




The Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS):

High School Pilot Study Summary - March 2019

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**HOW MANY OREGON CHILDREN
EXPERIENCE CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT,
AND/OR EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE?**

**HAVE WE MADE HEADWAY IN DECREASING
CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT IN THE PAST 20
YEARS?**

**OREGONIANS CANNOT ACCURATELY
ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.**

Until now, Oregon has relied almost exclusively on reports to child protective services to estimate child abuse and neglect rates. Research supports, and experts agree, that child welfare report data significantly under-reports the actual abuse and neglect experienced by Oregon children and youth. There is a need for better, more accurate data. OCAPS provides a way to collect that data.

The Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS) was designed to greatly improve how accurately Oregon measures the rates of child abuse and neglect. This is vital in order to better assess the effectiveness of interventions and strategies designed to prevent child abuse.

With support from The Ford Family Foundation and the Meyer Memorial Trust, the UO Center for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (**CPAN**) **explored how other states and countries measure child abuse prevalence rates in the hopes that there was an effective approach already out there. In the U.S. we found none.** This was when, in consultation with experts from the US and around the globe, we decided to pursue developing an effective plan to better measure actual prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Oregon. Thus the Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study was conceived in 2015.

To investigate whether OCAPS would be viable statewide, several legislators recommended that CPAN conduct a pilot of the study and bring those results to the Legislature. With foundation support, we spent several years developing the measure, obtaining permission to OCAPS from the UO Institutional Review Board, testing the measure, adapting the survey and then, in 2018, implementing a pilot study in Lane County. The pilot was conducted in five school districts, with 216 youth, and determined that OCAPS was viable: schools were supportive, parents were supportive, students were supported, and the data available was useful and meaningful.

This report highlights the success of the pilot. Because the CPAN research team completed the OCAPS pilot in 2018, we are now before the Oregon Legislature seeking funding, through HB 3179, to take OCAPS statewide in 2019-2021. We are working in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and Oregon Department of Education, supportive legislators, and statewide organizations that have endorsed HB3179. For more information on the groups that endorse HB3179, please go to bit.ly/about-ocaps.

This report briefly summarizes the findings of the OCAPS high school pilot.

OCAPS, a 167-question survey for students 16 years and older, measures social support, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, adverse childhood experiences (ACE), dating violence, weapons in schools, and school and health outcomes. The survey is anonymous, filled out on an iPad with security screen, and is both sensitive and extensive.

In order to be able to truly understand the experience of Oregon youth, the OCAPS includes 10 sexual assault questions, 19 physical abuse questions, 31 neglect questions, and many questions about domestic violence and household climate. All Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study questions are included in OCAPS. (For more information on the ACEs questions and the OCAPS pilot, please go to the bit.ly/about-ocaps.)

OCAPS Premises

- √ Child abuse and neglect prevention is an urgent public health need and there is no reliable data in Oregon on its prevalence
- √ Current child abuse data from reports to child welfare underestimate actual rates and represent a small proportion of child abuse and neglect incidence
- √ Tracking actual prevalence rates across time is vital for policy-making, putting decision-makers in a much better position to measure the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs
- √ OCAPS will be able to be reported out by Oregon regions and counties; local data inspire local action

We believe that youth are the best source for accurate information about their own experiences.

We believe asking youth directly about abuse they may have experienced can be done safely, ethically, and in a manner that youth find to be supportive and validating.

A Partial List of What We Will Know from the OCAPS Statewide Study

- How do OCAPS derived child abuse and neglect prevalence rates compare to child welfare report rates statewide?
- How many Oregon children experience physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and/or witness or hear intimate partner violence?
- What impact does social support have on health, behavior, and school performance for youth who have experienced abuse and/or neglect? How do these differences vary for students in the foster care system and by household income, gender, race and Oregon region?
- What impact do intervention (e.g., Oregon's Early Learning System) and prevention efforts (e.g., Healthy Families Oregon) have on child abuse rates over time and across generations?
- What do youth report about seeing guns and/or other weapons and about bringing guns/and or other weapons to school or school-sponsored events?

The OCAPS Pilot 2018 – Safety and Support for Student Participants

In the Lane County pilot, 216 youth from 12 classrooms in six schools and five Lane County districts participated in the OCAPS pilot. The questions they were asked are direct and sensitive, e.g., *“Have you seen adults in your home hurt each other physically, such as hitting, slapping, and kicking?”* and

“Has anyone ever forced you to have sex when you did not want them to?”

These are difficult questions and for some, they can be upsetting. They can also be triggering for abuse survivors. We¹ took great care to reduce risk for students and create a trauma-informed, safe and validating experience for survey participants. Our student support protocol included:



School-Specific Preparation.

- **The first contact with schools is in person.** The CPAN research team met with principal, counselor(s), and classroom teacher(s) at each school. There the student support plan was agreed on, and school and community-specific resources for students were identified for during and after the survey. From these first meetings that determine roles and the student support plan, an MOU was developed and signed with each individual school to meet the unique needs of that school.
- For each school, we worked with the school to develop a school and region-tailored resource list (delivered to students and school on day of the study and posted in the school for 2 months after).

School-Specific Implementation (Day of the Survey).

- The CPAN research team introduced themselves to the class – reminded students about study purpose, acknowledged its sensitivity, acknowledged that it may be upsetting and that this is natural, and reminded students that their participation is optional, they can skip questions, can stop at any time, and described privacy and limits of confidentiality.
- The Resource list was distributed to students before taking the survey. Each CPAN research team included student support staff who, prior to distributing the survey, introduced themselves to the class, explained they were there with the sole purpose of student support, explained which private room they would be in during the study and at least one hour following class.
- The survey is completed on an I-Pad with a security screen.

Fewer than 3% of parents/guardians opted their child out of the survey. And, with one school exception, fewer than 5% of students opted out.

Student Experience

Most students expressed strong support for the study. In feedback sessions and in anonymous open-ended questions on the iPad, students overwhelmingly encouraged our team to conduct the study statewide. Many students felt validated, urged us to share the findings widely, and appreciated that people were working to draw attention to child abuse. One student reflected the sentiment of many:

“Thank you. Childhood abuse and trauma will likely affect me and a lot of adolescents I know for the rest of our lives. It is nice to be validated and to know people are taking steps to help prevent this.”

¹ Among CPAN lead researchers, we have 30+ years of survivor support, advocacy, high school prevention implementation, counseling and state and federal abuse prevention policy development (e.g., Phyllis Barkhurst, Co-Founder, Oregon Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Task Force) and 15+ years of survey research experience with adult survivors of abuse (e.g., Todahl, Walters, & Olson, 2017).

Pilot Study Participants

- 45% identified as male, 52% as female, and 3% as gender non-binary
- 19% were 16 years old, 53% were 17 years old, and 28% were 18 or older
- Most identified as white (67%); 19% identified as mixed race, and 9% as Latino
- 92% spoke English as the primary language in their home
- During the past 12 months, 44% of students missed 0-5 days of school for any reason; 19% missed 6-10 days, and 33% missed 11 days or more
- 50% received free/reduced lunch
- 13% (n=27) of participants have ever been placed in foster care

SOME PRELIMINARY FINDINGS²

Social Support, Connection and Household Climate

- Nearly 92% of student participants reported feeling safe in their neighborhood
- 65% agreed that they received the emotional support that they need from their family

Among those who had an abuse experience, 47% had never talked with anyone about their experience.

Household Climate & Fear

- Many student participants (53%) reported they never or rarely feel tense or stressed out at home
- 26% said they sometimes feel tense/stressed at home
- 20% often or very often do

The vast majority of students always or usually feel safe at home. At the same time, many student participants reported they feel frightened due to adult behavior, at least some of the time:

<i>Item</i>	No	Yes
Has anyone in your home used alcohol and/or drugs and then behaved in a way that frightened you?	65.6% (n=141)	30.2% (n=65)
Have you seen adults in your home shouting and screaming in a way that frightened you?	50.7% (n=109)	45.1% (n=97)

Sexual Abuse

The type of sexual abuse participants experienced varied by gender. For example, 19% of participants (71.1% female; 18.4% male) answered yes to this question: “Has anyone ever touched your private parts in a sexual way, or made you touch theirs when you didn’t want them to?”

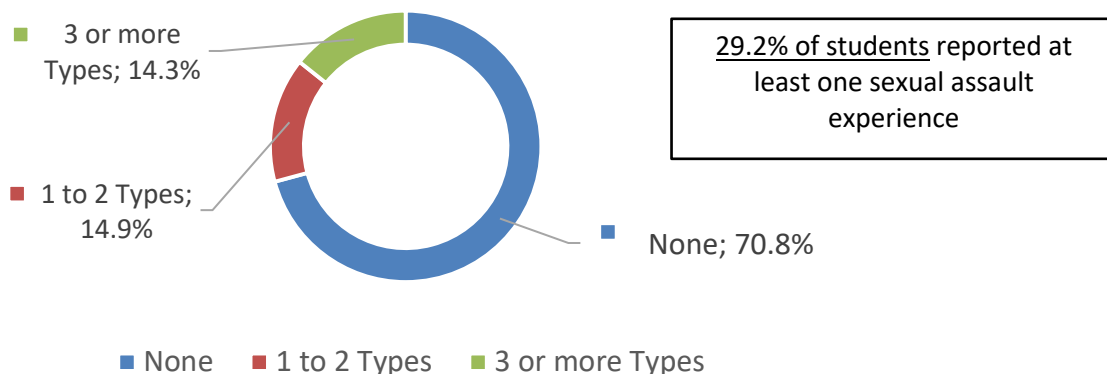
Participants who ever lived in foster care reported 3 or more sexual abuse types at a rate 2 times higher.

In addition, **sexual assault and sadness were highly correlated**. Among participants who had no history of sexual abuse, 26% reported being profoundly and persistently sad or hopeless at some point during the past 12 months. For participants with 3 or more experiences, reports of sadness/hopelessness³ jumped to 79%.

² This is a convenience sample. The statewide study will include at least 1,500 stratified and randomly selected schools and school districts and will closely represent Oregon youth.

³ Among all participants, 37% reported feeling sad or hopeless every day for two weeks or more in the past 12 months.

Sexual Abuse



Physical Abuse

Participants were asked 19 separate physical abuse questions. The questions focused on several abuse types, for example, being choked or being “beaten up.” The rates of physical abuse in this particular report only include abuse by adults to youth (although we do collect peer-to-peer abuse rates as well).

Among all participants, 52% personally experienced at least one type of physical abuse by an adult – and many experienced multiple forms of physical abuse. For example, 18% reported they had been often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at them – or were hit so hard it left marks or injuries by a parent/adult in their home.

52% of students reported at least one type of physical abuse by adults; 39% experienced four or more types of physical abuse.

Also among all participants, 19% were hit, beat, kicked, or physically hurt in some way one or more times by a parent or adult in their home. **For students who ever lived in foster care, this rate jumped to 41%.** Additionally, among all participants, 39% experienced 4 or more types of physical abuse; 56% for participants who ever lived in foster care.

Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence) by Adults in Household

Thirty-one percent (31%) of youth participants experienced at least one intimate partner violence type in their household. For example, 19% of participants said they have observed a parent get pushed, slapped, hit, punched, or beat up by another parent. Many participants also witnessed acts of verbal aggression. For example, 29% reported that *one of their parents or another adult in their home swears at, call names, or says things that puts another parent down* often or very often. **Twenty-five percent of participants “feel afraid because of behavior by an adult in my home” sometimes, often, or very often.**

Exposure to acts of physical aggression by adults that included breaking, throwing and ruining things – experienced by many participants – was significantly correlated with sadness/hopelessness, grades, and school attendance. For example, 47% of students who earn A’s and B’s answered yes to this question: “At any time in your life did any of your parents or another adult in your home, because of an argument, break or ruin anything in the house, or punch the wall or throw something?” Fifty-two percent of students who earn C’s answered yes to this question – and a full 82% of students earning D’s and F’s answered yes.

Seeing/hearing things being punched, thrown and broken was significantly correlated with school attendance. Among students who missed 0-5 days, 39% said they saw/heard these things, while a full 63% of students who missed 11 or more days experienced this type of violence exposure.

Intimate partner violence questions included: 1) Did you see any of your parents or another adult in your home hit, beat, kick or physically hurt your brothers or sisters, not including spanking? and 2) was your mother or stepmother sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?

31% of students reported seeing or hearing at least one type of intimate partner violence; 12% experienced three or more types; 8% experienced four or more types.

A Note on Income and Rates of Abuse: Income levels did not significantly correlate with abuse types – with one exception: Students who observed some forms of intimate partner violence or violence between adults in their home were more likely to live in a household with lower income, though rates of this kind of violence exposure were also high for middle and high-income households. For example, 38% of participants in high or very-high income households observed an adult, because of an argument, break, ruin, punch a wall or throw something with 41% of middle-income participants observed this; this increased to 74% for students in low or very-low income households.

BRIEF SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This OCAPS pilot represents the first time U.S. youth have been asked comprehensive questions about their experience with abuse/neglect, with social support, in a school environment. The rates reported by Lane County youth overall exceed, and often far exceed, previous reports in phone surveys with youth and in retrospective questionnaires with adults – which to this point has been considered the best research on prevalence.

These findings should be interpreted in context; this pilot used a convenience sample, meaning a non-scientific sampling strategy. Although it is the first time information at this level of detail has been asked of Oregon youth and it includes 216 participants, 6 schools and 5 Lane County School Districts, it is not fully representative of Lane County youth. A statewide random and representative selection of Oregon youth is the best way to more accurately determine child abuse prevalence rates in Oregon. HB3179 provides the mechanism to do just that.

The statewide study, which we plan to do during the 2019-2020 school year (pending passage of HB3179), will include at least 1,500 students randomly selected and stratified from public and private schools and will closely represent Oregon youth. With that sample we will be able to share with Oregonians more complete, valid and reliable information. We plan to collect this information every 3-5 years in order to track trends and changes over time.

“I feel like child abuse and neglect shouldn’t be taken lightly. Since we’re giving you the information I think it would be very useful if you used it to your max potential, and do as much as you can with the information as you possibly can, in every way that you can.” - Student Participant

For an electronic copy of this six-page report, the full research report, or the two-page summary, please visit: bit.ly/about-ocaps. For more information about the OCAPS pilot, please contact: Jeff Todahl (541) 346-0919; jtodahl@uoregon.edu