

AN INVESTIGATION OF ABUSE IN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES
WHO ARE IN OR AT RISK
FOR STATE CUSTODY

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Using a sample of children seen at two Tennessee Centers of Excellence for Children in State Custody (COE's), this study examined characteristics of abused children with disabilities compared to abused children without disabilities. Children with and without disabilities were also compared to children who were in state custody but did not experience abuse. Records of 443 children were coded for child, parent, family, abuse, placement, and other characteristics. Four main findings were noted. First, compared to non-abused children, children who were abused entered state custody at a younger age and had more siblings. Second, children with disabilities were most often evaluated during the middle years (especially from 8-11 years), whereas children without disabilities were evaluated when they were very young (0-3) or older (16 and up). Third, children without disabilities were more likely to have many siblings if they were abused, but the number of siblings was similar for children with disabilities who were and were not abused. Finally, compared to their percentages of the U.S. population, children with disabilities were significantly over-represented in the COE sample. Abuse of children also depended on type of disability: children with behavior disorders were more often abused;

children with mental retardation less often abused. Compared to groups without disabilities, fathers of children with mental retardation abused their children less often and mothers of children with health/orthopedic impairments abused their children more often. Results of this study have practical and theoretical implications for future research and interventions.

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