

# 2 Notifications, investigations and substantiations

## Overview

### Scope of the data collection

The notification, investigation and substantiation process is broadly outlined in Chapter 1. The data in this report on child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations relate to those notifications received by community service departments between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2000. Only child protection matters that were notified to community services departments are included in this national collection. Notifications made to other organisations, such as the police or the non-government welfare agencies, are included only if these notifications were also referred to the community services departments.

As well as reporting on the number of notifications, investigations and substantiations, this report also includes data on the number of children in notifications, investigations and substantiations. As a child can be the subject of more than one notification, investigation or substantiation in a year, there are less children than there are total notifications, investigations and substantiations.

### Categories used for notifications and investigations

In this report notifications are classified according to the 'Type of action' taken by the community services department to respond to them. The categories used are:

- *Investigation*—the process whereby the community services department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification received between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2000, and makes an assessment about the harm or degree of harm to the child and their protective needs. An investigation includes the interviewing or sighting of the subject child where it is practical to do so;
  - *Finalised investigation*—a notification received between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2000 which was investigated and the investigation was completed and an outcome recorded by 31 August 2000;
  - *Investigation not finalised*—is a notification received between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2000, which was investigated, but where the investigation was not completed and an investigation outcome was not recorded by 31 August 2000;

- *Dealt with by other means*—a notification that was responded to by means other than investigation, such as the provision of advice or referral to services; and
- *Not investigated/not dealt with by other means*—includes all other notifications, such as those where no investigation or other action was possible.

The ‘Outcomes of finalised investigations’ are classified into the following categories:

- *Substantiation*—where there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. Substantiation does not necessarily require sufficient evidence for a successful prosecution and does not imply that treatment or case management was, or is to be, provided.
- *Child at risk* (only used in Tasmania)—where there are reasonable grounds to suspect the possibility of previous or future abuse or neglect, and further involvement of the department is considered to be warranted; and
- *Not substantiated*—where an investigation has concluded that there is no reasonable cause to suspect prior, current or future abuse, neglect or harm of the child.

Definitions of other terms used in this report are in the Glossary.

## Data and analysis

This section includes the national data on child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations for the 1999–00 financial year. For most tables, Australian totals have not been provided because the data from the States and Territories are not strictly comparable. The legislation, policies and procedures of each State and Territory should be taken into account when interpreting these data.

### Number of notifications, investigations and substantiations

The number of child protection notifications received between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2000 for each State and Territory is shown in Table 2.1. The number of notifications was higher than in 1998–99 in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia (Table 2.3).

In Victoria and South Australia, for example, the definition of a notification is very wide and includes reports of child concerns that may not be classified as a notification in other jurisdictions. In contrast, in Western Australia and Tasmania, reports to the departments are initially screened by senior staff; a significant proportion are classified as family support issues and not counted as a notification.

A large majority of notifications were subject to an investigation. The proportion of notifications that were investigated ranged from 97% in Western Australia to 33% in South Australia (Table 2.1). This range reflects differences in the way in which jurisdictions both define and deal with notifications and investigations.

**Table 2.1: Notifications by type of action and State and Territory, 1999–00**

Type of action	NSW <sup>(a)</sup>	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT <sup>(b)</sup>
<b>Number</b>								
Investigations finalised <sup>(c)</sup>	14,105	12,582	10,904	2,365	5,002	356	918	775
Investigations not finalised <sup>(d)</sup>	4,002	311	4,394	212	16	24	113	4
<i>Total investigations</i>	<i>18,107</i>	<i>12,893</i>	<i>15,298</i>	<i>2,577</i>	<i>5,018</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>1,031</i>	<i>779</i>
Dealt with by other means <sup>(e)</sup>	12,291	23,912	2,880	—	10,163	9	—	—
No investigation possible/no action <sup>(f)</sup>	—	—	879	68	—	33	158	658
<b>Total notifications</b>	<b>30,398</b>	<b>36,805</b>	<b>19,057</b>	<b>2,645</b>	<b>15,181</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>1,189</b>	<b>1,437</b>
<b>Per cent</b>								
Investigations finalised <sup>(c)</sup>	46	34	57	89	33	84	77	54
Investigations not finalised <sup>(d)</sup>	13	1	23	8	—	6	10	—
<i>Total investigations</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>54</i>
Dealt with by other means <sup>(e)</sup>	40	65	15	—	67	2	—	—
No investigation possible/no action <sup>(f)</sup>	—	—	5	3	—	8	13	46
<b>Total notifications</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) The data provided relate to all notifications where the primary reported issue involved harm/injury or risk.

(b) In the Northern Territory notifications dealt with by other means could not be separately identified and were included in the category 'no investigation possible/no action'.

(c) An investigation is classified as finalised where it was completed and an outcome recorded by 31 August 2000.

(d) Investigation not finalised is an investigation that was begun but not completed by 31 August 2000.

(e) Includes notifications that were responded to by means other than an investigation, such as referral to police, referral to family services or provision of advice.

(f) Include notifications where there are no grounds for an investigation or insufficient information was available to undertake an investigation.

## Outcomes of investigations

Although the outcomes of investigations varied across the States and Territories, in all jurisdictions a large proportion of investigations were not substantiated, that is, there was no reasonable cause to believe that the child was being, or was likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. For example, 54% of finalised investigations in New South Wales and 58% in South Australia were not substantiated (Table 2.2).

The proportion of investigations that were substantiated ranged from 63% in Queensland to 25% in the Australian Capital Territory. Although a relatively low proportion of investigations in Tasmania were substantiated, an additional 22% of investigations were classified as 'child at risk'. As noted earlier, this category is not used in other jurisdictions.

**Table 2.2: Outcomes of finalised investigations by State and Territory, 1999–00**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
	<b>Number</b>							
Substantiations	6,477	7,359	6,919	1,169	2,085	97	233	393
Child at risk	..	..	..	..	..	77	..	..
Not substantiated	7,628	5,223	3,985	1,196	2,917	182	685	382
<b>Total finalised investigations</b>	<b>14,105</b>	<b>12,582</b>	<b>10,904</b>	<b>2,365</b>	<b>5,002</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>918</b>	<b>775</b>
	<b>Per cent</b>							
Substantiations	46	58	63	49	42	27	25	51
Child at risk	..	..	..	..	..	22	..	..
Not substantiated	54	42	37	51	58	51	75	49
<b>Total finalised investigations</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### Changes over time

The number of child protection notifications has increased considerably over the past decade in most States and Territories. (There are no national data available on the number of notifications before 1995–96. However, the number of ‘reported cases’ in Australia, that is, notifications that required investigation, increased from 49,721 in 1990–91 to 76,954 in 1994–95 (Angus & Wilkinson 1993; Angus & Hall 1996).) The total number of notifications across Australia increased from 91,734 in 1995–96 to 107,134 in 1999–00 (Table 2.3).

The following factors may have contributed to this increase in the number of notifications:

- an increase in the number of child protection matters that are reported, for example, due to the introduction of mandatory reporting in some jurisdictions and/or an increased awareness about child abuse and neglect in the community;
- an increase in the number of children who require a child protection response, for example through an increase in the incidence of child abuse and neglect, or inadequate parenting causing harm to a child; and
- changes in State and Territory legislation, policies and practices.

**Table 2.3: Number of notifications by State and Territory, 1995–96 to 1999–00**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
1995–96	28,930	29,914	15,362	3,748	8,895	2,933	1,437	515	91,734
1996–97	n.a. <sup>(a)</sup>	31,707	15,478 <sup>(b)</sup>	2,099	10,094	2,363	1,220	481	n.a. <sup>(c)</sup>
1997–98	31,223	33,163	17,233	2,447	11,651	1,016	1,125	710	98,568
1998–99	31,513	34,679	18,721	2,568	13,132	653	1,358	n.a. <sup>(d)</sup>	n.a. <sup>(e)</sup>
1999–00	30,398	36,805	19,057	2,645	15,181	422	1,189	1,437 <sup>(f)</sup>	107,134

(a) Data for the 1996–97 financial year were not available from New South Wales.

(b) Data refer to calendar year 1996, rather than the financial year.

(c) A total cannot be calculated for 1996–97 because of lack of data from New South Wales.

(d) Data for the 1998–99 financial year were not available from the Northern Territory.

(e) A total cannot be calculated for 1998–99 because of the lack of data from the Northern Territory.

(f) The number of notifications in 1999–00 in the Northern Territory was higher than in previous years due to the introduction of a new information system that enabled improved reporting of all reports received.

Changes in the number of substantiations however, followed a different pattern from that of notifications over the period from 1990–91 to 1999–00. The number of substantiations increased significantly across Australia from 20,868 in 1990–91 to 30,615 in 1994–95, and then decreased to 24,732 in 1999–00 (Table 2.4).

Changes to policy and practices in the States and Territories are likely to be important factors contributing to changes in the number of substantiations from year to year. For example, there was a large decrease in the number of substantiations in Western Australia in 1995–96 following the introduction of ‘New Directions’, where reports of concerns about children and their families were distinguished from concerns about maltreatment of children. Tasmania introduced new policies based on the Western Australia model in July 1997. Similarly, in New South Wales there was a large fall in the number of substantiations following the introduction in July 1996 of new policies that screened out reports of concerns about children from child protection matters (AIHW 1998). In contrast, in Victoria and Queensland the number of substantiations continued to increase over the same period.

**Table 2.4: Substantiations by State and Territory, 1990–91 to 1999–00**

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
1990–91	11,611	2,427	3,500	1,223	1,162	472	247	226	20,868
1991–92	12,645	2,146	3,027	1,380	1,048	598	295	232	21,371
1992–93	14,290	4,089	2,743	1,519	1,824	416	445	304	25,630
1993–94	15,128	5,253	3,127	1,830	2,077	424	495	377	28,711
1994–95	14,164	7,326	3,851 <sup>(a)</sup>	1,484	2,547	360	376	358	30,466 <sup>(a)</sup>
1995–96	14,063	6,663	4,662	1,095	2,415	235	445	255	29,833
1996–97	n.a. <sup>(b)</sup>	7,034	4,895 <sup>(c)</sup>	982	2,527	244	376	252	n.a. <sup>(b)</sup>
1997–98	8,406	7,357	6,323	1,135	1,915	135	411	343	26,025
1998–99	7,540	7,251	6,373	1,215	2,114	128	442	n.a. <sup>(d)</sup>	n.a. <sup>(d)</sup>
1999–00	6,477	7,359	6,919	1,169	2,085	97	233	393	24,732

(a) The data for Queensland were revised after original publication along with the national total.

(b) Data for 1996–97 financial year were not available from New South Wales and a national total could not be calculated.

(c) Data refer to calendar year 1996, rather than the financial year 1996–97.

(d) Data for the 1998–99 financial year were not available from the Northern Territory and a national total could not be calculated.

Between 1998–99 and 1999–00 the number of substantiations increased significantly in Queensland, but decreased significantly in New South Wales, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. The large decrease in the Australia Capital Territory reflects the change in child protection policy to focus on the level of harm to the child rather than an incident. The continuing decrease in the number of substantiations in Tasmania is the result of an increasing trend to classify the less serious reports as either consultations or child and family concerns.

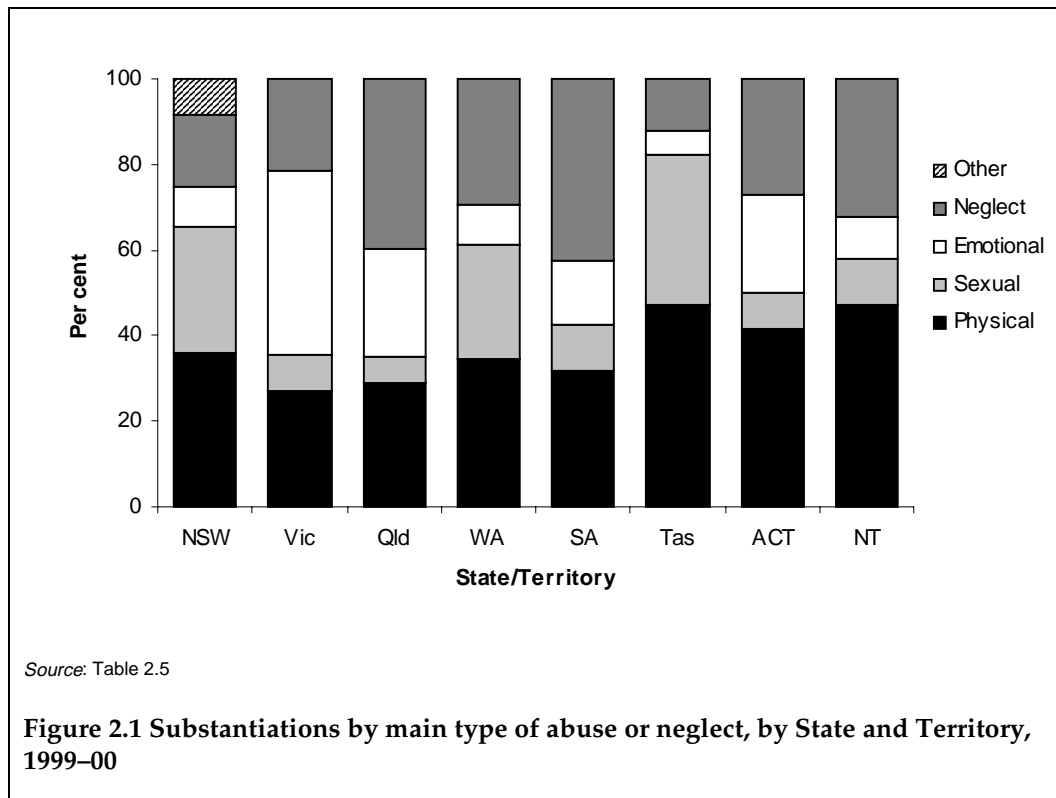
### Substantiations and type of abuse and neglect

Substantiations are classified into one of the following four categories depending on the main type of abuse or neglect that has occurred: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. It is not always clear what type of abuse, neglect or harm has occurred, and how a substantiation is classified will vary according to the policies and practices of the different jurisdictions.

In New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory physical abuse was the most common type of substantiation. In Queensland and South Australia neglect was the most common, and in Victoria, emotional abuse (Figure 2.1 and Table 2.5).

These variations in the types of abuse or neglect that are substantiated across jurisdictions are likely to be the result of differences in the way that child protection matters are classified, as well as differences in the types of incidents that are substantiated across

jurisdictions. In Western Australia and Tasmania a relatively high proportion of substantiations were classified as either 'physical abuse' or 'sexual abuse', as the child protection data from these two States include only child maltreatment cases—cases which require a family support response are dealt with and counted separately. Victoria, on the other hand, had a relatively high proportion of substantiations that were classified as 'emotional abuse' reflecting the broader range of incidents that are included in child protection notifications and substantiations. The high proportion of substantiations classified as 'neglect' in Queensland reflects the policies in that State which focus on identifying the protective needs of a child and assessing whether parents have protected the child from harm or risk of harm.



**Table 2.5: Substantiations by main type of abuse or neglect and State and Territory, 1999–00**

Type of abuse or neglect substantiated	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
	<b>Number</b>							
Physical	2,336	1,995	2,019	404	663	46	97	186
Sexual	1,903	608	398	311	223	34	20	42
Emotional	609	3,158	1,743	112	309	5	53	38
Neglect	1,087	1598	2,759	342	890	12	63	127
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	542	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
<b>Total substantiations</b>	<b>6,477</b>	<b>7,359</b>	<b>6,919</b>	<b>1,169</b>	<b>2,085</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>393</b>
	<b>Per cent</b>							
Physical	36	27	29	35	32	47	42	47
Sexual	29	8	6	27	11	35	9	11
Emotional	9	43	25	10	15	5	23	10
Neglect	17	22	40	29	43	12	27	32
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
<b>Total substantiations</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) The category 'Other' used for New South Wales comprises children identified as being at high risk but with no identifiable injury or harm.

## Characteristics of children

### Number of children

The number of child protection notifications and substantiations is greater than the number of children who were the subjects of notifications or substantiations. This is because some children are the subjects of more than one notification and/or substantiation in any one year.

For example, in 1999–00 in Victoria there were 36,805 notifications compared with 27,551 children who were the subjects of notifications, and in Queensland there were 19,057 notifications compared with 14,500 children who were the subjects of notifications (Table 2.6). Similarly, in relation to substantiations in South Australia, there were 2,085 substantiations compared with 1,708 children who were the subjects of substantiations.

**Table 2.6: Number of notifications and substantiations and number of children who were the subjects of notifications or substantiations, by State and Territory, 1999–00**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Children, subjects of notifications	24,889	27,551	14,500	2,392	10,164	239	1,013	1,154
Total notifications	30,398	36,805	19,057	2,645	15,181	422	1,189	1,437
Children, subjects of substantiations	5,876	6,848	4,835	1,065	1,708	79	190	353
Total substantiations	6,477	7,359	6,919	1,169	2,085	97	233	393

Note: Includes children aged 0–17 years and children of unknown age.

These data indicate that a substantial number of children across Australia were the subjects of more than one substantiation during 1999–00. It is not possible to calculate the exact proportion of children who were the subjects of more than one substantiation, however, as some children may be the subjects of more than two substantiations in the year.

## Sex and age

There were more females than males in substantiations in all jurisdictions in 1999–00 except in Victoria, where the number of males was slightly higher than the number of females (Table A1.1). The higher proportion of females is due predominantly to their over-representation in the sexual abuse category. There were almost three times as many girls as boys who were the subjects of substantiations of sexual abuse.

In relation to age, there were larger numbers of children who were the subjects of substantiations in the younger age categories and fewer children aged 15 years and over (Table A1.2). Rates of children by age are discussed in the following section.

## Rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations

There were significant differences between States and Territories in rates of children who were the subjects of child protection substantiations. Victoria and the Northern Territory had relatively high rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations. In Victoria there were 6.3 children per 1,000 children aged 0–16 years who were the subjects of substantiations and in Northern Territory there were 6.2 (Table 2.7). The rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations were lowest in Western Australia and Tasmania (2.3 and 0.7 respectively).

As noted previously, Western Australia and Tasmania have relatively low rates because they screen out those reports that do not involve child maltreatment, and do not count them as notifications. Victoria, on the other hand, counts a broader range of incidents as notifications and this, in turn, is likely to contribute to the higher rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations in that State.

**Table 2.7: Children aged 0–16 years who were the subjects of substantiations: number and rates per 1,000 children, by Indigenous status and State and Territory, 1999–00**

State/Territory	Number of children			Rate per 1,000 children			Rate ratio Indigenous/ Other
	Indigenous	Other	Total	Indigenous	Other	Total	
New South Wales <sup>(a)</sup>	761	5,054	5,815	14.6	3.5	3.9	4.2:1
Victoria	568	6,218	6,786	55.5	5.8	6.3	9.6:1
Queensland	502	4,303	4,805	9.9	5.4	5.6	1.8:1
Western Australia	329	724	1,053	12.7	1.7	2.3	7.5:1
South Australia	337	1,354	1,691	33.0	4.2	5.1	7.9:1
Tasmania	4	73	77	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.9:1
Australian Capital Territory	6	184	190	4.2	2.5	2.6	1.7:1
Northern Territory	172	179	351	7.6	5.3	6.2	1.4:1

### Notes

1. For details on the calculation of rates and the coding of Indigenous status, see Appendix 2.
2. Due to the small numbers involved, children aged 17 years were not included in this table.

## Rates by age

Rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations generally decreased with age. In most jurisdictions children aged under 1 year were the most likely to be the subjects of substantiations and children aged 15 to 16 years were the least likely (Table 2.8).

Age is one of the factors that child protection workers take into consideration when determining the time taken to respond to a notification, the type of response and whether a

notification will be substantiated, with younger children being regarded as the most vulnerable. In Victoria, for example, the High Risk Infants Service Quality Initiatives Project was developed to better identify and respond to children aged under 2 years who were regarded as being at high risk of child abuse and neglect (Victorian Department of Human Services 1999). Other jurisdictions also have special procedures in place to protect younger children.

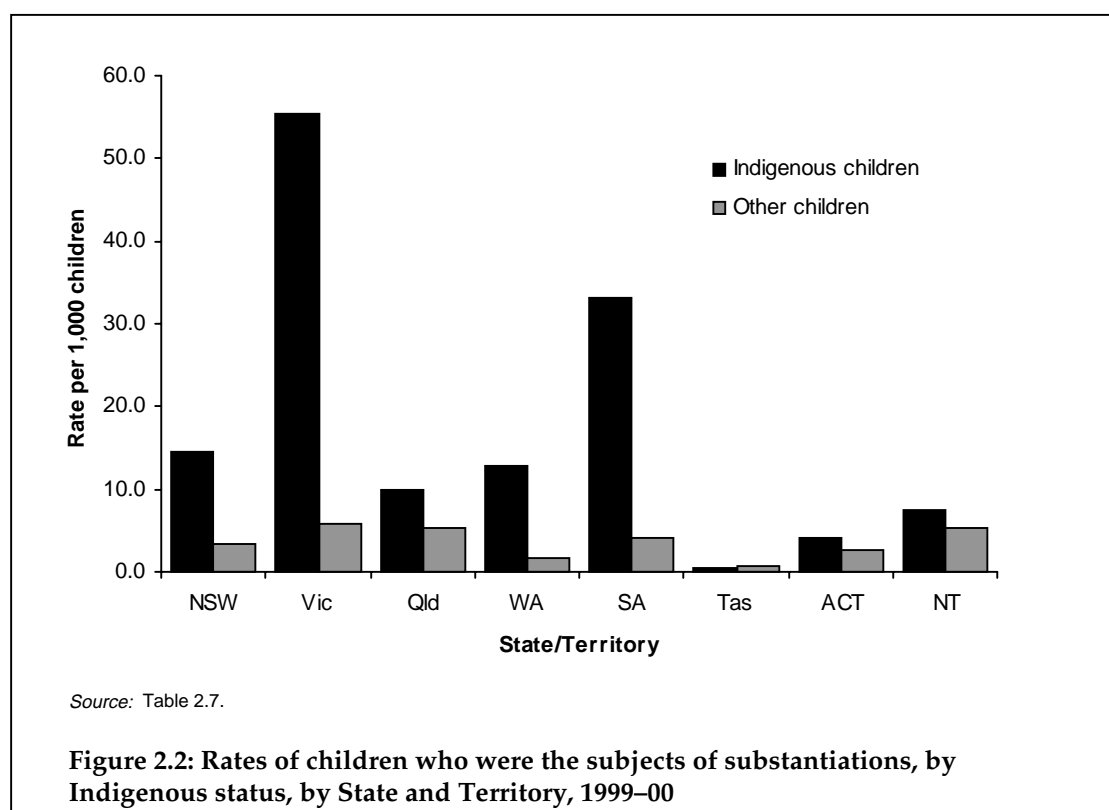
**Table 2.8: Children aged 0–16 years in substantiations: rates per 1,000 children by age and State and Territory, 1999–00**

Age	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
<1 year	4.8	9.2	9.8	4.7	8.3	0.2	4.3	12.6
1–4 years	3.7	7.6	6.2	2.4	5.5	0.6	2.1	7.2
5–9 years	4.0	6.0	5.7	2.5	5.4	0.3	2.9	5.5
10–14 years	4.2	5.7	5.6	2.3	5.0	0.6	2.6	5.6
15–16 years	3.1	5.3	2.7	1.0	2.1	0.6	1.0	4.0

Note: Refer to Table A1.2 for number of children.

## Indigenous children

In all jurisdictions except Tasmania, the rate of Indigenous children in substantiations was higher than the rate for other children (Table 2.7 and Figure 2.2). The rate ratio provides a summary measure of the relationship between the rate of Indigenous children who were the subjects of substantiations compared to the rate for other children. In Victoria, Indigenous children were 9.6 times more likely to be the subjects of substantiations than other children and in South Australia they were 7.9 times more likely.



The reasons for the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection substantiations are complex. The report *Bringing Them Home* (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (HREOC 1997)) examined the effect of child welfare policies on Indigenous people. It noted that some of the underlying causes of the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system include:

- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture;
- poor socioeconomic status; and
- cultural differences in child-rearing practices.

## Types of abuse and neglect

The pattern of substantiated abuse and neglect for Indigenous children differed from the pattern for other children. Indigenous children were much more likely to be the subjects of substantiations of neglect than other children. For example, in the Northern Territory, 47% of Indigenous children in substantiations were the subjects of substantiations of neglect, compared with 17% of other children in substantiations (Table 2.9). Similarly, the corresponding percentages in Western Australia were 43% for Indigenous children compared with 22% for other children.

**Table 2.9: Children who were the subjects of substantiations: type of abuse and/or neglect, by Indigenous status and State and Territory, 1999–00 (per cent)**

Type of abuse or neglect	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
<b>Indigenous children</b>								
Physical abuse	34	21	31	34	30	100	33	40
Sexual abuse	21	7	8	16	6	—	—	8
Emotional abuse	13	45	20	6	17	—	33	5
Neglect	24	26	41	43	46	—	33	47
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Other children</b>								
Physical abuse	36	28	31	36	38	44	46	56
Sexual abuse	32	9	7	32	14	36	10	12
Emotional abuse	9	42	25	10	15	7	21	15
Neglect	15	21	38	22	34	13	23	17
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) The category 'Other' used for New South Wales comprises children identified as being at high risk but with no identifiable injury.

### Notes

1. For details on the coding of Indigenous status see Appendix 2.
2. Refer to Table A1.3 for numbers of children.

## Additional data on notifications and substantiations

### Source of notifications

Child protection notifications made to community services departments come from a range of different sources. Data on the sources of notifications show that the most common sources of notifications in 1999–00 were police, school personnel, and parents or guardians (Table A1.4)

The likelihood of a finalised investigation being substantiated varied considerably with the source of notification. A relatively high proportion of notifications from the children who were the subjects of the notifications, medical practitioners and school personnel were substantiated, whereas a relatively low proportion of notifications from anonymous callers, and friends or neighbours were substantiated (Table 2.10).

**Table 2.10: Proportion of finalised investigations that were substantiated: source of notification by State and Territory, 1999–00 (per cent)**

Source of notification	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Subject child	54	59	70	47	56	33	40	88
Parent/guardian	45	55	61	45	33	15	34	41
Sibling	—	49	70	67	79	—	—	—
Other relative	36	51	57	37	34	4	26	49
Friend/neighbour	36	43	51	38	37	45	15	37
Medical practitioner	54	62	73	64	50	57	35	68
Other health	47	60	73	—	40	35	20	44
Hospital/health centre	46	61	71	54	47	26	33	56
Social worker	50	73	69	—	46	42	20	31
School personnel	53	58	71	44	35	31	34	49
Childcare personnel	36	57	65	—	—	—	22	—
Police	47	70	76	60	33	39	37	52
Departmental officer	46	58	72	64	57	28	31	70
Non-government organisation	43	61	71	56	60	53	22	57
Anonymous	32	—	43	26	23	—	—	76
Other	42	44	59	35	43	100	19	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>51</b>

#### Notes

1. Percentages calculated as a percentage of finalised investigations where the source of the notification is known. Numbers are shown in Tables A1.4 and A1.5.
2. 'Other' category may include the maltreater.

### Family type

Data on the type of family in which the child was residing are available from a number of jurisdictions. It is important to note, however, that a family member with whom the child was residing may not have been the person responsible for the abuse, neglect or harm.

Compared to family types in the Australian population, a relatively high proportion of substantiations involved children living in female-headed one-parent families and in two-parent step- or blended families, whereas a relatively low proportion of substantiations involved children living in two-parent biological families. For example, in South Australia

43% of substantiations involved children from female one-parent families, 20% involved children from two-parent step- or blended families, while 27% involved children from two-parent biological families (Table 2.11). In comparison in 1997, 16% of all Australian children lived in female one-parent families, 8% lived in two-parent step- or blended families and 74% lived in two-parent biological families (ABS 1997).

There are likely to be a number of reasons for the over-representation of one-parent families in substantiations, for instance, sole parents are more likely to:

- have low incomes and be financially stressed;
- suffer from social isolation; and
- have less support in their immediate family.

These are all factors that have been associated with child abuse and neglect.

**Table 2.11: Substantiations by type of family in which the child was residing, for selected States and Territories, 1999–00**

Family type	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
<b>Number</b>							
Two parent—biological	2349	1786	288	548	23	67	137
Two parent—step or blended	707	1511	276	422	18	41	42
Single parent—female	2379	2772	426	882	41	107	127
Single parent—male	324	417	48	124	3	4	13
Other relatives/kin	404	116	67	54	4	6	39
Foster	120	—	17	11	4	—	8
Other	458	309	31	22	4	3	8
Not stated	618	8	16	22	—	5	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>7359</b>	<b>6919</b>	<b>1169</b>	<b>2085</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>393</b>
<b>Per cent</b>							
Two parent—natural	35	26	25	27	23	29	37
Two parent—step or blended	10	22	24	20	19	18	11
Single parent—female	35	40	37	43	42	47	34
Single parent—male	5	6	4	6	3	2	3
Other relatives/kin	6	2	6	3	4	3	10
Foster	2	—	1	1	4	—	2
Other	7	4	3	1	4	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Notes*

1. For Victoria and Queensland, family of residence was categorised as where the child was living at the time of investigation. For other jurisdictions it was where the child was living when the abuse or neglect occurred.
2. New South Wales could not provide these data.
3. Queensland does not have a category for 'foster parent'—these have been included in 'Other'.

## Relationship of person believed responsible

The data on the relationship to the child of the person believed responsible in child protection substantiations highlight some of the differences in the approaches to child protection across jurisdictions. For example, in Queensland, the focus of the child protection system is on the identification and investigation of harm to the child and on the child's protective needs. In situations where harm has occurred outside the family, parents may still

be seen to be responsible if they have failed to protect the child. In Queensland the natural parent was believed to be responsible in 85% of substantiations and a step-parent in a further 4% of substantiations (Table 2.12).

In other jurisdictions, such as New South Wales and Tasmania, the focus has been on identifying who committed an action or who caused the harm to the child. Thus, those outside the family, such as friends or neighbours or strangers, are more likely to be regarded as responsible. In New South Wales, natural parents were believed to be responsible in 57% of substantiations, friends or neighbours were believed to be responsible in 12% of substantiations and strangers (included in the 'other' category) were also believed to be responsible in a proportion of substantiations. In Tasmania, natural parents were believed to be responsible in 48% of substantiations, step-parents in 13% of substantiations, friends or neighbours in 11%, with a further 13% in the 'other' category.

**Table 2.12: Substantiations by relationship to the child of person believed responsible, for selected States and Territories, 1999–00**

	NSW	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
<b>Number</b>							
Natural parent	2,493	5,791	698	1,670	36	190	216
Step-parent	327	302	94	114	10	9	18
De facto step-parent	204	286	78	81	2	1	13
Sibling	177	78	20	50	1	8	8
Other relative/kin	333	179	83	88	5	7	34
Foster parent	63	83	3	—	3	—	1
Friend/neighbour	512	10	66	30	8	3	4
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	294	92	59	52	10	1	9
Not stated	2,074	98	68	—	22	14	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,477</b>	<b>6,919</b>	<b>1,169</b>	<b>2,085</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>393</b>
<b>Per cent</b>							
Natural parent	57	85	63	80	48	87	71
Step-parent	7	4	9	5	13	4	6
De facto step-parent	5	4	7	4	3	—	4
Sibling	4	1	2	2	1	4	3
Other relative/kin	8	3	8	4	7	3	11
Foster parent	1	1	—	—	4	—	—
Friend/neighbour	12	—	6	1	11	1	1
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	7	1	5	2	13	—	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) This category may include other person with duty-of-care responsibility, guardians, other child, strangers and those people who have no particular relationship with the child.

Note: Victoria could not provide these data.