

Child Maltreatment in Mecklenburg County

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Key Takeaways:

- The number of children reported abused or neglected has increased **39.8%**, or **3,998 children**, since 2004-05.
- Nearly 40% of children reported abused or neglected were under the age of six.
- More than **59%** of child maltreatment reports involved **Black children** despite the fact that they make up **32.9%** of the child population.
- The number of children in foster care decreased more than **29%** since 2004-05.
- In 2014-15, DSS received **7,617 reports** of abuse and neglect concerning **14,047 children**, up from 7,162 reports concerning 13,305 children in 2013-14.
- Of the 7,617 reports, **1,143 (15.0%)** were considered substantiated.
- In 2014-15, 50% (7,044) of the children reported maltreated were **reported maltreated for a second, third, or more times**
- Maltreatment is most often reported by the court, law enforcement, and educational personnel.



Child Abuse and Neglect

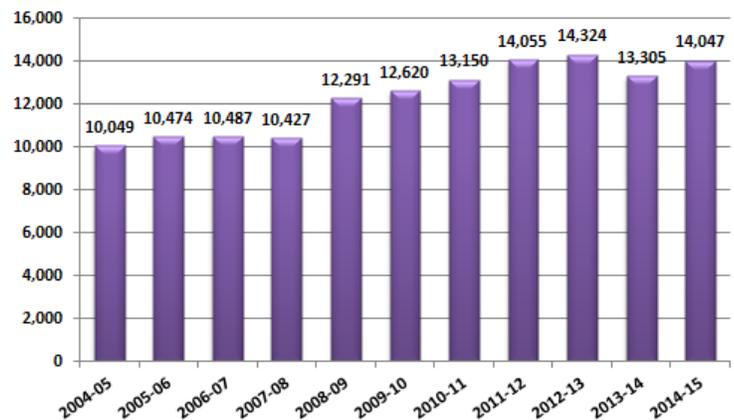
Child maltreatment is one of the most significant issues impacting child welfare. The UNC Jordan Institute for Families collects and reports child welfare data for North Carolina on the fiscal year running from July 1st to June 30th. During 2014-15, 14,047 children, or 5.8% of all children under age 18, were reported abused or neglected in Mecklenburg County; an increase of 5.6%, or 742 reported victims, from the previous year.¹ While the first decrease in children reported abused or neglected since 2008-09 occurred last year, current data show an increase similar to the increasing trend between 2008-09 and 2011-12. The number of children reported abused or neglected annually has increased 39.8%, or 3,998 children, since 2004-05.² The increase in reported maltreatment in Mecklenburg County far outpaced the 6.4% increase at the state level over the past ten years. In 2014-15, North Carolina received reports for 128,002 children, a slight decrease from the previous year.³ Unlike the county, North Carolina reports have steadily decreased since 2011-12.

The preceding numbers represent the total number of children reported maltreated. The number of reports received by the Department of Social Services (DSS) differs

from the number of children reported because reports often involve multiple children. In the current year, Mecklenburg County received 7,617 maltreatment reports, 4,662 (61.2%) of which involved more than one child.⁴ In understanding the scope of the problem, it is useful to distinguish between first time reports and re-reports. In 2014-15, 50.2% of the Mecklenburg County children referred to DSS were referred more than once. Re-reports exceeded first-time reports for the first time last year. At the state level, the number of first time reports has consistently exceeded the number of re-reports since 2004-05. For 2014-15, 50.6% of reports received were first time reports.⁵

Reported Abuse Victims

source: Jordan Institute for Families



Substantiated vs. Investigated Reports

When discussing child maltreatment, it is critical to distinguish between reports that are substantiated and those that are not. The act of filing a report does not constitute a definitive case of abuse or neglect. A report is substantiated if a claim of abuse, neglect, or dependency is verified by DSS. Multiple reporting categories are used to identify the types of maltreatment reported. These include: abuse and neglect, abuse, neglect, dependency, services needed, services provided-no longer needed, services recommended, unsubstantiated, and services not recommended.

During fiscal year 2003-04, North Carolina implemented a multiple response system involving two assessment tracks, investigative and family assessments*, which are selected based on the type of allegation reported. Investigative assessments have four possible case findings: abuse, abuse & neglect, neglect, and dependency. Family Assessments have four additional case finding possibilities: services needed, services not recommended, services provided-no longer needed, and services recommended. Findings of "services needed" are similar to what used to be called a substantiation, requiring involuntary child protective services, and findings of "services provided-no longer needed" indicate that risk was high enough, at one time, to require involuntary services. Therefore, the number of substantiated reports equals the sum of six categories: abuse, neglect, abuse & neglect, dependency, services needed, and services provided-no longer needed. Cases are deemed "services recommended" when the future risk of harm to the child is found to be low and the recommendations are voluntary.⁶

¹⁻⁵ UNC Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families

* Prior to 2003, only one investigative track existed.

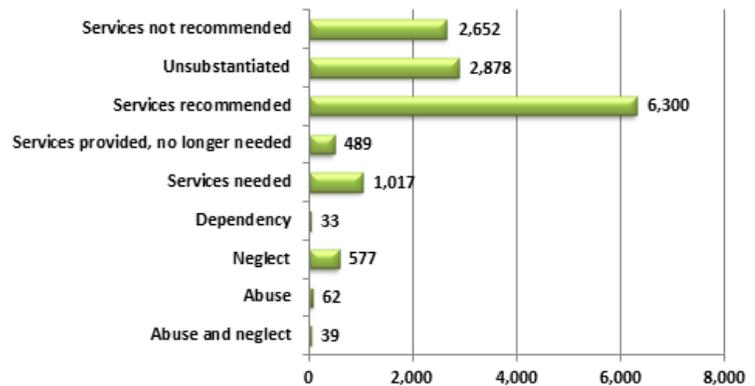
⁶ NC Division of Social Services, Family Services Manual, 2009

Complaint Findings

Because a report may involve multiple children, each with their own finding, complaint analysis reflects the most severe finding for each report where each report is counted only once. In 2014-15, 15.0% (1,143) of the 7,617 reports were considered substantiated. These cases involved 2,217 (15.8%) children reported abused or neglected.⁷

During this time, Family Assessments found that 6,300 children cited in 3,369 (44.2%) reports were recommended for services, 1,640 (21.5%) reports concerning 2,878 children were deemed unsubstantiated, 2,652 children cited in 1,465 (19.2%) reports were not recommended for services, and 1,017 children cited in 520 (6.8%) reports were in need of services. Investigative assessments found that 577 children cited in 277 (3.6%) reports were victims of neglect, 489 children cited in 246 (3.2%) reports were provided services, but services are no longer needed, 62 children cited in 47 (0.6%) reports involving were victims of abuse, 39 children cited in 29 reports (0.4%) were victims of abuse and neglect, and 33 children cited in 24 (.3%) reports were victims of dependency.⁸

Complaint Findings, children



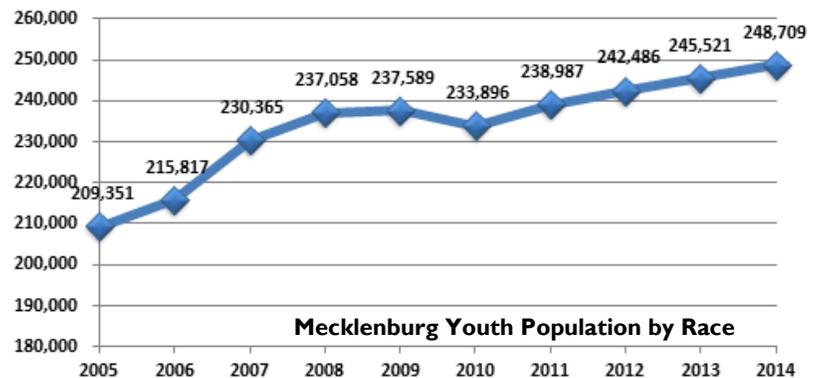
source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families, 2014-15

Mecklenburg County Youth Population

In 2014, there were 248,709 children under age 18 residing in Mecklenburg County. The number of children under age 18 grew more than 18% since 2005, when approximately 209,351 children resided in Mecklenburg County. Comparatively, the NC child population grew 7.2% during this same time period.⁹

Of the 248,709 children in Mecklenburg County, 70,720 (28.4%) were under age 5 in 2014. From 2005-2012, this population consistently accounted for the largest age group. However, in 2013, children ages 5-9 made up a slightly larger percentage

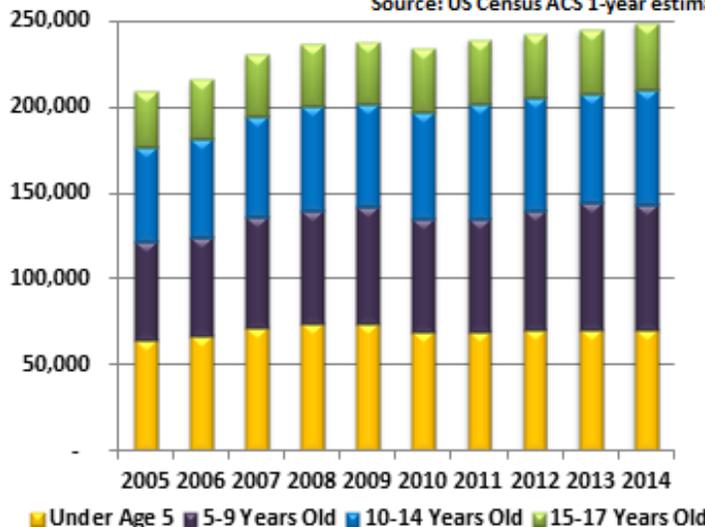
Youth under age 18



Source: US Census ACS 1-year estimates

Youth Breakdown by Age

Source: US Census ACS 1-year estimates



of the population. This trend continued in 2014, when children ages 5-9 accounted for 29.2% of the population and children under 5-years-old accounted for 28.4%.¹⁰

Youth demographics in Mecklenburg County are racially and ethnically diverse. In 2014, 48.9% of the youth population identified as White, 32.9% identified as Black, 5.1% identified as Asian, 5.8% identified as Multi-Racial, and 7.2% identified as Other.¹¹

Race and ethnicity are distinctly different demographic markers, collected and reported on separately. For instance, a child may be both Black and Hispanic. In 2014, 18.6% of the youth population of Mecklenburg County identified as Hispanic.¹²

⁷⁻⁸UNC Jordan Institute for Families

⁹⁻¹²US Census ACS 1-Year Estimates

¹³UNC Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families

¹⁴UNC Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families; ACS 1-Year Estimates

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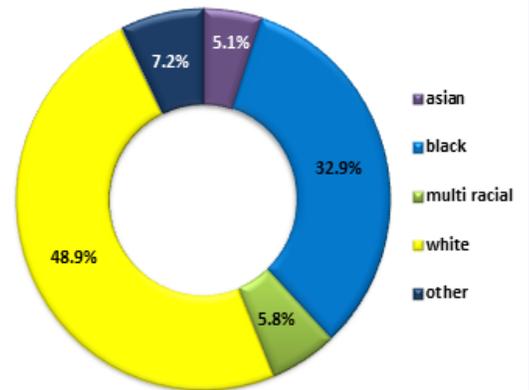
^{16&18}US Census ACS 1-Year Estimates

Do Reports Differ Along Lines of Race and Ethnicity?

Racial disparities exist in the rates at which maltreatment reports are made; with minority children consistently reported maltreated at higher rates. It is important to note that this finding does not indicate that minority children are abused more frequently than White children; it likely indicates that reports are made at disproportionate rates for minority populations. Unfortunately, complaint findings by demographics are not reported.

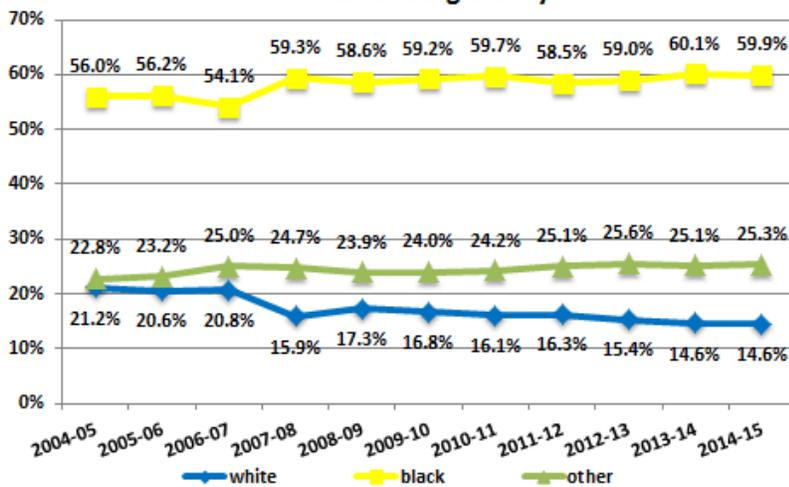
Since 2004-05, Black children consistently accounted for more than half of all children reported abused or neglected in Mecklenburg County. In 2014-15, 59.9% (8,420) of children reported maltreated in Mecklenburg County children identified as Black, 25.3% (3,558) identified as an “other” race, and 14.6% (2,052) identified as White. The percentage of children reported

Mecklenburg Youth Population



Source: US Census ACS 1-year estimates, 2014

Reported Victims by Race, Mecklenburg County



source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families

maltreated who identified as White decreased by 6.6% (74 children) over the past ten years. In contrast, the percentage of reported victims who identified as Black increased by 3.9% (2,792 children) and the percentage of reported victims who identified as an “other” race increased by 2.6% (1,270 children).¹³

These findings are particularly significant considering the racial makeup of Mecklenburg County as a whole. While Black children comprised 59.9% of maltreatment reports, they only represented 32.9% of the county population. White children, on the other hand, accounted for only 14.6% of reports but represented 48.9% of the population.¹⁴

In terms of ethnicity, 15.9% of children reported maltreated identified as Hispanic in 2014-15.

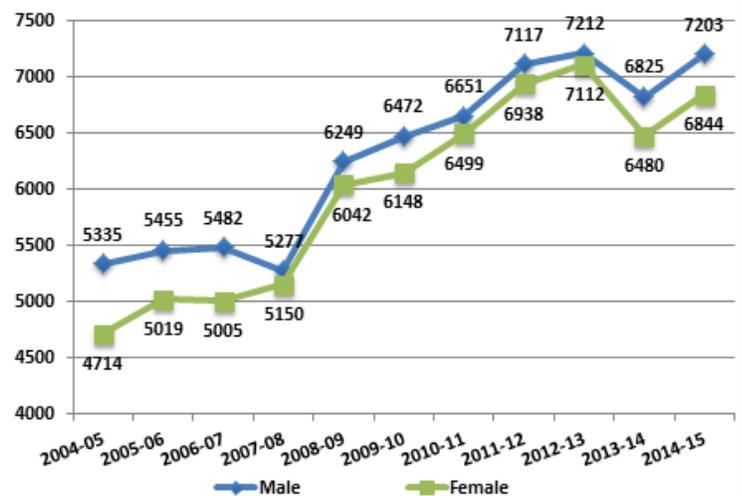
Does Biological Sex Make a Difference?

After a slight decrease in the number of children reported maltreated between 2012-13 and 2013-14, the current fiscal year saw an increase in reports for both sexes. There were 378 (5.5%) more males and 364 (5.6%) more females reported in 2014-15 than in 2013-14. Since 2004-05, reports have trended upward, with males experiencing a 35.0% (1,868 reports) increase and females experiencing a 45.2% (2,130 reports) increase over this time period.¹⁵ Since 2005, the male child population grew 17.9% and the female child population grew 19.7%.¹⁶

During the same times period, North Carolina saw a slight decrease in the number of males and females reported maltreated. In 2014-15, 380 (less than 1%) fewer males and 881 (1.4%) fewer females were reported than in 2013-14.

Furthermore, the increase at the state level over the past ten years is less dramatic than that seen in Mecklenburg County, with 7.3% (4,455 children) more males and 5.4% (3,223 children) more females reported in 2014-15 than in 2004-05.¹⁷ Since 2005, the male child population grew 7.0% and the female youth population grew 7.9%.¹⁸

Reported Victims by Sex, Mecklenburg County

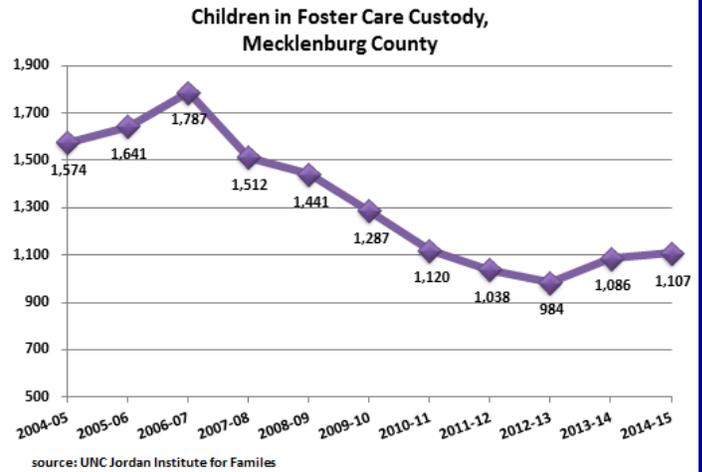
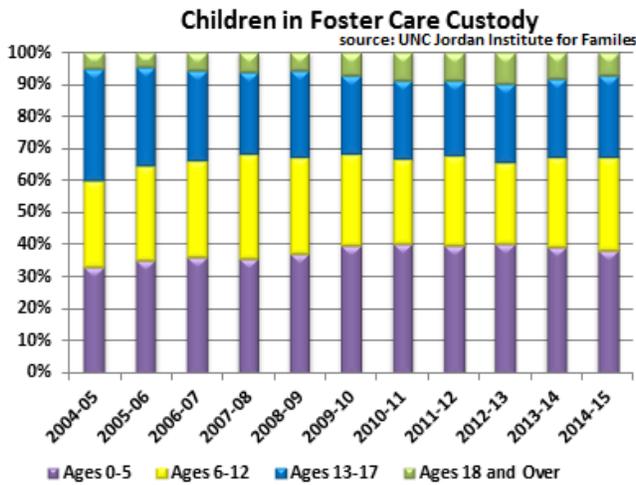


source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families

Foster Care

Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for abused, neglected, or dependent children in need of a safe place to reside while their parents or relatives are unable to care and provide for them. When the Department of Social Services (DSS) believes a child is not safe and a judge has agreed, DSS takes custody of the child and places him or her in a temporary foster home.

In 2014-15, 1,107 children were placed into foster care, up from 1,086 in 2013-14. From 2004-05 to 2006-07, the number of children placed in foster care increased from year-to-year



before beginning a sharp decline in 2007-08 that bottomed out in 2012-13. This decline in the number of children taken into custody reflects a 2008 change in federal law requiring DSS to invest in families in two main ways to address abuse, neglect and dependency: a) utilize community-based services and interventions prior to removal and b) make efforts to place children into kinship care, guardianship or adoption as opposed to foster care. In the past two years there was an increase of 12.5% or 123 children in foster care custody.¹⁹

In 2014-15, 64.7% (716) of the 1,107 children in custody in Mecklenburg County identified as Black, 16.4% (181) identified as White, and 19.0% (210) identified as an “other” race. In terms of ethnicity, 12.5% (138) of children in custody identified as Hispanic and 87.5% (969) identified as non-Hispanic. Along lines of sex, females accounted for

48% (531) of children in custody and males accounted for 52% (576).²⁰

At the state level, 32.7% (5,018) of the 15,362 children in custody in 2014-15 identified as Black, 55.0% (8,456) identified as White, and 12.3% (1,888) identified as Other or as American Indian/Alaskan. Along ethnic lines, 8.4% (1,295) identified as Hispanic and 91.6% (14,067) identified as non-Hispanic. Females accounted for 48.3% of children in custody and males accounted for 51.7%.²¹ Similar to children for whom reports were made in Mecklenburg County, children in foster care custody were more likely to be between the ages of 0 and 5 than in other age groups, with 38.5% or 417 of the 1,107 children falling into this age group.²²

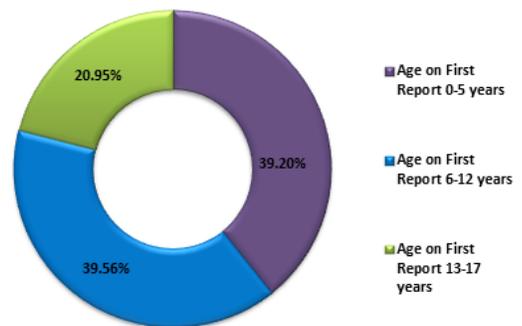
Do Reports Vary by Age?

Age is measured as the age of a child at the time of the first report received during the year. For 2014-15, 39.2% (5,507) of children reported abused or neglected in Mecklenburg County were under age 6, 39.6% (5,557) of children were 6- to 12-years-old, and 21% (2,943) of children were 13 to 17-years-old at the time of their first report.²³

These percentages are similar to those found at the state level, where 40% (51,077) of children reported abused or neglected were under age 6, 39% (49,947) were 6- to 12-years-old, and 20.7% (26,533) were 13- to 17-years-old at the time of their first report. A small number of cases, 445, in North Carolina had no date of birth available.²⁴

In 2014, children under age 6 accounted for 32% of the youth population in households²⁵ of North Carolina.²⁶⁻²⁷

Reported Victims by Age of First Report, Mecklenburg County



source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families, 2014-15

¹⁹⁻²⁴UNC Jordan Institute for Families

²⁵Excludes children living in group quarters.

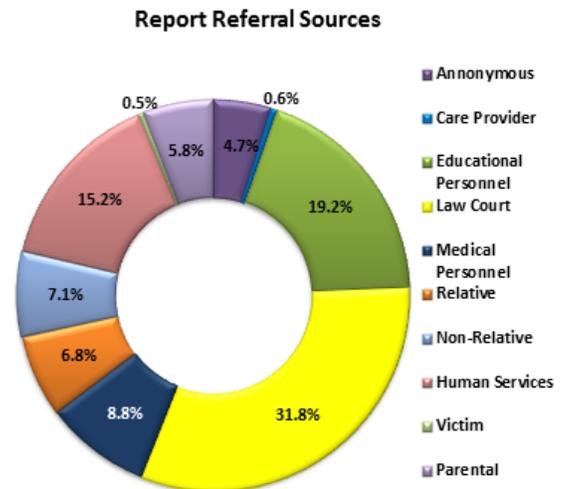
²⁶US Census ACS 1-Year Estimates

²⁷Age data for Mecklenburg County and North Carolina are presented in categories that do not correspond directly to the UNC Jordan Institute for Families data, precluding further direct comparisons on age variables.

Who Reports Abuse?

To protect the youth of our community, reporting abuse or neglect is not only essential, it is mandatory. North Carolina law mandates that any person or institution that suspects a child abused, neglected, or dependent must make a report to the county Department of Social Services at 704.336.CARE (2273).

In Mecklenburg County, the largest number, 31.8% of maltreatment reports came from the law enforcement or the court system, followed by educational personnel at 19.2%, and human services at 15.2%. Less than 1% of reports came from individuals designated as “care providers” and less than 1% of reports came from victims themselves.



source: UNC Jordan Institute for Families, 2014-15

About

The purpose of this document is to compile publicly-available data on child maltreatment to inform concerned stakeholders. It is produced annually in April for Child Abuse Prevention Month. In the future, Council for Children’s Rights will continue its endeavor to include additional data points, to diversify data sources, and to interrogate the data more critically.

Beginning in 1983, April was nationally designated as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Council for Children’s Rights chairs the Mecklenburg County Child Abuse Prevention Team. This collaborative committee is spearheading a public awareness campaign to educate the community about mandatory reporting and implementing a school-based initiative to protect the physical and mental health of our children. Part of this campaign involves planting “Pinwheel for Prevention” gardens around the community to ensure that people notice and stand-up for children. As the numbers throughout indicate, the majority of child abuse reports come from individuals working directly with children. However, those numbers fail to reflect the true prevalence of abuse and neglect, as they are largely underreported. Our organization and the committee understand that, to ensure every child’s safety, the community must be educated on the definitions of child abuse, the signs exhibited by a child who is abused, and the ways in which they can intervene to potentially save the life of an abused child.

Protecting children is the responsibility of every adult.

If there is a concern, it needs to be reported to Youth Family Services at 704.336.CARE (2273).

Additional definitions:

- Abused: inflicting physical harm on a child; allowing someone else to inflict physical harm on a child; creating an environment with substantial risk of physical injury; creating or allowing serious emotional damage on a child; encouraging/directing child to commit delinquent acts.
- Neglected: guardian has failed to provide proper care, discipline, supervision, medical attention, or is abandoned.
- Dependent: child needs placement because s/he either has no guardian or the current guardian is unable to provide adequate care/supervision.²⁸

²⁸ [N.C.G.S. § 7B-101](#)

Data Source Information

Population data found in this report is from the **US Census Bureau Population Estimates Division**:

U.S. Census Bureau: Population Estimates 2011. (2013) | March 2015. <<http://www.census.gov/popest/>>.

Child maltreatment and foster care data used in this report is from **UNC Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families, part of the UNC School of Social Work**. Data is found through the Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food and Nutrition Services in North Carolina and is available for all counties in North Carolina: <http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/>

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A copy of this report is also available for download and sharing at our web site: www.cfcrights.org

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