

2023 Child Welfare Survey Results Ohio Report

PREPARED FOR:



PREPARED BY:



August 15, 2023

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Detailed Findings	3
Overarching Value Systems About Parenting	3
Beliefs on Root Causes About Issues of Child Abuse and Neglect	4
Perceptions on Current System	5
Opinions on Path to Intervention and Ideal Child Welfare System	6
Perceptions on Child Removal / Family Preservation	8
Methods	9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Comparatively, the perceptions of the child welfare system as a whole, its function, and how it should operate among Ohioans mirror the views of all Americans nationally. There are some distinctions for the state in terms of personal experience, with Ohioans significantly more likely to be familiar with the system, but on most other metrics, Ohioans are nearly identical to the US national population more broadly. At the state level, the most significant difference between adults in Ohio and Georgia is what they attribute to the cause of child neglect.
- Adults in Ohio, whether they are parents or not, understand parenting to be a difficult job – if not one of the toughest, and the majority think that parents should have the upper hand over the government when it comes to deciding how to parent their children.
- Adults in Ohio have differing opinions when it comes to what attributes to abuse or neglect. In addition to this difference, neglect is seen as an act stemming from multiple intertwining circumstances while abuse is more attributed to the single cause of ill intent. Regardless of the combination of factors that may lead to abuse or neglect, nearly two-thirds agree that most acts of abuse or neglect are intentional or willful on that parent's part.
- Most adults in Ohio have learned about the US child welfare system through news and media outlets. While they view the system slightly more positively than negatively and understand that the system only gets attention when something bad happens, more Ohioans lean towards saying the current system is broken and unfixable than say it functions the way it's supposed to or is high functioning. Even with the more pessimistic view, Ohioans understand that the system faces various challenges and is overwhelmed and lacks resources.
- Adults in Ohio report fairly high familiarity with the US child welfare system yet are split when it comes to describing the primary purpose of the system. However, Ohioans lean towards authorities investigating every report of abuse or neglect versus only investigating reports with compelling evidence. Interestingly though, most would need a strong reason to suspect that a child has already been harmed at minimum to file a report.
- Ohioans lean towards keeping families together when it comes to situations where removing a child from their family is a possibility. They think it's better to keep a child with their family, even if the risk of future harm is unclear over removing them. The end game for Ohioans is family reunification; importantly, more than half favor giving parents ample time they need to address challenges especially if it means parents can be reunited with their child in the system. Additionally, if a child were to be removed, Ohioans strongly favor trying all extended family members for rehoming before resorting to foster care. Lastly, if a child were to be in foster care and eventually adopted, adults in Ohio feel strongly that continued relations with the child's biological parents/family should be a priority for both the system and the adopting family if it is safe for the child.

*Throughout the report, * indicates a small base size (<n=100) and that data should be viewed as directional in nature*

DETAILED FINDINGS

Overarching Value Systems About Parenting

Adults in Ohio, whether they are parents or not, understand parenting to be a difficult job – if not one of the toughest. And, the majority think that parents should have the upper hand over the government when it comes to deciding how to parent their children.

- Nearly all adults in Ohio (90%) believe that parenting is a tough job, with close to half saying that it's the toughest job out there (45%). **(Q103)**

- When it comes to the role that the government should play in how people parent their children, despite the fact that the government can and does impose restrictions on parenting to ensure children's well-being, the majority of adults in Ohio (60%) lean towards favoring parents' authority to raise their children as they see fit, with a quarter (27%) saying they *heavily* favor parents' authority. **(Q100)**



Beliefs on Root Causes About Issues of Child Abuse and Neglect

Adults in Ohio have differing opinions when it comes to what attributes to abuse or neglect. In addition to this difference, neglect is seen as an act stemming from multiple intertwining circumstances while abuse is more attributed to the single cause of ill intent. Regardless of the combination of factors that may lead to abuse or neglect, nearly two-thirds agree that most acts of abuse or neglect are intentional or willful on that parent's part.

- Adults in Ohio view the root causes of child abuse and child neglect as fundamentally different, especially as there is an overarching single cause attributed for abuse compared to multiple similarly cited causes for neglect.
 - a. Child abuse is most attributed to parents with ill intent or a desire to harm their child (81%), with parents with generational trauma patterns of their own (74%) in a far second. Further, among those who reported this as a cause of child abuse, 3 in 10 see it as the **primary** cause of child abuse (29%). **(Q200, Q205)**
 - b. Child neglect on the other hand, is most attributed to parents who use drugs or alcohol (70%). However, parents who don't want to care for their children (69%), parents who are uninformed or uneducated (68%) and parents who are unprepared/ have unplanned pregnancies (66%) follow in close pursuit as the most attributed cause. Ultimately, parents who don't want to care for their children (20%) is most likely to be considered the **primary** cause of neglect. **(Q200, Q205)**
- Three quarters of adults in Ohio (76%) agree that parents who have been neglectful can provide safe and nurturing care for their children when they receive needed supports. Though this sentiment isn't as strong towards abusive parents, still around half (54%) agree that these parents can provide the appropriate care when supported. **(Q215)**
 - a. Nearly 3 in 4 (71%) say that they are more understanding of parents involved in cases of child abuse or neglect if they know they are trying to get help or find a way out of their situation. **(Q215)**
 - b. However, empathy wanes when considering the ultimate fault of abuse or neglect. Just under 2 in 3 adults (64%) agree that most acts of child neglect or abuse are intentional or willful on the parent's part and are less likely to agree that these acts usually aren't the parent's fault, but rather a product of unfortunate circumstances (only 35% agree). **(Q215)**
- Parents' situations certainly impact how adults in Ohio view their worthiness of redemption, or if redemption is even possible.
 - a. Adults in Ohio are far more likely to see parents living in poverty or experiencing homelessness as likely to be able to ensure their children are safe and appropriately cared for if provided appropriate supports (70% say these individuals are somewhat or very likely) and are least likely to see parents with a history of physically abuse behavior in particular as able to turn their behavior around (41%). **(Q220)**

Perceptions of the Current System

Most adults in Ohio have learned about the US child welfare system through news and media outlets. While they view the system slightly more positively than negatively and understand that the system only gets attention when something bad happens more Ohioans lean towards saying the current system is broken and unfixable than say it functions the way it's supposed to or that it's high functioning. Even with the more pessimistic view, Ohioans understand that the system faces various challenges and that they system is overwhelmed and lacks resources

- Adults in Ohio have learned about the current child welfare system mostly through news/media outlets (46%), followed by their friends/family (42%), with most citing news/media outlets as their main source for information (29%). **(Q500, Q505)**
- Though adults in Ohio lean slightly more positively (48%) than negatively (45%) in terms of their perceptions of the current child welfare system in this country, most fall somewhere in the middle.
 - a. Less than 1 in 10 aren't sure how they feel about the system (7%). **(Q510)**
- In terms of the functionality of the current system, Ohioans appear pessimistic, as most (56%) lean towards the system being broken and unfixable, and only 22% say it functions the way it was designed to operate or is high functioning (15%). **(Q525)**
- Overall, adults in Ohio say lack of services to meet the needs of parents/children (95%), lack of resources/staffing (93%), and bureaucracy/red tape (93%) are the top obstacles the child welfare system faces. **(Q530)**
- The majority understand that the child welfare system is simply overwhelmed and lacks resources (81% somewhat/strongly agree, 33% strongly agree), and that the system only gets attention when something bad happens (78% agree, 27% strongly agree).
 - a. Similar proportions feel that the child welfare system faces the nearly impossible task of balancing the needs of families with the safety of children (76% agree, 23% strongly agree). **(Q535)**
- Further, nearly 3 in 5 disagree that the welfare system is government overreach (56%), though half say that the system does perpetuate the oppression of marginalized populations (50%). **(Q535)**

Opinions on the Path to Intervention and an Ideal Child Welfare System

Adults in Ohio report fairly high familiarity with the US child welfare system yet are split when it comes to describing the primary purpose of the system. However, Ohioans lean towards authorities investigating every report of abuse or neglect versus only investigating reports with compelling evidence. Interestingly, most – a third – would need a strong reason to suspect that a child has already been harmed at minimum to file a report.

- Adults in Ohio seem to be fairly familiar with the US child welfare system as a whole, with 3 in 5 (62%) saying they are familiar (14% very familiar) and just under 2 in 5 (38%) saying they are unfamiliar. **(Q300)**
- When it comes to describing what the primary purpose of the child welfare system in this country should be, Ohioans lean towards the system primarily strengthening families' ability to care for their children (54%) over primarily protecting children at risk of abuse or neglect by their families (41%). **(Q302)**
- To feel comfortable filing a report themselves in a situation where they suspected or knew that a child was being or had been abused or neglected, most say that they would at minimum need either a strong reason to suspect that a child has already been harmed (36%) or first-hand knowledge (26%). A quarter, though, would feel comfortable reporting with any reason to suspect harm or potential harm (25%). **(Q305)**
- When it comes to how the U.S. child welfare system should make decisions on whether to investigate reports, Ohioans lean towards authorities investigating every report, even if that means that some parents might be investigated unnecessarily (60%) over only investigating reports with compelling evidence (37%). **(Q310)**

Overall, adults in Ohio see child welfare as a joint responsibility between government agencies and community / religious organizations. Scenarios of abuse, however, are more straightforward – investigations and instances involving physical harm to a child are perceived to fall under the responsibility of the government, whereas support in meeting the needs of children and parents (including homelessness, poverty, hunger, and hygiene) should be a joint effort in the eyes of the public.

- Scenarios that adults in Ohio deem as warranting child welfare authorities' intervention vary. Overwhelmingly, they believe that child welfare authorities should investigate over other government or community agencies when: **(Q315)**
 - a. A child has bruises, cuts, burns, or other indications of physical harm (85%).
 - b. A newborn shows signs of exposure to substance use during pregnancy after being born (81%).
 - c. There is evidence of domestic violence / spousal abuse occurring in the child's home (80%).
 - d. There is evidence of a child's parent abusing substances (77%).
 - e. A young child is left unattended or unsupervised for any extended period of time (72%).

- But in other scenarios, Ohioans are split on whether another government or community agency should offer support or child welfare authorities should investigate, including when: **(Q315)**
 - a. A family with children is experiencing homelessness (47% say another government or community agency should offer support).
 - b. A child regularly says they have to skip meals because there isn't any food at home (36%).
 - c. There is evidence that a child routinely lacks basic hygiene (35%).
- The shared responsibility of support and intervention is further supported by 7 in 10 (69%) Ohioans saying that both governmental and community / religious organizations are needed to effectively respond to concerns of child abuse and neglect, rather than one or the other. **(Q330)**
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, adults in Ohio see the responsibility of conducting investigations into allegations of abuse or neglect largely as that of government agencies (59%) over that of community / religious organizations (6%). **(Q400)**
 - a. However, many aspects of protecting children in need are seen as shared responsibilities in the public's eyes between government agencies and community / religious organizations, namely meeting the needs of families to prevent abuse or neglect (61% say this is equally the responsibility of government agencies and community / religious orgs.), meeting the needs of children and parents who have been reported for abuse so that they can remain together (58%), ensuring temporary alternative homes for children who can't remain at home (58%), and finding permanent homes for children who can no longer be cared for by their parents (55%).
- To the same effect of the minimum level of evidence Ohioans themselves would feel they need in order to file a report, most think that child welfare authorities would need at least a report detailing a strong reason to suspect that a child has already been harmed or is actively being harmed (37%), though just under 1 in 4 think that all that is needed is a report detailing any reason to suspect harm (23%). **(Q320)**
- While 3 in 5 (61%) Ohioans agree that too often, decisions on whether the child welfare system should intervene in families are influenced by racial biases, this sentiment is even stronger when it comes to socioeconomic / poverty biases (71%). **(Q325)**

Perceptions on Child Removal / Family Preservation

Ohioans lean towards keeping families together when it comes to situations where removing a child from their family is a possibility. They think it's better to keep a child with their family, even if the risk of future harm is unclear over removing them. The end game for Ohioans is family reunification; importantly, more than half favor giving parents ample time they need to address challenges especially if it means parents can be reunited with their child in the system. Additionally, if a child were to be removed, Ohioans strongly favor trying all extended family members for rehoming before resorting to foster care. Lastly, if a child were to be in foster care and eventually adopted, adults in Ohio feel strongly that continued relations with the child's biological parents/family should be a priority for both the system and the adopting family if it is safe for the child.

- Half (51%) of Ohioans favor keeping a child with their family, even if the risk of future harm is unclear when it comes to removing a child from their family once an investigation takes place, rather than removing the child from their home (42%). **(Q605)**
- Additionally, adults in Ohio favor the child welfare system giving parents more time to address challenges and reunify with their children – even if that means more time in foster care (56%) versus minimizing the time in foster care (38%).
 - a. Notably, just over 1 in 8 (14%) *heavily* favor the system giving parents more time to be reunited with their children. **(Q620)**
- When details of the standard amount of time parents are given to address their issues (15 months), three in five adults in Ohio (60%) said they believe this is the right amount of time to give. However, the other 2 in 5 are split between those saying 15 months is too much time (23%) and those saying it's not enough (17%). **(Q625)**
- Ohioans overwhelmingly feel that extended family members should be identified to take in children when problems arise before resorting to foster care (89% somewhat / strongly agree, 42% strongly agree). **(Q615)**
 - a. Further, most agree that children should not be adopted to an adoptive family until all extended family / kin options have been exhausted first (76% agree, 33% strongly agree). **(Q630)**
 - b. However, they also feel that extended family members should receive similar screening, support and resources as foster parents when taking care of children (87%), especially as more than half (56%) also think authorities should be wary of relying on the help of extended family members who are related to the parent who is neglecting or abusing their child. **(Q615)**
- Ohioans lean towards keeping adoptions open as 7 in 10 (69%) say adoptive parents should help their adopted children maintain an ongoing and safe relationship with their biological parents/families and less than half (48%) agree that once a child is adopted from foster care that it is better for them to avoid contact with their biological parents/families. **(Q630)**

METHODS *(To be included in all materials for public release)*

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bipartisan Policy Center among 3,635 US adults aged 18+. The sample was divided into three groups: The national sample which included 2,013 respondents from all over the U.S., Georgia oversample which included 813 Georgia residents, and Ohio oversample with 809 Ohio residents. The survey was conducted from June 29 – July 19, 2023.

Data for the main sample is weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Data for Georgia and Ohio oversamples is weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, household size, household income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within the following percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

- Main sample, accurate to within ± 2.9 percentage points
- Georgia Oversample, accurate to within ± 4.6 percentage points
- Ohio Oversample, accurate to within ± 4.8 percentage points

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Abbreviated method statement available upon request