

BRIEFING POINTS

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Highlights of the North Dakota Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Study: 2005 Survey Results

Study Design: A random telephone survey of households throughout North Dakota was conducted during the months of April and May 2005. A two-staged stratified sampling design was used based on households, with approximately half of the sample drawn from urban households in North Dakota, and the remaining half drawn from the state's rural population to ensure a representative sample of respondents in North Dakota. A total of 455 respondents completed the survey.

Purpose of the Study: This research is a follow-up study to a baseline public opinion survey of North Dakotans conducted in the spring of 2002. The overall purpose of these public opinion surveys is to gain insight into respondents' attitudes and perceptions regarding child abuse and neglect issues in North Dakota in an attempt to develop effective prevention strategies. In addition, the results provide valuable information that can be used in evaluating educational and programmatic campaigns targeting child abuse and neglect.

Key Findings:

1. Campaign

- ▶ Beginning in 2002, the Alliance for Children's Justice initiated a statewide campaign against child sexual abuse. Informative publications, presentations, posters, billboards, television ads, radio ads, newspaper ads, and brochures have been distributed statewide. In addition, a website, www.StopChildAbuseND.com, has been developed that contains additional facts and resources.
- ▶ A majority of North Dakota residents (63%) indicated they have seen or heard the message "sexual abuse steals so much from a child," with a majority of those residents seeing or hearing it on television (77%), one-fifth reading it in the newspaper (23%), one-fifth hearing it on the radio (23%), and 15% seeing it on a billboard.
- ▶ Most residents (84%) have not visited the website "StopChildAbuseND.com" because they were not aware of it.

2. Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

- ▶ If aware of a child being abused or neglected, the majority of North Dakota residents (66%) indicated they would report the case to authorities. One in five (19%) said they would talk to the parents, and 7% said they were not sure what they would do.
- ▶ Half of residents (49%) said they are pretty sure they know what steps to take to report a case and an additional one-fourth (26%) said they definitely know the steps. One-fifth (22%) did not know what steps to take to report a case.
- ▶ Residents also indicated several reasons which would cause them to hesitate to report a case of child abuse or neglect, including: if they felt they didn't have enough information to follow up on the situation (63%), if they didn't know enough about the family to know if it really is a problem (57%), if the abuse didn't seem severe enough (56%), if they weren't sure if the abuse was a one-time thing (54%), and if they were uncomfortable getting involved (32%). Other reasons a respondent would hesitate include fear of retaliation and confidentiality concerns.

3. Levels of Abuse

- ▶ Survey data indicate that North Dakota residents see variation in the harmfulness of physical discipline. Residents were asked to rate the level of harm of certain actions used to discipline a child. Hitting a child with their fist, hitting the child's bottom with a belt, and slapping the child's face were seen to cause a great deal of harm to the child. Spanking the child with an open hand or slapping the child's hand were perceived to cause a low to moderate amount of harm to the child. The results also show that the action a parent takes is seen as more harmful when the child is younger (i.e., age 4) compared to a teenager (i.e., age 13).

4. Social Norms and Characteristics

- ▶ On average, North Dakota residents tended to ***DISAGREE*** with the following statements:
 - ▶ It is worse for a mother to abuse her child than for a father to abuse his child (83%).
 - ▶ Children should be seen and not heard (82%).
 - ▶ The mother's role in a child's upbringing is more important than the father's role (80%).
 - ▶ If you praise children too much it may go to their head (75%).
 - ▶ Parents who spare the rod will spoil the child (60% disagree; however, 20% agree).
 - ▶ It is better if the father is the achiever outside the home and the mother takes care of the home and family (52% disagree; however, 31% agree).
 - ▶ A preschool child is likely to be negatively impacted if his/her mother works (50% disagree; however, 26% agree).
- ▶ On average, residents tended to ***AGREE*** with the following statements:
 - ▶ Parents don't spend enough time with their children (78%).
 - ▶ Parents often feel uncertain about what is the right thing to do in raising their children (70%).
 - ▶ Women are more likely to notice abuse than men are (55% agree; however, 24% disagree).

5. 2005 Survey Results vs. 2002 Survey Results: Significant Differences

- ▶ Significance tests were run comparing the 2002 and 2005 survey results to determine whether the distributions of the same variable over two different years were statistically different. The following results show statistically significant differences in responses at the $p < .05$ level.
- ▶ ***CHILD NEGLECT:***
 - ▶ On average, North Dakota residents perceived child neglect to contribute more to various child behaviors in 2005 compared to 2002.
 - ▶ A smaller proportion of respondents perceived the rate of child neglect to be lower in North Dakota compared to other parts of the country in 2005 compared to 2002.
- ▶ ***CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:***
 - ▶ On average, North Dakota residents perceived child sexual abuse to contribute more to violence and substance abuse in 2005 compared to 2002.
 - ▶ A larger proportion of residents in 2005 than 2002 felt that sexually abused children were more likely to sexually abuse others.
- ▶ ***CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE:***
 - ▶ On average, North Dakota residents perceived child physical abuse to contribute significantly more to various child behaviors in 2005 compared to 2002.
 - ▶ Residents were more likely in 2005 than 2002 to indicate that the rate of child physical abuse is about the same in North Dakota compared to other parts of the country instead of lower.
 - ▶ Residents in 2005 compared to 2002 were more likely to perceive fewer annual reported cases of child physical abuse (i.e., 500 or fewer cases).
 - ▶ A larger proportion of residents in 2005 than in 2002 strongly disagreed that hitting a child is okay when the child misbehaves.
- ▶ ***ISSUES RELATING TO CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT***
 - ▶ A larger proportion of residents in 2005 compared to 2002 knew of a person who experienced a form of child abuse or neglect.
 - ▶ Of residents who knew someone, fewer knew of someone who experienced child sexual abuse or child physical abuse in 2005 compared to 2002, though this difference may be due to a change in how the question was asked. In 2002, each type of abuse was a yes/no question; in 2005, each type of abuse was part of a "check all that apply" list.