

Child Abuse & Neglect

For the most recent three-year period (Fiscal Years 1997 - 1999) an average annual of more than fifty-five thousand (55,711) situations were investigated by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) as possible abuse and/or neglect of one or more children.

During this period DHS confirmed a near record-high number of those allegations. On average more than fifteen thousand (15,518) of the incidents investigated each year were found to be actual abuse and/or neglect.

In Oklahoma, approximately every thirty-four minutes a child is a victim of confirmed abuse and/or neglect.

During the most recent three-year period (Fiscal Years 1997 - 1999), the rate of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma continued to rise when compared to the three-year period just one year earlier (Fiscal Years 1996 - 1998).

Oklahoma abuse and neglect rates moved from 15.9 to 17.7 confirmations per 1,000 children in the state, with comparable rates also worsening in the large majority (62 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

Child abuse and neglect is maintaining its record high rates. Today, Oklahoma's rate of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect (17.7 confirmations per 1,000 children) is close to double what it was in the mid-1980's (9.0 confirmations per 1,000 children). Such rates also worsened in almost every (71 of 77) Oklahoma county during the same period.

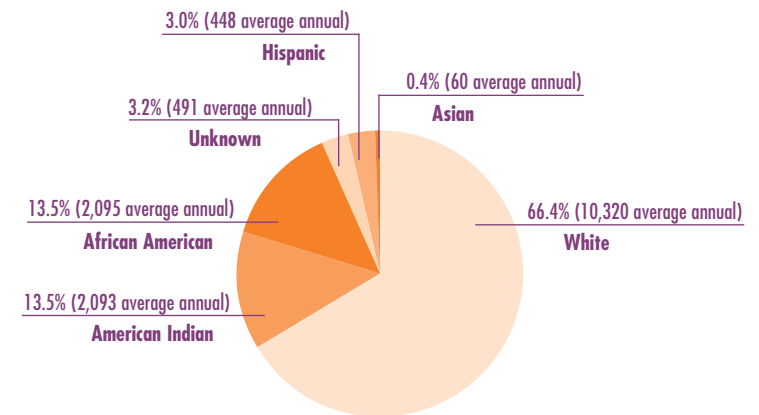
The rates of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect in the majority of Oklahoma counties (45 of 77) were better than the average county rate (18.7 confirmations per 1,000 children in the county). During this most recent period, the highest and worst proportion of children confirmed to be victims of child abuse and/or neglect (42.9 per 1,000) is found in Pushmataha County; the lowest and best (6.0 per 1,000) is in Beaver County.

A total of forty-seven Oklahoma children died from child abuse and/or neglect during FY 1999. Among the dead were nineteen girls and twenty-eight boys of all races. Twenty were less than one year of age; fifteen were toddlers (ages one through three). The dead also included school age children ranging from preschoolers to children old enough to be in high school. The oldest known to have died at the hands of their caretakers this year were four fifteen and sixteen year old girls. One was the victim of neglect. Three died from abuse.

The large majority (66.4%) of confirmations of abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma involve children who are White. However, while non-White children comprise only about one-fifth (21.7%) of the child population, they account for a greater proportion (37.4%, excluding Hispanics and unknown) of the confirmed child abuse and/or neglect incidents. Hispanic children, recorded as a nationality rather than a race, comprise just over five percent (5.5%) of Oklahoma's child population. A lower proportion of confirmed abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma (3.0%) involved children counted as Hispanic.

Impact on early childhood and Oklahoma's future

- » *Child abuse and neglect hurts and kills Oklahoma infants, toddlers and preschool children.* During the most recent three-year period (FY 1997 - 1999), more than forty percent (40.6%) of the victims of child abuse were not yet six years of age. Oklahoma's youngest abuse victims are more likely to die. More than three-quarters (78.4%) of the deaths attributable to child abuse or neglect during this time were children under six years old. An Oklahoma child dying as a result of abuse or neglect is most frequently an infant.



Child Abuse & Neglect Confirmations

By Race of Child,
Oklahoma, FY 1997-1999

- » *Oklahoma child abuse and neglect remains high, with child abuse and neglect deaths worsening.* FY 1999 Oklahoma child abuse confirmations fell just under the record high registered the prior year. Abuse and neglect related deaths continue to increase. Deaths from neglect are more common than deaths from abuse.
- » *Child abuse and neglect is a predictor of early childhood problems.* In Oklahoma, child victims of abuse are most commonly beaten or sexually abused. Mental injuries are on the rise; Shaken Baby Syndrome is a common cause. Half of the

young victims will suffer delay in their development or serious physical or emotional impairments. Attachment disorders are common. The number of very young Oklahoma children removed from their homes to live in foster care has grown rapidly over the past decade.

- » *Early childhood problems are a predictor of child abuse and neglect.* Low birthweight infants, infants born premature, and children with disabilities, chronic illnesses or developmental delay are at higher risk of abuse and neglect.

- » *Child abuse and neglect is part of a cycle threatening future generations of infants, toddlers and preschool children.* Children of adolescent mothers are more than twice as likely to be victims of child abuse and neglect than are the offspring of mothers who are either twenty or twenty-one years of age. There is a direct relationship between being a victim of sexual abuse and later teen pregnancy. Teen mothers and their babies, in turn, face bleak futures. Victims become abusers. Research indicates that victims of child abuse are at a higher risk of abusing their own children when they become parents.

Confirmed Cases of Child Abuse & Neglect

Three-year Rate of Confirmations After Investigation per 1,000 children; Oklahoma: Fiscal Years 1997-1999, State Rate: 17.7 per 1000 children, Average of County Rates: 18.7 per 1000 children

Just under one-third (4,917 per year or 31.7%) of the confirmed incidents of child abuse and/or neglect occurred in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with just over one-third (34.6%) of Oklahoma's children.

