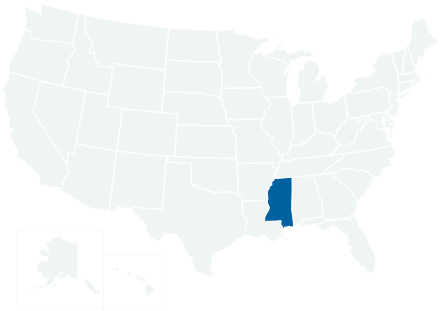
ECONOMIST IMPACT



# Mississippi

Estimations of the scale, scope and cost of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) in the United States are alarming.[1] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that approximately one in four girls and one in 20 boys will experience sexual abuse during childhood in US,[2] while the estimated lifetime cost per child sexual abuse victim is $282,734 million.[3,4] The good news is that CSAE is preventable. A range of interventions have been identified to help prevent child abuse and sexual violence from occurring in the first place and to minimize the impacts on survivors and their families.[5,6,7]

Economist Impact's Out of the Shadows Index, supported by World Childhood Foundation USA, was designed to shine a spotlight on state action—and inaction—to address CSAE. The assessment includes more than 170 metrics aggregated into 22 indicators and grouped into four categories to gauge the extent to which states have introduced essential measures to prevent and respond to this pressing issue. It aims to be a tool to highlight areas for prioritization, drive change, and benchmark progress.

**The following state profile was created as part of the second iteration of the Out of the Shadows Index (2024). For full findings and insights from the 2025 index, visit www.childhood-usa.org**

## 2025 results

| Score | Rank |
|---|---|
| 40.5/100 | 48/51 |

### Background indicators

| | |
|---|---|
| Population (m) | 2.94 |
| Median household income (USD) | 48,716 |
| Poverty rate (% below poverty level) | 19 |
| Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher) | 22 |
| Female representation in state government (%) | 14 |
| Investment in education per pupil (USD): | 10,170 |

## State overview (2024)

**While Mississippi has taken some important steps to address CSAE, increased investment is needed to guarantee a more comprehensive and holistic approach to this pressing issue. In particular, greater focus is needed to build prevention capacity and to support survivors' access to trauma-informed and victim-centered response processes.**

### State spotlights

Beginning in 2022, Mississippi introduced a **special license plate program where a portion of the proceeds flow to Children's Advocacy Centers** (CACs)[8] and the response to child abuse, including sexual abuse, across the state.[9]

### Priority areas for future focus

**Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence** by:
- Setting a legal minimum age for marriage to 18 without exception; and by
- Adopting a clear and explicit statutory definition of sexual consent.[10]

**Boost prevention capacity** through the development of a statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan or strategy, encompassing in-person and online abuse. Actions should include:
- Enacting more comprehensive sex education standards—requiring that such instruction include information about HIV/STIs, contraception and consent—and be evidence-based, medically accurate and inclusive of all students;
- Mandating age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education for all students in grades K–12 using evidence-based programs, including instruction on abuse that can be experienced online; and by
- Requiring regular training on child sexual abuse and teen dating violence for employees and volunteers of schools and youth-serving organizations.[11]

**Ensure children have access to services of the highest standards** by:
- Amending the statutory definition of CACs to be in line with or tied to the National Children's Alliance's National Standards of Accreditation; and by
- Mandating the use of CACs and trained forensic interviewers for all cases of suspected child sexual abuse.

**Promote a trauma-informed response** by:
- Mandating ongoing, statewide training for child-protective service investigators, law enforcement and prosecutors on providing a trauma-informed response to child sexual abuse; and by
- Ensuring that children up to the age of 18 have access to measures protecting against re-traumatization during criminal proceedings.[12]

**Support survivors' access to justice and compensation** by:
- Eliminating the criminal statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse crimes and the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse claims against all defendants; and by
- Reforming the state's eligibility requirements for crime victim compensation to address potential barriers to critical financial assistance for survivors of child sexual abuse (eg, to cover costs related to medical and therapeutic care).[13]

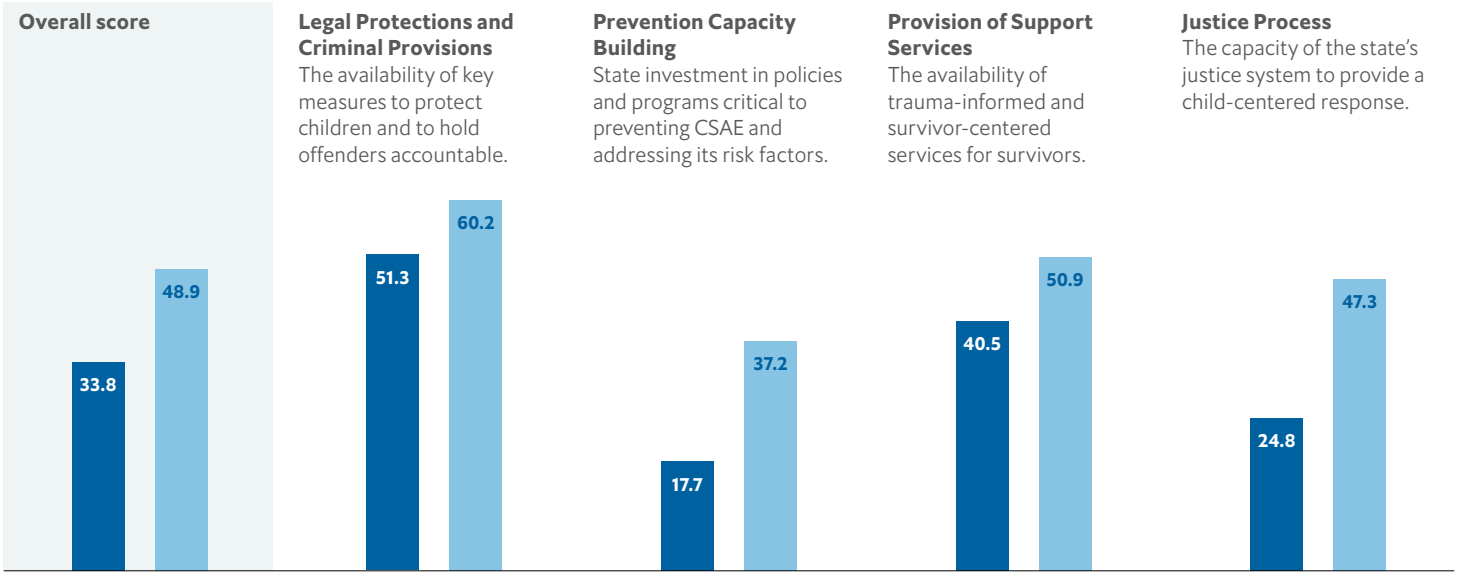
SUPPORTED BY CHILDHOOD WORLD CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION FOUNDED BY H.M. QUEEN SILVIA OF SWEDEN

© The Economist Group 2024

# The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Mississippi

## Index scores (2024)

Mississippi  28-state average




## Issue spotlights[14] (2024)

| Creating protective environments | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mandated sex education and HIV/STI instruction | Sex ed / HIV/STI instruction | ◐ |
| Comprehensiveness of sex education and HIV/STI instruction (if/when provided)[15] | Scale of comprehensiveness | 0/7 |
| Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education | Yes / no | ○ |
| Mandated online sexual abuse prevention and awareness education | Yes / no | ○ |
| Required school dating violence policies | Yes / no | ○ |
| Required training on child sexual abuse (CSA) for educators | Yes / no | ○ |
| Required training on CSA for youth-serving organization employees | Yes / no | ○ |
| Educator code of ethics: appropriate teacher/ student boundaries | Yes / no | ● |
| **Addressing risk and protective factors** | | |
| Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan | Yes / no | ○ |
| Child marriage laws | 18 without exception / required proof of age | ◑ |
| Mandated parental leave | Yes / no | ○ |
| Non-discrimination statutory protections[16] | Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity | ◐ |
| Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold | Yes / no | ○ |
| Income-eligible children with access to early head start | % | 9.6 |
| Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs | % | 1.2 |
| Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse | Yes / no | ○ |

| Building trauma-informed systems | | |
|---|---|---|
| Statute defining CACs in line with national standards[17] | Yes / no | ○ |
| Statute requiring the use of CACs in suspected CSA cases, where available | Yes / no | ○ |
| State funding for CACs: general revenue and special revenue | General revenue / special revenue | ◑ |
| Mandated training for child protective services investigators[18] | Child sexual abuse / trauma | ◐ |
| Mandated training for law enforcement | Child sexual abuse / trauma | ◐ |
| Mandated training for prosecutors | Child sexual abuse / trauma | ◐ |
| Preventing retraumatization in court: testifying by alternative means in CSA cases | Younger children / all minors | ◑ |
| Preventing retraumatization in court: hearsay exception in CSA cases | Younger children / all minors | ◑ |
| **Supporting justice and healing** | | |
| Medical care following sexual abuse: minors' authority to consent | Yes / no | ○ |
| Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate | Yes / no | ○ |
| Rape kit reform | Some reform / full reform | ◐ |
| Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes | Yes / no | ○ |
| Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims | Yes / no | ○ |
| Revival or window law for expired civil claims | Yes / no | ○ |
| Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA[19] | Yes / no | ● |
| Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA[20] | Yes / no | ○ |


**For further information, please contact:**

- **Katherine Stewart** katherinestewart@economist.com
- **Laura Avery** lauraavery@economist.com


© The Economist Group 2024

**Endnotes:**

1. The index and profile may refer to specific forms of child maltreatment or sexual violence (eg, child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation) to distinguish between findings or areas of research.
2. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html#:~:text=Many%20children%20wait%20to%20report,States%20experience%20child%20sexual%20abuse
3. $282,734 is the average lifetime cost for female victims of non-fatal child sexual abuse (CSA). For male victims, it is approximately $74,691 (although this lower estimate is likely influenced by the insufficient data available on productivity losses). The lifetime cost for victims of fatal CSA per female and male victim was estimated, on average, to be $1,128,334 and $1,482,933, respectively. All estimates pertain to the year 2015.
4. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29533869/#:~:text=Estimating%2020%20new%20cases%20of,%241%2C482%2C933%2C%20respectively%2C%20and%20the%20average
5. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
6. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
7. https://www.togetherforgirls.org/en/resources/what-works-to-prevent-sexual-violence-against-children-evidence-review
8. Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organizations located throughout the US that help facilitate a multidisciplinary and child-centered response to CSAE. These centers bring together several of the key actors—law enforcement, child protective services investigators, medical and mental health professionals, forensic interviewers, victim advocates, and more—under one roof, helping to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
9. MS Code Ann. § 27-19-56.402
10. This definition should include reference to consent being "freely" or "voluntarily" given.
11. The school board of each school district in Mississippi is required to adopt a comprehensive local school district school safety plan. As a component of this plan, school districts may adopt and implement a policy addressing sexual abuse of children, including training for school personnel on child sexual abuse and age-appropriate curriculum for students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Such instruction and training is, however, not required (MS Code Ann. § 37-3-83).
12. Testimonial aids can help protect a child who has already been the subject of sexual abuse from incurring further trauma. This includes avenues by which child victims or witnesses of sexual abuse may testify by an alternative method outside of the courtroom, such as via closed-circuit television. Many states also have statutory exceptions for child hearsay—or the admissibility of certain out-of-court statements made by a child, such as those made to police or forensic interviewers—which have been widely established for use in cases involving sexual abuse.
13. Key barriers that can prevent survivors from accessing victim compensation include set timeframes for when an application can be filed and/or requiring a police report as a condition for eligibility.
14. The research for the 2024 index was conducted between March and September 2023. As such, the findings reflect the most recent available data at the time the research was completed.
15. "Comprehensiveness" is assessed based on the following standards: whether the state has a law or statewide rules, regulations or standards with the force of law requiring that sex education and HIV/STI instruction be evidence-based, medically accurate, culturally appropriate and inclusive of all students, and whether related courses are required to include information about contraception and consent.
16. This figure indicates whether statewide laws or policies explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in all of the following areas: employment, housing, and education.
17. "National standards" refers to the National Children's Alliance's National Standards of Accreditation.
18. These indicators consider whether the state mandates specialized training for child protective services investigators, law enforcement, and prosecutors on CSA and/or trauma at regular intervals (eg, every two years). A separate indicator assesses basic training requirements for mandated reporters in the state more broadly.
19. This indicator considers whether state law establishing eligibility for the state's Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides an explicit time frame exception that is applicable to survivors of CSA (eg, minor victims of crime have up to the age of 21 to file a claim).
20. This indicator assesses whether state law establishing eligibility for the state's Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides alternatives to making a police report for survivors of CSA (such as reports made to child protective services, a sexual assault counselor, or a CAC employee; a restraining or civil protection order granted to the victim; or records from a sexual assault forensic examination). Limited, time bound, or vague exceptions to this requirement were not considered.

© The Economist Group 2024