

Homeschooling's Invisible Children

Report of Findings 2024



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Responsible
Home Education

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Introduction

While many families homeschool responsibly, abuse and neglect do occur in homeschooling environments. Since 2013, the Coalition for Responsible Home Education has maintained Homeschooling's Invisible Children (HIC): a database of severe, often fatal incidents of child abuse and neglect that occur in homeschool settings. The data we have collected illuminate how abusive caregivers are able to use homeschooling to conceal and escalate their abuse. We have found, furthermore, that homeschool oversight policies are rarely effective at identifying that abuse is taking place – much less at stopping it.

To date, credible research on homeschool and abuse has been minimal. Recent academic work¹ has focused on comparative questions: namely, investigating whether homeschooled children experience more or less abuse than children in school. Although this is a valid research question (though a limited one),² we need to understand what happens when abuse *does* occur in homeschooling environments. This is because there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating certain risks and patterns of abuse associated with abusive homeschooling environments.

A 2014 study of child torture victims³ found that nearly half of victims were homeschooled as means of evading suspicions of abuse. In a typical case, victims were originally enrolled in school, but abusive caregivers withdrew them to homeschool after the closure of a social services investigation. Research and investigative reporting from Connecticut,⁴ Iowa,⁵ Kentucky,⁶ Indiana,⁷ and Illinois⁸ all point to withdrawal from school as an indicator of abuse and neglect under certain circumstances. Across this body of work, a pattern emerges of at-risk families choosing to homeschool not for legitimate educational reasons, but in response to concerns raised over academic failure, chronic absenteeism, truancy, and/or signs of abuse.

¹ See Dills (2022); Ray & Shakeel (2023); Shakeel and Ray (2023); Stewart & McCracken (2023).

² This is because there is substantial uncertainty surrounding two key populations of interest to this research: homeschooled children and victims of child maltreatment, especially fatality victims. See Sedlak et al. (2010) and Putnam-Hornstein et al. (2013).

³ Knox et al. (2014).

⁴ Office of the Child Advocate, State of Connecticut (2018).

⁵ Endress (2011).

⁶ Nelson et al. (2018)

⁷ McCoy & LaMarr LeMee (2018).

⁸ Endress (2011); Hundsdorfer & Parker (2024).

In spite of this trend, **all 50 states** allow families that were recently subject of a social services investigation to withdraw their children from school. Furthermore, homeschool oversight on the whole remains sparse when it comes to protecting at risk children. **47 states** do not prevent caregivers convicted of crimes against children from homeschooling. **18 states** only require parents to notify their school districts that they are homeschooling without imposing any accountability to ensure children are educated or alive.⁹ In **11 states**, parents do not have to make any notification, effectively nullifying compulsory education law by creating “truancy loopholes.”¹⁰ **Only one state** enforces the requirement that all homeschooled children be consistently assessed for academic progress, and **no state** requires all homeschooled children to come into contact with a mandated reporter. The current landscape of homeschool policy enables abusive caregivers to use homeschool as a guise for isolating and abusing their victims with little recourse.

These policy gaps have devastating, and sometimes fatal, consequences for homeschooled children. Among **nearly 500** cases of abuse in our database, we have identified **nearly 200** fatalities of homeschooled children since 2000. For the majority of deaths, it was later uncovered that the victim had been suffering ongoing maltreatment for months or years. In this report, we seek to understand these outcomes by drawing on data from our HIC database. After providing a short overview of cases, we examine three key dimensions of abuse and homeschooling: 1) red flags surrounding homeschooling, 2) patterns in abuse, and 3) outcomes for victims and how abuse comes to light.

Key findings & recommendations

The following are select findings and our recommendations based on them. For detailed recommendations in the form of model legislation, please consult the Coalition for Responsible Home Education’s *Make Homeschool Safe Act*.¹¹

Finding: Withdrawal from school to homeschool under suspicious circumstances is a red flag for abuse.

- Since 2000, at least 31 homeschooled children have died from

⁹ See cases #000090 and #000127.

¹⁰ CRHE, n.d.

¹¹ CRHE (2024).

abuse after being withdrawn from school under suspicious circumstances.

- Withdrawal from school is associated with both higher risk factors for abuse and worse outcomes: withdrawal cases involve higher social service history, higher rates of systematic abuse, and higher fatality rates relative to other cases in the database.

Recommendation: We recommend that no one can withdraw a child from school to homeschool them within three years of a child abuse or neglect investigation.

Finding: Perpetrators with prior convictions of crimes against children have been permitted to homeschool – with devastating outcomes for homeschooled children.

Recommendation: We recommend that people convicted of specific violent crimes, including those against children, be banned from homeschooling.

Finding: At least 148 cases involve extreme abuse that likely meets most definitions of torture.

Finding: Abused homeschooled children are invisible to those who can help stop abuse – often with fatal

consequences.

- Fewer than one-third of cases involving homeschooled children are resolved by someone reporting abuse or by authorities intervening directly.
- When abuse is successfully reported, it is most often not reported by a professional: 82% (n=105) of reports came from non-professionals, while only 18% came from professionals (n=23).
- 61% of cases come to light too late, when the victim is dead or dying, or due to circumstances irrelevant to the victim, such as parental involvement with the law for unrelated reasons.

Recommendation: We recommend that all homeschooled students must come into contact with a mandatory reporter through assessments and annual well-child visits.

A note on scope

The HIC database encompasses a specific cross-section of homeschool abuse cases. Currently, child protective service agencies do not systematically report data on child maltreatment victims' school status. Therefore, we are limited to including cases available in the public record – which generally means incidents that are covered in the media. Child abuse cases that attract media attention are almost always fatal, severe enough for criminal prosecution, or uniquely disturbing. Indeed, our cases represent some of the most extreme incidents of child abuse and neglect that have taken place in the past several decades.

We maintain that studying these cases is instructive for policymakers, child welfare practitioners, and researchers alike, for several reasons. First, since 2000, well over 100 homeschooled children¹² have died from abuse that better policies could have helped prevent. This reality is worthy of inspection. Second, the database does not have to provide a fully exhaustive record of homeschooling abuse to give us important indicators of what risk factors might attend to homeschooled victims of abuse. In particular, we will endeavor to show how trends among HIC cases are extreme manifestations of more widespread problems in homeschool settings.

Finally, the fact that our analysis is not representative of all abusive and neglectful homeschool environments should constitute motivation for further research. There are important dimensions of abuse and neglect in homeschool environments to which research has not yet paid significant attention, but to which a chorus of alumni testimonials attests. This report does not, for example, examine educational neglect in homeschooling, a phenomenon with which many homeschool alumni strongly identify.¹³ Though we discuss identity-based abuse, we cannot, for example, capture the painful experience of growing up LGBTQ+ in an unaffirming religious environment without direct testimony from survivors.¹⁴ On the whole, the negative experiences of homeschooled children and alumni warrant far greater research and policy attention. This report represents one attempt to shine a light on these experiences through examining some of their most brutal manifestations.

¹² 191 fatalities, 133 in which there is evidence in public records of chronic abuse and neglect in a homeschool environment.

¹³ Research bears out the existence of this phenomenon. In addition to state data on withdrawal from school and educational neglect, national data indicate that non-religious homeschool students in particular report being behind grade level. See Green-Hennessy (2014).

¹⁴ Okrey Anderson & Lough (2019).

Key terms

Homeschooling: Homeschooling is a famously difficult concept to define.¹⁵ In addition to children being educated by their parents full-time, children enrolled in part-time school, virtual school, microschoools, or private tutorship programs can all be considered to be homeschooled in certain contexts.

Since we are interested in the relationship between homeschool law and abuse, we count victims as “homeschooled” if they are legally homeschooled, or if their caregivers or captors claimed to be homeschooling them when the incident occurred. We intentionally include families that claimed to be homeschooling but were not following their state’s homeschool requirements. The reason for this decision is that, in most US states, lack of enforcement allows parents to homeschool while not adhering to regulations. That lack of enforcement is of interest to our analysis of abuse and its relationship to policy.

Child abuse and neglect: Child abuse and neglect can take on many forms, and US states differ in how they define these phenomena. The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 2010 (42 USC.A. § 5106g) defines child abuse and neglect, at minimum, as

- “Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation,” or
- “An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”

Due to their extreme nature, cases in the HIC database clear this bar readily. Most perpetrators are convicted, or at least tried for, criminal child abuse or related charges. In addition to commonly recognized forms of abuse like physical and sexual abuse, in our analysis, we track two types of abuse that are particularly prominent among homeschool abuse cases:

- **Imprisonment** involves abusers physically restraining their victims and/or confining them to a small area.
- **Food deprivation** refers to abusers intentionally refusing their victims food, or providing them with an insufficient amount of food.

¹⁵ For a discussion of difficulties, see Coleman & McCracken (2020).

While most cases contain evidence of child neglect, we limit our analysis on forms of maltreatment that can be classified as “abuse.” Neglect is a concept that is challenging to define, and can be difficult to disentangle from conditions caused by poverty or lack of resources. We make an exception, however, for medical neglect because 1) at a certain point of severity, its existence is difficult to dispute, and 2) it is a form of child abuse that homeschool allows to go undetected.

- **Medical neglect** involves depriving a child of basic medical care. In the database, medical neglect is commonly motivated by anti-institutional ideologies followed by faith-healing communities and other extreme religious sects.

Perpetrator: We follow a recent report from the US Administration on Children, Youth and Families¹⁶ in defining a perpetrator as an adult who causes abuse and neglect or knowingly allows abuse to continue.

Also following their protocols, we count **biological, adoptive, and stepparents** as parents. We use the broader concept of “caregiver” to include parents, foster parents, and legal guardians.

Inclusion criteria & case identification

To be included in the database, cases must meet all of the following criteria:

1. The incident must occur in the United States or its territories;
2. At least one victim must have been homeschooled at the time of the incident;
3. The incident must be publicly documented.

We include incidents that took place in the time period ranging from the mass legalization of homeschool in the 1970s and 1980s until the present, although the bulk of cases occurred during or after the year 2000. We identify cases via monitoring of online news sources through GoogleNews, and supplement data with documentation from court records, obituaries, and other publicly available sources.

¹⁶ US Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau (2024). Henceforth “DHHS (2024).”

A nationwide problem: case overview

Case and death counts

We have identified and examined **close to 500 cases** of publicly documented abuse and neglect in homeschool environments.¹⁷ The database contains cases from nearly the entirety of the United States, encompassing 47 states and the District of Columbia.

<p style="text-align: center;">475 cases</p> <p>423 cases occurred during or after the year 2000.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Cases identified in 47 US states & DC</p> <p>We have not currently identified a relationship between a state's homeschool oversight and number of cases.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">211 fatalities</p> <p>191 fatalities occurred during or after the year 2000.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">About equal gender distribution among fatality victims.</p> <p>Boys accounted for 112 deaths (53.1%), and girls 99 (46.9%).¹⁸</p>

Tragically, across these incidents, we have counted **over 200 fatalities of homeschooled children**, overwhelmingly at the hands of their caregivers. Because our database is limited to publicly accessible sources, and school status is not always mentioned in reporting, the database is not comprehensive and very likely undercounts the deaths of homeschooled children.

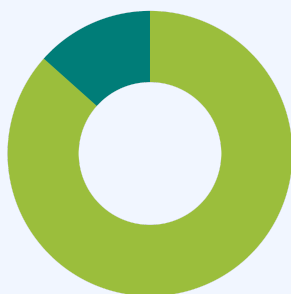
Perpetrators

We consider any adult that participated in abuse, or knowingly allowed abuse to persist, as a perpetrator. In the vast majority of cases, at least one perpetrator was a caregiver. Cases that did not include caregivers all involved abuse that was closely linked to the homeschool environment, whether at the hands of an adult living in the household, a homeschool teacher (who oftentimes resided in the home), or in the context of a cult or high control group living in a compound.

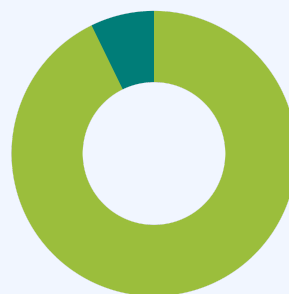
¹⁷ As of March 2024. Fatality count is updated year-round, while analyses of findings are conducted quarterly.

¹⁸ In the United States, boys have higher child death rates than girls across all age brackets and causes, including death by child maltreatment. In the latest Child Maltreatment report, which reports on 2022 data, boys accounted for 60.3% of fatalities, and girls only 39.7% (DHHS 2024).

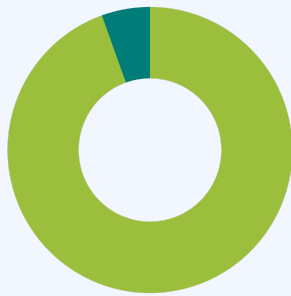
Perpetrator category	Cases
Two parents	221
Mother alone	67
Father alone	35
One parent and partner	25
Two parents and at least one adult	23
Cult; high control group; or polygamy	20
Two foster parents, guardians, or caregivers	19
Other	18
One parent and at least one adult	16
Homeschool teacher	13
One foster parent, guardian, or caregiver	8
One parent, partner, and at least one adult	5
Two foster parents, guardians, or caregivers and at least one adult	3
One foster parent, guardian, or caregiver and at least one adult	2
Grand Total	475



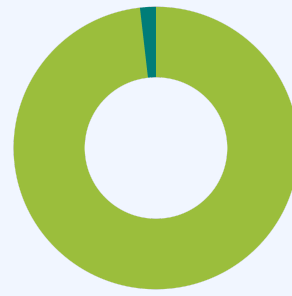
At least one parent was involved in **86.6% of all cases.**



At least one caregiver was involved in **92.8% of all cases.**



At least one parent was involved in **94.5% of fatality cases.**



At least one caregiver was involved in **98.2% of fatality cases.**

Prior abuse

The vast majority of cases were known to involve abuse that extended beyond the incident. 90% of all cases (n=428) were known to involve abuse and neglect that predated the incident that brought abuse to light, while 80% (n=133) similarly involved extended abuse and neglect. Both these figures are likely undercounts because, especially in fatality cases, reporting tends to focus on the inciting incident.

The remaining 10% includes family annihilation incidents, some abductions, and cases for which we, due to lack of evidence, cannot presently confirm extended abuse took place, but we have good reason to expect it did.¹⁹ We include abduction cases because the abduction of a child is inherently destabilizing, and, when homeschool law does not require enrollment or when enrollment provisions are not enforced, abductors can legally homeschool their victims without notifying state bodies of the child's identity. Across family annihilation incidents, even when evidence of prior abuse is not available, familial isolation and parental mental health crises are a prominent theme. Isolation, as we will discuss in Section 2, is a risk factor of abuse to which homeschooled children can be especially vulnerable.

As we will discuss in Section 2, however, the typical profile of an HIC case is a homeschooled child suffering chronic abuse and neglect, and a majority (62%) of cases involve prolonged, intentional forms of abuse like food deprivation and imprisonment.

¹⁹ See, for example, case #000133.

Section 1: Red flags

Key takeaway: At-risk homeschooled children are not sufficiently protected from caregivers using homeschool to hide and escalate abuse.

Homeschooling itself is not known to be a risk factor for abuse. However, in certain contexts involving at-risk children, the choice to homeschool may be a red flag indicating abuse and neglect. Growing evidence from various US states points to a relationship between withdrawal from school to homeschool and “non-purposeful homeschooling.”²⁰ Non-purposeful homeschooling refers to parents choosing to homeschool not for educational reasons, but in a reactive way, such as in response to truancy, academic failure, or suspicions of abuse and neglect.

In states with low homeschool regulation, research and reporting has found that non-purposeful homeschooling is tightly associated with educational neglect. 29 US states either solely require parents to notify school districts that they are homeschooling, or do not regulate homeschooling at all. We refer to these states as “enrollment only” and “no enrollment” states, respectively. In 2011, a study of 600 school principals in Illinois (no enrollment) and Iowa (formerly enrollment only, now no-enrollment) asked participants why they believed parents in their districts withdraw children from school to homeschool. According to the principals’ accounts, about 26% of children pulled from school were withdrawn to evade consequences for truancy. In Kentucky (enrollment only) in 2018, in a survey of all school districts in the state, the Kentucky Office of Educational Accountability found that 62% of students withdrawn from school to be homeschooled were chronically truant, and that the number of homeschool transfers among 11th and 12th graders grew by 63% when the state raised the compulsory attendance age to 18.

Evidence from Indiana (no enrollment) also shows that school administrators can abuse lax homeschool law to hide drop-out rates. In Indiana in 2019, scandal broke out when a reporter found evidence that school districts may have been padding graduate numbers by categorizing drop-outs as homeschool transfers. The reporter found that 3,700 homeschool transfers were concentrated in just six of Indiana's 507 schools, and that these schools cited unusually low dropout rates.²¹

²⁰ Endress (2011).

²¹ In Houston, Texas (no enrollment), two school administrators were arrested for similar abuse of administrative categories. See Mellon (2012).

While educational neglect is a serious concern, a recent report from Connecticut (no enrollment) suggests that caregivers might withdraw their children from school to homeschool to evade suspicions of abuse and neglect. In 2018, the Office of the Child Advocate in Connecticut launched an inquiry into the death of Matthew Tirado, a disabled boy who died from systematic starvation and physical abuse at the hands of his mother.²² In the six school districts they examined, the team found that 36% of children removed from school to be homeschooled were in families that had been subject to at least one accepted report of abuse or neglect. 90% of these families had either substantiated cases or multiple reports of abuse.

Withdrawal from school as a red flag

Our data provide a national picture of how withdrawal from school to homeschool is a red flag for abuse and neglect. 37% of all cases in the HIC database (n=180) – and 47% of fatality cases (n=78) – involve known withdrawal from school, and these cases represent 44 US states and the District of Columbia.²³ From an analysis of these cases, we have found that withdrawal from school is associated with both higher risk factors for abuse and worse outcomes: withdrawal cases involve higher social service history, higher rates of systematic abuse, and higher fatality rates relative to other cases in the database.²⁴

Moreover, while reporting does not often cite a family's reason for withdrawal, we have identified almost 60 cases (n=59) in which families withdrew their children from school soon after a social services investigation closed, or in direct response to school officials making a report to social services. **Since 2000, across 24 cases, at least 31 homeschooled children have died after being withdrawn from school under suspicious circumstances.** While state-level reports have been conducted in low regulation states, these fatality cases span 19 US states and the District of Columbia, representing states with varying degrees of homeschool oversight.

Key finding 1.1: Since 2000, 31 homeschooled children have died after being withdrawn from school under suspicious

²² Matthew's story is recorded in case #000116.

²³ Due to varying degrees of detail in reporting, this number is likely higher.

²⁴ Chi square tests comparing frequencies of social service history, systematic abuse, and fatality rates between withdrawal and non-withdrawal cases yield p values of 0.00 ($\chi^2=51.07$), 0.03 ($\chi^2=4.47$), and 0.02 ($\chi^2=5.51$), respectively.

circumstances, over one per year on average.

Deaths after suspicious withdrawal (2000-present)

Case	Victims	Deaths	State	Policy category	Year
#000157	Conrad Morales, Ricky Morales	2	WA, CA	Assessments without intervention, Enrollment only	2005
#00004 4	Raijon Daniels	1	CA	Enrollment only	2006
#00004 5	Chandler Grafner	1	CO	Assessments without intervention	2007
#00004 7	Chrystal Ramirez and Sister	1	TX	No enrollment	2007
#00004 9	Brittany Jacks, Tatianna Jacks, Kiah Fogle, Aja Fogle	4	DC	Enrollment only	2008
#00005 0	Calista Springer	1	MI	No enrollment	2008
#00006 3	Jeanette Marie Maples	1	OR	Assessments without intervention	2009
#00006 8	Zahra Baker	1	NC	Assessments without intervention	2010
#00006 9	Nubia Barahona	1	FL	Assessments without intervention	2011
#00007 5	Ame Deal	1	AZ	Enrollment only	2011
#00009 2	Emani Moss	1	GA	Assessments without intervention	2013
#00016 0	Teddy Foltz-Tedesco	1	OH	Enrollment only	2013
#000101	Isaiah Torres	1	AR	Enrollment only	2015
#000113	Natalie Finn	1	IA	No enrollment	2016
#000115	Sanaa Cunningham	1	AZ	Enrollment only	2017

#000120	Liam Roberts	1	IL	Enrollment only	2017
#000116	Matthew Tirado	1	CT	No enrollment	2017
#000122	6 Children of Jennifer and Sarah Hart	5	WA	Assessments without intervention	2018
#000132	Raylee Browning	1	WV	Assessments without intervention	2018
#000136	Eduardo Posso	1	FL, CA	Assessments without intervention, Enrollment only	2019
#000142	Takoda Collins	1	OH	Enrollment only	2019
#000499	Arabella McCormack	1	CA	Enrollment only	2021
#000150	Chaskah Davis Smith	1	AZ	Enrollment only	2022

To illuminate trends among these incidents, we will consider the case study of Eduardo Posso. Eduardo died in 2019 at age 12 after being purposefully starved by his father and stepmother. Before Eduardo’s death, he was enrolled in public school, and teachers, family members, and neighbors all expressed concern about his well-being. In fact, between June 2017 and December 2018, child welfare officials investigated reports of abuse at least five times.

While prior social service history should not necessarily preclude a family from homeschooling, we flag it here because children who have been maltreated in the past are at an increased risk for further child maltreatment,²⁵ and prior CPS cases are associated with a higher risk of fatality.²⁶ Social service history is more common for HIC cases with confirmed withdrawal from school than those without. In **34%** of all HIC cases (n=161), families had known interaction with social services, although this figure is possibly an underestimate due to gaps in reporting. The number jumps to **47%** for fatality cases (n=78), which also is likely an underestimate. In **49%** of withdrawal cases (n=89), and **58%** of fatality cases like Eduardo’s (n=46), families had some form of contact with social services prior to pulling their children from school. The five cases against Eduardo’s family were all closed for lack of evidence. A qualitative review of the 24 cases in question reveals that, the majority of the time, families were subject to multiple investigations which were all unsubstantiated. It is

²⁵ White et al. (2015).

²⁶ Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (2016); Hindley et al. (2006).

for this reason that Recommendation 1.1 (below) includes the phrase “regardless of the outcome of the investigation.”

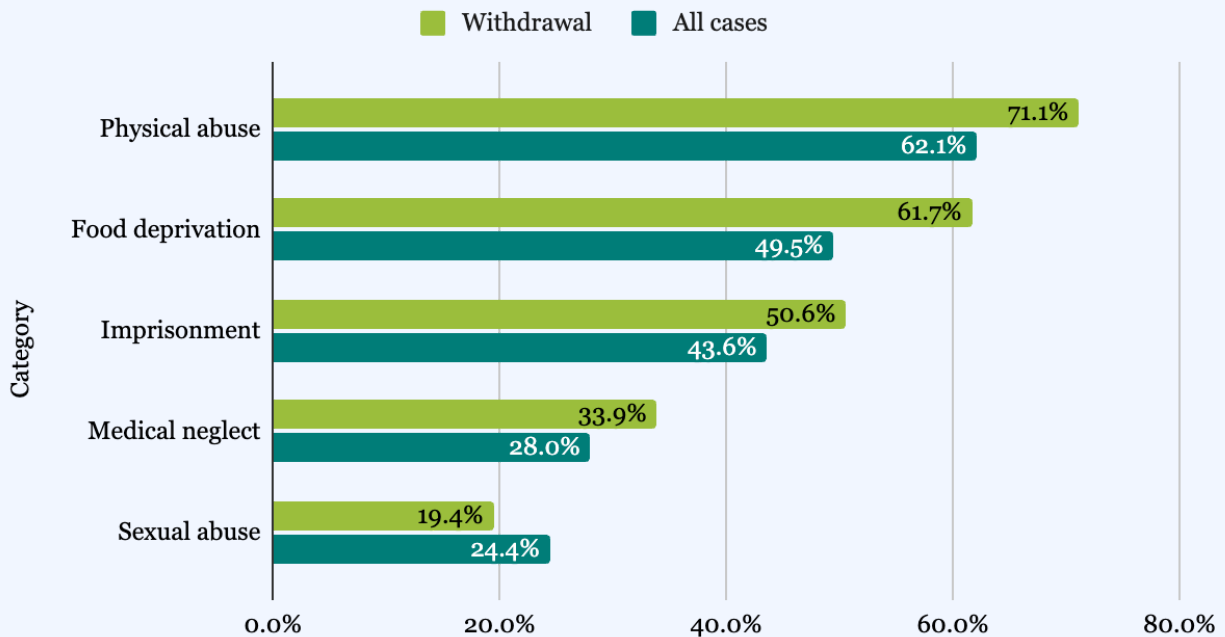
Two days after the last investigation into Eduardo’s family, his parents withdrew him and his siblings from school to homeschool them. Across the 24 cases of suspicious withdrawal, a similarly immediate response is observable, whether in response to an investigation or to teachers lodging reports. For abusive caregivers responding to reports, withdrawal not only removes children from the eyes of mandated reporters, but also assists with control over the investigation. Teddy Foltz-Tedesco²⁷ was withdrawn only months after teachers reported abuse, and when investigators attempted to investigate, the family did not allow them to see him. Withdrawal from school gives social workers no choice but to visit the family at their home, where they can refuse access, whereas a social worker can interview a traditionally schooled child at their school.

Intensity

A qualitative review of withdrawal cases, moreover, shows that abusive caregivers typically do not begin abusing their victims when they pull their children from school. Rather, the abuse predates withdrawal from school, and withdrawal is very often followed by an escalation in chronic, ongoing abuse. All forms of abuse, except child sexual abuse, are higher among withdrawal cases than all HIC cases.

²⁷ Case #000160.

Forms of abuse: withdrawal versus non-withdrawal



In particular, in addition to extreme physical abuse, withdrawal cases are heavily linked with two forms of abuse that we will consider in depth in the following section: food deprivation and imprisonment. As we will discuss, these forms of abuse are associated with isolation because, as they worsen, their effects are highly noticeable, and they cannot escalate if the child is in school or is otherwise appropriately socializing. Imprisonment and food deprivation are also, by nature, prolonged and deliberate forms of abuse. Under certain definitions, they are considered indicators of torture. **72%** of withdrawal cases involve food deprivation or imprisonment, versus **62%** of total HIC cases.

Other red flags

Withdrawal from school under suspicious circumstances, although it is the most well represented in the HIC database, is not the only red flag worthy of discussion. We identified a number of cases in which caregivers who had been convicted of crimes against children were permitted to homeschool.

Key finding 1.2: Perpetrators with prior convictions of crimes against children have been permitted to homeschool – with devastating outcomes for

homeschooled children.

This occurred in states with a range of homeschool oversight policies. In Idaho (no enrollment) in 2012, Melvin Bledsoe²⁸ pleaded guilty to felony injury of a child for beating his then-infant son. He went on to starve, imprison, and torture that same child while homeschooling him, and the abuse was only discovered after Bledsoe and his wife took the child to the hospital for severe injuries resulting from abuse. In Oregon (assessments with intervention), Shannon and Dale Hickman²⁹ served 6 years in prison for the manslaughter of their infant son. Upon their release in 2017, they were permitted to homeschool their other child, for whose felony abuse they were ultimately convicted. In California (enrollment only) in 2019, Trinity Love Jones³⁰ was systematically abused and ultimately murdered, by her mother and her mother's boyfriend. Both perpetrators had been convicted of violent crimes against minors; her mother was on the sex offender registry for enticing prostitution from a minor, while her stepfather had been convicted of felony child abuse and torture. They were permitted to withdraw her from school to homeschool her about a year prior to her death.

Recommendations

Our findings suggest that, at the national scale, withdrawal from school under suspicious circumstances is an indicator of abuse and neglect. In these scenarios, caregivers do not choose to homeschool with their children's education in mind, but rather as a way of avoiding scrutiny for abuse and neglect.

In all 50 US states, it is legally permissible for a family that was recently the subject of a social services investigation to withdraw their children from school to be homeschooled. This gap in oversight is compounded by the absence of other common-sense protections: for example, in 47 states there are no provisions prohibiting caregivers convicted of crimes that would disqualify them from employment as a school teacher from homeschooling. In order to sufficiently protect at-risk children from abuse in homeschooling, we issue the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1.1: We recommend that no one can withdraw a child

²⁸ Case #000426.

²⁹ Case #000494.

³⁰ Case #000134.

from school to homeschool them within three years of a child abuse or neglect investigation.

Recommendation 1.2: We recommend that people convicted of specific violent crimes, including those against children, be banned from homeschooling.

Section 2: Patterns in abuse

Key takeaway: In the isolation of abusive homeschooling environments, children suffer systematic abuse.

The following section contains detailed description of extreme and sadistic child abuse. Readers should exercise caution.

Child abuse can take on many forms, and abuse can occur regardless of how a child is schooled. Risk and protective factors, however, can differ based on school status. Families that homeschool responsibly go out of their way to ensure their children are well-socialized, but in homeschooling families that are neglectful or abusive, children are not guaranteed the same access to peers and adults as children in school are. Researchers and advocates have therefore flagged that there is a unique risk for social isolation in unhealthy homeschooling environments.³¹ Social isolation is a known risk factor for child maltreatment for multiple reasons. In addition to isolation itself being a stressor,³² isolated caregivers are cut off from community support and resources that can protect against other stressors the family might be facing, such as economic stress or mental health issues. For victims, social isolation poses a cluster of risks. When they are socially isolated, victims proportionally spend more of their time with their abusers. Their abuse is also less likely to be noticed when their social support network is smaller. For all of these reasons, social isolation has been shown to increase the intensity of abuse and neglect as well as the risk of child fatality.³³

In the context of our data and related research on child torture, it is important to distinguish between isolation as a risk factor for child maltreatment and isolation being used to enact systematic, deliberate abuse. Research has identified isolation as a core precondition of child torture. A 2014 study examining 28 case studies of child torture found that 89% of cases involved abusers heavily restricting victim contact with the outside world. One of the key forms of isolation was withdrawal from school.³⁴ Nearly half of victims in the study were withdrawn from school to be homeschooled as abuse escalated, and a further 29% were never enrolled in school

³¹ CRHE (2020).

³² Lee et al. (2022).

³³ Lee et al. (2022); Tucker & Rodriguez (2014); Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (2016).

³⁴ Knox et al. (2014).

in the first place. In recent years, research developing the concept of intrafamilial child torture (ICT)³⁵ similarly flags isolation as a core tactic of coercive control, and lists homeschooling as a common strategy of isolation.³⁶

Our data show that abusive caregivers use the cover of homeschooling to inflict systematic abuse on victims. We have identified at least 148 cases that we consider to involve systematic abuse, on the basis that they feature, at the very least, a combination of two deliberate forms of abuse: imprisonment and food deprivation. In our whole dataset, a majority (62%, n=294) of cases involve either food deprivation or imprisonment, and when cases involve one form of abuse, about half of the time they involve the other. All these cases involve caregivers isolating victims from the outside world, generally preventing them from leaving the home.

Imprisonment involves abusers physically restraining their victims and/or confining them to a small area. In a prototypical case, victims are confined to a room or a cage, though in more extreme cases, they can be confined in small areas such as a footlocker or buckets. Perpetrators often enforce imprisonment comprehensively, either by equipping rooms with padlocks or alarms, or by restraining victims with chains, leashes, or zip ties. While imprisonment can be conducted over a short period of time, it is generally totalistic or near totalistic: victims are either confined to a space for an extended period of time (months or years), or let out during set intervals for a permitted meal or bathroom break.

Food deprivation refers to abusers deliberately refusing their victims food. Food deprivation is intentional, which distinguishes it from conditions often caused by poverty as opposed to deliberate neglect, like malnutrition. A common trend across food deprivation cases is caregivers putting locks or alarms on their refrigerator or kitchen cupboards to prevent children from eating. Food deprivation is also commonly marked by regimen: victims are often allotted a limited amount of (generally non-nutritive) food per day, or are fed or not fed depending on their compliance to a set of arbitrary rules.

Imprisonment and food deprivation can be treated as indices for not only isolation of victims over an extended period of time, but also for abuse that is intentionally cruel. The National Center for Child Abuse Statistics and Policy defines torture as

³⁵ See Miller et al. (2021).

³⁶ Fontes & Miller (2022).

protracted abuse that involves at least “two cruel or inhumane acts,” and imprisonment and food deprivation are counted among such acts.³⁷ The database contains nearly 150 cases (n=148) that involve both imprisonment and food deprivation.

Key finding 2.1: At least 148 cases involve extreme abuse that likely meets most definitions of torture.

When imprisonment and food deprivation co-occur, they are almost always imposed on victims as part of a wider project of systematic abuse. Throughout the report, we use the term “systematic abuse” to describe abuse that is intentionally cruel and lasts a long time. This abuse likely meets most definitions of torture.

The following case study is an example of how systematic abuse can take shape among the 148 cases involving imprisonment and food deprivation. As the case study shows, in systematic abuse cases, homeschooled children are subjected to extreme cruelty, which often results in physical effects that would be noticed if they were seen by peers, adults, or professionals of any kind.

Case #000492: Boy and two siblings in Norton Shores, Michigan

A 15-year-old Boy (b.c. 2007) was systematically abused and starved to death by his mother, and his 20-year-old Older Brother (b.c. 2002). The victim was homeschooled. His 7-year-old brother (b.c. 2015) also lived in the home.

Boy was homeschooled because of his disabilities—he was autistic and had speech and motor impairment. In 2012, Mother was the subject of previous substantiated child abuse investigations in Oklahoma, but evaded having her parental rights terminated by agreeing to vacate the family home. Boy had lived with his father until his father’s death in 2022, after which he began living with Mother again. Soon afterwards, Mother began to abuse the victim and ordered his brother to participate in the abuse.

Boy was forced to sleep on a tarp in a closet under the stairs, which was locked with an alarm at night so he had no access to a bathroom. Mother monitored her sons with five surveillance cameras in the home while she was at work and instructed the older brother to abuse the victim over the speakers and by text. Mother and Older Brother set up their work schedules to keep the victim under constant

³⁷ Cited in Gehrman & Haegele (2024). Note that The National Center for Child Abuse Statistics and Policy recently dissolved in 2021.

surveillance. Mother instructed the Older Brother “to keep [the boy] awake by making sure he was uncomfortable and throwing cold water on him” and by leaving the light on to prevent him from falling asleep. Other “punishments” the older carried out on Boy included cold showers, forced vomiting, excessive exercise, and prolonged standing. Boy was regularly restrained with zip ties and shackles.

Mother instructed Older Brother on what to feed the Boy. Boy was deprived of food and water between January 2022 and his death in July 2022; he was fed only “bread with hot sauce or rice with hot sauce.” The refrigerator door was kept locked to prevent Boy from accessing food. Mother instructed Older Brother to force-feed Boy hot sauce with a “severely painful” burn as punishment for “stealing food he didn’t need.” Mother also instructed Older Brother to torture Boy by pouring hot sauce on his genitals; Older Brother refused. Shortly before Boy’s death, Mother instructed Older Brother to taunt Boy with a pizza roll to see if he was still coherent; when Boy tried to take the pizza roll, she instructed Older Brother to take it away. Boy weighed 69 pounds at the time of his death and his ribs were clearly visible through his skin.

Mother and Older Brother noticed that Boy was “shaking and struggling to walk, but they dismissed those symptoms as fake.” The day before his death, Boy was incoherent and unable to respond. At Mother’s instruction, Older Brother subjected Boy to an ice bath for as long as nine and a half hours. Mother told Older Brother that she was determined to “outlast” Boy. Older Brother struck Boy several times on the head and dropped him on his head after removing him from the ice bath. Boy died the following morning of dehydration, malnourishment, and hypothermia. At the time of his death, his body was covered with bruises and marks.

The abuse came to light after Mother called the authorities to report finding Boy dead. R. tipped off investigators to the abuse occurring in the home, which led to Mother’s arrest. Mother was charged with murder and first-degree child abuse, and Older Brother was been charged with child abuse.

Singling out and identity-based abuse

In the case study, a disabled child was singled out for disproportionate abuse. While we are in the process of analyzing this trend, we note that, in nearly half of HIC cases (45%, n=213), there is evidence of homeschooled children within a family being

singled out for abuse, or clearly being abused disproportionately compared to other children in the home.³⁸

Category	Frequency	Description
N/A	16.8% (n=80)	There is only one child in the household, or, in a small number of cases (n=24), the child is abused by a non-family member.
No	28.6% (n=136)	Evidence suggests all children were abused or neglected in a relatively proportionate manner.
Unclear/unknown	9.7% (n=46)	Minimal coverage with respect to how/whether victims were differentially treated.
Yes, unknown factors	17.9% (n=85)	There is no clear pattern or factor that can explain why victim(s) are singled out.
Yes, inferrable factors	26.9% (n=128)	There are clear pattern(s) or factor(s) that can explain why victim(s) are singled out.

In about 60% of cases that involve singling out, caregivers either cite a specific reason for singling out a victim, or the victim(s) that receive disproportionate abuse have an identity or status different from other family members. Quite often, disproportionate abuse is associated with a victim having a marginalized identity. We list out several categories of marginalized identities present in the data below.

Category	Number	Description
Adoption	n=32	Adopted children can be singled out for abuse compared to biological children. Adoption is closely tied to race, nationality, and disability. A common theme of adoption cases in the database is families deliberately adopting

³⁸ A common trend among cases involving singling out/disproportionate abuse is parents framing abuse as a necessary disciplinary response to the victim's behavior. Future analysis will investigate this theme further.

		children with special needs or children of color from the Global South.
Non-biological child	n=29	By non-biological, we mean that the victim singled out is not an adopted or a foster child, but is also not the biological child of both caregivers. This includes stepchildren, or the non-biological child of a parental guardian, being singled out.
Gender	n=26	Female and male children are singled out on the basis of gender, but the most common theme is girls being singled out for sexual abuse. We have identified at least one case in which a transgender victim's gender identity plays a role in their abuse. ³⁹
Disability	n=21	Disability here refers to all disabilities, physical, behavioral/emotional, developmental, and sensory. Disabled children are often singled out for abuse for being perceived as difficult or burdensome.
Age	n=17	There are no clear patterns around age. There are cases of both older and younger children being singled out on account of their age.
Other	n=3	In three singling-out cases, parents cite a reason for abuse that does not pertain to a victim's identity or relationship to other family members: these reasons are eating habits, redheadedness, and the adult having a religious vision.

Takeaways

Homeschooling itself is not known to be a risk factor for systematic abuse, and there is no evidence that cases of systematic abuse discussed in this section are representative of abusive homeschooling environments on the whole. Researchers of child torture estimate that it is rare.⁴⁰

³⁹We rarely have access to information about a victim's gender beyond sex assigned at birth, so it is possible there are more incidents involving trans children than we have currently identified.

⁴⁰ Knox et al (2014).

However, when systematic abuse does occur, abusive caregivers do use homeschool as a way of exercising complete control over their victims. Since all our cases involve homeschooling, we cannot compare systematic abuse of homeschooled children to systematic abuse of children in school. However, the abuse children suffered in the 148 cases we focused on would be difficult to achieve if they were enrolled in school.

As discussed in the previous section, we see a strong association between children being withdrawn from school and rates of imprisonment and food deprivation. School attendance places limits on how comprehensive an abuser's control over a victim can be. Children cannot be imprisoned during the hours that they are at school. In Florida in 2023, Dustin Huff and Yurui Xie⁴¹ were charged with aggravated child abuse and child neglect for imprisoning their children by locking them in cages when at work. The abuse came to light when their 6-year-old told a teacher about the abuse, and the teacher contacted social services. Homeschooled children do not have similar access to professionals who can help them, as our analysis in the next section will show.

School attendance can be protective against food deprivation in multiple ways. Children cannot be fully deprived of food when at least one meal is generally available. In one case⁴² that ultimately included systematic abuse, the victim credits his survival to the food he received at school before he was withdrawn. When a child is in school, moreover, the signs of food deprivation often become apparent to teachers after a certain point. In food deprivation cases, we see starved children exhibit odd behaviors around food – for example, begging their teachers and peers for food, or eating out of trash cans. Or parents themselves act suspiciously by requesting that children not be given extra food between meals or not be given meals at all.⁴³ A common trend among food deprivation cases, as a result, is abusive caregivers withdrawing victims from school after teachers express suspicion about a child's relationship with food.

Furthermore, we found that nearly half of cases in the database involve specific children being singled out for abuse, and disproportionate abuse can be dealt out to certain children on the basis of a child's marginalized identity status. In response to

⁴¹ Neath (2023).

⁴² Case #000454.

⁴³ For example: cases #000044, #000465.

racism⁴⁴ and queerphobia⁴⁵ in schools, parents opt to homeschool to ensure their children receive an education that honors their identity. While preliminary, our findings suggest that homeschooling can be used for the opposite intentions when proper oversight measures are not in place.

⁴⁴ Adams (2023)

⁴⁵ Oller (2021)

Section 3: Outcomes and discovery

Key takeaway: Abused homeschooled children can be invisible to those who can help stop abuse – often with fatal consequences.

The presence of vigilant adults is crucial to identifying and stopping child abuse. From national data on social service referrals, we learn that professionals trained to notice child abuse – whether they work in education, law enforcement, child welfare, or medical or mental health – make up the majority of referrals.⁴⁶ As we have seen, abusive caregivers who homeschool intentionally limit their children’s access to mandated reporters by withdrawing them from school, refusing to take them to the doctor, or not letting them leave the house. Since no state currently requires that all homeschooled children come into contact with a mandated reporter, it follows that the abuse of homeschooled children is less likely to be uncovered and stopped by these established channels.⁴⁷

How, then, does abuse successfully come to light, and who is typically involved? To answer this question, we conducted a review of the actions taken that resulted in abuse coming to light successfully. We paid attention to 1) whether abuse comes to light by reporting, 2) who makes reports and why, and 3) how much the uncovering of abuse relies on the victim's action, as opposed to that of a responsible adult.⁴⁸

Key finding 3.1: Fewer than one-third of cases involving homeschooled children are resolved by someone reporting abuse or by authorities intervening directly.

Key finding 3.2: When abuse is successfully reported, it is most often not reported by a professional: 82% (n=105) of

⁴⁶ Professionals make up 70% of referrals in NCANDS data (DHHS 2024). Nadon et al. (2023) found that education personnel account for 18.4% of reports, followed closely by law enforcement (18.3%), and then social service workers (11.1%) and medical (8.3%) and mental health professionals (5.3%). These top five categories of reporters accounted for about 61% of reports.

⁴⁷ This is not to suggest that established channels are always effective. For example, Nadon et al. (2023) find that, though educators make the most reports of all professionals, theirs are least likely to be substantiated.

⁴⁸ These cases only reflect when abuse finally came to light, meaning that victims were either successfully removed from the abusive home or, tragically, their abuse ended with their death.

reports came from non-professionals, while only 18% came from professionals (n=23).

Key finding 3.3: 61% of cases come to light too late, when the victim is dead or dying, or due to circumstances irrelevant to the victim, such as parental involvement with the law for unrelated reasons.

We found that homeschooling abuse comes to light by a successful report or direct intervention from authorities in only about **one-third** of cases (31.2%, n=148) – and, most of the time, the instigating report is not made by a professional. In the majority of cases (60.6%, n=288), however, abuse comes to light when or **after** abuse has ceased. Tragically, in a large share of these incidents, “abuse ceasing” refers to the death of the victim or the discovery of their remains.⁴⁹

Someone notices signs of abuse and reports it or intervenes	(n=112)
Victim reaches out to a trusted adult or authorities, who then make a report or intervene	(n= 36)
Victim flees abuse or is abandoned	(n=70)
Abuse comes to light when the victim is dead or dying	(n=153)
Abuse comes to light through circumstances unrelated to abuse	(n=36)
Abuse is reported after the fact, or the main intention behind the report is not child abuse	(n=29)
Unknown or not applicable	(n=39)

⁴⁹ We included all cases in this analysis, including those for which we do not have evidence that abuse extended beyond the incident recorded in HIC. If we exclude those cases (n=47), the trend still holds: 32.9% (n=141) of cases come to light via report or direct intervention, while 59% come to light via non-ideal means (n=256). Of these, victim death or discovery of remains still holds the largest share at 30.6% (n=131) of cases.

“Ideal” outcome: Report and intervention

In fewer than one-third of cases (n=148), abuse comes to light because of a report or direct intervention from authorities. We separated these cases into two groups: 1) cases in which an adult notices abuse and reports it or intervenes, and 2) a smaller group of cases in which the victim reaches out directly to a trusted adult or authorities. We did so in order to examine the kinds of adults to whom victims have access.

While this outcome is ideal relative to other ways in which abuse comes to light, it is not always effective in preventing fatal abuse. The category contains 14 fatality cases that resulted in 18 deaths of homeschooled children. Such fatality cases either involved ongoing medical neglect that was effectively reported, but not in time to prevent fatality, or were cases in which victims were dead at the time of reporting, but reporting parties were under the impression they were alive.

Across the two “ideal” outcome categories, when reports were made, 82% (n=105) came from non-professionals, while only 18% came from professionals (n=23).

Someone notices signs of abuse and reports it or intervenes

112 cases were brought to light by a successful report or intervention instigated by an adult. Overwhelmingly, non-professionals (n=91) were the parties who noticed abuse and successfully reported abuse.

Almost half the time (n=41), reports were made by way of anonymous tips, so most of the time, we do not know the relationship the reporter had to the family. When the source of the referral is known, the three most common parties are neighbors (n=16), relatives (n=9), and adults in the home (n=7), which mainly involves perpetrators responding to another perpetrator’s escalating abuse (n=5). Though these are small numbers, it should be noted that the most frequent reporters were either in the abusive household or intimate to the family environment, whether by proximity or relationship. Only eight incidents total were reported by members of a wider community (six by family friends, and one by a babysitter and a church member), and only a further three involved adults incidentally making contact with the victim (a store owner, a pizza delivery man, and a passerby who noticed the condition of one of the victims).

In the small number of cases in which the reporting party was a professional (n=23), the most represented group were medical or mental health professionals. It was typical among these cases for parents to bring children to professionals to seek care

for reasons unrelated to abuse, and for professionals to notice abuse and report. Two cases involved education professionals; in both instances, parents were homeschooling under a legal option that required interaction with a teacher, and a teacher successfully flagged abuse. In no state is such interaction universally required, since families have a choice between higher and lower regulation options.

Finally, a handful of cases (n=8) were not resolved via a report but by authorities directly intervening after noticing abuse – whether by encountering the family in the world and noticing concerning signs, or by caseworkers with ongoing involvement with the family.

***Victim reaches out to a trusted adult or authorities,
who then make a report or intervene***

A relatively small number of cases (n=35) were brought to light after victims disclosed abuse to a trusted adult or authorities while abuse was ongoing. 12 cases saw victims reaching out directly to authorities, most often the police. In two of these cases, victims contacted authorities to confess abusing their siblings.

In 14 cases, victims disclosed abuse to a trusted individual in their life. Most often, this adult was either a non-perpetrator parent (n=4) or a relative (n=4). Non-perpetrator parents were all mothers who were not aware of the abuse until it was disclosed and who acted promptly to stop it. A pattern among these 14 cases is that the means of disclosure is often difficult; victims must slip a note, send a letter, or surreptitiously obtain a cell phone to reach their confidant.

In 10 cases, victims disclosed abuse to professionals or mandated reporters. Surprisingly, educators are the party victims disclosed to most often (n=4). In two cases, victims were enrolled in virtual school. Virtual school, though it counts as homeschool under certain circumstances, affords students far greater access to teachers than conventional homeschooling. In the other two cases, victims reported directly to the school district. In one it is unclear how the victim gained access; in the other, the victim had recently been enrolled in school and he reported abuse to teachers.

Nonideal outcomes

In the majority of cases (61%, n=218), abuse comes to light either too late, under circumstances that had nothing to do with the victim's abuse, or in a manner that forced the victim to advocate for themselves without help from a trusted adult.

Victim flees abuse or is abandoned

In about 15% of cases (n=70), the abuse comes to light when a homeschooled victim flees or, in a handful of cases, orchestrates their rescue through other means (e.g., a victim sets a mattress on fire to raise awareness of their imprisonment). The category also includes a small number of cases in which abusive caregivers abandoned their victims with no means of survival.

Among cases in which a victim flees, there is variation in how premeditated the victim's escape is, which results in different interventions. Sometimes the victim escapes or runs away and approaches someone for help more or less immediately. Typically they run to a neighbor, who calls the police, or occasionally they contact police directly. Or, about twice as often, the victim escapes or runs away but does not approach someone for help. They either come into contact with someone who reports seeing them to the authorities, or they come into contact with authorities directly.

Regardless of circumstances surrounding a victim's flight, however, victim flight is a nonideal means of abuse coming to light. A qualitative review of cases in this category reveals that every single case involves years-long severe abuse and/or imprisonment, starvation, and sadistic acts of psychological manipulation or violence. Children attempt escape as a last resort for evading death, or they are left for dead by caregivers. In these cases, the children are successful, which makes them comparatively rare among peers in the database.

Abuse is reported after the fact, or the main intention behind the report is not child abuse

In about 6% (n=29) of cases, a report is made about the incident recorded in HIC, but after abuse has ceased, or reporting child abuse is not the main motivation behind the report. The most prominent theme in this category is victims speaking out later as adults (n=17). Other situations include adult victims in high-control groups seeking help for their own abuse, and/or perpetrators confessing to abuse after the fact.

Abuse comes to light through circumstances unrelated to abuse.

In a small but notable set of cases (n=37), circumstances irrelevant to the abuse lead to abuse being discovered. There are two broad patterns among these cases. First, cases are included in this category when parents come into trouble with the law for unrelated reasons, such as a domestic dispute or an eviction. Second, cases are also included in this category if the death of a sibling too young to be homeschooled brings abuse to light.

Abuse comes to light when the victim is dead or dying.

In the largest share of cases (n=153), the abuse comes to light too late: when the victim is dying, has just died, or their remains are found. The category also includes three cases in which victims survived life-threatening injuries.

Invisibility in death

Among cases in which abuse comes to light during or after death, we have located several incidents in which victims have died and they continue to be “homeschooled” in the eyes of the state. This occurs in states with all levels of regulation. In no-notification states, Alysha Quate (Illinois),⁵⁰ Christian Choate (Indiana),⁵¹ and Stoni Blair and Stephen Berry (Michigan)⁵² were all dead for years before officials learned they were even missing. All had been severely abused for years prior to their murders at the hands of their parents. Since families are not required to submit any documentation to the state, the perpetrators in all the above cases technically continued to comply with homeschool law.

In states with laws requiring more interaction between the state and homeschooling families, however, children still slip through the cracks. This can be due to negligence in enforcement, or the fact that enforcement provisions are not sufficient. In North Carolina, which requires homeschooled children to be tested annually, Erica Parsons⁵³ was missing for five years before her body was discovered in 2016. During that time, her parents continued to submit enrollment paperwork for homeschooling, but did not submit her test scores to the school district. In Iowa, which used to require annual testing, Timothy Boss’ family told school district officials that Timothy was living with relatives in Michigan when asked to provide his test scores, so officials did not have authority to inquire further. Timothy had been dead for several days at that point, and two years transpired before authorities realized he was missing. Directly after killing

⁵⁰ Case #000001

⁵¹ Case #000061

⁵² Case #000100

⁵³ Case #000090

her son, Caden McWilliams⁵⁴ mother notified her Colorado school district she was homeschooling him to cover up his death. It took four months for police to discover Caden was missing and ultimately issue an arrest.

Recommendations

Our analysis has shown that, the majority of the time, abuse comes to light not because the victim receives help, but under unacceptable circumstances: either too late, by coincidence, or when the victim flees or is abandoned. When abuse does come to light because someone notices and reports abuse, it is overwhelmingly by a non-professional, generally someone intimately tied to the family or homeschool environment. In only 36 cases, abuse is successfully brought to life when children have access to an adult they trust enough to ask for help. And, among these cases, the lines of communication are not readily accessible, with children having to surreptitiously report by slipping a note or secretly obtaining a phone.

This analysis suggests, therefore, that abused homeschooled children have decreased access to mandated reporters and decreased connection to trusted community. Only one state, New York, requires every homeschooled child to come into contact with an adult outside of the family: this is during the assessment process, for which parents have a choice of children receiving a test proctored by, or portfolio review conducted by, a certified educator or a “qualified person.” The “qualified person,” however, does not have to be a mandated reporter. Therefore, currently, no US state requires every homeschooled child to be seen by a mandated reporter. While access to mandated reporters by no means guarantees that abuse will be stopped, the continued presence of professionals in a child’s life does increase the likelihood that abuse and neglect will be noticed. As mentioned, national data on child welfare reports show that mandated reporters are the most common sources of social services referrals, and that educators make the highest number of reports among professionals.

In the 29 states that either require enrollment alone or no enrollment, parents can legally homeschool their children regardless of whether any education occurs. In the remaining states, oversight provisions are uneven and rife with loopholes: only two states, New York and Hawaii, universally enforce their requirement that all homeschooled children submit test scores or portfolios to the state, but only New York requires that the test be proctored to ensure that results are not fudged. Additionally, only New York requires that caregivers submit a learning plan, which can be as short as one paragraph. In the vast majority of the country, therefore, homeschool oversight laws do not require caregivers to show meaningful proof that children are being

⁵⁴ Case #000127

educated, opening the possibility for abuse to take the place of education in home education environments.

More broadly, our analysis of invisible deaths shows that homeschool oversight can be so ineffective that children can be dead and still legally homeschooled.

On account of this, we recommend the following:

Recommendation 3.1: We recommend that all homeschooled students must come into contact with a mandatory reporter through assessments and annual well-child visits.

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