

Child Abuse: 2004 - 2005

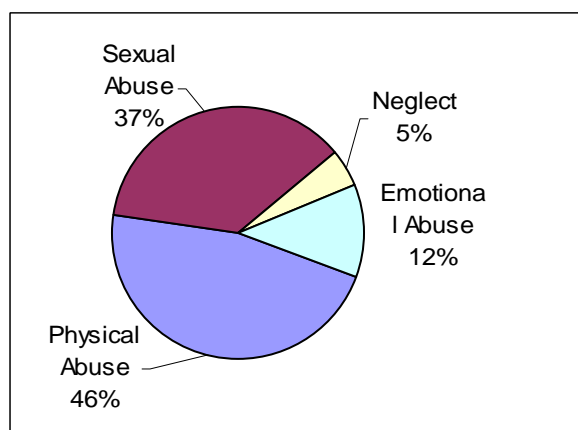
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During the 2004 - 2005 financial year, **Kids Help Line counsellors responded to 3,783 contacts from children and young people with concerns about child abuse.** Of contacts made to KHL about child abuse, 21% were received via web and email counselling - 30% higher than for the previous twelve months (16%).

Child abuse accounted for 5.9% of counselling contacts during the 2004 - 2005 financial year and was the 7th most common reason young Australians contacted KHL after relationships (family, friends, partners), bullying, emotional/behavioural management and mental health concerns.

The majority of these contacts concerned physical or sexual abuse, however, emotional abuse and neglect were also significant issues for children and young people. For 2,982 children and young people child abuse was the main reason for contacting KHL, while for 801 young people child abuse was a significant secondary concern. Five percent of these children and young people reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse.



It is important to appreciate the KHL problem classification of 'child abuse' is a reflection of the content of the counselling session. It is not possible to make complete assessments of abuse by telephone or online, however, KHL counsellors seek to identify situations of risk that require further assessment and referral to appropriate services.

Who is Seeking Help?

Females made 83% of the 3,783 contacts concerning child abuse while males made 17%.

Australian children of all ages had concerns about child abuse with 49% aged between 10 and 14 years and 47% aged between 15 and 18. The table below shows the proportion of calls from each gender and age group.

AGE	FEMALES	MALES
5 - 9	2.6%	1.7%
10 - 14	38.3%	10.1%
15 - 18	42.3%	5.0%

Counsellors recorded the young person's ethnic background for 25% of contacts concerning child abuse. Of those, a significant representation were from Indigenous backgrounds (4%), non-English speaking (7%) or other English speaking (3%) backgrounds. The remaining 86% were of an Anglo-Australian background.

Children and young people with child abuse concerns were mostly located in metropolitan areas (65%) with the remaining 35% in rural and remote areas. This proportion of calls from rural and remote areas is consistent with the population distribution of children and young people across Australia.

Connecting Children with Other Support

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

During this twelve-month period 25% of children and young people contacting about child abuse were referred to another service or agency. The proportion of contacts referred varied based on the type of abuse:

- Neglect - 37%
- Physical abuse - 32%
- Emotional abuse - 22%
- Sexual abuse - 17%

Counsellors intended offering referrals to a further 6% of young people but were unable to because either no appropriate service was available or the client finished the session before a referral could be given. An additional 15% of clients were given a non-specific referral such as to a local doctor or school/guidance counsellor.

For the majority of clients (50%), the nature of their issue did not require a referral. In the remaining 5% of cases (all via email), the young person was encouraged to access via KHL's real-time services - telephone or web.

In addition to connecting young people with other support, 1 in 3 clients affected by child abuse agreed to reconnect with their counsellor again on a specific date and time for ongoing counselling and support.

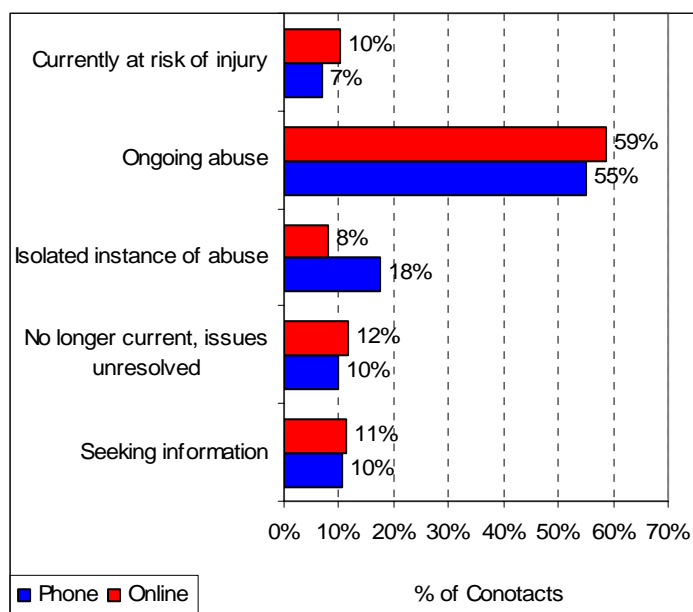
Duty-of-Care situations resulted in Kids Help Line facilitating 130 liaisons with external agencies, mostly state child protection agencies. Forty-four percent (57) of these liaisons involved a 3-way telephone conversation between the child, a Kids Help Line counsellor and a worker from the agency.

The proportion of child abuse contacts where a duty of care response was enacted increased to 3.4% of contacts in 04-05 (up from 2% the previous year).

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.”

Physical abuse is the most common form of abuse reported by children accounting for 46% of contacts about child abuse. In the past year Kids Help Line received 1,463 contacts from children and young people where physical abuse was their main concern. The graph below shows the nature and severity of physical abuse contacts via telephone and online counselling.



The largest proportion (56%) of both telephone and online clients reporting physical abuse stated they were the victims of ongoing abuse (either occasional or regular physical abuse).

Male (13) is being hit for being 'naughty'. The hitting had been going on for about two months. Caller believed that his parents had started hitting him because they were becoming increasingly stressed by the amount of work they had to do (e.g. father had just taken a second job).

Seven percent of young people stated they were at risk of injury at the time of their call.

Male (15) father had physically assaulted him and held a knife to him tonight. Felt he could not return home and was seeking information about shelters in the area. Has had involvement with the Department of Families in the past and has a social worker he has agreed to reconnect with.

A further 16% of children reported an isolated incidence of physical abuse.

Female (13) was just hit by her mother. This is not a common thing and has never happened before. She normally loves home and finds it a safe and comfortable place to be.

For 10% of young people the abuse was no longer occurring but they were seeking support in relation to unresolved issues.

Male (10) living in foster care and wanting to talk about past issues. Spoke of past abuse perpetrated by father who beat him really badly when he was 4 years old. Is doing really well now and has reconnected with his mother recently for visits.

The remaining 11% of children and young people contacting about physical abuse were seeking information.

Male (12) rang to get information for a friend who is possibly being physically abused by her father.

Neglect

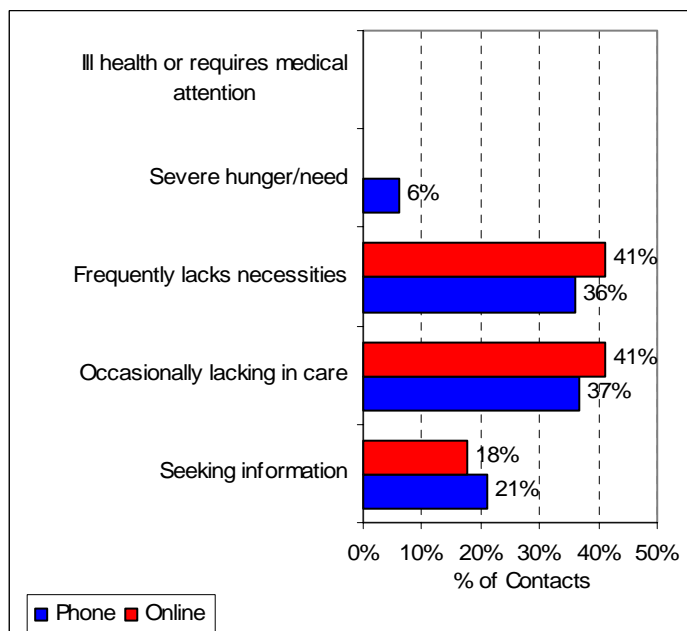
In the 12-month period Kids Help Line received 145 contacts from children and young people where neglect was their main concern.

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 of children contacting about neglect were occasionally lacking in care (37%) or frequently lacking of necessities (37%).

Female (13) reported that her mother drinks alcohol to the point of intoxication on a daily basis. Her father works three hours away and is only home one night per week. Went on to say that her mother often spends all of their money on alcohol.

A small proportion of children (5%) reported severe hunger or severe need. The remaining 21% of young people were seeking information.

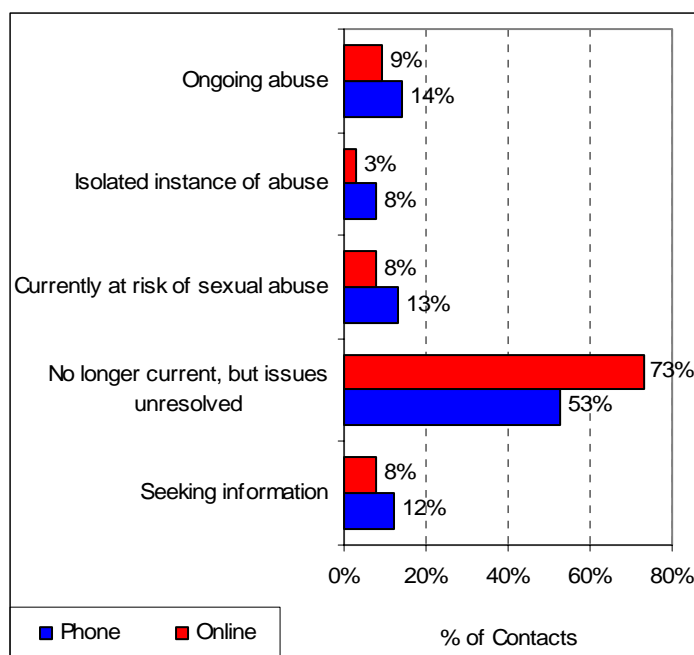


Sexual Abuse

In the 12-month period Kids Help Line received 1,061 contacts from children and young people where sexual abuse was their main concern.

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.”

The majority (77%) of both telephone and online clients stated they had been abused at least once. The graph below shows the nature and severity of sexual abuse calls.



Thirteen percent of these young people reported ongoing (occasional or regular) sexual abuse to their counsellor while a further 7% reported an isolated instance of abuse.

For 57% of clients, the sexual abuse was no longer current but issues resulting from the abuse were unresolved. The remaining young people were reporting a current risk of sexual abuse (12%) or were seeking information (11%).

The Ongoing Impact of Sexual Abuse

Kids Help Line plays a significant role in providing ongoing support for children and young people who are seeking help for unresolved issues resulting from past sexual abuse. **Over half of the 1,061 sexual abuse contacts in the past year were from young people requiring help to deal with the long term impact of past abuse on their daily lives.**

Qualitative analysis reveals that young people were most commonly seeking ongoing support due to significant effects on their **mental health**. These effects included self-harm, nightmares, depression, anxiety, flashbacks of the abuse, suicidal thoughts or attempts, panic attacks, bulimia, anorexia, fatigue, loss of sleep and drug or alcohol use.

Female (16) gets flashbacks of the abuse which are distressing and confusing, she finds it difficult to breathe and feels as if she is going to die.

Female (14) was abused by her father from 2 to 8 years of age and he is currently being charged. She suffers from anxiety and suicidal thoughts - she blames herself for the abuse.

For a large number of young people it was really important just to be listened to by a counsellor, to tell their story again and to be believed. For many, it had been particularly distressing to have **not been believed** by their mother or father; for their experience to have been minimised or trivialised; or to have been disowned or cut-off from part of their family.

Female (13) had been sexually abused by her father who threatened to kill her if she told anyone. Her mother did not believe her and when her doctor found that she had been sexually penetrated and severely torn internally, her mother accused her of letting the boys at school do it to her.

Female (11) wanted to tell someone about sexual abuse that had occurred almost 6 years ago. She said that she feels like no-one believes her and she wanted to tell someone to see if it would make things better.

For some young people, the long term impact of sexual abuse is the **disintegration of family relationships**, resulting in them being kicked out of or leaving their home. These young people may be seeking accommodation support or support to reconnect with family members.

Female (16) has been sexually abused by her father for as long as she can remember. She has been kicked out of home by her mother after disclosing the abuse.

Young people were often seeking support with their ongoing emotional well-being, most commonly dealing with feelings of **self-blame or very low self-worth**. Young people regularly sought help with managing emotions like anger, frustration and confusion and rebuilding their sense of self and self-worth.

Often young people had never told anyone before about the abuse. Some clients sought support with deciding **who to tell**; being scared that they won't be believed; or concerned about the impact on their family. Others were seeking support as they started to remember the abuse or because a recent experience (e.g., rape) had resurfaced feelings of earlier abuse.

Male (17) described being sexually abused by his stepdad at age nine. His main concern was whether he should tell his mum who still lives with his stepdad as he is concerned they will separate. He is also finding it hard to be intimate with his girlfriend.

Young people also called with regard to **legal action**, ranging from contemplating whether to proceed with legal action, support leading up to or during a hearing and coping with feelings after the final court decision.

Male (12) abused by his mother's defacto and seeking help because the court case is coming up soon.

It was also common for young people to be concerned about **seeing the perpetrator again** and scared about the abuse recurring. These young people often were looking for ways to keep themselves safe.

For some young people the past abuse was having a significant effect on their current relationships, particularly intimate relationships when they experience difficulty **developing trust and intimacy with a partner**.

Female (15) was abused from 5 to 13 years by various family members. She is now unable to have a healthy sexual relationship with her boyfriend.

Providing Ongoing Counselling & Support

By working from a framework of child-centred practice and empowerment; providing ongoing support for clients who are seeking help for unresolved past sexual abuse may include assisting young people to:

- regain trust and establish supportive relationships;
- understand the effects on their current thoughts and feelings;
- validate the normality of their thoughts and feelings;
- manage impacts on other relationships;
- rediscover their strengths and value what is special about them;
- help them to make meaning from their experiences; and help them to make the changes they want to make, at their pace.

Associated or Resultant Impacts of Abuse

In 35% of the 2,982 child abuse contacts, the young person disclosed a second significant concern to their counsellor. These concerns were mostly commonly (in rank order):

- Family Relationships
- Another form of child abuse (e.g., main problem is physical abuse and secondary problem is emotional abuse)
- Mental health concerns
- Emotional and/or behavioural management
- Leaving home or homelessness
- Suicide (contemplating suicide or concerned for another)
- Peer Relationships

For children and young people where child abuse is either a main or second significant concern (n = 3783):

- **5% reported suicidal thoughts (n=178)**
- **19% reported that they were engaging in self-injury (n=710)**

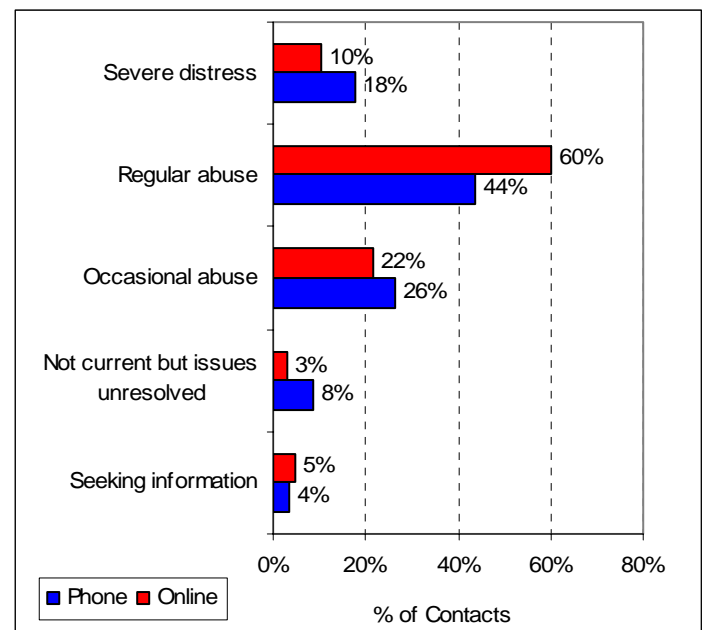
This data demonstrates that young people seeking help about child abuse are often experiencing severe distress and/or significant impact on their their relationships, mental health and emotional well-being.

Emotional Abuse

In the 12-month period Kids Help Line received 313 contacts from children and young people where emotional abuse was their main concern.

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 (48%) of both telephone and online clients who contacted about emotional abuse stated they were the victims of regular emotional abuse while 25% reported occasional abuse. Sixteen percent of these children and young people were severely distressed at the time of their contact (see graph below).



Female (17) spoke about constant verbal put-downs, insults, belittling, criticism and threats of violence from her mother. Is scapegoated by her mother, who tells her that she is just like her father, who was violent and a "bad man". Her father died a year ago.

The remaining contacts about emotional abuse were from young people who were dealing with unresolved issues as a result of past abuse (7%) or were seeking information (4%).

Female (15) thinking a lot today about some of the ways her father used to talk to her that hurt her like calling her fat and telling her that her mother was a bad person.

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www.kidshelp.com.au

NATIONAL OFFICE:

PO Box 2000, Milton, Qld, 4064
Ph (07) 3369 1588 Fax (07) 3367 1266
Email admin@kidshelp.com.au
24 hour telephone counselling line: 1800 55 1800