

CHILD ABUSE

Scope

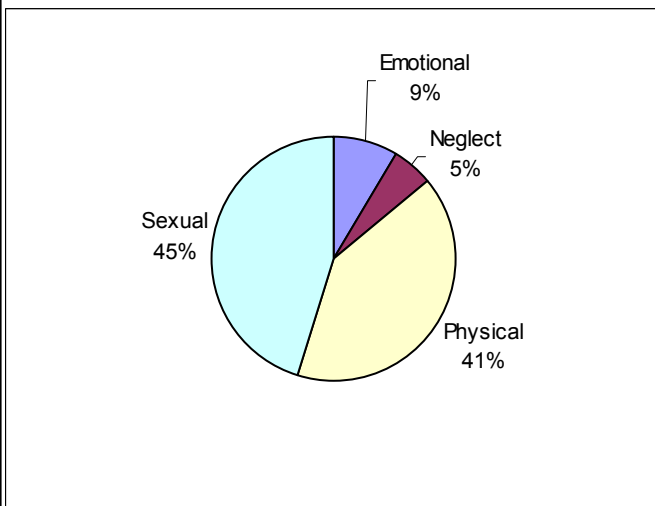
This Information Sheet covers calls fitting four problem types: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

The abuse of children is recognised as a serious problem in New Zealand that causes the death of several children each year and causes immediate and long-term harm to a great many others. Official figures show the 2003 rate of substantiated cases of abuse for all children and young people aged up to 16 years to have been 7.4 per 100,000¹. It is believed that reported and substantiated cases of abuse are an under-estimate of the actual rates².

Calls about child abuse make up 2.75% of the problems presented to What's Up by children and young people and there is some indication that the proportion of calls about child abuse might be dropping with time.

It is important to note that this information relates to what the callers to What's Up are saying and What's Up is not in a position to investigate the situation beyond discussing it with the caller. Where What's Up is concerned about the safety of a caller or someone else, every effort is made to engage an appropriate agency in the care and protection of those concerned.

The most common type of abuse called about is sexual abuse (45.23%), followed closely by physical abuse (40.98%) and then emotional abuse (8.55%) and neglect (5.23%).



Sex and Age of Callers

What's Up receives significantly more calls from girls than boys about abuse, even when the predominance of girls among What's Up's callers is taken into account (Figure 1).

There is also a tendency for callers about abuse to be in early adolescence, particularly compared with pre-teenagers (Figure 2).

The type of abuse reported also varies with sex, with females being more likely to call about sexual abuse and

Figure 1. Sex of callers about abuse compared with all callers to What's Up

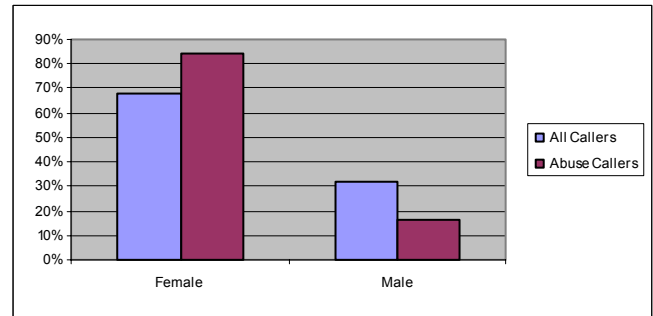


Figure 2. Age of callers about abuse compared with all callers to What's Up

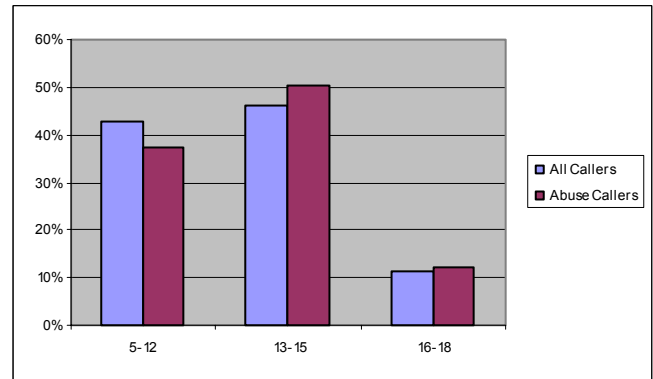
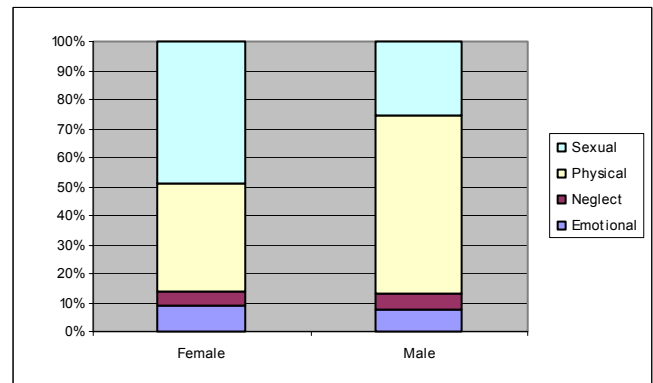


Figure 3. Type of abuse as a function of the sex of the caller



males being more likely to call about physical abuse. There is little difference between the sexes for emotional abuse or neglect.

Sexual Abuse

Definition: 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.

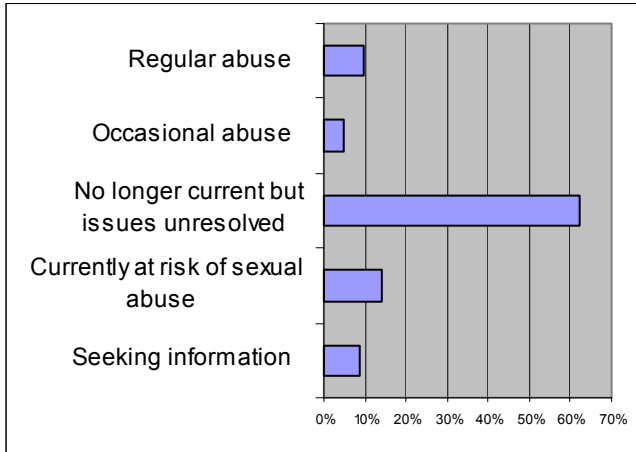
The most common type of abuse presented to What's Up, sexual

abuse makes up 45% of calls about abuse and 1.3% of all issues raised with our Counsellors.

The majority of these calls concern past abuse (Figure 4) which has had a lasting effect on the caller, who is commonly seeking help to overcome these effects.

"Caller was sexually abused by her father a year ago. She doesn't live with him but now feels she needs to get it out of her head and wants him to have to deal with what he has done to her."

Figure 4. Characteristics of sexual abuse calls



Physical Abuse

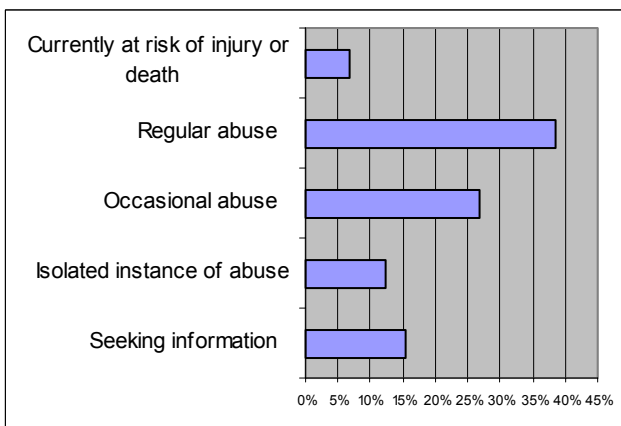
Definition: Caller identifies behaviour by family member or caregiver that has caused harm. Includes a range of behaviours from slapping to actions that cause bruising or other injury.

Physical abuse is the second most common form of child abuse presented to What's Up, making up 41% of abuse calls and 1.1% of all issues.

Unlike sexual abuse callers, physical abuse callers are more likely to be experiencing regular abuse. A significant proportion are also reporting occasional abuse (Figure 5).

"Caller has run away from home and doesn't want to return because he will get bashed by Dad. He has been living with Dad and his step-mum but said that he has just had enough and can't take it anymore. Subjected to arguing and aggression every night and has witnessed his step-mum and auntie being bashed a number of times as well."

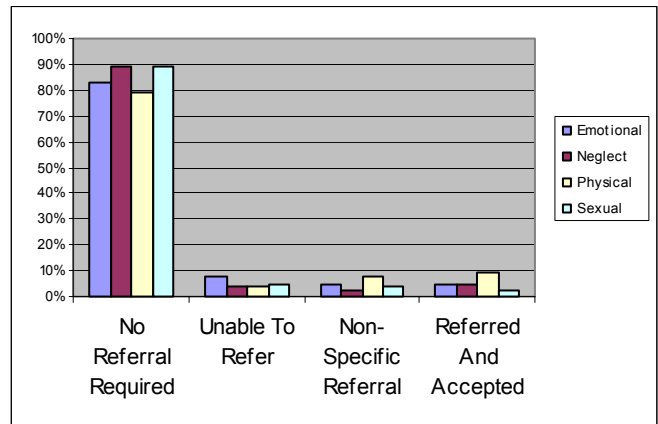
Figure 5. Characteristics of physical abuse calls



Referral To Other Agencies

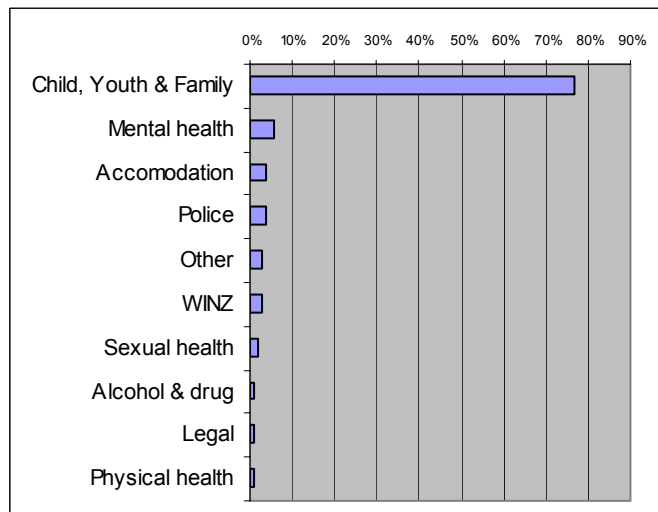
The great majority of calls to What's Up about abuse do not require referral to other agencies (Figure 6). Of those that do, appropriate resources are most often found for cases of physical abuse and are most difficult to find for emotional abuse.

Figure 6. Referral of abuse calls



Child, Youth and Family is the agency involved in the great majority of calls about abuse where referral is made (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Referral agencies for abuse calls



References:

1. Children and Young People: Indicators of Wellbeing In New Zealand. Wellington. Ministry of Social Development, 2005.
2. DHB Toolkit: Interpersonal Violence, Edition 1. Wellington. Ministry of Health, 2001

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