

Can strengthening national data on child fatalities aid in prevention?

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What can we learn from this study?

According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), approximately 1,770 children died from maltreatment in fiscal year 2018, most of whom (78%) were age 3 or younger. Experts have expressed concerns, however, that this number is an undercount. This report examines the extent to which the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) collects and shares data on child maltreatment fatalities, and identifies the challenges states encounter in collecting and sharing fatalities data.

Study details:

- **Data sources:** NCANDS report FY2009; National Center for Child Death Review data; web-based survey of child welfare administrators; site visits to three states; interviews with HHS officials and other experts; review of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and related state laws
- **Methodology:** Literature review; quantitative and qualitative analyses
- **Dates:** Study conducted between April 2010 and July 2011

What are the critical findings?

- It is difficult to compare child fatality data over time or across states because of inconsistent definitions of maltreatment, differing standards for substantiating maltreatment, missing data, and lack of a date of death (NCANDS does not ask for a date of death).
- NCANDS is a voluntary data-reporting system. The lack of coordination and cooperation among different jurisdictions and among different state agencies was identified as a challenge. Only a small number of states include relevant fatality data from other departments.
- Nearly half of states (N=24) only report fatality information on children who had previous CPS cases, thereby excluding all child maltreatment fatalities among children who were not previously known to CPS agencies.
- NCANDS does not include data for near fatalities, and states' definitions for near fatalities vary.
- Linking multiple data sources provides more accurate data on both the number of and details surrounding child maltreatment fatalities, and multi-disciplinary teaming may be the most effective approach to identifying deaths from maltreatment provided there is a standard data collection system in place.

Why is this important for our work?

Greater coordination, standardization, and information sharing among local, state, and federal agencies would result in a better understanding of the risk factors for child fatalities and near fatalities, which can inform the development of more effective prevention strategies. The [National Partnership for Child Safety](#), a quality improvement collaborative, is convening state leaders to do just that. Further, the [National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention](#) collects comprehensive data on child fatalities from all causes, and it [aims to improve data consistency and quality](#).

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research study. To learn more about child fatalities, please review Casey's [resources on child abuse and neglect fatalities](#).

For additional information, [access the article directly](#) or email KMResources@casey.org.