

Child Abuse: Western Australia: 2004-2005

In the 2004-2005 financial year, Kids Help Line counsellors responded to 334 contacts from children and young people in Western Australia with concerns about child abuse. This included 304 telephone, 14 email and 16 real-time webcounselling contacts where child abuse was recorded as the young person's main or secondary concern. These contacts accounted for 6.1% of all counselling contacts from the state - similar to the national rate of 5.9%.

The following report is based on 277 phone, web and email counselling contacts where child abuse was the young person's main concern.

It is important to appreciate that the KHL problem classification of 'child abuse' is a reflection of the content of the contact rather than a counsellor's assessment of the child's situation. It is not possible to make adequate assessments of abuse by telephone or online but rather KHL counsellors seek to identify situations of risk that require further assessment and referral to appropriate services.

Client Profile

Females made 80% of contacts concerning child abuse while males made 20%.

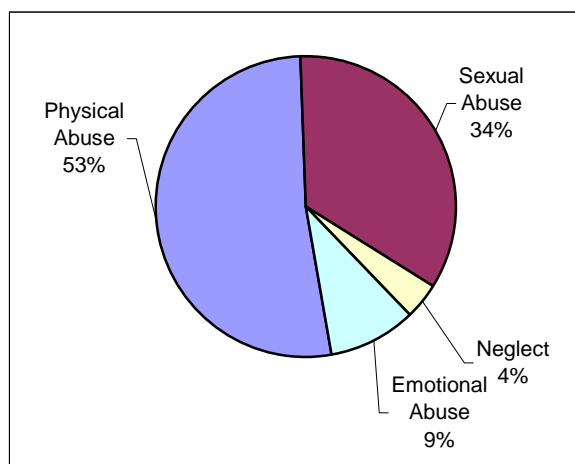
Western Australian children of all ages had concerns about child abuse with 51% aged between 10 and 14 years and 44% aged between 15 and 18. The table below shows the proportion of contacts from each gender and age group.

AGE	FEMALES	MALES
5 - 9	1.9%	3.0%
10 - 14	42.0%	9.5%
15 - 18	36.4%	7.2%

Young people with concerns about sexual abuse were more likely to be older (71% aged 15 to 18 years) while concerns about neglect (91%), emotional abuse (72%) and physical abuse (68%) were more often from children younger than 15 years.

Types of Abuse

The majority of contacts concerned physical and sexual abuse. Emotional abuse and neglect, however, were still concerns for children in this state.

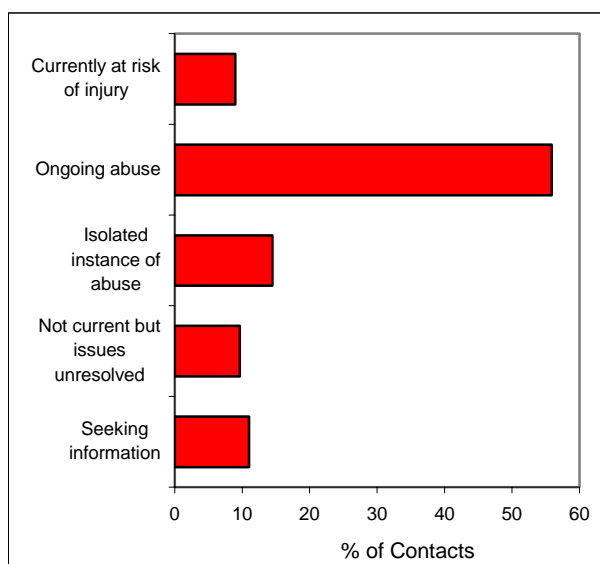


Physical Abuse

In the 12-month period Kids Help Line received 175 contacts from Western Australian children and young people concerning physical abuse.

Physical abuse is defined as: "caller identifies behaviour of family member or caregiver that has caused harm. Includes a range of behaviours from slapping to actions that cause bruising or other injury."

The largest proportion (56%) of children and young people who contacted about physical abuse stated they were the victims of ongoing abuse (occasional or regular) while 14% reported an isolated incidence of abuse. A further 9% stated they were at risk of injury at the time of their contact.



For 10% of young people, the abuse was no longer current but issues resulting from the abuse were unresolved while the remaining 11% were seeking information.

Neglect

During the 12-month period KHL counsellors received 11 contacts from children and young people relating to neglect.

Neglect is defined as "caller identifies lack of basic necessities within their family including food, shelter, reasonable living conditions, emotional security, adequate supervision, medical and dental care, educational support, money, etc."

The largest proportion (45%) of children contacting about neglect were frequently lacking in necessities while 27% were occasionally lacking in care. Two children reported severe hunger or severe need. The remaining child was seeking information.

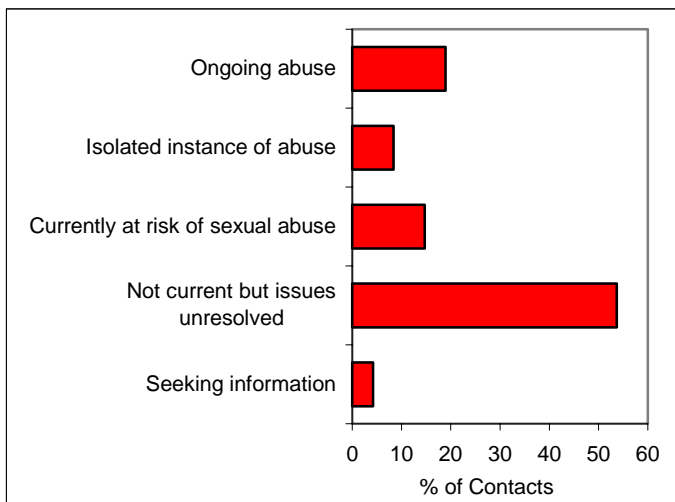
Note: When a child seeks help from Kids Help Line about multiple types of abuse (i.e., physical and emotional abuse), the contact is logged/recorded in the area in which the majority of counselling took place.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as: “exploitation of child by family member for sexual gratification or stimulation. Characterised by secrecy, and distortion of adult/child relationship. Includes a range of behaviours from touching, voyeurism, penetration, etc.”

In the past year Kids Help Line has received 95 contacts from Western Australian children concerning sexual abuse. Nineteen percent of these young people reported ongoing sexual abuse (occasional or regular) to their counsellor while 8% reported an isolated incidence of abuse.

For 54% of young people, the abuse was no longer current but issues resulting from the abuse were unresolved. A further 15% reported being at risk of sexual abuse while 4% were seeking information. The graph below shows the nature and severity of sexual abuse contacts.



Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is defined as “a range of behaviours from excessive and unreasonable demands, constant yelling, criticism, belittling, teasing, ignoring, humiliating, holding back praise/affection, demeaning punishment, belief the child is evil, etc. Confined to family members.”

The largest proportion of the 26 young people (58%) who contacted KHL about emotional abuse stated they were victims of regular emotional abuse or were severely distressed at the time of their contact. A further 31% reported occasional emotional abuse. The remaining children were either seeking information or contacting about unresolved issues from emotional abuse that was no longer current.

Outcome of Contacts

During this twelve-month period, 31% of children and young people contacting about child abuse were referred to another service or agency. This rate of referral is triple the rate across all other problems. A further 15% of young people were given a non-specific referral such as to a local doctor, school/guidance counsellor or mental health worker.

The rate of referral varied based on the type of abuse with children concerned about physical abuse (43%) and neglect (36%) most frequently offered a referral. Emotional abuse followed with 23% of young people referred. Only 15% of young people with sexual abuse concerns were referred to another service or agency - largely due to the high proportion of young people no longer at risk of sexual abuse but who still require support with associated issues.

In 8% of contacts, counsellors intended offering a referral but were unable to because either no appropriate service was available or the young person disconnected before a referral could be given. A small number of email clients were encouraged to access via KHL’s real-time services - telephone or web. For the remaining 45% of young people, the nature of their concern did not require a referral.

A third (34%) of young people who contacted KHL about child abuse agreed to reconnect with their counsellor again on a specific time and date.

Kids Help Line has developed and maintains a referral protocol with child protection agencies in each state, which is designed to ensure seamless and child-centred referral of children when our staff enact their Duty of Care reporting responsibilities.

Duty of Care responses were involved in 15 of the child abuse contacts from Western Australia. These situations involved Kids Help Line facilitating 15 external liaisons including 6 “three-way” telephone conversations, mostly with Crisis Care or regional offices of Family & Children’s Services.

For more information

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