



Children Missing from Care: 2019 Update

PREPARED BY THE MISSING CHILD & DATA ANALYTICS TEAM

DATE RANGE: INTAKED BETWEEN 10/1/2017 AND 9/30/2019

NCMEC DATABASE QUERIED ON 11/13/2019

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

As more state care agencies comply with the 2014 “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act,”¹ which requires these agencies to report any children missing from their care, not only to law enforcement but also to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC), we learn more and more about the children who go missing from state care. Analyzing these missing incidents, both before the act was passed and years after, differences began to emerge regarding the characteristics of the missing children and their circumstances. This report delves into the differences between two time periods. This update primarily focuses on the fiscal years between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2019². When relevant, this time period is compared to data from the preceding five fiscal years between October 1, 2012 and September 30, 2017. Therefore, this provides a snapshot of the circumstances faced by children missing from care.

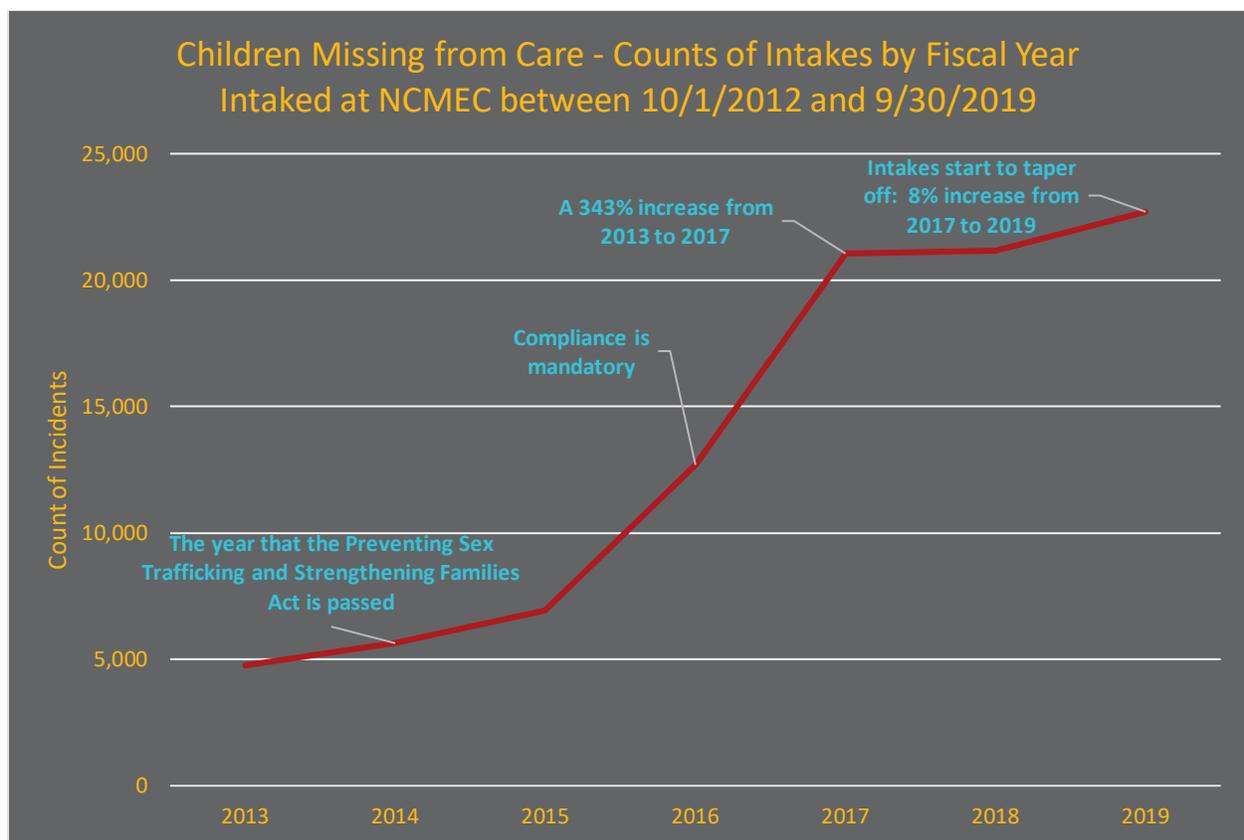
Of note, in the earlier time frame, there were more black children reported missing from care than any other racial group. In FY 2017 – 2019 white children (37%) were reported missing from care more than any group, followed by black children (33%) and Hispanic children (15%). In the most recent time period, there was an increase in Hispanic children reported missing from care (16%), compared to the earlier analysis (14%). Additionally, children reported missing in the 2017-2019 data set had slightly shorter missing durations than children reported missing in the 2012-2016 data set.

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 671 (a)(35) Provision

² The most recent Child Missing from Care Report focused on the time period between 10/1/2012 and 9/30/2017. Therefore, the current report focuses on the following two fiscal years.

BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

With the passage of the “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act” in September 2014, states were given two years from the date the act was passed to comply. Since the passage of the act, the number of incidents of missing children reported to NCMEC steadily increased each year before beginning to taper off, as depicted in the chart below. Of all the missing children reported to NCMEC between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2019, those missing from care made up the majority of all cases (71%).³ This analysis includes the 94,906 reported incidents of missing children from care⁴ during these seven fiscal years.



³ NCMEC tracks incidents of missing children. Children with multiple missing incidents are included in this report unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Children missing from care consists of children who were under the legal guardianship of a state social services agency. These children may have been residing in a family placement, foster home, group home, or treatment facility at the time they went missing.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE

Children who were missing from care in the most recent fiscal years (September 1, 2017 - September 30, 2019) were primarily endangered runaways (94%), followed by young adults between the ages of 18 and 20⁵ (4%) as a distant second. These proportions were similar to case type proportions for the previous five fiscal years. More than half of all

children missing from care were females (60%), while 40% were males. Both females (93%) and males (89%) were more likely to be between the ages of 13 and 17, with a mean age of 15. These proportions were similar to age and gender proportions for FY 2012 - 2016.

In FY 2017 - 2019 white children (37%) were reported missing from care more than any group, followed by black children (33%) and Hispanic children (15%). In FY 2012 - 2016, a higher proportion of black children were reported missing from care than white children (40% versus 36%). Of note, the percentage of black children missing from care reported to NCMEC in both time periods remains disproportionate to the average percentage of black children who are in the care system (22%).⁶

In FY 2017 - 2019, almost three quarters (74%) of all children missing from care went missing from their foster home placement, and just over half were recovered at home (57%). More males (20%) compared to females (15%) were recovered on the street. In FY 2017 - 2019, males were most likely to be recovered by turning themselves in (41%). This differs from the preceding FY 2012 - 2016, wherein males were most likely to be recovered via police investigation (43%). Females were most likely to be recovered by returning home on their own across all seven fiscal years (43% versus 44%).

96% OF ALL CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE WERE RECOVERED

BOTH GENDERS WERE AS LIKELY TO BE RECOVERED IN THE SAME STATE FROM WHERE THEY WENT MISSING DURING THE MOST RECENT TWO FISCAL YEARS (95% FOR FEMALES, 96% FOR MALES)

HOW MANY TIMES DO THEY GO MISSING?

Thirty-four percent of all children missing from care had multiple missing incidents in FY 2017 - 2019. More than half of all children with multiple missing incidents went missing on two occasions (51%)

⁵ This category is derived from Suzanne's Law, a provision in the PROTECT Act of 2003 (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 41307), which extends to missing young adults the same reporting and law enforcement response requirements already provided for children younger than 18 years of age.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>, accessed March 3, 2020.

while the mean number of missing incidents for each child was three.

During FY 2017 - 2019, those with multiple missing incidents were more likely to be female (60%), white (37%), and between the ages of 13 and 17 (95%), with a mean age of 16.

10% OF ALL CHILDREN HAD AT LEAST 4 MISSING INCIDENTS

HOW LONG ARE THEY MISSING?

During FY 2017 - 2019, **children who went missing from care and were recovered had slightly shorter missing durations when compared to the preceding five fiscal years.** In the most recent time period, there was an average missing duration of 32 days and median missing duration of eight days. The average missing duration for children during FY 2012 - 2016 was 49 days and a median missing duration of 11 days. During FY 2017 - 2019 males and females tended to have similar missing durations. On average, males were missing for an average duration of 31 days and median of seven days compared to females who were missing for a mean duration of 34 days and a median missing duration of eight days. This is a decrease from FY 2012 - 2016, when males had an average

Female Children Average Missing Duration: (FY 2017-2019)

WITHOUT AN ENDANGERMENT: 43 DAYS MEAN, 9 DAYS MEDIAN

WITH AN ENDANGERMENT: 33 DAYS MEAN, 8 DAYS MEDIAN

Male Children Average Missing Duration: (FY 2017-2019)

WITHOUT AN ENDANGERMENT: 42 DAYS MEAN, 9 DAYS MEDIAN

WITH AN ENDANGERMENT: 29 DAYS MEAN, 7 DAYS MEDIAN

missing duration of 44 days and median missing duration of nine days and females had an average missing duration of 53 days and a median duration of 11 days. During FY 2017 - 2019, nearly a quarter (24%) of all males who were missing from care were recovered within 48 hours, while 18% of

females were recovered within the same time frame. This is a positive change from the preceding five years. During FY 2012 - 2016, 18% of all males were recovered within 48 hours, and 13% of all females were recovered within 48 hours.

The presence of a reported additional endangerment may have made a difference in the length of time children in care were missing during the most recent two fiscal years. **In FY 2017 - 2019, children who had a reported endangerment had a mean missing duration that was a week and a half shorter than children who had no reported endangerments, while the median duration was one day shorter.** Females with an

IN THE PAST TWO FISCAL YEARS OVER A FIFTH (21%) OF ALL CHILDREN RECOVERED IN THE SAME STATE WERE RECOVERED WITHIN 48 HOURS

endangerment had a longer mean missing duration and a slightly shorter median missing duration than male children with an endangerment. Males who did not have an endangerment had almost the same mean missing duration and the exact same median missing duration as females who did not have an endangerment. The mean missing duration for children without an endangerment decreased between the most recent two fiscal years and the preceding five years, however the median missing duration decreased by three days. In FY 2017 – 2019, these children had a mean missing duration of 43 days and a median missing duration of nine days, while in FY 2012 - 2016 these children had a mean missing duration of 75 days and a median missing duration of 12 days. In comparison, children with an endangerment had a mean missing duration of 31 days and a median missing duration of seven days during the most recent two fiscal years, and a mean missing duration of 46 days and a median missing duration of nine days in the preceding five years.

In FY 2017 - 2019, children missing from care who were recovered in a state other than the one from which they went missing were missing longer. Over half of all children recovered in a different state (51%) were missing for a month or longer, compared to 24% of all children who were recovered in the same state.

As of November 13, 2019, just 2% of children reported missing from care between October 1, 2012 and September 30, 2019 remained actively missing. Eighty-nine percent (1,651 children) of these still-actively missing children went missing during the two most recent fiscal years.

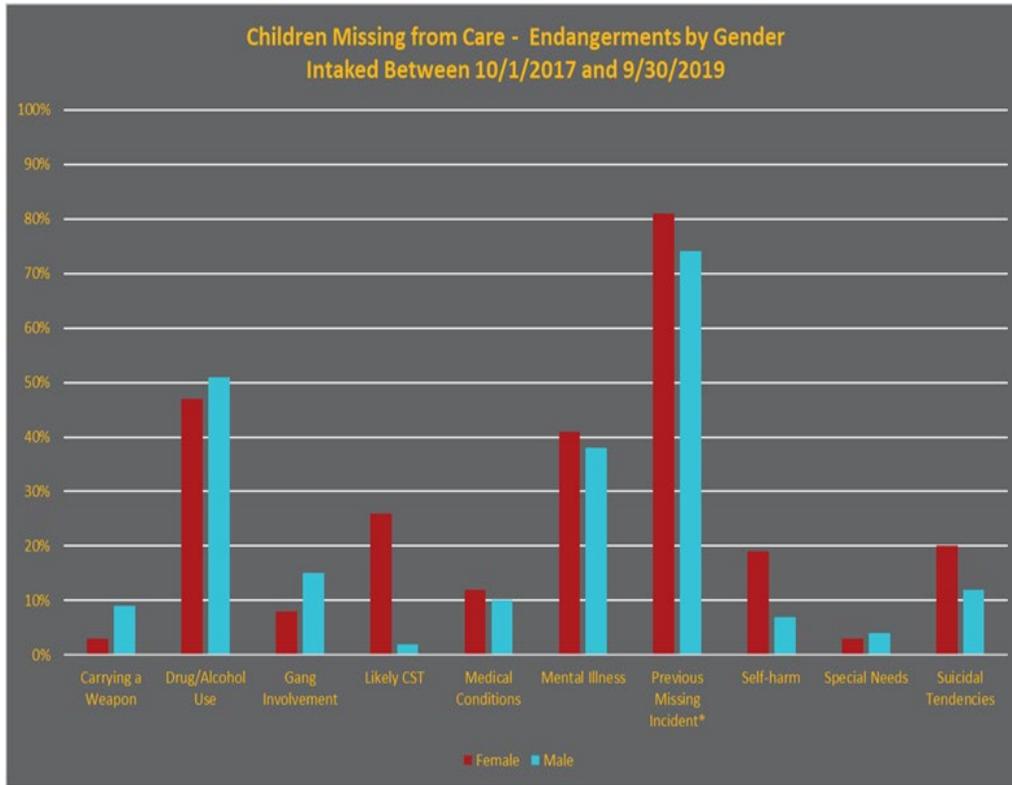
CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE ARE AT RISK

Eleven categories of endangerments reported to NCMEC during a missing child case were analyzed, including previous missing incidents, possessing a weapon, use of alcohol/drugs, possible gang involvement, mental illness, pregnancy, self-harm and suicidal tendencies, special needs, having a medical condition, and likely victimization through child sex trafficking.

The most common endangerment reported for FY 2017 - 2019 was children who were missing at least once previously (78%). The second most common endangerment was alcohol/drug use (49%), followed by a mental illness diagnosis (39%), suicidal tendencies (16%), likely child sex trafficking victimization (16%), self-harm tendencies (14%), having a medical condition (11%), possible gang involvement (11%), carrying a weapon (5%), a history of pregnancy (6% of all female children), and having a special needs condition (3%). Children missing from care during the preceding five years had similar proportions for each endangerment, with a few minor fluctuations of one or two percentage points. Reporting a mental health condition was the one endangerment to deviate from this pattern; however, this difference was only a matter of four percentage points (39% percent in FY 2017 – 2019 versus 35% in FY 2012 - 2016).

About the same percentage of children had a reported endangerment in FY 2017 - 2019 when compared to the preceding years. Approximately 88% of children had at least one endangerment in

the most recent time period, while in FY 2012 - 2016 90% of children had at least one endangerment. In the most recent two fiscal years, 43% had one or two endangerments, and one female child was reported with all eleven endangerments. During this time period, males (15%) were more likely not to



have an endangerment listed compared to females (10%). Nearly a fifth (18%) of females had five or more endangerments, while only 10% of males had five or more. Females had a mean number of three reported endangerments, while males

had a mean number of two endangerments. During FY 2012 - 2016 males and females had the same number of mean endangerments.⁷

There were also gender differences among the specific type of endangerments in this sample of children missing from care during FY 2017 - 2019. **Females reported missing from care had significantly higher proportions of child sex trafficking victimization, and self-harm and suicidal tendencies. Males were more likely to reportedly possess a weapon, engage in alcohol or drug use, and have possible gang involvement.**

Alcohol and Drug Use

In FY 2017 - 2019, 49% of all incidents of children missing from care involved children who were reported to use alcohol or drugs. Marijuana/K2/spice was the most common type of drug indicated (21%), followed by alcohol (19%). Males (24%) were reported to use marijuana/K2/spice more than

⁷ Due to the inclusion of pregnancy as an endangerment, female children were capable of having all possible endangerments, while male children were not. However, due to the relative rarity of pregnancy (6%) this had little effect on data pertaining to mean number of endangerments.

females (18%). Though, females (20%) had higher proportions of alcohol use than males (18%). Children who were reported to use drugs had a longer missing duration. Children had similar proportions of reported drug use during FY 2012 - 2016, both as a whole and also when broken out by different types of drugs.

During FY 2017 - 2019, children with a drug endangerment had a mean missing duration of 40 days and a median missing duration of 12 days, while children with no reported drug usage had a mean missing duration of 38 days and median missing duration of six days. In FY 2012 - 2016, children with reported drug usage had an average missing duration of 51 days and a median missing duration of 14 days, while children without reported drug usage had a mean missing duration of 48 days with a median missing duration of eight days.

Mental Illness

In FY 2017 - 2019, out of all children missing from care, 39% were reportedly diagnosed with a mental illness. This is an increase from FY 2012 - 2016 in which 35% of all children with an endangerment were diagnosed with a mental illness. In FY 2017 - 2019, children with reported mental illness had shorter mean and median missing durations compared to children who did not have this endangerment (35 days and 7, versus 42 and 8 days). In FY 2012 - 2016, children had a longer mean missing duration regardless of whether they had this endangerment or not. Children without a diagnosed mental illness had a mean missing duration of 51 days and median missing duration of 10 days, while children with a diagnosed mental illness had a mean missing duration of 46 days and a median missing duration of 12 days.

Child Sex Trafficking

In FY 2017 - 2019, black children and white children experienced equal proportions of likely child sex trafficking victimization (35%). There was a recent increase in the proportion of Hispanic children who were likely victims of child sex trafficking. In FY 2017 - 2019, 15% of likely child sex trafficking victims were Hispanic, while in FY 2012 - 2016 11% were Hispanic. The majority of likely child sex trafficking victims were female (94%) and between 15 and 17 years of age (84%). **Recovery times for children likely to have been victimized through child sex trafficking were longer than children who were not likely to have been victimized through sex trafficking (an average of 40 days and a median of seven days, versus a mean of 35 days and a median of seven days).** In FY 2012 - 2016, children had a longer mean and median missing duration regardless of whether they had this endangerment or not. Children who were likely to have been victimized through child sex trafficking had a mean missing duration of 56 days and a median missing duration of 15 days, while children who were not likely to have been victimized through child sex trafficking had a mean missing duration of 52 days and a median missing duration of eight days.

DECEASED CHILDREN

In the past seven fiscal years, 60 children missing from care were recovered deceased. Twenty-six (43%) of these children were recovered in FY 2017 - 2019. Fifty-one (85%) of the children recovered deceased during this time period had at least one endangerment. Children who were missing from care and recovered deceased during this time period had a mean missing duration of 50 days and a median missing duration of 14 days. Children who were recovered alive had a mean missing duration of 39 days and median missing duration of seven days.

HALF (50%) OF ALL CHILDREN RECOVERED DECEASED IN THE MOST RECENT TWO FISCAL YEARS WERE RECOVERED AFTER 1 MONTH OR LONGER

FINAL THOUGHTS

Overall, children reported missing from care in the 2017-2019 data set had very similar demographics and endangerments to children from the earlier time frame. However, there was a slight difference when it came to missing duration. In the most recent two fiscal years, children were missing for a slightly shorter duration in contrast to the earlier time frame. This difference was the same for both females and males. There was also a slight increase in the percentage of children recovered within the crucial 48-hour time period. Finally, a clear majority (89%) of all children reported missing from care between October 1, 2012 and September 30, 2019 who remain actively missing were reported missing during FY 2017 – 2019. While some differences between the two time frames can likely be explained by the influx of reported cases of children missing from care, some differences such as length of time missing or the presence of an endangerment will need further analysis. Hopefully, missing durations continue to grow shorter.