

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHILD ABUSE



ONE  **PLACE**
CREATING HOPE FOR FAMILIES

INTRODUCTION

Much is understood about the impact of child abuse and neglect on a child's overall well-being and long-term trajectory—and the immediate, short-term economic impact. However, only in recent years have details about the long-term economic impacts of child maltreatment become increasingly clear.

The long-term burden of child maltreatment poses a staggering social and economic cost to society. From estimated productivity losses to long-term support for psychological illness, the economic impact of child abuse and neglect is tremendous—and results in unimaginable losses for communities across the United States.



Protecting and nurturing the generation of tomorrow is everyone's responsibility—one that starts by spreading awareness of child abuse and neglect, building community supports, and advocating for new policies to support parents and caregivers. Child maltreatment is a preventable crisis—and it's one that requires a comprehensive approach to improve the lives of child victims and ensure a stronger future. By striving toward a society free of child abuse and neglect, the United States economy will also dramatically improve.

THE PROBLEM

The National Economic Cost of Child Abuse

According to a 2018 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “the estimated average lifetime cost per victim of nonfatal child maltreatment includes a multitude of factors: Childhood healthcare costs, adult medical costs, loss of productivity, child welfare costs, criminal justice costs and special education costs” (*The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*).

Because of the multidimensional work required to support child victims of abuse and neglect, the costs per year are astronomical. In the United States alone, the total lifetime cost associated with just one year of confirmed cases of child maltreatment is estimated at **\$428 billion** (*The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*).



In 2010 dollars, the estimated average lifetime cost per victim of nonfatal child maltreatment was estimated at **\$210,012**, which included the following costs:



In the event that a child dies as a result of child abuse or neglect, the average lifetime cost is estimated to be substantially higher: **\$1,272,900**, which includes **\$14,100** in medical costs and **\$1,258,800** in productivity costs—the potential loss of a lifetime of work and contributions to society (*The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*).

All of the costs associated with child maltreatment place a distinct and substantial burden on the U.S. economy, underscoring the importance of child abuse prevention and intervention efforts to reduce the prevalence of maltreatment across the United States.

To best understand the complex impact of child maltreatment on the economic longevity of the country, the costs of child abuse and neglect can be separated into two categories: Direct and indirect costs.

The Direct Costs of Child Abuse

Direct costs associated with child maltreatment include the short-term and long-term costs of immediate medical attention, mental health services, interaction with the child welfare system, and law enforcement costs required to address maltreatment.

After a child suffers abuse or neglect in the United States, the total estimated cost per year in services is estimated to be:

HOSPITALIZATION:
\$6,206,385,000

CHRONIC HEALTH PROBLEMS:
\$2,987,957,400

MENTAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM:
\$425,110,400

CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM:
\$14,400,000,000

LAW ENFORCEMENT:
\$24,709,800

JUDICIAL SYSTEM:
\$341,174,702

*(Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States,
Suzette Fromm Reed, Ph.D.)*

The Indirect Costs of Child Abuse

The long-term and secondary effects of child abuse and neglect span greatly—and can have a long-lasting economic impact on a child's entire life. Indirect costs for children who have been abused or neglected include:

Special Education

Children who have suffered abuse or neglect may be more vulnerable to cognitive delays, leading to special education requirements. One study discovered that young children who experience physical abuse display “lower social competence, show less empathy for others, have difficulty recognizing others' emotions, and are more likely to be insecurely attached to their parents” (*A Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants and Toddlers, ZERO TO THREE*). Another study discovered that half of maltreated infants exhibited some form of cognitive delay, underscoring the necessity of special education and its subsequent costs (*National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being*)





Mental Health and Health Care

The lifelong psychological consequences of child abuse and neglect often require the support of mental health professionals and health care services. Victims of maltreatment during infancy and early childhood can negatively impact early brain development, resulting in a variety of negative behavioral health outcomes. “Childhood abuse has been associated with a plethora of psychological and somatic symptoms, as well as psychiatric and medical diagnoses including depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic pain syndromes, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and irritable bowel,” according to a study (*The Long-Term Health Outcomes of Childhood Abuse, Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2003*).

To combat psychological disorders and prepare a child for a stronger adulthood, mental health and health care services are vital. There is a growing body of evidence that underscores the power of mental health services for victims of abuse or neglect.

Positive results have been reported with both group and individual psychotherapy for victims of childhood sexual abuse; trials with women who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) associated with childhood abuse indicated that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has the power to reduce patient suffering (*The Long-Term Health Outcomes of Childhood Abuse, Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2003*).

Criminal Justice

Childhood abuse often results in a cycle of violence; individuals who suffer from abuse or neglect as a child are at the highest risk of becoming delinquent and involved in criminal activity. A 2001 study reported that **27.4%** of maltreated children had a juvenile arrest, compared with **17.2%** of non-abused children (*An Update on the "Cycle of Violence," National Institute of Justice, 2001*).

A 2002 study estimated that "expenditures to the criminal justice system for juveniles with court petitions were **\$18,950** per participant in 1998 dollars, including the administrative expenditures associated with the juvenile arrest and the weighted national average of the proportion of cases that led to residential treatment, community treatment or probation services, and release" (*The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*).

Because child abuse leads to violence in many adults, preventing abuse has a long-term impact on the social and economic costs of an adult crime—from the cost of arrest and judicial processing to long-term treatment. Personal crime in the U.S. cost almost **\$2.6 trillion** in 2017, and direct costs to victims and taxpayers totaled **\$620 billion** (*Incidence and Costs of Personal and Property Crimes in the USA, Cambridge University Press, 2017*).



Lost Productivity to Society

Lifetime productivity losses associated with child maltreatment are measured by the potential loss of earnings. Individuals with documented histories of neglect and/or abuse were found to earn approximately **\$5,000** less per year on average (*Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect on Adult Economic Well-Being, Child Maltreatment Journal, 2015*).

According to the Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States, lost productivity has been estimated at **\$656 million** to **\$1.3 billion** (*Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States, 2015*).



The Economic Impact of Child Abuse in North Carolina

Although child abuse is a preventable problem, estimates show that North Carolina spends more than **\$2 billion** in 2012 dollars annually on the “downstream consequences of child abuse and neglect in our social services, criminal justice, health care and education systems — and in lost worker productivity for the workforce” (*Economic Supports Can Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect in North Carolina, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina*).



In North Carolina, reports of child maltreatment are high. In 2020, there were 108,485 children with investigated reports of possible abuse and neglect—and of those children, **11,295** girls and **11,098** boys were victims, respectively (*Child Maltreatment Report, 2020*).

Due to the difficulties of reporting child abuse and neglect during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of children who faced abuse and neglect throughout 2020 is likely much higher. At the One Place Child Advocacy Center, reports of child abuse increased by **25 percent** once children returned to school in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although some reports of child maltreatment and abuse in Onslow County are available, it is nearly impossible to measure the overall economic impact of child abuse within the county itself without more robust tracking and analysis. County-level data—particularly in terms of the economic impact—tells an important story. One 2019 study analyzed child abuse and maltreatment on a county level in Tennessee, finding that child abuse and neglect was higher in counties with higher rates of teen births and higher crime rates (*County-Level Disparities in Child Abuse and Neglect, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, 2019*).

This lack of granular data, particularly on an economic level, makes it difficult to understand the short- and long-term consequences of child abuse and maltreatment in Onslow County and in other counties across North Carolina.

While the data is certainly limited in Onslow County and North Carolina, the availability of national data is also sparse. Within the past five years, very few studies have focused on the cost and impact of child maltreatment and abuse—and this lack of robust data only contributes to a deeper lack of knowledge about the current crisis of child abuse and maltreatment.

Lastly, as a state, North Carolina has historically underfunded services that focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect—but it is remediable with a more robust economic investment. “A serious investment upfront to prevent child abuse is not only a moral imperative, it is more cost-effective than making investments after the fact to treat its costlier effects,” according to a brief from the North Carolina Budget and Tax Center in 2017 (*NC Justice, 2017*).



Preventing Child Abuse: Our Impact

Child abuse and neglect is a preventable problem—but it is an ongoing crisis that requires a comprehensive commitment to upstream strategies, targeting the root causes of child maltreatment. From traumatic early experiences to exposure to unhealthy environments, preventing child abuse and neglect is possible by incorporating strategic policies that strengthen families and promote resilience.

Although research is still being done, there are indicators that “investments in economic supports for families save money in the child welfare system and, most importantly, improve outcomes for children and families, ultimately improving health, safety, educational attainment, and future workplace productivity” (*Economic Supports Can Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect in North Carolina, Prevent Child Abuse, North Carolina*).



At One Place, we strive to strengthen our community by creating a society that nurtures and protects children. As we work toward a community that is free of child maltreatment, we take a two-pronged approach: Prevention and intervention. In alignment with current research, all One Place programs are designed to support and protect children and families, furthering child development and reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect.

Preventing Child Abuse in Onslow County

All of One Place's programs are designed to serve as a preventative approach to child abuse. From helping families connect with safe, trustworthy child care programs to giving children and parents the tools they need to thrive, we seek to protect every child in our community.

Connecting families with high-quality, trustworthy child care

High-quality child care increases the chances that children will spend their educational time in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment led by trustworthy adults. In addition, access to affordable child care alleviates parental stress, allowing many families to return to the workforce or pursue other opportunities.

Providing family support services and parental education

Evidence-based home visiting and parenting education programs can help parents and caregivers build their parenting skills and increase their knowledge of child development. We provide family support services through our Early Head Start program and our Child Care Resource & Referral team connects parents with vital resources and support to build resilience and expand parenting knowledge.

Building a trauma-informed staff

As One Place expands to deepen our reach and impact in Onslow County, we are committed to ensuring our staff is trauma-informed through various trainings and initiatives. This includes the Five Protective Factors Framework and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), two fields of study that are relevant to child abuse and neglect.

Training early childhood educators in Onslow County

To ensure that Onslow County's early childhood education workforce is well-equipped to prepare children for a successful future, One Place provides trainings centered on social and emotional development, ACEs, and additional topics designed to enhance their knowledge and expertise.

Fostering community awareness around child abuse and neglect

Protecting children is everyone's responsibility. At One Place, we are dedicated to fostering community awareness of child maltreatment in Onslow County. We are also developing materials and support for local businesses to improve workplace policies.



Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

Beyond preventing child abuse and neglect in Onslow County, One Place strives to interrupt intergenerational patterns of child abuse and neglect—a complex and persistent challenge. Since 2020, Onslow County has seen an increase in the total cases of child abuse: From 130 cases in 2020, 163 cases in 2021, and 170 cases in 2022.

"Families today face many stressors. Economic struggles, housing instability, health problems, substance abuse or mental health issues all can place great pressure on families' abilities to cope. Some young parents are unprepared for what it takes to care for a child," writes Patricia A. Cole (*To Prevent Child Abuse, Strengthen Families, ZERO TO THREE, 2013*).

Breaking the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment can start by strengthening families so they have the skills and support to protect, nurture, and care for their children. At One Place, we prioritize teaching the Five Protective Factors: five family strengths shown to enhance child development and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. All of our programs—from Early Head Start to literacy and beyond—work to build these strengths in children and families.

PARENTAL RESILIENCE

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN



THE ONE PLACE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

When abuse and neglect occurs, One Place offers support through the Child Advocacy Center (CAC), a child-focused facility that provides hope and healing to children from birth to age 17 who have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, serious neglect, and/or violence.

The Child Advocacy Center model provides a powerful child-focused environment where law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, and medical and mental health professionals can work together and develop a coordinated strategy to support a child in need. Our approach is based on a nationwide model of child advocacy centers and we are accredited by the National Children's Alliance.

Our multidisciplinary team of professionals responds to reports of physical abuse, sexual abuse, serious neglect, or violence. We investigate alleged abuse, conduct forensic interviews, provide sensitive medical exams, offer family advocacy, and identify vital resources so children and families can begin to heal and build resilience.

At a Child Advocacy Center, a child tells their story only once to a trained interviewer, preventing any retraumatization from occurring, and providing them with a safe place to heal. All of our services are offered in a safe, sensitive, and child-centered environment. We also offer resources and referrals to evidence-based mental health services to help reduce trauma and improve the lives of children and their families in Onslow County.

Since the opening of our Child Advocacy Center, we have supported more than 3,100 cases of child abuse and neglect in Onslow County. Each case is estimated to cost approximately \$3,000 in total—a number that includes the multidisciplinary work required to adequately support child victims of maltreatment.

Having a Child Advocacy Center in Onslow County supports the community in numerous ways, including from an economic perspective. According to a cost-benefit analysis performed by the National Children's Advocacy Center, for every dollar spent on a Child Advocacy Center, there is a benefit of \$3.33 provided to the greater community at large (*Cost-Benefit Analysis of Community Responses to Child Maltreatment: A Comparison of Communities With and Without Child Advocacy Centers, The National Children's Advocacy Center*).

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GET INVOLVED

To learn more about One Place visit www.oneplaceonslow.org or follow us on social media to stay informed on how to support children and families in Onslow County.

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