

# Child Maltreatment in Mecklenburg County

April 2017

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## Key Findings:

- In 2015-16, DSS received **7,723 reports** of abuse and neglect concerning **14,527 children**, up from 7,618 reports concerning **14,048 children** in 2014-15.
- The number of children reported abused or neglected has increased **38.6%**, or **4,046 children**, since 2005-06.
- Of the 7,723 reports, **1,320 (17.1%)** were considered substantiated.
- The **number of reports** has **increased by 37.7%** since 2005-06, while the number of **substantiations** has **decreased** by 2.1% and the number of **services recommended findings** increased by **67.3%**.
- Since 2007-08, when the gap was the widest between initial and re-reports, first time reports increased 15.5% or 966 reports and **re-reports increased 74.9% or 3,134 reports.**
- Nearly 40% of children reported abused or neglected were under the age of six.
- Nearly 63% of investigated reports include **more than one child victim.**
- The number of children in foster care decreased has more than **39%** since 2005-06.

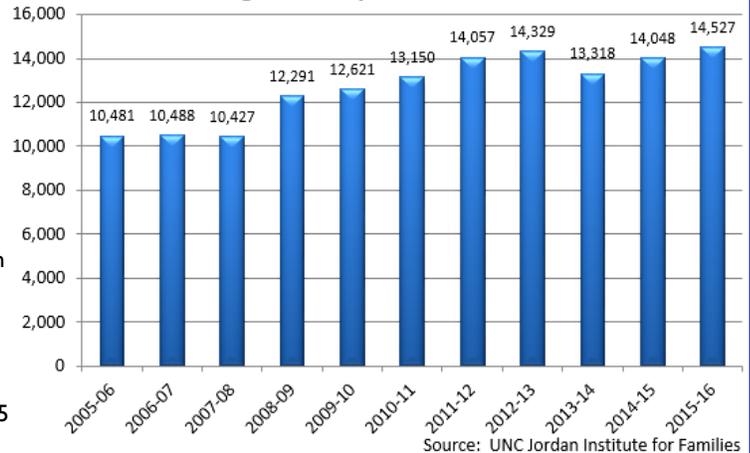
## Child abuse and neglect

Child maltreatment is one of the most significant issues impacting child welfare. The UNC Jordan Institute for Families collects and reports child welfare data for North Carolina on the fiscal year running from July 1st to June 30th. In Mecklenburg County during 2015-16, 14,527 children, or 5.5% of all children under 18, were reported maltreated.<sup>1</sup> The number of reported victims increased 3.4%, or 479 children, from the previous year.

The number of children reported abused or neglected annually in Mecklenburg County has increased 38.6%, or 4,046 children, since 2005-06. Over the past ten years, there was a steady increase in children reported maltreated with the exception of a slight decrease in 2007-08 and a significant dip in 2013-14. Over the past two years, the number of children reported maltreated increased 9.1% or 1,209 reported victims.

The increase in reported maltreatment in Mecklenburg County far outpaced the 5.0% increase reported at the state level over same time period. North Carolina State reports peaked at 134,541 in 2011-12 before hovering around 130,000 and decreasing to 126,067 in the 2015-16. The preceding numbers represent the total number of children reported maltreated. In 2015-16, Mecklenburg County received 7,723 maltreatment reports, 4,869 (63.0%) of which involved more than one child. The remainder of the report will make the distinction between children and reports where applicable.

Figure 1: Reported Abuse Victims

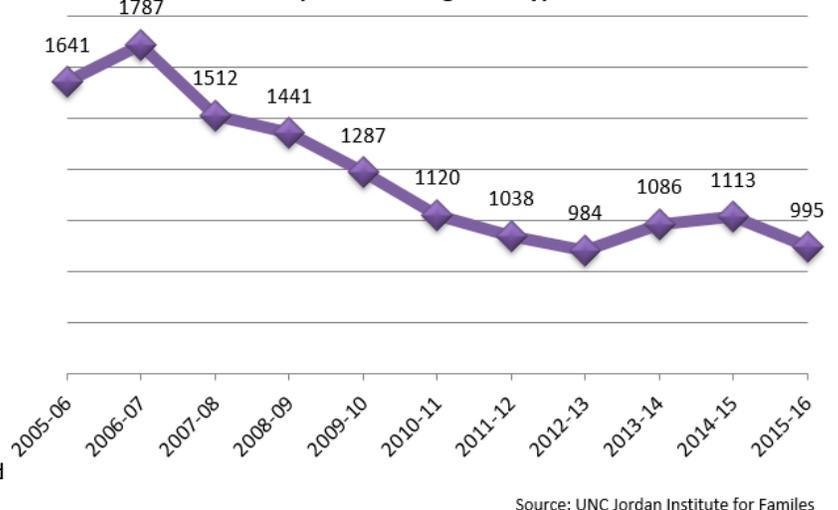


## Decline in children in Foster Care

Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for abused, neglected, or dependent children in need of a safe place to reside while their parents or relatives are unable to care and provide for them. When the Department of Social Services (DSS) believes a child is not safe and a judge has agreed, DSS takes custody of the child and places him or her in a temporary foster home.

In 2015-16, 995 children were placed into foster care, down from 1,113 in 2014-15. From 2004-05 to 2006-07, the number of children placed in foster care increased from year-to-year before beginning a sharp decline in 2007-08 that bottomed out in 2012-13. This decline in the number of children taken into custody reflects a 2008 federal law requiring DSS to invest in families in two main ways to address abuse, neglect and dependency: a) utilize community-based services and interventions prior to removal and b) make efforts to place children into kinship care, guardianship, or adoption as opposed to foster care. In the past year, there was a decrease of 10.6% or 118 children in custody.

Figure 2: Children in Foster Care (Mecklenburg County)



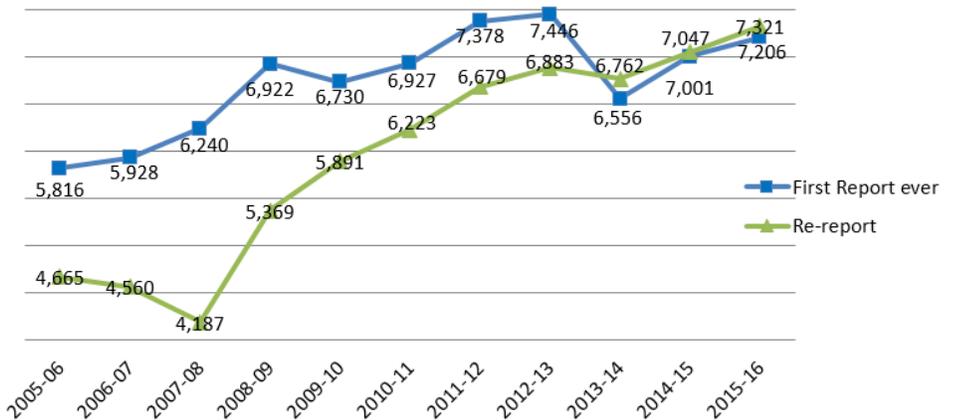
<sup>1</sup>Reports are investigated reports and do not include reports that are screened out.



### Increase in children reported multiple times

Distinguishing between children investigated in first time reports and re-report helps in understanding the scope of the problem because the gap between these numbers has gradually closed since 2007-08, which means that the proportion of children investigated as a result of a second, third, or fourth report to DSS has increased. In 2015-16, 50.4% of the Mecklenburg County children referred to DSS were referred more than once. Re-reports have slightly exceeded first-time reports since 2013-14. Prior to that year, initial reports far outpaced re-reports. In 2007-08, 59.8% of investigations resulted from first time reports to DSS and 40.2% resulted from re-reports, indicating a difference of 19.7% or 2,053 reports, which significantly decreased to a difference of 0.8% or 115 reports in 2015-16. In the past eight years, first time reports increased 15.5% or 966 reports and re-reports increased 74.9% or 3,134 reports.

Figure 3: Number of First Report Ever vs. Number of Re-Reports (Children)



Source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families

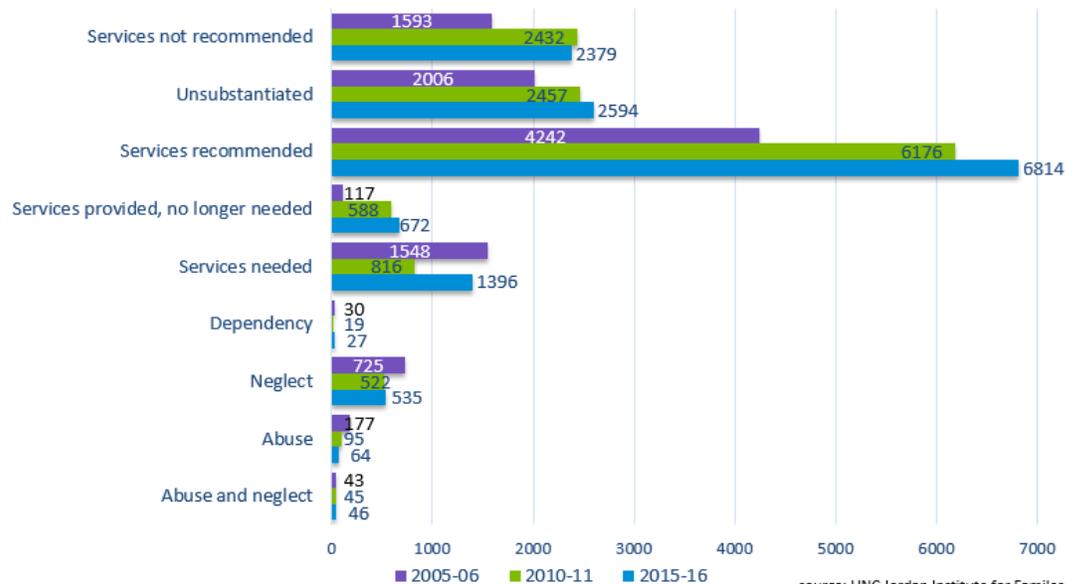
Similarly, at the state level, the difference between first time reports and re-report percentages decreased significantly. In 2007-08, 54.5% of investigations resulted from first time reports and 45.5% resulted from re-reports, indicating a difference of 8.9%. This dropped to a difference of 0.6% in 2015-16 with 50.3% of investigations resulting from initial reports and 49.7% resulting from re-reports. Also, statewide the number of first time reports has consistently exceeded the number of re-reports since 2004-05. Unlike Mecklenburg County, where the total number of reports has increased since 2013-14, statewide the total number of reports has decreased.

### Increased findings of Services Needed and Services Recommended

When discussing child maltreatment, it is critical to distinguish between reports that are substantiated and those that are not. The act of filing a report does not constitute a definitive case of abuse or neglect. A report is substantiated if a claim of abuse, neglect, or dependency is verified by DSS. A report of maltreatment may only be substantiated when it involves abuse, neglect, or dependency by a caregiver. The statutory definitions do not extend to non-caregivers.

North Carolina's differentiated response system involves two assessment tracks, Investigative and Family Assessments, which are selected based on the type of allegation in the report. Investigative Assessments have four possible case findings: abuse, abuse & neglect, neglect, and dependency. Family Assessments have four additional case finding possibilities: services needed, services not recommended, services provided-no longer needed, and services recommended.<sup>2</sup> Because a report may involve multiple children, each with their own finding, complaint analysis reflects the most severe finding for each report where each report is counted only once.

Figure 4: Complaint Findings (Children)



source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families

<sup>2</sup>Definitions of these terms can be found on page 6 of this report.

### Increase in investigated reports, decrease in substantiations

In 2015-16, 17.0% (1,320) of the 7,723 reports were considered substantiated. These cases involved 2,740 children. Figure 4 graphs complaint findings breaking out the six substantiation categories for the years 2005-06, 2010-11, and 2015-16. Of the six substantiation categories, “services needed” is consistently the most common finding and dependency is consistently the least. While not a substantiation, findings of “services recommended” has increased at the highest rate.

In 2015-16, Family Assessments found that 6,814 children cited in 3,685 (47.7%) reports were recommended for services, 1,443 (18.7%) reports concerning 2,594 children were deemed unsubstantiated, 2,379 children cited in 1,275 (16.5%) reports were not recommended for services, and 1,396 children cited in 665 (8.6%) reports were in need of services. Investigative Assessments found that 535 children cited in 230 (3.0%) reports were victims of neglect, 672 children cited in 317 (4.1%) reports were provided services but services are no longer needed, 64 children cited in 48 (0.6%) reports involving were victims of abuse, 46 children cited in 40 (0.5%) were victims of abuse and neglect, and 27 children cited in 20 (0.3%) reports were victims of dependency.

Figure 5: Investigation Findings

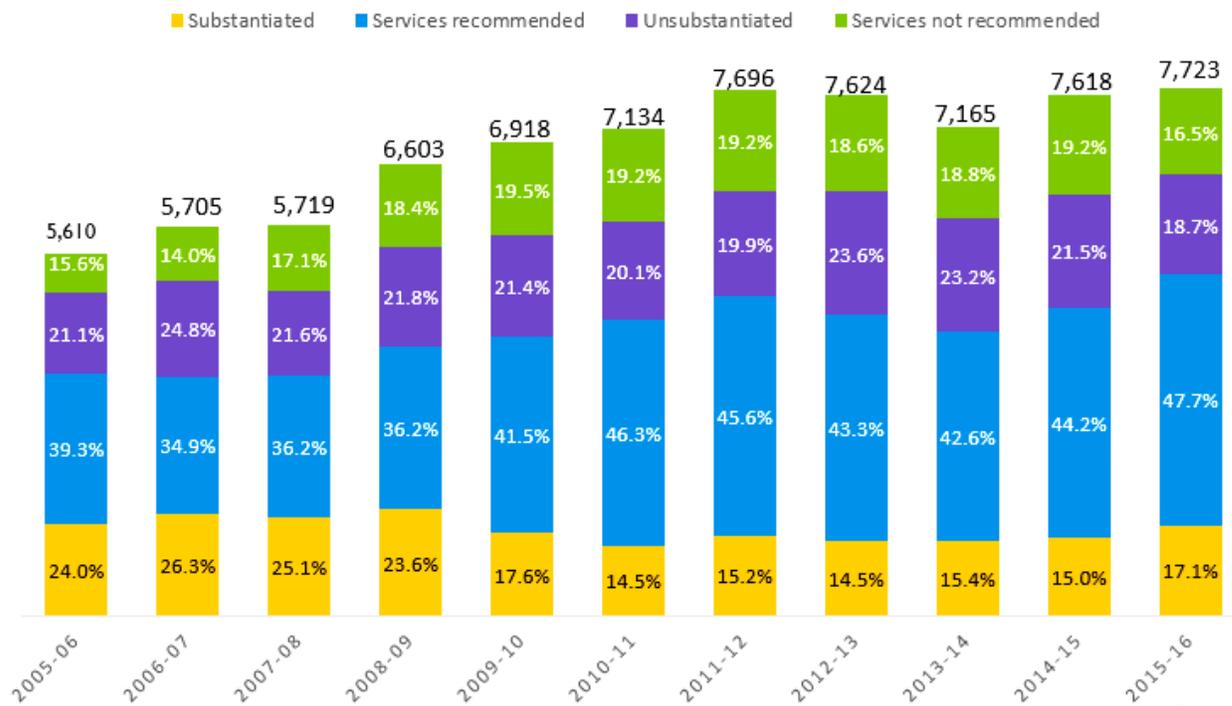


Figure 5 groups the six substantiation categories and displays the trend over the past ten years. Since 2005-06, the number of investigated reports increased 37.7%, from 5,610 in 2005-06 to 7,723 in 2015-16. Concurrently, the number of substantiations decreased 2.1%, from 1,348 substantiations in 2005-06 to 1,320 substantiations in 2015-16. The number of “services recommended” findings increased 67.3%, from 2,203 reports to 3,685 reports. Increases in both investigated re-reports and in services recommended findings occur in the years following the enactment of Fostering Connections legislation in 2008 which requires DSS to prioritize placement with relatives and to increase supports for families. It is unclear why substantiations decreased slightly while reports increased at a high rate. Experience of our advocates indicate that it may reflect a practice of placing children with kin and providing services prior to substantiation but there are limitations on the availability of data in this area.

### Reports do not vary by age

After a slight decrease in the number of children reported maltreated in Mecklenburg County between 2012-13 and 2013-14, the current fiscal year saw an increase in reports for both sexes. There were 118 (7.3%) more males and 361 (10.9%) more females reported in 2015-16 than in 2014-15. Since 2005-06, reports have trended upward, with males experiencing a 34.4% (1,873 children) increase and females experiencing a 43.2% (2,173 children) increase over this time period. Since 2005, the male child population grew 24.4% and the female child population grew 29.1%.

During the same time period, North Carolina State saw a slight decrease in the number of males and females reported maltreated. In 2015-16, 2,520 (3.8%) fewer males and 1,629 (2.5%) fewer females were reported than in 2014-15. Furthermore, the increase at the state level over the past ten years is less dramatic than that seen in Mecklenburg County, with 5.5% (3,316 children) more males and 4.5% (2,702 children) more females reported in 2015-16 than in 2005-06. Since 2005, the male child population of North Carolina grew 12.0% and the female youth population grew 12.8%.

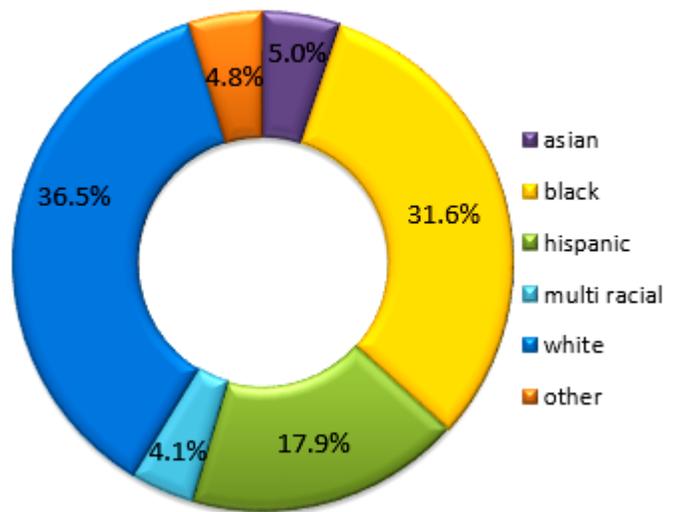
**Children of color are reported at higher rates**

Racial disparities exist in the rates at which maltreatment reports are made. Children of color are consistently reported maltreated at higher rates. It is important to note that this finding does not indicate that children of color are abused more frequently than white children. It likely indicates that reports are made at disproportionate rates for families of color. Unfortunately, complaint findings by demographics are not reported.

Since 2005-06, black children consistently accounted for more than half of all children reported abused or neglected in Mecklenburg County. In 2015-16, 59.5% (8,639) of children reported maltreated in Mecklenburg County were identified as black, 26.6% (3,857) were identified as an “other” race, and 13.9% (2,021) identified as white. The percentage of children reported maltreated who were identified as white decreased by 5.9% (127) over the past ten years. In contrast, the percentage of reported victims who were identified as black increased by 46.5% (2,740) and the percentage of reported victims who were identified as an “other” race increased by 58.6% (1,425).

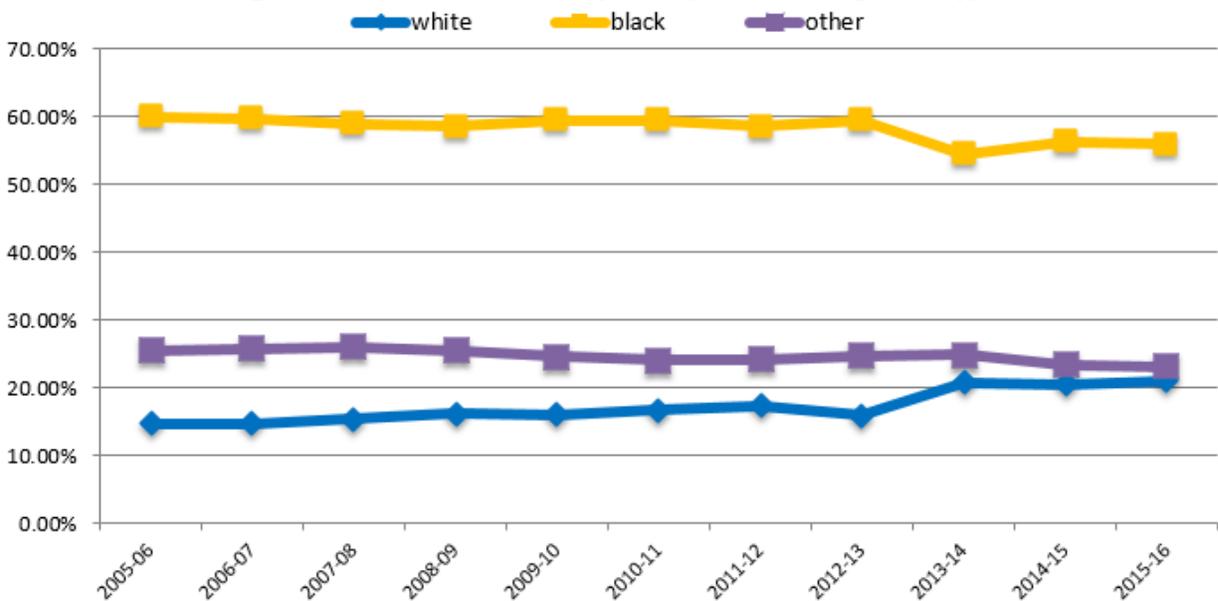
These findings are particularly noteworthy considering the racial makeup of Mecklenburg County as a whole. While black children comprised 59.5% of maltreatment reports, they represented only 31.6% of the county population. White children, on the other hand, accounted for only 13.9% of reports but represented 36.5% of the population.

**Figure 6: Mecklenburg County, under 18**



ACS 2015, 1 year estimates, nonexclusive

**Figure 7: Reported Victims by Race (Mecklenburg County)**



Source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families

In terms of ethnicity, which is collected separately, 17.5% of children reported maltreated identified as Hispanic in 2015-16.

In 2015-16, 65.8% (655) of the 995 children in custody in Mecklenburg County were identified as black, 13.1% (130) were identified as white, and 21.1% (210) were identified as an “other” race. In terms of ethnicity, 10.2% (101) of children in custody were identified as Hispanic and 89.8% (894) were identified as non-Hispanic. Along lines of sex, females accounted for 48.9% (487) of children in custody and males accounted for 51.1% (508).

At the state level, 32.4% (5,158) of the 15,908 children in custody in 2015-16 were identified as black, 55.0% (8,741) were identified as White, and 9.8% (1,562) were identified as other or as American Indian/Alaskan. Along ethnic lines, 8.1% (1,294) were identified as Hispanic and 91.9% (14,614) were identified as non-Hispanic. Females accounted for 48.2% of children in custody and males accounted for 51.8%. Similar to children for whom reports were made in Mecklenburg County, children in Foster Care were more likely to be between the ages of 0 and 5 than in other age groups, with 39.4% or 6,264 of the 15,908 children falling into this age group.

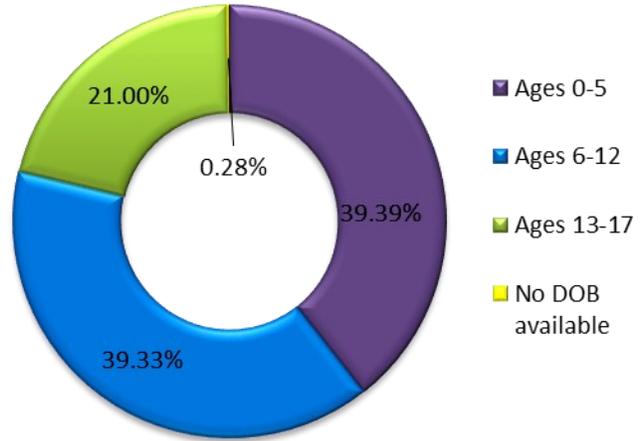
### Children under 6 reported most often

Age is measured as the age of a child at the time of the first report received during the year. For 2015-16, 39.4% (5,722) of children reported abused or neglected in Mecklenburg County were under age 6, 39.3% (5,713) of children were 6- to 12-years-old, and 21% (3,051) of children were 13- to 17-years-old at the time of their first report. In 2015, children under 6 accounted 27.9% of all children living in households.<sup>3</sup>

These percentages are similar to those found at the state level, where 39.7% (50,023) of children reported abused or neglected were under age 6, 39.2% (49,471) were 6- to 12-years-old, and 20.8% (26,162) were 13- to 17-years-old at the time of their first report. In a small number of cases, 411, no date of birth was available.

In 2015, children under age 6 accounted for 28% of the youth population in households of North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 9: Reported Victims by Age of First Report, Mecklenburg County

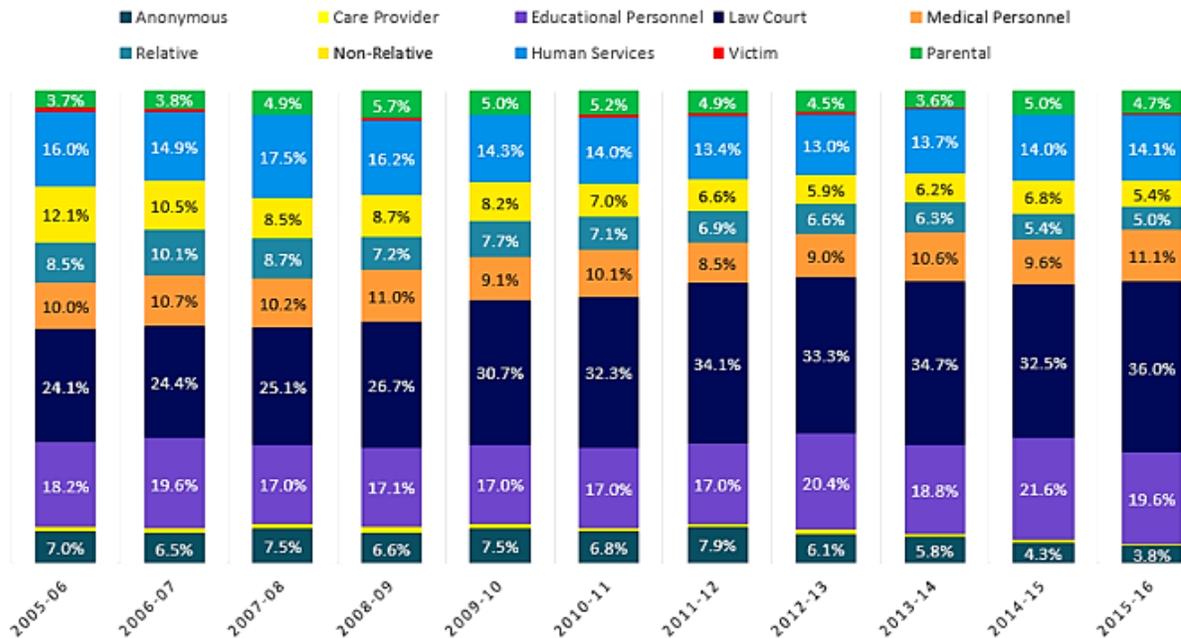


Source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families, 2015-16

### Maltreatment most often reported by law enforcement and the courts

To protect the youth of our community, reporting abuse or neglect is not only essential, it is **mandatory**. North Carolina law mandates that any person or institution that suspects a child is abused, neglected, or dependent must make a report to the county Department of Social Services at **704.336. CARE (2273)**.

Figure 10: Report Referral Source



Source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families

In Mecklenburg County, the greatest percentage of maltreatment reports have consistently come from law enforcement or the court system, followed by educational personnel and human services. Less than 1% of reports came from individuals designated as “care providers” and less than 1% of reports came from victims themselves.

<sup>3</sup>Does not include children living in group homes.

<sup>4</sup>Age data for Mecklenburg County and North Carolina are presented in categories that do not correspond directly to the UNC Jordan Institute for Families data, precluding further direct comparisons on age variables.

## About

The purpose of this document is to compile publicly-available data on child maltreatment to inform concerned stakeholders. It is produced annually for Child Abuse Prevention Month. In the future, Council for Children's Rights will continue its endeavor to include additional data points, to diversify data sources, and to interrogate the data more critically.

Beginning in 1983, April was nationally designated as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Council for Children's Rights chairs the Mecklenburg County Child Abuse Prevention Team. This collaborative committee spearheads a public awareness campaign to educate the community about mandatory reporting and implements a school-based initiative to protect the physical and mental health of our children. Part of this campaign involves planting "Pinwheels for Prevention" gardens around the community to ensure that people notice and stand-up for children. As the numbers throughout indicate, the majority of child abuse reports come from individuals working directly with children. However, those numbers fail to reflect the true prevalence of abuse and neglect, as they are largely underreported. Our organization and the committee understand that, to ensure every child's safety, the community must be educated on the definitions of child abuse, the signs exhibited by a child who is abused, and the ways in which individuals can intervene to potentially save the life of an abused child.

Protecting children is the responsibility of every adult.

**If there is a concern, it needs to be reported to Youth & Family Services at 704. 336. CARE (2273).**

### Definitions and Data Notes:

- Reports are "investigated reports" and do not include reports that are screened out
- Reports vs. Children: a report may contain multiple children
- Abused: inflicting physical harm on a child; allowing someone else to inflict physical harm on a child; creating an environment with substantial risk of physical injury; creating or allowing serious emotional damage on a child; encouraging/directing child to commit delinquent acts.
- Neglected: guardian has failed to provide proper care, discipline, supervision, medical attention, or is abandoned.
- Dependent: child needs placement because s/he either has no guardian or the current guardian is unable to provide adequate care/ supervision.<sup>5</sup>
- Services needed: similar to what used to be called a substantiation, requiring involuntary child protective services.
- Services provided-no longer needed: indicates that risk was high enough, at one time, to require involuntary services.<sup>6</sup>
- Substantiation: the sum of six categories: abuse, neglect, abuse & neglect, dependency, services needed, and services provided-no longer needed.
- Services recommended: when the future risk of harm to the child is found to be low and the recommendations are voluntary.

<sup>5</sup>[N.C.G.S. § 7B-101](#)

<sup>6</sup>NC Division of Social Services, Family Services Manual, 2008

## Data Source Information

**Child maltreatment and foster care data used in this report is from UNC Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families, part of the UNC School of Social Work.** Data is found through the Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food and Nutrition Services in North Carolina and is available for all counties in North Carolina: <http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/>

**Population data found in this report is from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey Office:** United States Census Bureau / American FactFinder. 2015 American Community Survey. U. S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey Office, 2015. Web. 1 October 2016 <<http://factfinder2.census.gov>>.

### Prepared by:

#### Council for Children's Rights

601 East Fifth Street Suite 510, Charlotte, North Carolina 28202, (704)372-7961

A copy of this report is also available for download and sharing at our web site: [www.cfcrights.org](http://www.cfcrights.org)

**Authors:** Emily R. Tamilin, M.A., *Director of Research & Policy*; Kriti Yadav, M.A., *Research Associate*

