from the 2002 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) were used as the basis for the analysis. Only cases of substantiated or indicated maltreatment were included in the data set. These data are submitted on a voluntary basis in a common record format to the Federal Government by State CPS agencies. The submissions are a rich source of information about children who are the subjects of child maltreatment investigations, including data about the investigations, child demographics, and types of maltreatment, perpetrators, and services. Data from 18 States were used to create the data set for this research.<sup>1</sup> These States were chosen for the completeness and validity of their data on the relationship of the perpetrators to the victims. The population in these 18 States was comparable to the national population on a range of demographic characteristics, including age, race distribution, and poverty level. The findings in this study are not necessarily representative of all reporting States or the entire nation as there may be other differences that are not reported or observed. For some analyses, fewer States were included if some States did not provide valid data on the variables of interest. Consistent with the research questions, the analysis of the data depended on developing a data set of unique perpetrators. Data on all reports, children, and maltreatments were merged and recoded to represent the categories of reports, children, and maltreatments associated with each unique perpetrator. Some perpetrators were excluded if they were missing critical data elements such as gender or relationship to the victim. The final data set was composed of 192,321 unduplicated perpetrators based on data from 18 States.

### **Limitations to Analyses of These Data**

While the advantages of this large, multi-State data set are many, some limitations to these data should be noted as well. The designation of the individuals in this data set as perpetrators was made by CPS representatives during the disposition of a report or reports of child maltreatment. Inevitably, some individuals with similar circumstances or relationships may have been inconsistently recorded as perpetrators across agencies, counties or States. Furthermore, the NCANDS data did not include whether the perpetrators were living in the same home as the victims. Similarly, the relationship between co-perpetrators was not captured. A child may have been maltreated by both his biological mother and biological father, but this data set does not indicate whether these parents were married to each other or whether they lived in the same household. It is also important to note that some categories of male perpetrators that are discussed are much smaller than others. For example, adoptive fathers account for only 1 percent of all male perpetrators, but are discussed along with other groups that are much larger. The implications of findings related to these small groups should be considered carefully.

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<sup>1</sup> These States were: Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.

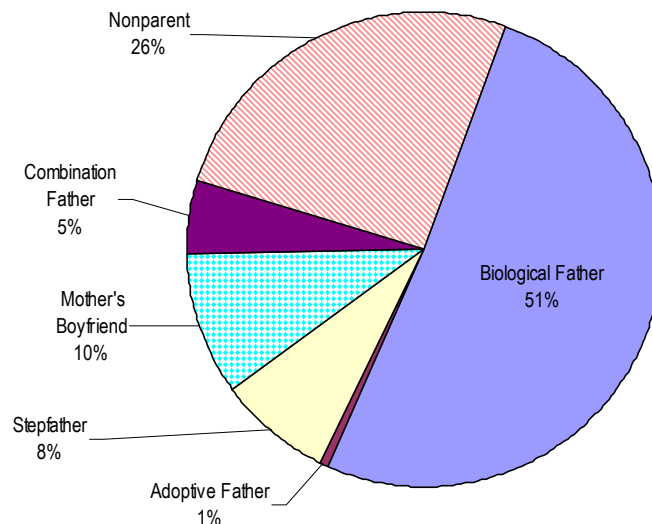
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**FINDINGS****What are the characteristics of male perpetrators of child maltreatment?**

**Relationship to Victim.** Of the 192,321 unique perpetrators in the data set, 89,028 (46%) were male and 103,293 (54%) were female. Figure 1 shows male perpetrators by their relationship to their victims. More than half of all male perpetrators (51%) were biological fathers. The second largest group was male nonparents (26%), who included male relatives (12%), male non-relatives (13%), and those with a combination of non-parental relationships (1%). Boyfriends, stepfathers, combination fathers, and adoptive fathers accounted for 10 percent, 8 percent, 5 percent, and 1 percent of all male perpetrators, respectively. In comparison, among female perpetrators, 86 percent were biological mothers, 10 percent were nonparents, and the remaining 4 percent were stepmothers, adoptive mothers, fathers' girlfriends, or combination mothers.

**Figure 1. Male Perpetrators  
(n = 89,028)**



**Age of Perpetrators.** Male perpetrators were 5 years older, on average, than female perpetrators. The average age of male perpetrators was 38.6 years, while among females the average age was 33.4 years. This coincides with the typical age disparity between married partners. According to U.S. Census data, among married couples with children, husbands are on average 2.4 years older than their wives.

**Race of Perpetrators.** Male and female perpetrators did not differ in terms of race. More than half of male perpetrators were White (58%), as were female perpetrators (57%). Sixteen percent of male perpetrators were African American; 21 percent of female perpetrators were African American. Among both male and female perpetrators, 13 percent were Hispanic. When the race of male perpetrators was examined for the different father categories, all had similar racial distributions. Among all father categories, the largest racial group was White and the second largest group was African American.

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**Caregiver Status.** Biological or legal fathers were more likely to be designated as being in a caregiving relationship to the maltreated child than were non-parent males. Perpetrators in most of the father categories were almost as likely as female perpetrators to be in caregiver roles. The highest percentages of caregivers were among combination fathers (86%), stepfathers (82%), biological fathers (81%), and adoptive fathers (72%). Among mothers' boyfriends, only 43 percent were caregivers. Among male non-parents, 15 percent were in a caregiving role.

### **What specific patterns of maltreatment are associated with male perpetrators?**

**Number of Child Victims.** The majority of both male and female perpetrators were associated with only one child victim—67 percent of males and 61 percent of females. Biological fathers were most likely of all the male perpetrators to be associated with more than one child. Among biological fathers, 35 percent were associated with more than one child. Among mothers' boyfriends, 31 percent were associated with more than one child. Among stepfathers, 22 percent were associated with more than one child. Among adoptive fathers, only 15 percent were associated with more than one child. Among nonparents, 18 percent were associated with more than one child. All combination fathers were associated with more than one child, because by definition they have more than one relationship with more than one child.

**Age of Child Victims.** When compared with female perpetrators, male perpetrators were involved with more children over age 8 and fewer children under age 1. Twenty-one percent of females were associated with child victims under age 1, while only 11 percent of male perpetrators were associated with infant victims; and 29 percent of male perpetrators were associated with victims between age 12 and 15, compared with 22 percent of females. The different groups of male perpetrators varied in their associations with children in each age group (see Figure 4). Biological fathers, combination fathers, and mothers' boyfriends were most frequently associated with infants and children under age 3. Stepfathers, adoptive fathers, and nonparents were most frequently associated with older children and adolescents.

**Sex of Child Victims.** Perpetrators were categorized as having been associated with girls, boys, or both boys and girls. Male perpetrators were associated more often only with female victims, while female perpetrators were associated with male and female victims in almost equal numbers. However, this pattern does not hold true for all categories of male perpetrators. More than half of the perpetrators who were stepfathers or adoptive fathers maltreated girls. The majority of combination fathers were associated with both male and female victims; this is related to the fact that all these perpetrators were associated with multiple victims. Among biological fathers and mothers' boyfriends, the proportions associated with boys and with girls were more evenly distributed. Nonparents had the highest proportion of perpetrators (65%) who maltreated only girls.

**Type of Maltreatment.** Male and female perpetrators had distinct patterns of maltreatment. More than one-third of male perpetrators (36%) were associated with neglect; 66 percent of female perpetrators were associated with neglect (see Figure 6). A quarter of males (26%) were associated with sexual abuse, while 2 percent of female perpetrators were associated with sexual abuse. The percentages associated with physical abuse were comparable, although slightly higher for males (22%) than for females (18%).

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**What outcomes are associated with male perpetrators of child maltreatment?**

**Services.** Nearly half of all male perpetrators were associated with at least one investigation after which additional services were provided and recorded by the child welfare agency (47%). A larger percentage of female perpetrators (57%) received services. Approximately 16 percent of male perpetrators were associated with at least one victim who was placed in foster care as a result of the investigation compared to 24 percent of female perpetrators.

**Perpetrator Recidivism.** Survival analysis techniques were used to estimate the proportion of perpetrators who had a second finding of having maltreated a child within 12 months of the first finding in the reporting period. Overall, male perpetrators had a lower recidivist rate, 6 percent at 6 months and 9 percent at 12 months, compared with female perpetrators (8% and 12% respectively). Within 12 months, it was projected that 7 percent of biological fathers were associated with a second maltreated child, while approximately 4 percent of adoptive and stepfathers, 7 percent of boyfriends, and 8 percent of non-parents experienced an additional report of maltreatment in the same year.

**How does the presence of a mother co-perpetrator influence circumstances surrounding the child maltreatment or the outcomes?**

Perpetrators were classified by whether they always acted alone or they were responsible for the maltreatment along with the victim's mother (biological mother, stepmother or adoptive mother) in at least one victimization event. Male perpetrators who acted only with a person or persons other than the victim's mother were not included in these analyses. Of a total of 79,031 male perpetrators, 65 percent only acted alone, and 35 percent were associated with at least one victim's mother on at least one occasion. Fifty-five percent of biological fathers always acted alone; and 58 percent of father surrogates (adoptive fathers, stepfathers, and mothers' boyfriends) and 73 percent of male non-parents acted alone.

**Age of Child Victims.** Male perpetrators showed different patterns in the age of their child victims. Among biological fathers who acted with mothers, 25 percent were associated with children under age 1, but among those who acted alone only 9 percent were associated with infant victims. Among other groups of male perpetrators, very few were associated with the youngest victims regardless of whether they acted with the mother or alone. Biological fathers were associated with fewer preteen (age 8 to 11) and teenage (age 12 to 15) victims than were the other male perpetrators, regardless of whether they acted alone or with the mother.

**Sex of Child Victims.** Male perpetrators acting alone were consistently associated with maltreating girls more often compared with male perpetrators acting with mothers. Among biological fathers acting alone, 42 percent had maltreated girls; 55 percent of father surrogates (adoptive fathers, stepfathers, and mothers' boyfriends) acting alone and 68 percent of male nonparents acting alone were associated with girls.

**Maltreatment Type.** Male perpetrators acting alone followed a very different pattern of maltreatment from those acting with the victim's mother. In all instances, male perpetrators acting alone were more likely to be associated with sexual abuse than if they acted with mothers. Also, biological father and father surrogate perpetrators were more likely to be associated with physical abuse and less likely to be associated with neglect if they acted alone.

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**Services.** Male perpetrators who acted alone were less likely to receive services than males who acted with the victims' mothers.

**Recidivism.** Recidivism was projected to be highest among biological fathers acting with mothers (10%), and lowest among father surrogates acting alone (4%). Five percent of biological fathers alone were recidivists compared with 10 percent of biological fathers acting with mothers. Similarly, among father surrogates, 4 percent of those acting alone were again perpetrators within one year, compared with 8 percent of those acting with mothers

## IMPLICATIONS

These findings provide insights that may prove helpful in designing improved prevention and intervention programs. It is especially clear that if prevention and treatment interventions for child maltreatment are targeted primarily toward women, a large proportion of perpetrators will not benefit from these efforts. Similarly, in-home services, in their most narrow sense, may be missing the opportunity to involve men who maltreat children but are not living in the home.

The findings also make it clear that perpetrators who are not biological fathers were more commonly associated with physical abuse and sexual abuse, older children, and female children. Similarly, when acting alone, biological fathers and father surrogates were more often perpetrators of physical and sexual abuse, but when acting with the mother were more often associated with neglect. The relatively large proportion of stepfathers and adoptive fathers associated with sexual abuse, as well as with older, female children, suggests the need for prevention efforts in blended and adoptive families.

The third area of findings with potential policy implications is that male perpetrators have many different relationships with their victims. The findings and the literature suggest that interventions that strengthen the role of fathers to prevent further child maltreatment and improve child well-being are a complex undertaking. This study provides insights into this complexity by identifying clear subgroups of perpetrators. Because of the distinct differences among these male perpetrators with different relationships to their victims, interventions of all types may need to be more highly differentiated.

A full copy of the report can be accessed at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/child-maltreat/>.

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January 2005

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