

2023-2024 Child Fatalities from Maltreatment

Safe Passage

for Children of Minnesota



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OUR GOAL is a Minnesota child protection and foster care system that continuously improves the lives of children as demonstrated by objective, measurable outcomes



- Ten years of data documenting over 200 child maltreatment fatalities.
- Third Safe Passage Report on Child Maltreatment Fatalities occurring between June 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024
- 44 known child maltreatment fatalities
- 4 more cases were added too late to be included in the statistics, 48 fatalities total



- Child Safety is the priority
- Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) responsibility
- Studying child fatalities for case details
- **Identify areas for improvement**



Methods and Sources

- Sources used in identifying children:
 - media reports
 - nonprofit databases
 - MN Department of Vital Records death records
 - DCYF Critical Incident Details Reports (CIDR)
- Sources used in interpreting the circumstances of death:
 - County fatality disclosures
 - Court records: criminal, juvenile, family.



Issues with Transparency

- Data must be requested by name
- Many county disclosures required multiple requests
- Information provided was variable



Significant Findings



Finding #1:

Child maltreatment deaths are increasing in Minnesota

40% increase from our last report



Finding #2:

**20.45% of the deaths were
due to fentanyl toxicity**



Finding #3:

63% of the fatalities were due to neglect.



Finding #4:

75% of maltreatment fatalities were
three years and younger



Finding #5:

50% of child fatalities lived in families that received
**previous reports to child
protection**



Finding #6

**40.9% Co-Occurrence rate of
substance abuse and child
maltreatment deaths**



Finding #7:

**52.27% Co-Occurrence rate of
Domestic Violence (DV)**



Qualitative Policy Analysis: Common Misconceptions



NEGLECT IS LESS SERIOUS THAN ABUSE

Yet 63% of MN child fatalities were due to neglect.

AND

Nationally, neglect is consistently a significant factor in around 70% of child fatalities due to maltreatment



Child Protection unnecessarily removes children from their families due to their inability to distinguish poverty and neglect

MN statute:poverty alone is not a reason for a screened in case for child protection involvement.



Removal from parents is more traumatic than chronic neglect or chronic physical abuse

Children who are chronically maltreated or neglected have long-term emotional consequences



**Foster care is worse than leaving children
in unsafe homes.**

**Recent studies show that foster care is protective of young
children and infants.**

**Several studies show that a majority of adults who
experience foster care believed it to be a positive
experience.**



Reporting prenatal substance exposure criminalizes women

Studies show that most women who abuse substances during pregnancy are further involved with CPS within the infant's first year of life.

Not reporting misses an opportunity for support of both the baby and mother.



A Better Approach



Reconsider the seriousness of neglect:

- Only removing children who are at an immediate risk of harm minimizes how deadly neglect can be.
- For children who survive neglect, their trauma will continue to affect them throughout their life.



Hold parents accountable for their actions:

- Children are routinely left with parents who are unable to address chronic issues, like substance abuse, resulting in severe harm and neglect.
- Current practices demonstrate a preference for parents' rights at the expense of children's safety.



Manage domestic violence:

- Current state policy screens out reports of domestic violence if there is not direct maltreatment or risk of injury to the child.
- This is in conflict with data that children who grow up in homes with caretaker violence can be emotionally traumatized.
- Better protection of children and victims is possible.



End the overuse of Family Assessment (FA):

- Although FA was designed for use in 20-30% of low risk cases, FA is currently used in nearly 65% of cases.
- Not appropriate for families that deal with chronic issues, like substance use.
- FA should not be used for children under 3-years old



Expand Services:

- Increase services that support case plans.
- Child Advocacy Centers and Multi-Disciplinary Teams are national recommendations for supporting children in the system.



Mandate Consistent Standards:

- Low level of structure causes inconsistencies from county to county.
- Best Interest Factors can be weighed differently depending on the judge.
- Prioritize standardized practices.



Transparency For Child Fatality Data

- Consistent, searchable data patterns
- Measurable intervention outcomes
- Available to concerned public
- Systems improvement for children
- Lives changed for the better



In Conclusion



Thank You



- Additional copies of our Child Fatalities Report are available on our website at:
safepassageforchildren.org
- Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota email:
contactus@safepassageforchildren.org



Safe Passage 2026 Legislative Priorities

- Posters identifying possible abuse injuries in daycares
- Make permanent the Volunteer Guardian *ad litem* Program
- Fiscal Analysis of Child Welfare Funding Streams
- Transparency for Child Fatalities

