

Ohio Family Violence County Profiles: Introduction

Part of an 88-county series prepared by
the **Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project** –
a collaborative project of the Ohio State University College of Public Health
and the Health Policy Institute of Ohio with support from the HealthPath Foundation of Ohio.

What is family violence?

Family violence differs from other types of violence in that it occurs in the context of a **trust relationship** and involves a **pattern of behavior over time**. Because of these characteristics, its consequences are especially harmful and complex.¹

The findings on this county profile help describe the scope of common types of family violence in our county in a single year. Specifically, we focus on:

- **Child abuse/neglect:** When a family member or caretaker neglects basic needs or inflicts physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Neglect is the most common type of child maltreatment, followed by physical and then sexual and emotional abuse.
- **Intimate partner violence:** When physical, sexual and/or emotional violence occurs in the context of a current or former relationship. A perpetrator often abuses power in order to control his partner. The most serious injuries and adverse consequences of intimate partner violence are disproportionately experienced by women.
- **Elder abuse/neglect:** When a family member or caretaker neglects basic needs, financially exploits an elder, or inflicts physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Neglect is the most common type of elder abuse reported to adult protective services, followed by financial exploitation and then emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Self-neglect is an important related issue, yet because it does not require interpersonal interaction it is beyond the scope of our work. Consistent with our focus on elders, we exclude victims under 60 years old.

These three types are not the only important kinds of family violence; we chose to focus on them because of the paucity of research on other types (e.g., neglect of non-elderly disabled adults).

What should I know about these data?

Our estimates of the underlying prevalence of family violence refer to the number of unduplicated victims who experienced a specific outcome (e.g., child abuse or neglect) at least once during the year **2007**. For most agency reports, we took the annual mean across multiple years (e.g., 2006, 2007 and 2008) to provide more stable counts.

For several findings, the numbers we present refer to “reports”, “petitions,” “incidents” or “cases.”. These **totals should not be confused with the number of individuals**. A single child who experiences both physical abuse and neglect, for example, would merit two reports to children’s services. In contrast, a single petition for a civil protection order may seek protection for multiple individuals (e.g., a mother and child) as protected parties. Unfortunately, unduplicated counts are unavailable.

¹ Health Policy Institute of Ohio. *White paper on improving family violence prevention in Ohio*. Columbus, OH: Health Policy Institute of Ohio; 2008. Available: <http://www.healthpolicyohio.org/publications/OhioFamilyViolence.html>

Our figures include both estimates as well as exact counts. When presenting estimates, we **round numbers** to the nearest 100. Where figures are less than 1000, we round estimates to the nearest 10, or “<5” as appropriate.

How can I use these data?

This county profile is designed to **help local stakeholders understand and communicate the scope of family violence in their community**. It is designed to help with grant writing and public education, rather than for program planning or evaluation.

Some findings are presented as a range (see explanation, below). The following statements are some examples of appropriate ways to quote findings presented in a range:²

- “...a recent study found that **between 8,400 and 11,000 women** experience physical intimate partner violence in our county each year.”
- “...a recent study found that **at least 8,400 women** experience physical intimate partner violence in our county each year.”
- “...a recent study found that **as many as 11,000 women** experience physical intimate partner violence in our county each year.”

Data from the county profile may also be useful to highlight specific themes, including:

- **each year, many victims of family violence never come to the attention of authorities;**
“According to a recent study, ___ elders are abused or neglected each year in our county, yet the local adult protective service only received ___ reports.”
- **family violence places a tremendous burden on social service agencies;**
“Since 2000,, the number of petitions for civil protection orders jumped from ___ to ___.”
- **certain types of family violence are every bit as common as other, more widely recognized threats to health and well-being.**
“One recent study estimated that each year in our county, at least ___ teenage girls experience dating violence, compared to ___ who are injured in motor vehicle crashes. “

How accurate are these data?

These data represent **the best available, most recent figures** for family violence in Ohio. They are based on a thorough review of current research and have been reviewed by dozens of researchers and practitioners. Nonetheless, measuring the true scope of family violence is very difficult. Many victims are isolated, afraid or ashamed and may be unwilling or unable to report their experience to trained professionals, let alone to researchers. Similarly, perpetrators have little incentive to report behaviors that are socially undesirable and illegal. To reflect this uncertainty, we present each underlying prevalence estimate as a range (e.g., 3,900 to 4,900) rather than as a single, precise number. In general, we err on the side of caution and keep our estimates conservative. For a detailed description of how we calculate our estimates, please refer to the “Sources and Methods” document.³

Other figures reflect data from agency reports. In some instances, **our figures may not match up with numbers from another source**. Usually, such discrepancies can be explained by carefully reading the relevant section of our “Sources and Methods” document.³

² These estimates are from Franklin County. Be sure to use the correct figures for your county.

³ Health Policy Institute of Ohio. *Sources and methods for Ohio family violence county profiles*. Columbus, OH: Health Policy Institute of Ohio; 2010. Available: www.healthpolicyohio.org/OFVPP_CountyProfiles.html

Can I compare my county to other counties?

Readers may be tempted to compare counties in order to examine whether (or highlight that) their community has a greater underlying prevalence of family violence. For most data sets, however, apparent differences across counties are more due to organizational capacity and reporting procedures than underlying prevalence. For this reason, **we do not recommend individual county-level comparisons for most family violence indicators.**

There are, however, two family violence indicators that we believe are appropriate for making some limited county comparisons. New petitions for civil protection orders and reported incidents of abuse, neglect and exploitation in long term care facilities are recorded in a relatively similar manner across Ohio. As such, we compare each county to a group of similar counties in Ohio. Please note that some counties have too few cases to make a reliable comparison.

Do these data prove that family violence is increasing?

No. Within a county, some data sources may suggest family violence is increasing; others suggest it is stable or is even decreasing. Because most family violence indicators are based on agency reports, **changes over time are probably mostly due to changes in victims' ability to access services.** Even if we cannot be sure whether the underlying prevalence of family violence is changing, these data can help demonstrate changes in how agencies address the problem.

My county's rate looks different than the rate for other counties. So why do you state that the rates are "about the same?"

When comparing quantitative data, **apparent differences are often just due to chance.** It would be unreasonable to expect that two counties to have identical rates of agency reports, even if they had the same underlying prevalence of family violence. Using statistical procedures, we identified differences (between counties; over time) that were unlikely to be due only to chance. After making some reasonable assumptions about the data, we calculated "95% confidence intervals" (i.e., an upper and lower limit) for each figure. When comparing two different figures, we examine whether their confidence intervals overlap. If they do not, we refer to this as a "noteworthy" difference. Rates in less populous counties are often based on few cases, so the confidence intervals are quite large, making it difficult to conclude that the differences are not due to chance.

Where can I get more information?

For a detailed description of our exact data sources and calculation methods, please refer to our companion document: ***Sources and Methods for Ohio Family Violence County Profiles***³ or contact the Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project at ofvpp@cph.osu.edu, 614.292.3373.

