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CHILDREN AFFECTED BY HOUSEHOLD SUBSTANCE USE OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

HOUSEHOLD SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES, MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES, AND CHILD MALTREATMENT

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Millions of American children live with people affected by substance use and mental health challenges. Parental substance use and mental health issues are common risk factors for child welfare system involvement. Although most children who live with people affected by these issues do not come into contact with the child welfare system, many could benefit from supportive services.¹

CHILDREN LIVING WITH A PARENT WITH A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

About 6.5 million children in the United States live with someone who has a substance use disorder.

For 77 percent of those children, that substance use disorder is associated with alcohol use. For 32 percent, it is associated with illicit drug use. In some families, it is associated with both alcohol and illicit drugs.

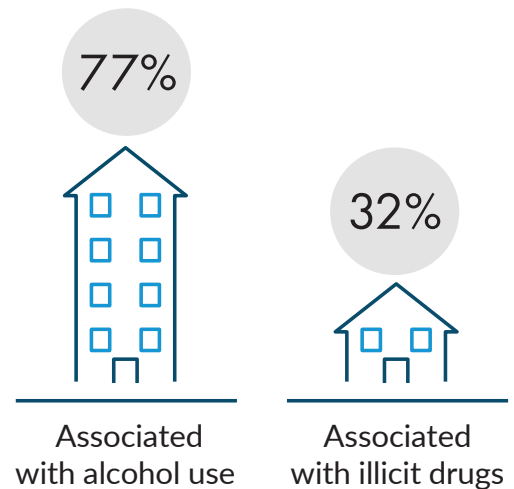
CHILDREN LIVING WITH SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE

About 1 in 12 children have lived with someone with a mental health challenge.² Some research has found that at least one-third of parents investigated for child maltreatment may have a mental health need.³



PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Parental mental health issues are a common risk factor for child welfare system involvement, but most families with these issues care for their children safely without child welfare system involvement. Often these families receive support from other family members and through community- or faith-based support systems.⁴

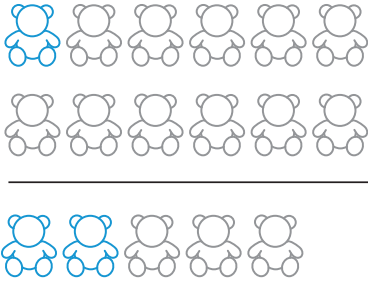


Source: Robin Ghertner, "U.S. National and State Estimates of Children Living with Parents Using Substances, 2015–2019," US Department of Health and Human Services, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy, November 2022, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/f34eb24c1aff645bed0a6e978c0b4d16/children-at-risk-of-sud.pdf>.

1 Elizabeth M. Breshears, Shalia Yeh, and Nancy K. Young, *Understanding Substance Abuse and Facilitating Recovery: A Guide for Child Welfare Workers* (Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2009), <https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/files/Understanding-Substance-Abuse.pdf>.
 2 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH; two-year dataset, 2019–20). See About the Data section for more details.
 3 Heather Ringeisen, Cecelia Casanueva, Keith Smith, and Melissa Dolan, NSCAW II Baseline Report: Caregiver Health and Services, OPRE Report #2011-27d (Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2011), <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/nscaw-ii-baseline-report-child-well-being-final-report>.
 4 We do not report on the relationship between parental mental health and child welfare involvement because the two major federal child welfare datasets—National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)—do not collect reliable data on caregiver mental health.

PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Childhood exposure to family members affected by substance use is common. It is even more common among children who interact with the child welfare system. Yet most children who live with someone affected by substance use do not interact with the child welfare system.



About 1 in 12 children in the US have lived with someone affected by substance use.⁵

Of the children who enter out-of-home care, **about 2 in 5** have parental substance use documented as a concern.⁶

Although some children are placed in out-of-home care, most who live with parents with substance use issues remain safely with their families without child welfare involvement.



Each year, approximately **335,000 children** are reported to the child welfare system with parental substance use identified as a risk factor.



About **136,000** of those are confirmed victims of maltreatment.



And **95,000 children** with a parent with a substance use issue are placed in **out-of-home care**.

Sources: National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, FFY 2019; Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Foster Care File Annual File 2019. See About the Data section for more details.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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For more information on family behavioral health and preventing child welfare involvement, check out the following resources:

[Resources for Families Coping with Mental and Substance Use Disorders](#)

[Promotion and Prevention in Mental Health](#)

[Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

ABOUT THE DATA

This fact sheet uses data from three sources: the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Annual File, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child File, and the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) 2019–20 combined two-year dataset.

AFCARS is a federally mandated administrative data collection system and includes case-level data on all children in out-of-home care. These data can produce statistics that represent the universe of all children who are in the custody of a state's Title IV-E child welfare agency, which includes all children in out-of-home care. We used the AFCARS Annual Files from 2017 through 2019. Out-of-home care includes family foster care, kinship care, treatment foster care, and residential and group care. Note that some authors use the language "foster care" to refer to out-of-home care, even when out-of-home care includes types of care beyond foster care.

NCANDS is a federally sponsored national administrative data collection effort to track the volume and nature of child maltreatment reporting each year. The data contain all investigated reports of maltreatment to state child protective service agencies for children from birth to age 17. These data can produce statistics that represent the universe of child-specific reports of alleged child abuse and neglect that received a child protection service (CPS) response. We used the NCANDS Annual Child File from FFY 2019. The NCANDS subsample used here includes all children who were reported to the child welfare system in FFY 2019 with a nonmissing value for the parent drug and/or alcohol risk variables.

The **NSCH** is a household survey conducted by the US Census Bureau and collects a broad range of information about children's health and well-being and provides information on the national prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, including exposure to substance use and mental health issues. The survey is designed to estimate national- and state-level prevalence of child and family measures. Survey data were weighted to reflect the demographic composition of noninstitutionalized children and young people from birth to age 17.⁷

5 Data are from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH; two-year dataset, 2019–20). This statistic is taken from the NSCH variable indicating whether a child lived with someone "who had a problem with alcohol or drugs."

6 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Foster Care File Annual File 2019. See About the Data section for more details.

7 National Survey of Children's Health (two-year combined dataset, 2019–20): STATA dataset, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (CAHMI), Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by Cooperative Agreement U59MC27866 from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://childhealthdata.org>.