

## 6. DISTRIBUTION OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY PERPETRATOR CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter discusses how the children who suffer maltreatment defined under the Harm Standard are related to their perpetrators and describes their distribution for each category of relationship and for each type and severity of maltreatment in terms of their perpetrators' sex, age, and employment status and in terms of the children's race.

### 6.1 Information About Perpetrator Identity

As part of evaluating cases for their countability in the NIS-3, it was necessary to identify the perpetrator(s) of every alleged form of maltreatment and to determine that at least one of the persons responsible for the maltreatment qualified as an allowable perpetrator for that form of maltreatment under the study definitions. Cases of alleged abuse had to have been committed by an adult caretaker of the child (such as a parent, adult baby-sitter, etc.) or, if committed by someone other than a caretaker, had to have been permitted by a parent or custodian in order to be countable.<sup>1</sup> Cases of alleged neglect had to have been committed by a parent or custodian in order to be counted in the national estimates. Parents and custodians included the child's natural, foster, step- or adoptive parent, or other person, such as a family member, who had legal custody of the child or at least the primary responsibility for the day-and-night supervision and care of the child at the time of his or her maltreatment.

Readers should be aware of several aspects of the classifications used in the analyses reported in this chapter. First, a parent, a custodian, or a caretaker was included in the tables here only if she or he actually committed the maltreatment itself, so the tables given here reflect who actually *does* the maltreatment in question. Thus, where a parent simply permitted someone else to maltreat the child, that parent was not counted for the purposes of these analyses.<sup>2</sup>

Second, because multiple parties were sometimes involved in maltreating a child, a classification hierarchy was established for the tables presented here. To begin with, if a child had suffered multiple forms of a particular type of maltreatment with different severities of injury or

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<sup>1</sup> These were the perpetrator requirements that were applied in conjunction with the Harm Standard, as described in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Although, as described in Chapter 2, there are categories of maltreatment where children were countable on the basis of their parents' or caretakers' *permitting* their maltreatment.

impairment, then the perpetrators of that type of maltreatment were considered to be those persons who had been responsible for the most severe injury or impairment. For example, if a child who was physically neglected had been both seriously harmed by inadequate supervision and fatally harmed by delay of medical care, then only the person (or persons) responsible for the physical neglect that had the fatal result (in this case, the delay of medical care) were included in this analysis. This strategy applied in a similar way at the summary levels of “all abuse,” “all neglect,” and “all maltreated.” For instance, for a child who was both sexually abused and physically abused, the “all abuse” analyses focused on the perpetrator (or perpetrators) of the abuse that caused the more serious injury or impairment. Next, even within this more focused set of perpetrators, multiple perpetrators were sometimes involved in the maltreatment. For the analyses here, the child was considered to have been maltreated by the most closely related perpetrator who was involved. To determine the most closely related perpetrator for these analyses, a hierarchy of relationships was established. This hierarchy is given by the ordering of perpetrator categories shown in Table 6–1. Whenever multiple categorizations of the child’s perpetrators were possible, those who fit the earlier categories in this listing were given precedence over those who fit categories later in the listing.

Third, because some of the types of perpetrators were involved in maltreating only small percentages of the children, the hierarchy shown in Table 6–1 was further simplified for presentation purposes by combining the categories as shown by the brackets in that table.

Fourth, all findings continue to use the child as the unit of measurement, as presented in earlier chapters and as explained in the discussion in subsequent sections. This was necessary because the weights that were constructed to provide national-level estimates in the NIS have all been geared to the child as the unit of analysis. (If perpetrators were to be “counted” and distributed in their own right, a different approach to sample design and statistical weighting would have been required.) Thus, all NIS findings concerning perpetrators must be couched in terms of the child, such as “the percentage of children maltreated by perpetrators who....”

Fifth, this chapter provides only descriptive tabulations concerning the perpetrators of Harm Standard maltreatment. It is intended as a preliminary exploration of NIS–3 perpetrator characteristics. Because perpetrator analyses of the NIS data are very complex and because project resources were limited, no statistical tests of the significance of between-group differences have been conducted, nor have tabulations of the Endangerment Standard perpetrators been undertaken.

Table 6.1 Categorization and Distribution of Perpetrators of Child Maltreatment.

Perpetrator Category	Percentage of Children with Closest-Related Perpetrator of Most Severe, Countable Maltreatment	
In-home birth parent	74.0%	} Birth Parents 77.8%
Out of home birth parents	3.8%	
In-home step-parent	4.6%	} Other parents and parent-substitutes 13.6%
Other in-home parents and parent-substitutes, (foster, adoptive, etc.)	5.9%	
Separated/divorced spouse of in-home parent	0.02%	
Parent's boyfriend or girlfriend	3.1%	
Other family members	5.5%	} Others: 8.7%
Other unrelated adults	3.1%	
Others	0.1%	

**N = 1,553,800**

## 6.2 Overall Distribution of Perpetrators of Countable Maltreatment under the Harm Standard

Table 6–1 lists the hierarchy of perpetrator categories used in the analyses given in this chapter and indicates the percentage of children whose most closely related perpetrator was in a given category in the hierarchy. Note that the majority of countable children (74%) were maltreated by their in-home, birth parent(s) and that other in-home parents and parent-substitutes, such as adoptive, foster, and step-parents, make up the next largest perpetrator categories (5.9% and 4.6%, respectively). Very small percentages of children were maltreated by an out-of-home birth parent (3.8%), by a separated or divorced spouse of a parent who is not related to the child (only about 0.02%), or by a boyfriend or girlfriend of a parent (3.1%). Other family members or relatives were the most closely related perpetrators of maltreatment for 5.5 percent of the countable children. The next-to-last category of perpetrators in this hierarchy comprises other adults known to be unrelated to the child, accounting for another 3.1 percent of the children’s maltreatment; and other individuals (who may or may not have been adults) make up the last category, which represents the most closely related perpetrator for only 0.1 percent of the children.

Because of the small numbers of children in the database whose most closely related perpetrators were persons other than their birth parents, the perpetrator categories listed in Table 6–1 were further consolidated for purposes of presentation here, as shown by the brackets in the table, into three major groupings of perpetrators:

- **Birth parent(s):** includes both in-home birth parents and out-of-home birth parents;
- **Other parents or parent-substitutes:** includes in-home adoptive parents and step-parents, and other in-home parents and parent-substitutes, such as foster parents, separated/divorced spouses of in-home parents, and parents’ boyfriends or girlfriends (paramours); and
- **Others:** includes all other adults (both those who were and those who were not family members) as well as other perpetrators (persons whose adult status or whose family status in relation to the child was unclear, persons who were clearly not adults including relatives of the child, and others whose identity was unknown).

### 6.3 Perpetrators' Relationship to the Child and Severity of Harm as a Function of the Type of Maltreatment

The first two columns in Table 6–2 show the distribution of maltreated children according to their most closely related perpetrator for each category of maltreatment. The bottom-most section in this table corresponds to the bracketed categories shown in Table 6–1, again showing that the majority of all children with countable maltreatment (78%) were maltreated by their birth parents and that relatively small minorities were maltreated by other parents or parent-substitutes (14%) or by others (9%). Table 6–2 also shows a marked difference between the distribution of the abused children by their perpetrators and the distribution of neglected children by their perpetrators. Among children who experienced some form of countable abuse, 62 percent had been abused by their birth parents, 19 percent by other parents or parent-substitutes, and 18 percent by someone else. In contrast, 91 percent of all neglected children had been maltreated by their birth parents, only 9 percent by other parents and parent-substitutes, and none by other perpetrators. This pattern accords with countability rules associated with the Harm Standard (as discussed in Chapter 2). According to those rules, neglect could be perpetrated only by a parent or custodian, whereas abuse could, in principle, be committed by anyone (as long as the perpetrator was a caretaker of the child or the abuse had been permitted by a parent or parent-substitute).

Also note that perpetrators of sexual abuse appear to be distinctly different from perpetrators of the other types of abuse (physical and emotional). Slightly more than one-fourth of sexually abused children were sexually abused by a birth parent (29%). One-fourth were sexually abused by other parents or parent-substitutes, such as step-parents, fathers' girlfriends, etc. (25%). Nearly one-half (46%) had been sexually abused by someone other than a parent or parent figure. In contrast, birth parents were the perpetrators for most of the physically abused children (72%) and for most of the emotionally abused children (81%), followed by other parents and parent-substitutes (21% of physically abused children and 13% of emotionally abused children). Only small fractions of physically and emotionally abused children suffered these forms of maltreatment at the hands of someone other than a parent or parent figure.

The remaining three columns of Table 6–2 show the distribution of the maltreated children in each category of maltreatment and for each perpetrator relationship, according to the severity of their injury or impairment. When all maltreated children are considered (the bottom-most section of the table), the nature of the perpetrator does appear to be systematically related to differences in the severity

Table 6-2. Distribution of Perpetrator's Relationship to Child and Severity of Harm by the Type of Maltreatment.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Injury/Impairment. . .		
			Fatal or Serious	Moderate	Inferred
ABUSE:	100%	743,200	21%	63%	16%
Natural Parents	62%	461,800	22%	73%	4%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	19%	144,900	12%	62%	27%
Others	18%	136,600	24%	30%	46%
Physical Abuse	100%	381,700	13%	87%	+
Natural Parents	72%	273,200	13%	87%	+
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	21%	78,700	13%	87%	+
Others	8%	29,700	*	82%	+
Sexual Abuse	100%	217,700	34%	12%	53%
Natural Parents	29%	63,300	61%	10%	28%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	25%	53,800	19%	18%	63%
Others	46%	100,500	26%	11%	63%
Emotional Abuse	100%	204,500	26%	68%	6%
Natural Parents	81%	166,500	27%	70%	2%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	13%	27,400	*	57%	24%
Others	5%	10,600	*	*	*
NEGLECT:	100%	879,000	50%	44%	6%
Natural Parents	91%	800,600	51%	43%	6%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	78,400	35%	59%	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
Physical Neglect	100%	338,900	64%	15%	21%
Natural Parents	95%	320,400	64%	16%	20%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	5%	18,400	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
Emotional Neglect	100%	212,800	97%	3%	+
Natural Parents	91%	194,600	99%	*	+
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	*	*	*	+
Others	^	^	^	^	+
Educational Neglect	100%	397,300	7%	93%	+
Natural Parents	89%	354,300	8%	92%	+
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	11%	43,000	*	99%	+
Others	^	^	^	^	+
ALL MALTREATMENT:	100%	1,553,800	36%	53%	11%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,100	41%	54%	5%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	20%	61%	19%
Others	9%	134,500	24%	30%	46%

\*This severity level not applicable for this form of maltreatment.

\*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

of injury or impairment: 41 percent of children who were maltreated by their natural parents suffered fatal or serious injuries, compared to 20 percent of those maltreated by other parent figures and 24 percent of those maltreated by others. Upon further inspection of the table, however, it is evident that this overall difference is due entirely to the fact that birth parents are by far the perpetrators for the majority of the neglected children and neglect, in turn, is associated with a relatively higher incidence of fatal and serious injuries to the children (facts that both derive from the countability rules for the Harm Standard as explained earlier in Chapters 2 and 3). Thus, the overall pattern that suggests a correlation between the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the severity of injury or impairment apparently stems entirely for the nature of the countability rules under the Harm Standard. The pattern may reveal more about the study methodology, and the consistency with which that methodology was followed, than it necessarily does about the distribution of child abuse and neglect. For this reason, it may not be as inherently interesting as it may first appear.

To determine whether or not there are interesting patterns of relationship between the perpetrator's relation to the child and the severity of injury or impairment, one should look across the different perpetrator categories within each specific type of abuse.<sup>3</sup> In fact, when one does so, some interesting patterns emerge: it appears that a sexually abused child was more likely to sustain fatal or serious injury or impairment when he or she was sexually abused by a birth parent,<sup>4</sup> but more likely to suffer moderate or inferred injury or impairment when the perpetrator was someone other than the child's birth parent. In contrast, an emotionally abused child was more likely to sustain moderate injury or impairment when the perpetrator was a birth parent, but more likely to sustain inferred injury or impairment when the perpetrator was another type of parent or parent-substitute. There are no notable differences across the perpetrator categories in the severities of injuries or impairments in relation to physical abuse.

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<sup>3</sup> Because neglect is largely committed by birth parents (by definition), there is little opportunity to examine differences in severities of injuries/impairments within the different subtypes of neglect.

<sup>4</sup> Fatal and serious injury or impairment were combined in Table 6-2.

## 6.4 Perpetrator's Sex as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child

Table 6–3 presents the distribution of children according to the sex of their perpetrators for each type of maltreatment and category of perpetrator relationship. Note that Table 6–3 resembles Table 6–2, except for the last three columns. Also observe that a given child who was maltreated by both male and female perpetrators fitting all the classification constraints described earlier was counted under *both* columns, so the percentages shown in the last three columns of this table can sum to more than 100 percent. For example, a child who was physically abused by both his natural mother and his natural father was included under both “male” and “female” columns under “physical abuse by birth parents.”<sup>5</sup> Children were classified as having been maltreated by a perpetrator of unknown sex only if sex was unknown for all perpetrators under consideration. Thus, a child who was sexually abused by two “other” perpetrators, one male and one of unknown sex, was classified under the “male” column for other perpetrators of sexual abuse, and not under the “unknown” column.

As the bottom-most section of Table 6–3 shows, the majority of children who were maltreated by their birth parents were maltreated by their mothers (75%), and a sizable minority were maltreated by their fathers (46%). In contrast, children who were maltreated by other parents and parent-substitutes were more likely to have been maltreated by a male (85% by male other parents and parent-substitutes and only 41% by female other parents and parent-substitutes). The pattern is similar for children who were maltreated by other perpetrators (80% were maltreated by males, and only 14% were maltreated by females). For 7 percent of the children maltreated by others, there was no information about the sex of their perpetrators. This is congruent with the fact that the “other” perpetrator category was the general catch-all in this classification scheme and included those cases where the information was insufficient to determine whether or not the perpetrator was a family member or even an adult.

Note that there are different patterns concerning perpetrator's sex for abuse and for neglect. Children tended to suffer neglect from female perpetrators—87 percent of those neglected in any way

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<sup>5</sup> In analyses concerning perpetrator's sex, age, and employment status, this type of multiple-categorization of children was possible. Note, however, that it was minimized as far as possible by following the nine-category perpetrator hierarchy (shown in Table 6–1) in identifying the child's perpetrator(s). For example, consider the case where a child was seriously physically abused by two perpetrators—a step-parent and a parent's boyfriend. According to the nine-category hierarchy, the analyses would focus on the step-parent (since this was the most closely related perpetrator according to the hierarchy), and only the sex, age, and employment status of this perpetrator would be considered in the tabulations. Thus, multiple classifications of the child were limited to those cases where there were two (or more) perpetrators of exactly the same degree of relationship according to the nine-category hierarchy.

Table 6-3. Distribution of Perpetrator's Sex by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Sex was . . .		
			Male	Female	Unknown
<b>ABUSE:</b>	100%	743,200	67%	40%	*
Natural Parents	62%	461,800	56%	55%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	19%	144,900	90%	15%	*
Others	18%	136,600	80%	14%	*
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	100%	381,700	58%	50%	*
Natural Parents	72%	273,200	48%	60%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	21%	78,700	90%	19%	*
Others	8%	29,700	57%	39%	*
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	100%	217,700	89%	12%	*
Natural Parents	29%	63,300	87%	28%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	25%	53,800	97%	*	*
Others	46%	100,500	86%	8%	*
<b>Emotional Abuse</b>	100%	204,500	63%	50%	*
Natural Parents	81%	166,500	60%	55%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	13%	27,400	74%	*	*
Others	5%	10,600	*	*	*
<b>ALL NEGLECT:</b>	100%	879,000	43%	87%	*
Natural Parents	91%	800,600	40%	87%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	78,400	76%	88%	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Physical Neglect</b>	100%	338,900	35%	93%	*
Natural Parents	95%	320,400	34%	93%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	5%	18,400	*	90%	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Emotional Neglect</b>	100%	212,800	47%	77%	*
Natural Parents	91%	194,600	44%	78%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	18,200	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Educational Neglect</b>	100%	397,300	47%	88%	*
Natural Parents	89%	354,300	43%	86%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	11%	43,000	82%	100%	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>ALL MALTREATMENT:</b>	100%	1,553,800	54%	65%	1%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,100	46%	75%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	85%	41%	*
Others	9%	134,500	80%	14%	7%

\* Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate, estimate too unreliable to be given

^ These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

were neglected by a female. This finding is congruent with the fact that mothers and mother-substitutes tend to be the primary caretakers and are the primary persons held accountable for any omissions and/or failings in caretaking. In contrast, children are more often abused by males (67% of all abused children were abused by males). The predominance of males as perpetrators of abuse held true for each of the specific types of abuse and is most pronounced for sexual abuse, where 89 percent of the children experienced abuse from a male perpetrator.

Also observe that there are sex differences across the different perpetrator categories in abuse overall and in the various types of abuse. Among all abused children, those abused by their birth parents were about equally likely to have been abused by mothers (55%) as by fathers (56%), but those abused by other parents and parent-substitutes or by others were much more likely to be abused by males (90% versus 15% and 80% versus 14%, respectively). For emotional abuse, the pattern is largely congruent with the overall abuse pattern. For physical abuse, the pattern is slightly different, with children more likely to be physically abused by their mothers than by their fathers (60% versus 48%), but much more likely to be abused by a male when the perpetrator was an other parent or parent-substitute (90% versus 19%), and somewhat more likely to be abused by a male when the perpetrator was related to them in some other way (57% versus 39%). For sexual abuse, however, the differences across the perpetrator categories are diminished, since males clearly predominate as perpetrators in that maltreatment category.

Table 6–4 presents an overview of the sex of the perpetrators as a function of their relationships to the children and the severity of the children’s injuries or impairments. The bottom-most section of this table is identical to the bottom-most section of Table 6–3, showing that, overall, children tend to be maltreated by female perpetrators more often than by male perpetrators (65% versus 54%, respectively). Note, however, that there appears to be a progressive decline in the predominance of female perpetrators moving down the rows of the table, from those children who were fatally injured (78% by female perpetrators), to those seriously injured (75% by female perpetrators), to those moderately injured (66% by female perpetrators), to those with inferred injury or impairment (where only 30% were by female perpetrators). To a large extent, this pattern probably reflects both the fact that female perpetrators predominate in neglect, where greater proportions of the children are more seriously injured, and the fact that inferred injury or impairment is most often associated with sexual abuse, which is most often perpetrated by males.

Table 6-4. Distribution of Perpetrator's Sex by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Sex was . . .		
			Male	Female	Unknown
<b>FATAL</b>	100%	1,500	*	78%	*
Natural Parents	80%	1,200	*	*	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	*	*	*	*	*
Others	*	*	*	*	*
<b>SERIOUS</b>	100%	565,000	48%	75%	*
Natural Parents	87%	490,000	43%	81%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	8%	43,000	77%	49%	*
Others	6%	32,000	77%	*	*
<b>MODERATE</b>	100%	822,000	55%	66%	*
Natural Parents	80%	653,700	48%	72%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	16%	128,000	87%	47%	*
Others	5%	40,300	69%	31%	*
<b>INFERRED</b>	100%	165,300	72%	30%	*
Natural Parents	38%	63,300	45%	65%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	24%	40,000	86%	*	*
Others	38%	62,100	90%	*	*
<b>ALL MALTREATMENT</b>	100%	1,553,800	54%	65%	1%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,100	46%	75%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	85%	41%	*
Others	9%	134,500	80%	14%	7%

\* Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

One other aspect of this table deserves comment: the overall pattern of sex differences across the perpetrator categories appears to hold at each severity level. Overall, more of the children maltreated by their birth parents were maltreated by their mothers, whereas those maltreated by other parents and parent-substitutes or by other perpetrators were more often maltreated by males. From what can be determined, this appears to be true for children who suffered inferred injuries or impairments, those who suffered moderate injuries or impairments, and those who suffered serious injuries or impairments. The data were insufficient to allow this question to be addressed for children who suffered fatal injuries or impairments.

## 6.5 Perpetrator's Age as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator's Relationship to the Child

The NIS-3 examined perpetrator age to determine whether perpetrators of specific ages were predominant as perpetrators of any specific type of maltreatment. Table 6-5 shows the distribution of children countable under the Harm Standard according to the age of the perpetrator for each type of maltreatment and category of perpetrator. The classification here was treated just as in Tables 6-3 and 6-4, in that children were counted under every age category that applied to the perpetrators who fit the classification constraints. As a consequence, the row percentages can sum to more than 100 percent. Thus, a child who was physically abused by two other parents and parent-substitutes of different age groups was counted in each applicable column, and a child was classified as maltreated by a perpetrator of unknown age only if age was unknown for all perpetrators under consideration. The bottom-most section of Table 6-5 indicates that the age of the perpetrator was entirely unknown for one-third of the countable children, which represents a substantial minority of the database. This proportion is even higher for the category of "other" perpetrators, which (as noted above) tended more often to include cases with missing information about various characteristics of the perpetrator. Given the prevalence of children maltreated by perpetrators of unknown age, other aspects of the patterns in this table (and in Table 6-6, which follows) must be read very cautiously, since they could easily be eradicated if all perpetrators' ages were known.

Two aspects of Table 6-5 are especially striking—and both of these concern the relative prevalence of perpetrators in the youngest age group. First, younger perpetrators (those under 26 years of age) are relatively more predominant among perpetrators of sexual abuse (maltreating 22% of all sexually abused children) than among perpetrators of any other specific type of maltreatment (where they maltreated between 3% and 19% of the children). Second, younger perpetrators are relatively more predominant as perpetrators of children maltreated by "other" perpetrators than among children maltreated by their parents or other parents and parent-substitutes. Note that a higher proportion of the children maltreated by "other" types of perpetrators were maltreated by a person in the youngest age group, and this pattern appears in connection with overall maltreatment (where they maltreated 40% of the other-maltreated children), abuse overall (where they maltreated 40% of the other-maltreated children), physical abuse (where they maltreated 35% of the other-maltreated children), and sexual abuse (where they maltreated 39% of the other-maltreated children).

Table 6-5. Distribution of Perpetrator's Age by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Age was . . .			
			< 26 Years	26 - 35 Years	> 35 Years	Unknown
<b>ABUSE:</b>	100%	743,200	14%	29%	25%	31%
Natural/Parents	62%	461,800	9%	34%	28%	29%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	19%	144,800	9%	32%	28%	31%
Others	18%	136,600	40%	8%	13%	39%
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	100%	381,700	13%	34%	24%	29%
Natural/Parents	72%	273,200	10%	38%	26%	26%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	21%	78,700	11%	28%	26%	35%
Others	8%	29,700	47%	*	*	36%
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	100%	217,700	22%	21%	26%	31%
Natural/Parents	29%	63,300	10%	25%	41%	24%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	25%	53,800	*	38%	29%	28%
Others	46%	100,500	39%	8%	15%	38%
<b>Emotional Abuse</b>	100%	204,500	7%	28%	24%	41%
Natural/Parents	81%	166,500	7%	31%	25%	37%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	13%	27,400	*	*	*	*
Others	5%	10,600	*	*	*	*
<b>NEGLECT:</b>	100%	879,000	11%	34%	22%	37%
Natural/Parents	91%	800,600	12%	37%	21%	35%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	78,400	*	*	32%	59%
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Physical Neglect</b>	100%	338,900	19%	37%	18%	32%
Natural/Parents	95%	320,400	20%	39%	16%	33%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	5%	18,400	*	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Emotional Neglect</b>	100%	212,800	3%	32%	31%	36%
Natural/Parents	91%	194,600	*	35%	30%	35%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	18,200	*	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Educational Neglect</b>	100%	397,300	7%	30%	20%	45%
Natural/Parents	89%	354,300	*	33%	21%	41%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	11%	43,000	*	*	*	82%
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>ALL MALTREATMENT:</b>	100%	1,553,800	13%	32%	23%	34%
Natural/Parents	78%	1,208,100	11%	36%	23%	33%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	7%	22%	30%	41%
Others	9%	134,500	40%	8%	13%	38%

\* Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.  
 ^ These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

Table 6-6 gives the distribution of children according to the ages of the perpetrators for each outcome severity and each perpetrator relationship. Most differences across the various rows and sections of this table are slight and probably inconsequential—especially in view of the relatively high proportions of children with perpetrators of unknown age. However, one aspect of the table is striking. Note that, again, the youngest perpetrators are relatively more predominant among “other” perpetrators of children than among parents or parent-substitutes.

Table 6-6. Distribution of Perpetrator's Age by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Age was . . .			
			< 26 Years	26 - 35 Years	> 35 Years	Unknown
FATAL	100%	1,500	*	*	*	*
Natural Parents	80%	1,200	*	*	*	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	*	200	*	*	*	*
Others	*	100	*	*	*	*
SERIOUS	100%	565,000	12%	31%	26%	33%
Natural Parents	87%	490,000	11%	34%	25%	32%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	8%	43,000	*	*	47%	36%
Others	6%	32,000	34%	*	*	43%
MODERATE	100%	822,000	11%	33%	22%	36%
Natural Parents	80%	653,700	11%	37%	22%	34%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	16%	128,000	*	21%	27%	46%
Others	5%	40,300	38%	*	16%	39%
INFERRED	100%	165,300	24%	29%	19%	29%
Natural Parents	38%	63,300	10%	43%	25%	22%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	24%	40,000	*	37%	20%	31%
Others	38%	62,100	45%	*	11%	36%
ALL MALTREATMENT	100%	1,553,800	13%	32%	23%	34%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,100	11%	36%	23%	33%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	7%	22%	30%	41%
Others	9%	134,500	40%	8%	13%	38%

\*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

## **6.6 Perpetrator’s Employment Status as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator’s Relationship to the Child**

Tables 6–7 and 6–8 present the distributions of the children who were countable under the Harm Standard according to the perpetrators’ employment status for each type and severity of maltreatment and each perpetrator relationship. When more than one person had maltreated a child, the perpetrators’ employment was classified in the first category that applied to any members in the group, reading from left to right across the employment columns. Multiple classifications were avoided. “Employed” included all those perpetrators who were employed full- or part-time or were on active duty for the military. “Unemployed” included those who were unemployed but currently looking for work. “Other” was a heterogeneous category. It included perpetrators who were unemployed but not technically in the active labor force (e.g., housewife, unemployed and not looking for work, disabled, receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children, on maternity leave, in hospital, in jail), and those with livelihoods that were criminal in nature and therefore did not fit legitimate employment categories (e.g., drug dealer, pimp, etc.). “Unknown” included those perpetrators whose employment status could not be determined.

As these tables show, the “Unknown” category is very prevalent, involving the perpetrators of over one-third of all maltreated children and all neglected children (38% and 36%, respectively), and of 40 percent of all abused children. Therefore, only tentative conclusions about the relation between the perpetrator’s employment status and type of maltreatment and relationship can be made. With that proviso in mind, it can be seen in Table 6–7 that nearly one-half of all maltreated children (47%), all abused children (46%), and all neglected children (48%) were abused by a perpetrator who was employed. As Table 6–8 shows, of the children who sustained serious injury, the majority (54%) were maltreated by an employed perpetrator.

## **6.7 Child’s Race as a Function of the Maltreatment and the Perpetrator’s Relationship to the Child**

The NIS–3 analyses explored whether the children’s race was in any way systematically related to the type of maltreatment and the perpetrator’s relationship to the child. Since perpetrator race was not known for perpetrators who had been reported to the study solely through non-CPS sources,

Table 6-7. Distribution of Perpetrator's Employment Status by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Employment Status was . . .			
			Employed	Unemployed	Other	Unknown
<b>ABUSE:</b>	100%	743,238	46%	7%	7%	40%
Natural Parents	62%	461,825	52%	9%	8%	31%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	19%	144,850	37%	4%	*	52%
Others	18%	136,564	32%	*	*	60%
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	100%	381,675	41%	9%	8%	42%
Natural Parents	72%	273,244	46%	10%	9%	35%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	21%	78,741	36%	*	*	51%
Others	8%	29,690	*	*	*	82%
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	100%	217,655	43%	4%	5%	48%
Natural Parents	29%	63,270	57%	8%	*	29%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	25%	53,850	30%	*	*	62%
Others	46%	100,535	40%	*	*	53%
<b>Emotional Abuse</b>	100%	204,486	55%	5%	8%	32%
Natural Parents	81%	166,518	59%	7%	7%	28%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	13%	27,389	*	*	*	*
Others	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>NEGLECT:</b>	100%	879,003	48%	9%	6%	36%
Natural Parents	91%	800,565	50%	10%	6%	34%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	78,438	30%	*	*	62%
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Physical Neglect</b>	100%	338,888	45%	12%	9%	34%
Natural Parents	95%	320,450	46%	13%	8%	33%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	5%	18,440	*	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Emotional Neglect</b>	100%	212,844	61%	7%	*	27%
Natural Parents	91%	194,597	62%	*	*	27%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	18,246	55%	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Educational Neglect</b>	100%	397,324	46%	8%	4%	43%
Natural Parents	89%	354,292	50%	9%	4%	38%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	11%	43,031	*	*	*	83%
Others	^	^	^	^	^	^
<b>ALL MALTREATMENT:</b>	100%	1,553,786	47%	8%	6%	38%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,144	51%	10%	7%	32%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,179	35%	3%	6%	56%
Others	9%	134,464	33%	*	*	59%

\*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

Table 6–8. Distribution of Perpetrator’s Employment Status by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator’s Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Perpetrator Whose Employment Status was . . .		
			Employed	Unemployed	Other/ Unknown
FATAL	100%	1,500	*	*	82%
Natural Parents	81%	1,200	*	*	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	*	200	*	*	*
Others	*	100	*	*	*
SERIOUS	100%	565,000	54%	8%	38%
Natural Parents	87%	490,000	57%	9%	34%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	8%	43,000	42%	*	53%
Others	6%	32,000	*	*	77%
MODERATE	100%	822,000	45%	9%	46%
Natural Parents	80%	653,700	48%	11%	41%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	16%	128,000	36%	*	61%
Others	5%	40,300	22%	*	74%
INFERRED	100%	165,300	35%	4%	61%
Natural Parents	38%	63,300	32%	7%	62%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	24%	40,000	23%	*	73%
Others	38%	62,100	47%	*	51%
ALL MALTREATMENT	100%	1,553,800	47%	8%	44%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,100	51%	10%	39%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	35%	3%	62%
Others	9%	134,500	33%	*	64%

\*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

child’s race was used as the basis for this exploration. Table 6–9 presents the race distribution of the children within each perpetrator category for each type of maltreatment.

The predominance of birth parents as perpetrators of neglect makes it unfeasible to examine perpetrator differences in connection with neglect or any of its subcategories, as can be seen by the preponderance of cells with asterisks and carets in that section of the table. However, some interesting patterns are apparent in connection with abuse.

Table 6-9. Distribution of Child's Race by Type of Maltreatment and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Race/Ethnicity . . .		
			White	Non-White	Unknown
<b>ABUSE:</b>	100%	743,200	75%	23%	3%
Natural Parents	62%	461,800	77%	21%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	19%	144,900	79%	17%	*
Others	18%	136,600	63%	33%	*
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	100%	381,700	73%	26%	*
Natural Parents	72%	273,200	72%	27%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	21%	78,700	80%	18%	*
Others	8%	29,700	58%	42%	*
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	100%	217,700	77%	19%	*
Natural Parents	29%	63,300	93%	7%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	25%	53,800	83%	13%	*
Others	46%	100,500	64%	31%	*
<b>Emotional Abuse</b>	100%	204,500	78%	19%	*
Natural Parents	81%	166,500	79%	19%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	13%	27,400	79%	*	*
Others	5%	10,600	*	*	*
<b>ALL NEGLECT:</b>	100%	879,000	71%	28%	2%
Natural Parents	91%	800,600	71%	28%	2%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	78,400	73%	26%	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Physical Neglect</b>	100%	338,900	72%	27%	*
Natural Parents	95%	320,400	71%	27%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	5%	18,400	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Emotional Neglect</b>	100%	212,800	76%	21%	*
Natural Parents	91%	194,600	76%	21%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	9%	18,200	*	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>Educational Neglect</b>	100%	397,300	68%	31%	*
Natural Parents	89%	354,300	68%	31%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	11%	43,000	70%	*	*
Others	^	^	^	^	^
<b>ALL MALTREATMENT:</b>	100%	1,553,800	72%	26%	2%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,100	73%	26%	2%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,200	77%	20%	*
Others	9%	134,500	63%	34%	*

\*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

^These perpetrators were not allowed by countability requirements for cases of neglect.

First, for abuse overall, the distribution of children does not reflect any notable connection between the child's race and the perpetrator's relationship to the child. However, among the specific types of abuse, there do appear to be differences in the race distributions of the children who are maltreated by the different types of perpetrators. Of children who were physically abused, white children appear to account for a higher proportion of those physically abused by other parents and parent-substitutes (80%) than of those physically abused by their birth parents (72%) and of those physically abused by other types of perpetrators (58%). A different pattern appears in connection with sexual abuse, which is the maltreatment category with the greatest proportion of white children (77% overall). Among sexually abused children, white children make up a greater proportion of children who were sexually abused by their birth parents (93%) as compared to their representation among the children who were sexually abused by other parents and parent-substitutes (83%) or by others (64%). In contrast, non-white children account for a greater proportion of those who were physically abused or sexually abused by others (42% of those physically abused and 31% of those sexually abused, respectively) than of those who were maltreated by their birth parents or by other parents and parent-substitutes (27% and 18% of those physically abused and 7% and 13% of those sexually abused, respectively).

Table 6–10 presents the race distribution of the children with perpetrators in each relationship category for each level of injury or impairment. For the most part, there appear to be only trivial differences across the different perpetrator categories. However, two patterns are of interest. White children account for a greater proportion of those who suffered other-than-fatal injuries by other parents and parent-substitutes than of those who suffered fatal injuries by birth parents or by others. (That is, 81% of those who suffered serious injury, 79% of those who suffered moderate injury, and 67% of those who suffered inferred injury were injured by other parents and parent-substitutes.) In contrast, non-white children account for a greater proportion of those children who suffered serious injury by their birth parents than of those who suffered serious injury by other parents and parent-substitutes or by others (22% versus 16% and 19%, respectively). Non-white children account for a greater proportion of those who suffered moderate or inferred injury by others than of those who suffered moderate or inferred injury by birth parents or other parents and parent-substitutes (38% were moderately injured by others versus 28% by birth parents and 20% by other parents and parent-substitutes; 39% suffered inferred injury by others versus 32% by birth parents and 24% by other parents and parent-substitutes).

Table 6-10. Distribution of Child's Race by Severity of Outcome and Perpetrator's Relationship to Child.

Category	Percent Children in Maltreatment Category	Total Maltreated Children	Percent of Children in Row with Race . . .		
			White	Non-White	Unknown
<b>FATAL:</b>	100%	1,500	*	*	*
Natural Parents	81%	1,200	*	*	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	200	*	*	*
Others	5%	100	*	*	*
<b>SERIOUS:</b>	100%	565,000	77%	21%	*
Natural Parents	87%	490,000	76%	22%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	8%	43,000	81%	16%	*
Others	6%	32,000	76%	19%	*
<b>MODERATE:</b>	100%	822,000	72%	27%	*
Natural Parents	80%	653,700	71%	28%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	16%	128,000	79%	20%	*
Others	5%	40,300	62%	38%	*
<b>INFERRED:</b>	100%	165,300	62%	33%	6%
Natural Parents	38%	63,300	64%	32%	*
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	24%	40,000	67%	24%	*
Others	38%	62,100	56%	39%	*
<b>ALL MALTREATMENT:</b>	100%	1,553,786	72%	26%	2%
Natural Parents	78%	1,208,144	73%	26%	2%
Other Parents and Parent/substitutes	14%	211,179	77%	20%	*
Others	9%	134,464	63%	34%	*

\*Fewer than 20 cases with which to calculate estimate; estimate too unreliable to be given.

## 6.8 Implications of the Findings Regarding Perpetrator Relationships and Characteristics

In considering the findings reported here, one should continue to bear in mind the various assumptions on which these analyses were based. Perhaps most important, these analyses were designed to provide a child-based count, not a perpetrator-based count, so they reflect only the most closely related person or persons responsible for the maltreatment with the most serious outcome. This means that other perpetrators who are not described here also may have been involved in a child's maltreatment. A different series of analyses would be needed to describe these children's perpetrators comprehensively (i.e., they would need to categorize each child in connection with all involved perpetrators, regardless of

outcome severity or closeness of relationship to the child). Moreover, without very differently designed sample selection, data collection, and analysis approaches, the NIS cannot provide perpetrator-based counts and distributions.

In view of the fact that the NIS-3 focused on the kinds of abuse and neglect that would be in the purview of CPS, it is not surprising to see that the majority of countable children (74%) were maltreated by their in-home birth parents and that another 13.6 percent were maltreated by in-home other parents and parent-substitutes such as step-parents and foster parents. Thus, even though other persons also might have been involved in maltreating these children, their parents or parent-substitutes were directly involved in committing the maltreatment that had caused the children the most serious harm.

Key differences in perpetrators were found among the categories of abuse, where nearly one-half of the sexually abused children had been abused by persons other than parents or parent figures in contrast to only small fractions of those children who had been physically or emotionally abused by “other” perpetrators. However, sexually abused children appeared to be more likely to suffer fatal or serious injury or impairment<sup>6</sup> when they were sexually abused by their birth parent.

Consistent with the fact that mothers and mother-substitutes tend to be the primary caretakers, 87 percent of all neglected children and 93 percent of physically neglected children suffered their neglect at the hands of female perpetrators. In contrast, abused children in all categories were more often maltreated by males: 67 percent of all abused children, 89 percent of sexually abused children, 63 percent of emotionally abused children, and 58 percent of physically abused children were maltreated by males.

Due to the prevalence of cases where the perpetrators’ age or employment status was unknown or “other,” only tentative conclusions could be made about the relationship of these characteristics to maltreatment. However, it appears that sexually abused children were more often victimized by the younger perpetrators and that nearly one-half of all maltreated children were maltreated by a perpetrator who was employed.

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<sup>6</sup> Fatal and serious injury categories were combined.

Finally, there appear to be differences in the racial distributions of the children who were maltreated by the different types of perpetrators. White children made up a higher proportion of those physically abused by other parents and parent-substitutes than of those physically abused by their birth parents or by others, whereas white children made up a greater proportion of those sexually abused by birth parents than of those sexually abused by other parents and parent-substitutes or other types of perpetrators. In contrast, non-white children accounted for a greater proportion of children who were physically or sexually abused by perpetrators who were related to them in some other way than of those who were physically or sexually abused by parents and parent-substitutes.