

# Hospitals in Recession-hit Areas See Increase in Serious Cases of Child Abuse

## Statement of Problem

The recent economic recession raised concerns that child physical abuse rates would increase after a long period of decline, but federal data sources were not detecting such increases. According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), the primary source of surveillance for child maltreatment in the U.S., the number of cases of physical abuse had been declining over the past 15 years. In light of severe and prolonged economic hardship since late 2007, there was concern by small regional studies and case reports that prior trends may have been reversed, and that child physical abuse rates were actually increasing.

## Description

Examining data from 38 children's hospitals nationwide, the team described trends in hospitalizations for child physical abuse in the context of economic trends in unemployment and housing foreclosure. The study detected a significant increase in children admitted to the nation's largest children's hospitals due to serious physical abuse over the last decade and also found a strong relationship between the rate of child physical abuse and local mortgage foreclosure.

## Next Steps

Identifying ways to collaboratively monitor the safety of children at a population level using multiple sources of information, including hospital data, can inform a more comprehensive response to child maltreatment. An accurate understanding of the relationship between the trend of child physical abuse and housing security issues could stimulate dialogue and collaboration among health care, child welfare, and housing agencies. This type of collaborative effort would enable a more targeted response to the needs of children. Further research is needed to examine community-level impact of the housing crisis on child wellbeing and safety.

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## Suggested Citation

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## PolicyLab Leads

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## Faculty Member

Joanne N. Wood (she/her) is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), an associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, and an attending physician in the Division of General Pediatrics. She is also the director of research and the Child Abuse Pediatrics Fellowship director for Safe Place: Center for Child Protection and Health at CHOP.

Since her medical training at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Wood has committed to improving quality of care and outcomes for vulnerable children, especially abused and neglected children. Her current work includes supporting families and decreasing risk of maltreatment through positive parenting interventions. Dr. Wood is also interested in strategies to improve the timely and accurate diagnosis of abuse in young children. She is one of the principal investigators on a Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development funded project to establish CAPNET, a multi-center child abuse research network.

Dr. Wood attended the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, where she earned her medical degree in 2002. She was an intern and resident in pediatrics at CHOP, where she subsequently served as chief resident. In 2006, she participated in the Child Abuse Pediatrics Fellowship at CHOP. From 2007 to 2010, Dr. Wood was a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation clinical scholar at the University of Pennsylvania and earned her Master in Health Policy Research. Dr. Wood is board certified in General Pediatrics, Pediatric Hospital Medicine and Child Abuse Pediatrics.



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