

At a glance:

Prevalence of harm to children in New Zealand



Background

To better understand the level and types of harm experienced by tamariki, we undertook a literature scan around harm in the general New Zealand population.

There are multiple different ways in which children might experience harm. Often, harm is not the result of a deliberate or malicious cause. However, some children in New Zealand do experience harm that is intentional, or easily avoidable. This summary focusses on what we know about those instances.



The focus

1 How safe are children in New Zealand?

2 What are the types of harm that exist for children in New Zealand?



Measurement

There is no single data source that gives a holistic and exact understanding of harm to children in New Zealand. Current data sources include **Oranga Tamariki, Police, the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), the Ministry of Health, and the University of Otago's Injury Prevention Unit.**

These data enable us to look at the number of children with substantiated abuse findings, avoidable hospitalisations, reported crimes, deaths from injuries, and family violence notifications.

However, the current level of unreported harm to children in New Zealand is suspected to be significant. Therefore, relying on official records is likely to understate the problem. For example, the most common type of child abuse in developed countries – simple neglect – is often the least publicised.



Results

Some key insights gained from the data:

- **Abuse or neglect findings:** In the 12 months to June 2020, 12,861 children (around 1.1% of the population) had been found to be abused or neglected after an investigation or assessment was completed by Oranga Tamariki. Of all children in New Zealand, 0.7% had experienced emotional abuse, 0.3% physical abuse, 0.3% neglect, and 0.1% sexual abuse.
- **Family violence notifications:** In 2018, 79,200 children (around 7.0% of the population) had been recognised as having a family violence notification.
- **Reported crime:** In the 12 months to June 2020, around 0.7% of children under the age of 20 reported that they were a victim of acts intended to cause injury or harm.
- **Injury:** In 2018, there were 12,095 public hospital injury discharge events for children under 20. Of these injuries, 282 were from assault.
- **Avoidable hospitalisation*:** In 2018, 31,300 children (2.8%) had a potentially avoidable hospitalisation.
- **Death from injury:** In 2016, 63 children under the age of 15 died of injuries. Of these deaths from injury, 2 were a result of assault.

**Avoidable hospitalisations refer to treatment for illnesses arising from poor environmental factors e.g. nutrition, housing, timely treatment, and as such are considered preventable.*

7%
of children
had a family
violence
notification

2.8%
of children
suffered an
avoidable
hospitalisation



Significance

Although some information exists, a true picture of the current level of harm to children in New Zealand is unknown. Knowing more about the types and prevalence of harm to children in New Zealand would help us to work towards preventing it, keeping children safe, and finding an appropriate agency response to make sure their specific needs are met.



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Prevalence of harm to children in New Zealand



Number of substantiated abuse and neglect findings

- The proportion of children with a substantiated finding has marginally fallen from 1.8% of New Zealand children in 2013, to 1.1% of New Zealand children in 2020.

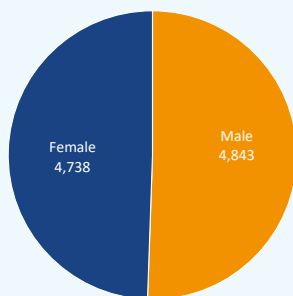
Proportion of children in New Zealand with a substantiated finding



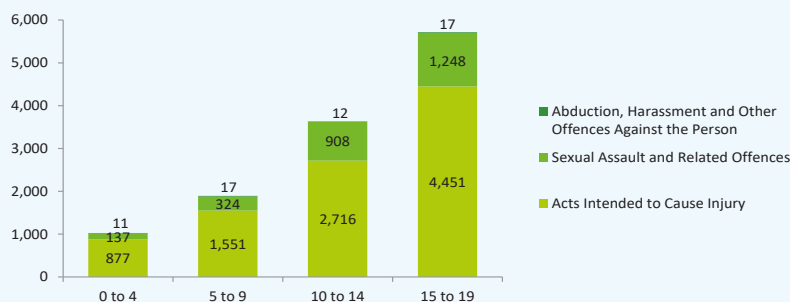
New Zealand Police reported crimes

- The number of crimes reported increases with age.
- 4,843 male children and young people were reported as victims of acts intending to cause injury, compared with 4,738 female children and young people.
- Female children and young people are far more likely to report as victims of sexual assault and related offences, and account for approximately 85.7% of all reported victims of sexual assault and related offences for people aged under 20.

Victims of acts intended to cause injury – by gender



Count of reported crimes – by age and type



New Zealand Public Hospital injury discharges

- In 2018 unintentional injuries accounted for 74.9% of all injury hospital discharges for people aged under 20. 2.3% of injury discharges were from assault.
- The proportion of assault injury discharges per capita has been reducing incrementally since 2009.
- The rate of children discharged from hospital due to assault has declined from 43 per 100,000 in 2009 to 22 per 100,000 in 2018.

2018
Unintentional injuries account for 3/4 of all injury discharges

Note: Data sources are operational and administrative and are therefore updated on a regular basis. Data extracted August & September 2020.

