

OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

There are over half a million (529,773) Oklahomans over age 14 and under age 25. This decade in a young person's life can be the best. Becoming an adult is exciting. It is a time of change. Dreams become reality. Dependency turns into responsibility. Anxiety is transformed into confidence. Most Oklahoma youth successfully navigate their road to independence — graduating, finding employment, beginning careers and families. These youth benefit from the solid support and guidance of family, friends and communities. Their education and experience provide the foundation upon which they build their future and Oklahoma's future.

There are other young people in Oklahoma who, through little fault of their own, face their futures with fear and frustration. Too many of these young Oklahomans live in poverty. Some are neither in school nor employed. Many live out their teenage years away from their own family. Some become parents themselves, too young, too soon. Others spiral into misuse of alcohol and drugs, mired in addiction or in trouble with the law or both. Some die.

Their problems are serious. It should be no mystery these youth have difficulties. They have been seriously

harmed and have rarely been given a chance for success. Emerging solutions are encouraging. Key is supporting the individual assets of each young person. Here family matters much. School and community become vital. Programs which develop youth assets, combined with those that reduce risk-taking behaviors, offer the promise that Oklahoma's youth will successfully grow to be productive adults.

The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Partnership, a project of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA), uses key strategies to achieve its goal. First, KIDS COUNT "counts kids," providing accurate and up-to-date data on the status of Oklahoma's children and youth. Second, KIDS COUNT cultivates leadership on behalf of children and youth, giving voice to their needs at the local level. Third, KIDS COUNT communicates the needs of children and youth, using extensive public awareness activities.

The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook uses benchmarks to profile the status of children and youth in our state. Benchmarks are quantifiable measures that, when taken together, help determine child, family and community well-being. From an established baseline, this ninth Oklahoma KIDS COUNT

Factbook tracks progress, or the lack of progress, over time for **low birthweight infants, infant mortality, births to young teens, child abuse & neglect, child death, and juvenile violent crime arrests**. Changes in state data collection methods currently prevent comparisons over time for **high school dropouts**.

There is good news. The 2004 Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook documents that four benchmarks improved over the comparable data from the middle of the 1980's.

There is bad news. Two of the seven benchmarks tracked worsened when compared to data from the middle of the 1980's.

The improved rates obscure the challenges faced by large numbers of young Oklahomans each year. One in every five (19.6%) Oklahoma children lives in poverty. Each year, more than thirteen thousand (13,253) children are abused or neglected and sixty-five hundred (6,528) youth quit high school. Each year, more than twenty-three hundred (2,343) girls ages 15 through 17 become mothers and almost four hundred (394) babies do not live to see their first birthday. Each year, one thousand (1,001) children and youth are arrested for murder, rape, aggravated assault or robbery.

Oklahoma		Number of Children (2002): 873,560		Children are 25.0% of the state population		Number of Poor Children (2000): 166,213		Child Poverty Rate: 19.1% (2000)	
Indicator	Base Data	-	Worsened	Improved	+	Recent Data	Recent Numbers		
Low Birthweight	6.4% of live births 1984-86	-21.0%				7.8% of live births 2000-2002	3,877 average annual 2000-2002		
Infant Mortality	10.5/1000 live births 1984-86				25%	7.9/1000 live births 2000-2002	394 average annual 2000-2002		
Births to Young Teens	43.9/1000 girls 15-17 1984-86				29.2%	31.1/1000 girls 15-17 2000-2002	2,343 average annual 2000-2002		
Child Abuse & Neglect	9.0 confirmed/1000 children FY 1984-86	-66.5%				15.0 confirmed/1000 children FY 2001-2003	13,253 average annual FY 2001-FY 2002		
Child Deaths	41.5/100,000 children 1-14 1984-86				31.3%	31.3/100,000 children 1-14 2000-2002	194 average annual 2000-2002		
High School Dropouts	3.8% of grades 9-12 SY 2000/01-2002/03					Trend data available in future Factbooks.		6,528 average annual School Year 2001/2002 - 2002/2003	
Violent Crime Arrests	334.1/100,000 youth 10-17 1990-92				26.1%	246.7/100,000 youth 10-17 2000-2002	1,001 average annual 2000-2002		

A State Profile:

Youth and Young Adults Building Oklahoma's Future

More than a third of all Oklahomans (35.8%, or 1,250,816) are younger than twenty-five years of age. Almost half of those (529,773) are over the age of 14, perched on the very edge of adulthood. Growing up is difficult in the best of circumstances. Some will mature with grace, making us proud. Others, facing this transition unprepared and unsupported through no fault of their own, will simply terrify us.

The successes and failures of today's young people will determine their futures and ours. Today's youth will become tomorrow's teachers and doctors. They will set policy at Oklahoma's ballot boxes. They will run state agencies and be responsible for Oklahoma's security. From their ranks will come school board and city council members, state and federal legislators, Oklahoma's governor, and maybe even the President of the United States. They will also become tomorrow's unemployed. Those in poor health will fill our hospitals and die before their time. Some will skirt the law. Many will be in prison. One will be the police officer that arrives in your neighborhood to keep another one from robbing or raping.

Why do some young people succeed and others do not? There are no easy answers. In 2004, the KIDS COUNT Factbook takes this initial look at how teens and young adults are faring in Oklahoma, highlighting some promising approaches to complex situations.



State of Oklahoma

Youth Status Indicator	Number	Rate	Youth Status Indicator	Number	Rate
Living in Poverty, Ages 15-24	101,759	21.4%	In Foster Care During Month, Ages 15-17	660	422.9 per 100,000
Disconnected Youth, Ages 16-19	19,758	9.3%	Drug & Alcohol Arrests, Ages 15-17	3,592	2,302.6 per 100,000
Births to Older Teens, Ages 18-19	5,150	97.6 per 1,000	Violent & Accidental Deaths, Ages 15-19	165	62.3 per 100,000

CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAKE OKLAHOMA YOUTH VULNERABLE TO NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

The Concept of Vulnerability

Most Oklahomans understand that some specific circumstances or behaviors can affect an individual's health or well-being. The concept of "risk factors" is one used frequently by public health officials. For example, it is commonly understood that bad diets put people at risk for heart problems, that a family history of cancer puts people at increased risk of being diagnosed with cancer themselves, and that not wearing seat belts invites the risk of death or disability from an automobile accident. A similar concept applies to Oklahoma teens and young adults. It is well documented that risks associated with specific circumstances or behaviors can affect a young person's health or well-being, making them more or less vulnerable to a myriad of positive and negative consequences.

Living with dismal circumstances becomes a risk factor for many young Oklahomans, making them more vulnerable and less likely to become self-supporting adults. Currently, more than one hundred thousand (101,759, ages 15 through 24) young Oklahomans live in poverty. Almost twenty thousand Oklahoma youth (19,758, ages 16 through 19) are disconnected, neither working nor in school. More than five thousand older teen females are already mothers (5,150, ages 18 and 19). Almost seven hundred (660, ages 15 through 17) teens live in foster care each month. Each year, more than thirty-five hundred (3,592, ages 15 through 17) arrests of teens for drug or alcohol crimes are made in Oklahoma. One hundred sixty five teens (ages 15 through 19) die accidental or violent deaths each year. These Oklahoma youth find themselves in circumstances where they face increased odds against making a successful transition to a productive, healthy adulthood. Some succeed in spite of risks they face, others don't. Some have already lost.

parents. One of every five (101,759, or 21.4%) teens and young adults (ages 15 through 24) in Oklahoma lives in poverty. More than fifty thousand (50,835), or half of those young people, live in extreme poverty in households where the income fails to reach even half of the poverty line.

High rates of child poverty among Oklahoma's youngest are well documented. The highest rates of poverty for those under age 18 are found among those age 4 and under. Poverty rates typically decline over childhood. Then youth are abruptly thrown back into poverty as they enter adulthood where rates for those just over age 18 skyrocket to almost twenty-four percent (23.9%). Half (50.6%) of these youth ages 18 through 24 who are poor live in extreme poverty.

The highest and worst rate of poverty for young people over the age of 14 and under the age of 25 is found in Payne County where almost half (45.2%) live in poverty. Payne County's high youth poverty rate results in part from relatively low-income university students making up a large portion of its youth population. Wagoner County has the lowest and best poverty rate (10.4%) among their teens and young adults.

Teens and Young Adults Living in Poverty

Poverty can sabotage a young person's effort to become a healthy, productive adult. For a teen or young adult, being poor means living in a household unable to purchase enough food for an adequate diet. It means being more likely than their peers to stay too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. Poor youth are less likely to receive medical care when they are sick and are more likely to drop out of school. Poverty can be fatal.

For young people, adequate resources are vital to becoming healthy adults, to starting higher education, to beginning careers, and to enabling independence. In spite of progress made throughout the 1990's, it is as though Oklahoma has accepted defeat in the war against poverty for youth about to become adults. For the first time in history, these young people will fare worse than their

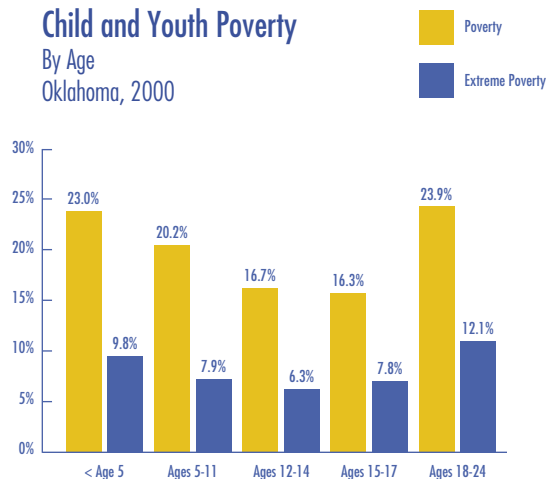
Disconnected Youth (Not Working and Not in School)

Getting a good start as a young adult is vital to lifelong success. Those who spend their young adult years unemployed and out of school have a hard time finding and getting a job later in life. Education is critical to maintaining employment. Almost one in ten (9.3%) Oklahoma youth from the ages of 16 through 19 are not engaged in either school or work. These nearly twenty thousand (19,758) idle youth undergo a difficult transition into adulthood and fail to get the good start vital to becoming self-supporting.

The rate of young Oklahomans who are not connected

Child and Youth Poverty

By Age
Oklahoma, 2000



to either work or school is higher for all non-White races, except Asian, than for Whites. In every racial group, young women are more often idle than young men. Disability contributes to young people being disconnected. One in eight (13.1%) idle youth over age 17 and under age 25 is disabled.

The proportion of idle teens ranges from the highest and worst rate of almost seventeen percent (16.9%) in Okfuskee County to the lowest and best rate of two percent (2.0%) in Grant County.

Births to Older Teens

Consequences of sexual activity among teens too often include unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. Each year about seventy-six hundred (7,606 average annual, 2000 - 2002) babies are born to Oklahoma females under the age of 20. Compared to women who delay childbearing until at least age 20, their risks are greater.

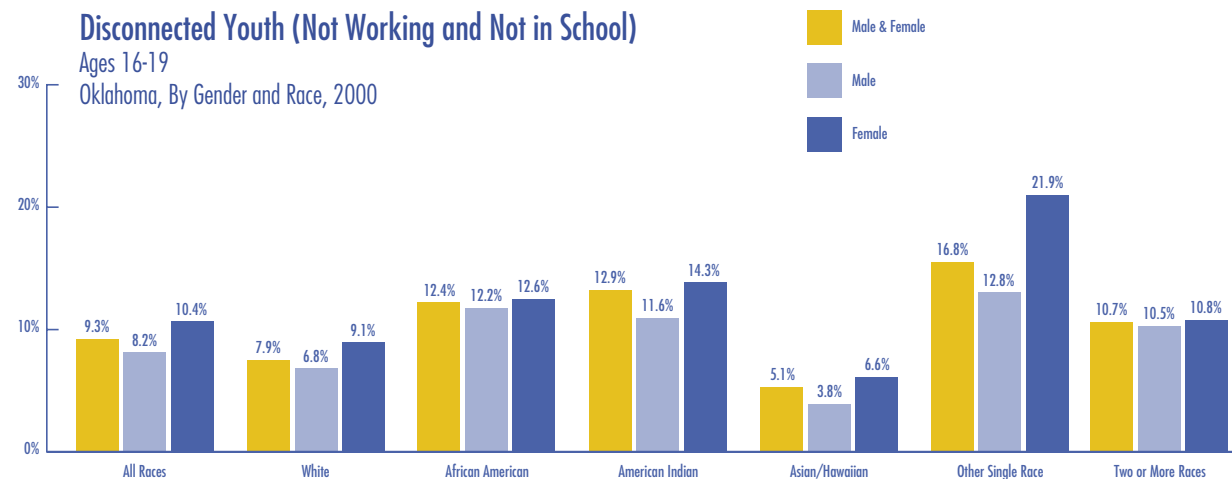
Births to older teens (ages 18 and 19) comprise over two-thirds (67.7%) of all teen births in Oklahoma each year. Oklahoma birth rates for older teens (96.9 per 1,000 females ages 18 and 19, 2002) far exceed national rates (72.8 per 1,000 females ages 18 and 19, 2002).

These young women, considered by many to already be adults, are often overlooked by health and education initiatives. However, having a child, even late in the teen years, complicates the process of becoming an adult. Many older teen mothers are still in school when they become pregnant and are less likely than their peers to graduate. During the most recent three year period (2000 - 2002), almost half (44.6%) of 18 and 19 year old mothers had not completed high school. With her education interrupted, the new mother is less likely to ever finish school and more likely to live in poverty. The children of 18 and 19 year old mothers are often born too small or too early. Low birthweight is more common among 18 and 19 year old mothers (8.7% annual average, 2000 -

2002) than among mothers age 20 or older (7.5% annual average, 2000 -2002).

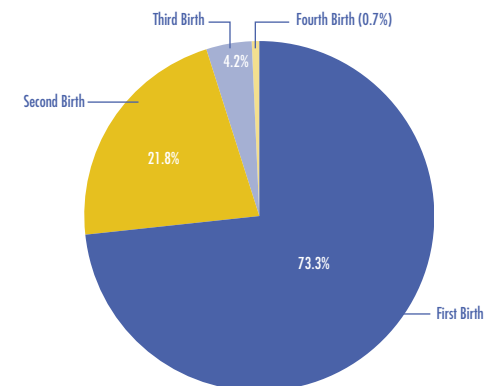
Subsequent births to Oklahoma teens who are already mothers are disturbingly common. Almost one in every four (22.5%) births to an older Oklahoma teen is a repeat pregnancy, with the first child likely born before the mother even turned 18. Young mothers who have a difficult first pregnancy or whose babies are born with problems have a three-fold risk of repeating that poor outcome in their second pregnancy. With more than one child, the teen mother has little chance of returning to school or attaining economic self-sufficiency.

The babies' risks increase also. Children of teen mothers, more often than children of older women, have mental retardation, live in poverty, and grow up without a father. They will more likely perform poorly in school, receive insufficient health care and inadequate parenting, or be abused or neglected. They are more likely to become teen parents themselves. If a teen mother gives birth again



Births to Older Teens

Ages 18 and 19
Oklahoma, 2000-2002 Annual Average



as a teenager, all of her children are more likely to have behavioral problems and less likely to be prepared for school themselves.

Currently, the highest and worst rate of older teen births in Oklahoma is found in Greer County where almost two hundred out of every thousand (199.0 per 1,000) young women ages 18 and 19 have babies each year. Young women ages 18 and 19 in Payne County have the lowest and best birth rate (27.9 per 1,000) for their age group.

Teens Living in Foster Care

Teens need permanency, stability and a family with whom to stay connected. Poor outcomes for young people whose family lives have been disrupted are well documented. Foster care youth are less healthy than other poor children. Most studies show that former foster care children do more poorly in school than other students. The multiple school changes often associated with foster care placements result in lower math and reading skills. Fewer graduate. Challenges of foster care are intensified for older

youth who contend with high rates of drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and teen parenting. Consequences are life altering and long term. Compared to other youth in the community, a higher proportion of foster care graduates end up in the criminal justice system, homeless, unemployed or dependent on public assistance.

Foster care children are a particularly vulnerable population. Most children and youth in foster care have been victims of poor parenting and substantial abuse or neglect. Some have been abandoned or orphaned. Children and youth are placed in state custody as a way to protect them after it has been determined that their parents are unable or unwilling to provide them care. They arrive in state care with emotional, behavioral, developmental and health troubles that reflect their difficult circumstances. Many foster care children are further traumatized by the separation from their parents. They struggle with difficult adjustments to new caregivers, often facing multiple placements. Some youth stay in foster care for a short time, then are reunified with their families. Others remain in care for months or years. Some grow into adults in state

care, literally “aging out” of the system.

Once in state custody, foster care children might be placed in regular foster care homes with adults not known to the child. Some state custody children are placed with relatives, or other adults they already know, such as the parents of a close friend, teachers or health care providers. Those “kinship” placements, whether with relatives or other adults, may be paid or unpaid. Some children are returned to their own homes under state supervision. Oklahoma maintains some therapeutic foster care homes as short term placements for children exhibiting severe behavior problems and some psychiatric placements for youth experiencing severe mental problems. Older foster care youth are substantially less likely than other foster children to be placed with a family. Congregate living facilities, such as group homes, are frequently used for older youth in Oklahoma.

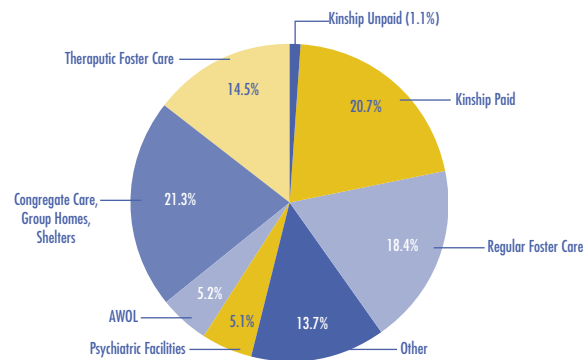
Currently, Oklahoma’s foster care system serves more than six thousand children and youth (6,258 annual average, FY2001-2003) each month. One in eight (749, or 12.0%) of Oklahoma’s foster care children are age 15 or older. Of these older youth, six hundred sixty (660) are ages 15 through 17 and eighty-nine are age 18 or older, having voluntarily remained in state custody in their foster homes to complete high school classes or finish their GED. Each year, the number of older youth in Oklahoma foster care steadily increases.

With girls making up almost sixty percent (58.1%) of the youth age 15 and older in the custody of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, older youth in foster care are disproportionately female. The foster care population is racially diverse and disproportionately non-White. One in five (19.9%) Oklahoma teens age 15 and older in foster care is African American and one in ten (9.2%) is American Indian.

Foster families receive monthly payments to help defray some of the costs of having an extra child in their

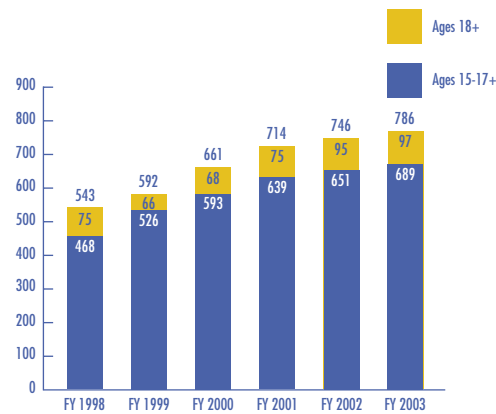
Placement of Youth in State Custody

Age 15 and Over
Oklahoma Department of Human Services, August 2004



Youth in Foster Care

Average Monthly Number, Ages 15 and Over
Oklahoma, FY 1998 - FY 2003

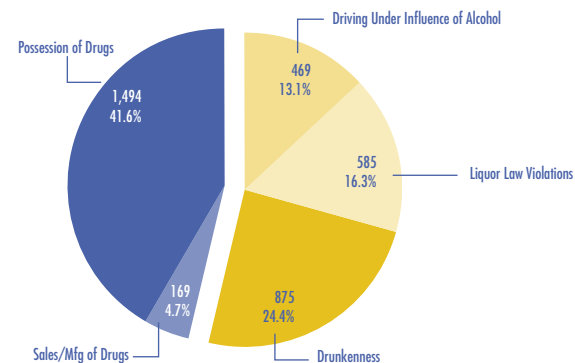


home. Regardless, national studies have documented that almost a third of the foster care population lives in poverty while in foster care. Reimbursement rates fail to fully compensate for the costs associated with the around-the-clock care provided by a foster family. Currently, the highest and worst foster care rate is in Coal County where during an average month youth ages 15 through 17 live in foster care at a rate of almost three thousand (2,857.1) per 100,000 teens. The lowest and best rate (0.0 per 100,000) is found in nine Oklahoma counties (Cimarron, Ellis, Grant, Harmon, Harper, Jefferson, Major, Roger Mills and Woodward).

Arrests of Teens for Drug and Alcohol Related Offenses

There is a tendency to consider some use of alcohol as a normal teenage right of passage. Since moderate drinking is typically viewed as acceptable among adults, experimenting with alcohol in adolescence may be inappropriately accepted. For many young people, use of alcohol, or even drugs, does not become a regular behavior or a permanent problem. Even so, because their bodies are

Drug and Alcohol Arrests
Age 15 through 17, By Charge
Oklahoma, Average Annual Number and Percent,
2000-2002



going through an important developmental period, the consequences of alcohol and drug use can be much more negative for youth than for adults.

Use of drugs or alcohol can interfere with a young person's ability to learn by causing memory problems, learning problems, reasoning difficulties and impairing brain functioning. Judgment and social functioning diminish substantially. Coordination and motor functioning become impaired. Because of the skills which are adversely affected by drug and alcohol use, safely operating an automobile becomes impossible. Intoxication is commonly involved with traffic fatalities, violence and serious criminal behavior. Extensive alcohol and drug use increases the risk a young person will develop serious medical complications.

Alcohol use is too common among Oklahoma teens. Each year almost two thousand arrests are made charging youth ages 15 through 17 with driving under the influence of alcohol, drunkenness or violating liquor laws. After alcohol, marijuana remains the drug of choice for Oklahoma teens ages 15 through 17 and was involved in four out of five (82.6%) of their arrests for drug possession and half (53.2%) of their arrests for drug manufacturing or sales. Drug and alcohol arrests among youth ages 15 through 17 are four times more likely to be males than females.

Currently, the highest and worst arrest rate is in Okfuskee County where during an average year youth ages 15 through 17 are arrested for drug- and alcohol-related offenses at a rate of almost seven thousand (6,812.7) per 100,000 teens. The lowest and best rate (0.0 per 100,000) is found in three Oklahoma counties (Cimarron, Ellis and Major).

Violent and Accidental Teen Death

Violence among teens typically involves carrying weapons, physical fighting and involvement in gang

activity. Consequences can be serious — altering lives or ending them.

It is common for youth, especially males, who have been exposed to violence in their homes and personal lives to carry weapons and act violently themselves. Smoking cigarettes and using drugs or alcohol strongly predict that a young person will act violently. Depression frequently predicts violence by a young person, turned inward toward one's self or outward towards others. Gang members and youth who associate with peers who are involved in delinquent behaviors have high rates of participation in violent crimes. Youth can, and often do, face legal consequences for their violent behaviors.

As children age, the severity of violent behavior escalates. A violent elementary school child may bully his classmates. A violent high school student might commit assault, hurting or killing another, or attempt suicide, hurting or killing himself.

Anti-social behavior often accompanies violent behavior, causing young people to be rejected by their peers and their teachers. As youth fail to regulate their emotions, they do poorly in school, skip classes and receive suspensions. School failures and school dropout rates increase as violence increases. If violent youth survive to adulthood, their difficulties continue. As adults they will frequently confront severe depression, termination of employment, dishonorable discharge from the military, alcohol and drug dependency, incarceration and high mortality rates.

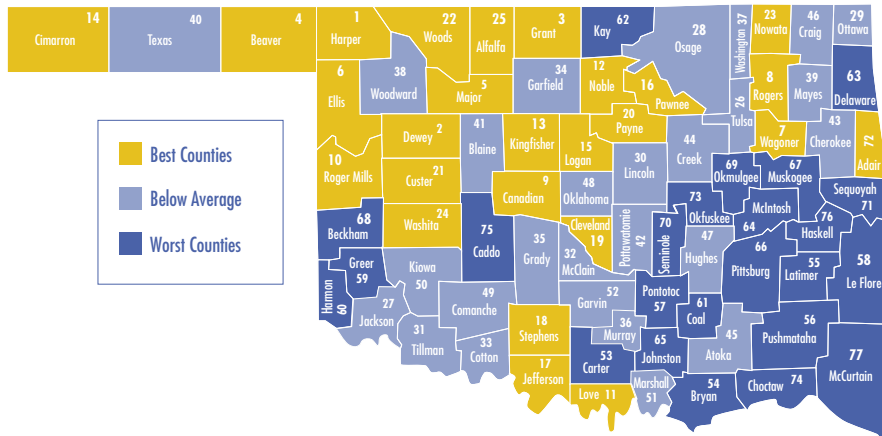
Motor vehicle crashes are the most common cause of accidental teen death. Serious injuries and fatalities are increased when young drivers and passengers fail to wear seatbelts. Recreation can hold dangers for young people. Death or serious disabilities can be caused by sports-related injuries, boating and swimming accidents, hunting injuries or bicycle accidents. Injuries, and deaths resulting

Youth Status Indicators by County

For the first time, Oklahoma KIDS COUNT ranks Oklahoma's 77 counties on these six indicators related to teen vulnerability (youth living in poverty, disconnected youth, older teen mothers, youth living in foster care, teen drug and alcohol arrests, and violent and accidental deaths of young people). Taken together, these indicators provide a comprehensive picture of the status of each county's youth in a manner which can be ranked, updated and tracked from year to year. Each county is ranked on each of the six indicators. All measures are given the same weight, with no attempt to judge relative importance. The six individual county rankings are totaled for each county into a Youth Status Indicator, in which the higher the number, the more improvement the county needs to achieve in order to provide the best opportunity for its teens to make a successful transition to a productive, healthy adulthood.

County Youth Status: Ranking of Various Youth Indicators

Living in Poverty (ages 15-24), Disconnected Youth (ages 16-19), Births to Older Teens (ages 18 and 19), In Foster Care During Month (ages 15-17), Drug and Alcohol Arrests (ages 15-17), Violent and Accidental Deaths (ages 15-19), Oklahoma Counties: Primarily using three-year averages of data from 2000 through 2002



from injuries, are more common among young males than among young females.

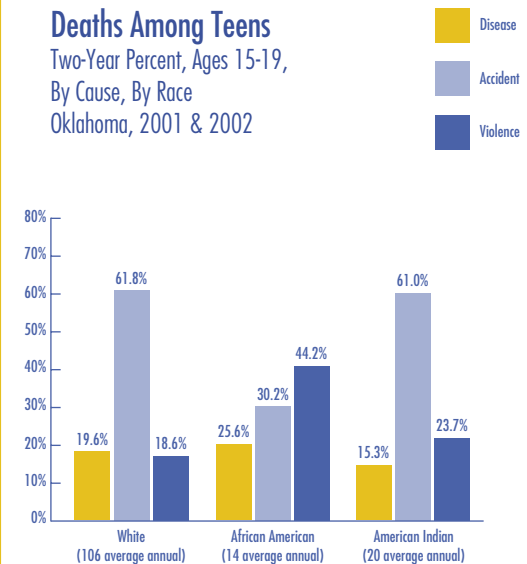
Today, accidents and injuries are the leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults. During the most recent three-year period an average of two hundred three youth from the ages of 15 through 19 died each year. Four of every five Oklahoma teen deaths (165, or 81.8%) were the result of accidents or violence.

Just under half of all deaths (44.2%) of Oklahoma African Americans ages 15 through 19 are violent, making violence the leading cause of death for young African Americans. Accidents are the leading cause of death for Whites (61.8%) and American Indians (61.0%) of the same ages in Oklahoma.

During the last two years (2001 and 2002) in Oklahoma, an average of twenty-six young people each year stood on the brink of adulthood and committed suicide instead. Over forty percent (42.3%) of the violent deaths of youth ages 15 through 19 in Oklahoma during this period resulted from suicide. Most suicide victims were White male youth.

Currently, the highest and worst death rate is in Greer County where during an average year youth ages 15 through 19 die accidental or violent deaths at a rate of over three hundred (330.7) per 100,000 teens. The lowest and best rate (0.0 per 100,000) is found in eleven Oklahoma counties (Beaver, Coal, Dewey, Harper, Jefferson, Marshall, Noble, Okfuskee, Roger Mills, Tillman and Woodward).

Deaths Among Teens Two-Year Percent, Ages 15-19, By Cause, By Race Oklahoma, 2001 & 2002



BEHAVIORS WHICH MAKE OKLAHOMA YOUTH VULNERABLE TO NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Taking risks is a part of growing up. Children cannot make new friends without chancing rejection. Teens cannot explore their own intellect without risking embarrassment in class. Young athletes cannot develop without pushing themselves physically. It is not unusual for young people, exploring the edge of adulthood, to be extreme. Unless youth behavior risks death, disability or other long term negative consequences, adults applaud the courage of their young. Oklahoma kids are good, even though some of the risks they take are dangerous.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) monitors health risk behaviors that contribute to death, disability and social problems among young people. In 2003, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and local public high schools collaborated to complete the first statewide survey which can be compared to national data. Administered in randomly selected classrooms in randomly selected schools, YRBS provides data representative of all state and national public high school students during the spring of 2003.

Behaviors Contributing to Injuries and Violence

Results from Oklahoma's YRBS demonstrate that numerous high school students engage in behaviors that increase their likelihood of violent or accidental death. One in ten (11.1%) rarely or never wears a seat belt when someone else is driving. During the 30 days preceding the survey, almost a third (30.6%) had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol and nearly a fifth (17.1%) drove themselves after drinking. More than twenty percent (21.8%) of Oklahoma's high school students had carried a weapon during the 30 days preceding the survey and more than twenty-eight percent (28.4%) had been in a physical fight during the year before the survey. Seven percent (7.0%) had attempted suicide in the prior year.

Compared to high school students nationally, Oklahoma students are more likely to wear seat belts when someone else is driving. While all high school students ride with drivers who had been drinking at about the same rate, Oklahoma students were more likely to drive

themselves after drinking. While a smaller percent are involved in physical altercations, a greater proportion of Oklahoma high school students carry a gun, knife or a club as a weapon than is common in other places. Rates of forced sexual intercourse and dating violence are about the same in Oklahoma as in the nation. Results from YRBS indicate that suicide is attempted less frequently in Oklahoma, although mortality data documents that rates of completed suicide for young people in Oklahoma are among the highest in the nation.

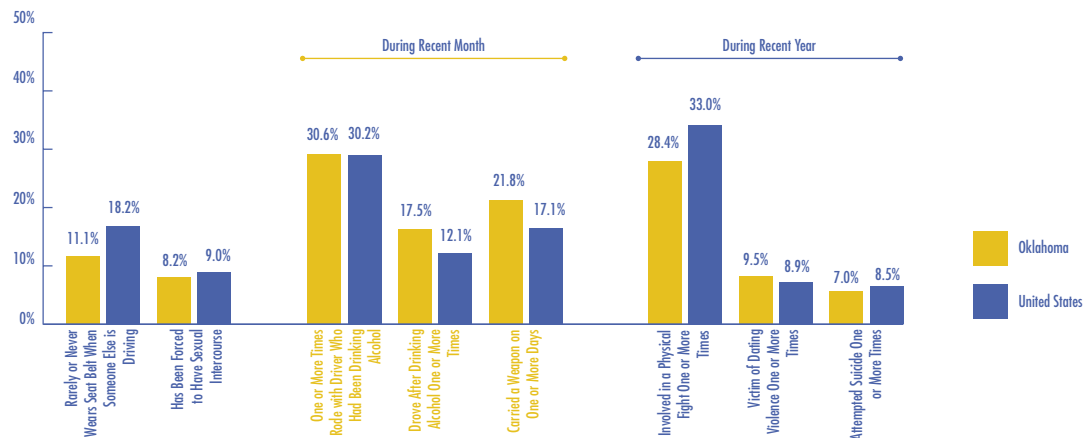
Behaviors Contributing to Addiction, Dependency and Substance Abuse

Tobacco addiction typically begins in childhood. More than three quarters (76%) of adult smokers in Oklahoma acquired the habit before they turned 18. Tobacco use in Oklahoma remains the leading cause of preventable death, killing more than six thousand Oklahomans every year. Today's young Oklahomans will become part of that grim statistic when one in every three teen tobacco users will die prematurely from their tobacco use.

The 2002 Oklahoma Youth Tobacco Survey documents recent improvement, reporting that tobacco use dropped for Oklahoma high school students between 1999 and 2002. Unfortunately, rates of current tobacco use remain painfully high. YRBS 2003 documented that cigarettes had been tried by two thirds (64.1%) of Oklahoma's high school students and more than one in four (26.5%) still smokes cigarettes.

Even with a legal drinking age of twenty-one in Oklahoma, alcohol use is common among children and youth. Four of every five (78.6%) high school students admit to already having tried alcohol at some time in the past. Almost half (47.8%) of all Oklahoma youth in high school currently drink alcohol.

Behaviors Contributing to Injuries and Violence
Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Oklahoma and United States, 2003



Too many Oklahoma youth are entangled in the drug culture. Two in five (42.5%) high school students have tried marijuana and one in five (22.0%) still smokes it. One in ten have tried some form of cocaine (9.2%), inhalant (9.9%) or methamphetamine (9.9%). Some still use. About three percent (3.4%) of Oklahoma high school students acknowledge that they currently use cocaine powder, “crack,” or “freebase”. About the same rate of high school students (3.9%) acknowledge currently sniffing glue, breathing the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling paints or sprays to get high.

Oklahomans start young. Before the age of 13, one in four high school students smoked cigarettes (23.7%) or drank alcohol (26.8%). One in ten (11.1%) had tried marijuana. The younger people are when they try marijuana, the more likely they are to become drug-addicted adults.

Compared to high school students nationally, Oklahoma students are more likely to try and more likely to continue smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol.

Oklahoma youth are slightly more likely to try marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamines and slightly less likely to try inhalants. The rate of current drug use among Oklahoma high school students is slightly lower than comparable national rates.

Behaviors Contributing to Unintended Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Disease

Results from Oklahoma’s YRBS demonstrate that numerous high school students engage in behaviors that increase their likelihood of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. Half (50.0%) of Oklahoma’s high school students report that they have already engaged in sexual intercourse. More than a third (37.2%) are currently sexually active, having had intercourse during the preceding month. About two-thirds (64.3%) of the currently sexually active high school students (or their partner) used condoms during their most recent sexual encounter. Considerably fewer (17.7%) relied on birth control pills. One in four (25.3%)

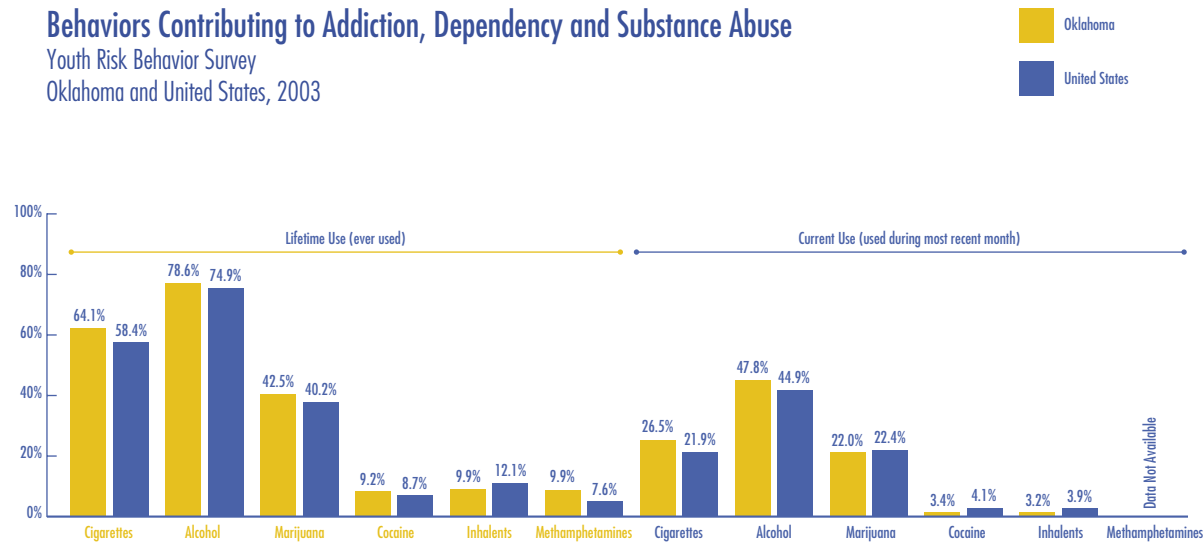
currently sexually active Oklahoma high school students reported having used drugs or alcohol before their most recent sexual encounter.

Among all high school students, eleventh grade girls are the most sexually active, with almost half (47.0%) reporting sexual intercourse during the preceding month. Oklahoma girls are more likely to be currently sexually active than Oklahoma boys from the tenth grade on. Professionals believe this data suggests that the sexual encounters of many high school girls are with older youth no longer in high school or other male adults.

More Oklahoma high school students report being sexually active than do their peers around the nation. While all sexually active high school students use condoms at about the same rate, Oklahoma students are only about half as likely than youth around the nation to use birth control pills. The rate of Oklahoma high school students using alcohol or drugs before engaging in sexual intercourse is significantly lower than comparable national rates.

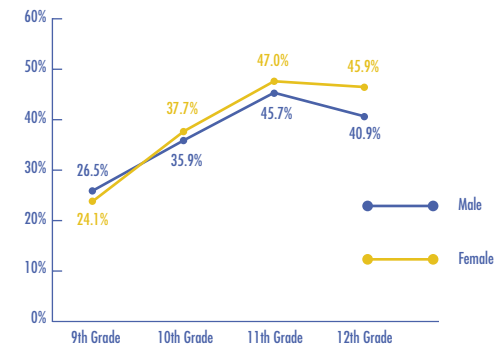
Behaviors Contributing to Addiction, Dependency and Substance Abuse

Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Oklahoma and United States, 2003



Percentage of High School Students Who Are Currently Sexually Active

Oklahoma Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2003



WHAT WORKS — LINKING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WITH RISK REDUCTION

Historically, programs attempting to help young people avoid risk-taking behaviors used a “problem” approach — focusing on the risks, trying to increase what young people knew about them and trying to change attitudes. Less attention was paid to what assets or “protective factors” each young person had internally or in their environment that might help buffer them against risk. With sufficient protection, a young person’s resiliency can help them beat the odds. Over the past several years research has accumulated to demonstrate that programs which develop youth assets, combined with those that reduce risk-taking behaviors, hold the promise to help Oklahoma’s youth successfully grow to be productive adults.

Good individual social and problem solving skills are key. Young people do best when they maintain a commitment to their own education and when they stay connected to their family, their school and their community. Here family matters. When the teen’s parents effectively manage family conflict, their children do best. Youth thrive when their parents have clear expectations for them and monitor teen behavior. Youthful transgressions are best met with reasonable, consistent consequences. School and community are vital. Youth do best in places where drugs are scarce and firearms are not readily available. High community and school expectations combine with the active involvement of parents and other adults to support youth.

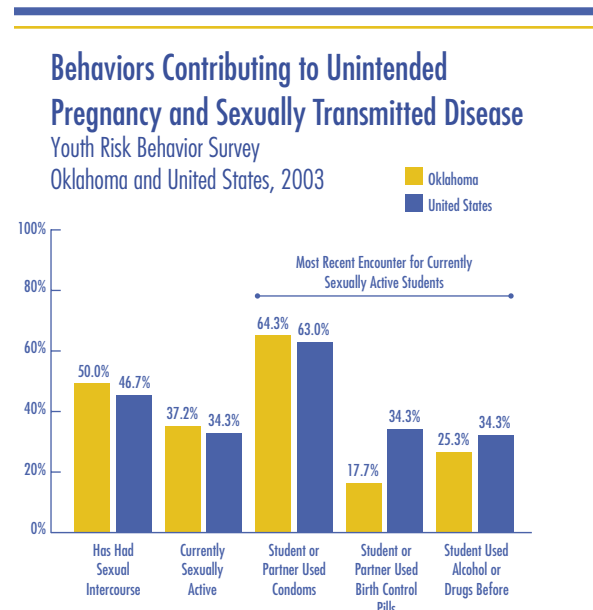
Oklahoma has led the nation in documenting the relationships between specific youth assets and risk behaviors. Research from the *HEART of OKC* Project (Healthy, Empowered And Responsible Teens of OKC), a partnership between the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy and the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, studied nine youth assets as they related to specific youth behaviors, and identified ways to translate research into practice. (see chart pp. 20-21)

Facilitating a young person’s successful transition to adulthood requires multiple and ongoing interventions and consistent, nurturing and positive adult and peer relationships. Youth who have not yet engaged in risky behaviors are to be educated. The attitudes and habits of young people who are already involved in risk-taking behaviors are to be modified. Young people who are currently in trouble are to be helped. Even then, more is required. As noted expert, Karen Pittman, Director of

the Forum for Youth Investment, explains, “Problem-free is not fully prepared. We need to define what we want youth to do as forcefully as we articulate what we do not want.” Effective youth development involves prevention, preparation and participation. Successful youth learn the behaviors to avoid and the skills, values and capabilities to develop.

Much is known about what can be done to help Oklahoma teens succeed. Research has documented that programs can encourage healthy and safe lifestyles, can reduce teen pregnancy and risky sexual behavior, can reduce teen substance abuse and violence, and can involve youth in healthy activities and relationships. Relationships are key to adolescent well-being, with quality parent-child relationships topping the list. Parents matter in the lives of their children. Caring, positive adult and peer role models and mentors matter in the lives of all adolescents. Effective programs engage youth in addressing their own problems and creating their own programs. Oklahoma has some good beginnings.

No single factor or set of factors will predict with certainty that a youth will suffer harm or be protected from it. Everyone knows a youth in dire circumstances who, in spite of being exposed to multiple risks, grew up to be a stellar, productive adult; or a teen who had multiple advantages yet lost their way in life. To ensure the majority of young Oklahomans grow up healthy, caring and capable, more adults and communities must become actively engaged in the lives of the youth around them. Caring, engaged adults will determine the path and the promise of Oklahoma’s youth. Their future is Oklahoma’s future.



OKLAHOMA YOUTH ASSETS

If a young person has one or more of the following assets...	...compared to youth who do not have assets, the young person is...	Effective strategies might include...
<p>Non-Parental Adult Role Models</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 2 times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • 2 times more likely to be tobacco free • 2 times more likely to be drug free • over 2 times more likely to not be involved in physical fighting (if high school age) • over 2 times more likely to not be involved in physical fighting (if middle school age and from a one-parent family) • more than 1 ½ times more likely to not carry a weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that young people have several positive and supportive adults in their daily lives, including teachers and school staff • linking youth with adults who share their interests and will work with them to increase their skills and learning experiences • increasing the number of foster care families by improving payment rates and enhancing support
<p>Peer Role Models</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 2 times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • 2 ½ times more likely to be tobacco free • about 3 times more likely to be drug free • nearly 2 ½ times more likely to be alcohol free • more than 2 ½ times more likely to not be involved in physical fighting (if female) • over 1 ½ times more likely to not carry a weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding activities where young people can serve as positive role models for their peers, and for younger teens • encouraging youth to have friends who have positive attitudes, are connected with school and are involved in constructive activities • discussing with young people how to handle negative media messages and peer pressure
<p>Family Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • almost 1 ½ times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • over 1 ½ times more likely to be tobacco free • over 2 times more likely to be drug free • about 2 times more likely to be alcohol free • 1 ½ times more likely to not be involved in physical fighting • over 1 ½ times more likely to not carry a weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talking with youth about issues related to their healthy growth and development • communicating clear expectations about behavior • telling young people that you love them and care about them
<p>Use of Time (Groups/Sports)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 times more likely to be tobacco free • over 1 ½ times more likely to be drug free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding groups and activities youth enjoy that have consistent, caring adults who will help them learn and grow • providing on-going opportunities for youth to practice leadership and decision making skills both in and out of school

OKLAHOMA YOUTH ASSETS (CONTINUED)

If a young person has one or more of the following assets...	...compared to youth who do not have assets, the young person is...	Effective strategies might include...
Use of Time (Religious Activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 2 ½ times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • 2 ½ times more likely to be tobacco free • over 2 ½ times more likely to be drug free • about 4 times more likely to be alcohol free (if female) • 1 ½ times more likely to be alcohol free (if male) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allowing young people to coordinate and lead congregational activities of interest to them • ensuring the congregational programs are “teen-friendly” • providing congregational-sponsored activities that are open to all community youth
Good Health Practices (Exercise/Nutrition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 ½ times more likely to be tobacco free • over 1 ½ times more likely to be drug free • almost 1 ½ times more likely to be alcohol free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encouraging adults to promote and model good eating and exercise habits for youth — in the home, school and community • helping young people develop and maintain a personal fitness plan • making sure young people have regular health screenings and physicals
Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 1 ½ times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • 1 ½ times more likely to be tobacco free • 2 times more likely to be drug free • 2 ½ times more likely to be alcohol free (if living in a one-parent household) • 2 times more likely to not carry a weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing a wide variety of age-appropriate volunteer activities for youth, where young people can work with adult volunteers and “learn-by-doing” • recruiting youth to participate in community volunteer activities • including youth-planned activities as a part of community events
Aspirations for the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about 2 times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • 2 times more likely to be tobacco free • 2 times more likely to be drug free • 1 ½ times more likely to be alcohol free • 2 times more likely to not carry a weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping youth build good study habits for school success • talking with youth about their future plans and career options • providing interning and job shadowing opportunities
Responsible Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 ½ times more likely to never have had sexual intercourse • over 2 times more likely to be tobacco free • 2 ½ times more likely to be drug free • 4 times more likely to be alcohol free (if female) • 2 times more likely to not be involved in physical fighting • over 1 ½ times more likely to not carry a weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encouraging young people to take on leadership and responsibilities in their home, school and interest groups • providing feedback and recognition when young people show responsibility

economically advantaged areas of Oklahoma have the lowest rates of **infants born too small, births to young teens, child abuse & neglect confirmations and juvenile violent crime arrests**. Oklahoma's 15 wealthiest counties also have the lowest Youth Status Index, displaying the best results on indicators measuring conditions for teens and older youth.

The two clusters of Oklahoma's 35 poorest counties and 4 poorer counties have the worst indicators in five of the seven benchmark areas investigated by Oklahoma Kids Count. Taken together the highest rates of **infants born too small, infant mortality, births to young teens, child abuse & neglect confirmations and juvenile**

violent crime arrests are found in these economically disadvantaged areas. The two clusters of Oklahoma's 35 poorest counties and 4 poorer counties virtually tied for the highest Youth Status Index, displaying the worst results on indicators measuring conditions for teens and older youth.

COMPARING PROFILES: Oklahoma Economic Clusters

	STATE OF OKLAHOMA	NUMBER 1 WEALTHIEST	NUMBER 2 WEALTHIER	NUMBER 3 MIDDLE	NUMBER 4 POORER	NUMBER 5 POOREST
Total Population (2002)	3,493,714	640,244 (18.3%)	677,783 (19.4%)	611,540 (17.5%)	783,675 (22.4%)	780,472 (22.3%)
Child Population (2002)	873,560	154,188 (17.7%)	173,933 (19.9%)	154,371 (17.7%)	197,391 (22.6%)	193,677 (22.2%)
Number of Counties	77 (100.0%)	15 (19.5%)	3 (3.9%)	20 (26.0%)	4 (5.2%)	35 (45.5%)
Percent of Child Population Residing in Metropolitan Counties	64.3%	81.4%	85.2%	54.8%	86.3%	17.1%
Percent of Child Population Residing in Mixed (Metropolitan and Rural) Counties	12.6%	8.4%	6.8%	19.4%	5.9%	22.7%
Percent of Child Population Residing in Rural Counties	23.0%	10.2%	8.0%	25.7%	7.8%	60.2%
Number and Percent of Children Living in Poverty (2000)	171,929 (19.6%)	19,183 (12.3%)	28,178 (16.4%)	31,108 (19.7%)	43,109 (22.3%)	50,351 (25.6%)
Average Annual Per Capita Income (2000-2002)	\$25,264	\$24,227	\$33,072	\$21,758	\$28,265	\$19,119
Average Monthly Number and Percent of Children Receiving TANF (FY2001-FY2003)	27,101 (3.1%)	2,305 (1.5%)	3,622 (2.1%)	3,375 (2.1%)	11,262 (5.7%)	6,596 (3.4%)
Average Annual Unemployment Rate (2000-2002)	3.8 (State Rate)	2.6 (avg of county rates)	3.4 (avg of county rates)	3.8 (avg of county rates)	4.0 (avg of county rates)	4.9 (avg of county rates)
Average Annual Percent of Low Birthweight Babies (2000-2002)	7.8%	7.0%	7.8%	7.6%	8.5%	7.5%
Average Annual Rate of Infant Mortality (2000-2002)	7.9 / 1,000 births	6.2 / 1,000 births	8.3 / 1,000 births	6.1 / 1,000 births	8.7 / 1,000 births	9.1 / 1,000 births
Average Annual Rate of Births to Teen Girls ages 15 through 17 (2000-2002)	31.1 / 1,000 teen girls	17.9 / 1,000 teen girls	32.8 / 1,000 teen girls	29.7 / 1,000 teen girls	38.0 / 1,000 teen girls	35.3 / 1,000 teen girls
Average Annual Rate of Child Abuse/Neglect Confirmations (FY2001-FY2003)	15.0 / 1,000 children	11.6 / 1,000 children	10.7 / 1,000 children	13.1 / 1,000 children	18.6 / 1,000 children	19.6 / 1,000 children
Average Annual Death Rate among Children ages 1 through 14 (2000-2002)	28.5 / 100,000 children	27.3 / 100,000 children	26.6 / 100,000 children	33.4 / 100,000 children	24.8 / 100,000 children	30.3 / 100,000 children
Average Annual High School Dropout Rate (School years 2001/2002 & 2002/2003)	3.8	3.3	4.2	3.5	4.6	3.3
Average Annual Violent Crime Arrest Rate of Youth ages 10 through 17 (2000-2002)	246.7 / 100,000 children	98.8 / 100,000 children	457.4 / 100,000 children	205.4 / 100,000 children	293.7 / 100,000 children	180.4 / 100,000 children
Average of County Youth Status Indices	232.8	143.3	219.0	202.3	284.0	283.9

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT INFANTS

Low birthweight is a predictor of later difficulties for Oklahoma babies. Most of the infants who die each year were born too small. Of those who live, one in four will experience serious health and/or developmental problems.

Each year almost thirty-nine hundred Oklahoma babies (3,877 annual average) are born too small (weighing less than 5 ½ pounds). The lower the birthweight, the greater the harm. Very, very tiny infants (weighing less than 3 pounds, 5 ounces) continue to be born in steadily increasing numbers (652 annual average).

During the most recent three-year period (2000-2002) the proportion of Oklahoma babies born too small slowly and steadily continued to worsen (increasing from 7.3% to 7.8% of all births) when compared to the three year period just two years earlier (1998-2000). Comparable rates also recently worsened

in most (57 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

This trend has continued for years. A higher proportion of Oklahoma babies (7.8% of all births) are born too small today as compared to the population born in the mid-1980's (6.4% of all births), with such rates also worsening in the majority (61 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period. Currently, the highest and worst low birthweight rate (11.0% of all county births) is found in Kiowa County; the lowest and best (2.5% of all county births) is in Ellis County during this most recent period.

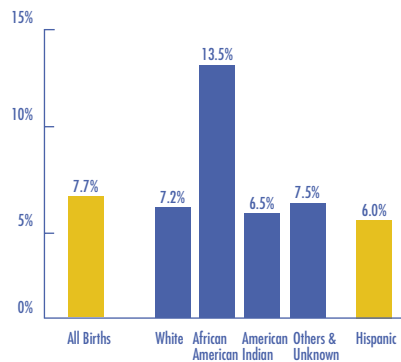
The rate of babies born too small for African Americans (13.5% of all African American births) nearly doubles the rate for White infants (7.2% of all White births). By race, the best low birthweight rate is recorded for American Indian infants (6.5% of all American Indian births). Hispanic mothers, who may be of any race, have an even lower rate of babies born too small (6.0% of all Hispanic births).

While early prenatal care is known to improve these rates, over one-third (37.5%) of Oklahoma's babies were born to mothers who failed to receive the recommended level of prenatal care during the most recent three-year period reported.

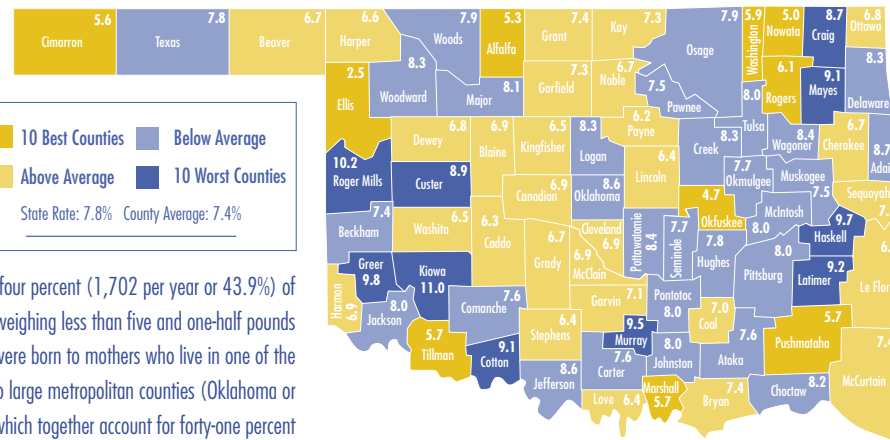
Ranking near the middle of all the states, Oklahoma's rate of low birthweight infants is average relative to other parts of the country. Oklahoma was ranked 27th among the fifty states during the most recent year (2001) measured.

Babies Weighing Under 5 1/2 Pounds

Three-year Percent, By Race & Ethnicity
Oklahoma, 2000-2002



Three-Year Percent of Infants Born Weighing Less than 5 ½ Pounds (2000-2002)



Nearly forty-four percent (1,702 per year or 43.9%) of the infants weighing less than five and one-half pounds at birth were born to mothers who live in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together account for forty-one percent (41.0%) of Oklahoma's births.

INFANT MORTALITY

Infant death can be caused by disease, poverty, abuse, neglect, injuries or infections. Reflecting the effectiveness of educational, economic, social and health care measures, the infant mortality rate is an indicator of a community's overall quality of life. Each year almost four hundred babies born in Oklahoma (394 annual average) do not live to see their first birthday.

The rate of Oklahoma infants who die in their first year of life improved slightly during the most recent three years (2000-2002) when compared to the three-year period just two years earlier (1998-2000). Oklahoma infant death rates dropped from 8.4 to 7.9 deaths per 1,000 live births, with comparable rates also improving or staying the same in the majority (43 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

Infant death rates have declined substantially over time. Today, proportionately fewer Oklahoma babies

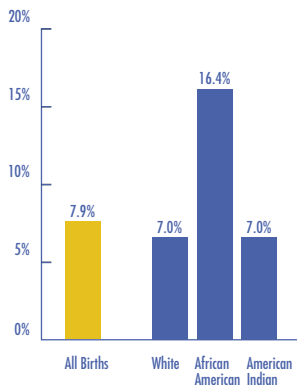
(7.9 per 1,000 live births) die in their first year of life than did in the mid-1980's (10.5 per 1,000 live births), with such rates also improving or staying the same in the large majority (57 of 77) of Oklahoma counties during the same period. Currently, the highest and worst infant death rate (22.4 per 1,000 live births) is found in Major County; the lowest and best (0.0 per 1,000 live births) is found in five Oklahoma counties (Alfalfa, Beaver, Ellis, Johnston and Noble).

Infant death rates have improved for all races since the mid-1980's. However, the most recent death rate for African American infants (16.4 per 1,000 African American births) remains well over twice as high as the comparable rates for both White and American Indian infants (7.0 per 1,000 White births and 7.0 per 1,000 American Indian births).

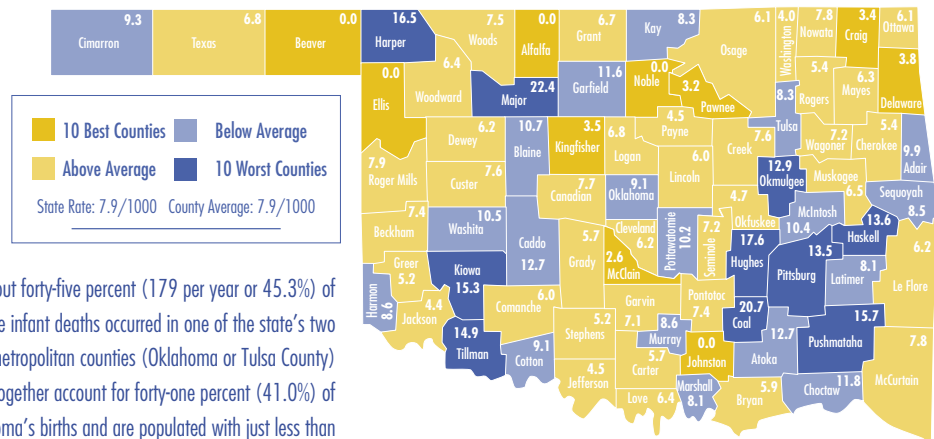
Ranking in the bottom half of all the states, Oklahoma's rate of infant death is only fair relative to

other parts of the country. Oklahoma's rank among the fifty states was 29th during the most recent year (2001) in which states were compared.

Infant Deaths
Three-year Rate per 1000 Births, By Race
Oklahoma, 2000-2002



Three-Year Rate of Death Per 1,000 Live Births (2000-2002)



About forty-five percent (179 per year or 45.3%) of the infant deaths occurred in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together account for forty-one percent (41.0%) of Oklahoma's births and are populated with just less than forty percent (38.6%) of Oklahoma's infants.

BIRTHS TO YOUNG TEENS

Young mothers are the most at-risk for being poor parents. They and their children face bleak futures. Each young mother is more likely to be poor, to be a victim of physical violence, to have another child before reaching adulthood, to drop out of school, to have unsteady employment, to be on public assistance at some point in her life, to be less skilled, and to experience marital instability compared to peers who delay childbearing until age twenty or later.

For the most recent three year period, an average of about seventy-six hundred (7,606) babies were born to Oklahoma women under the age of twenty. Each year more than five thousand (5,150) of those babies were born to teen mothers ages 18 and 19. Almost twenty-five hundred (2,456) Oklahoma school-age girls (age 17 and under) had babies. One hundred sixteen of those school age girls were between ten and fourteen years of age.

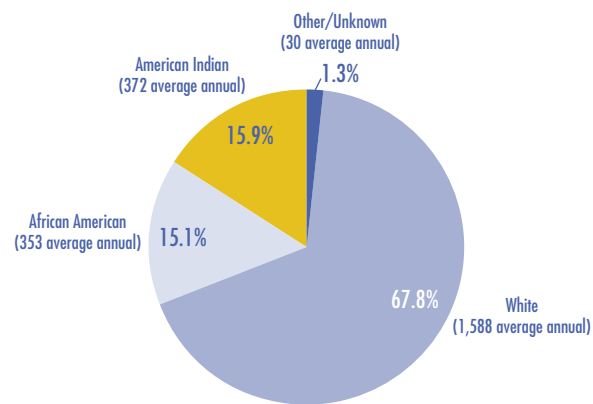
The rate of births to Oklahoma young teens continued its modest decline (from 33.0 to 31.1 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) during the most recent three years (2000-2002) when compared to the three-year period two years earlier (1998-2000). Birth rates for that age group showed some improvement in a large majority of Oklahoma counties (50 of 77) during the same period.

The progress made in decreasing the high Oklahoma birth rate to young teens of the mid-1980's (from 43.9 to 31.1 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) has been evident at the county level where such rates also improved in nearly every (73 of 77) Oklahoma county during the same period of time. Currently, the highest and worst rate (60.6 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) is found in Choctaw County; the lowest and best (4.1 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) is in Woods County.

The large majority (67.8%) of Oklahoma's young teen mothers are White. However, while African American and American Indian teenage girls comprise only about one-fifth (20.1%) of the teenage girl population, they account for almost one-third (31.0%) of the teenage girls giving birth in Oklahoma.

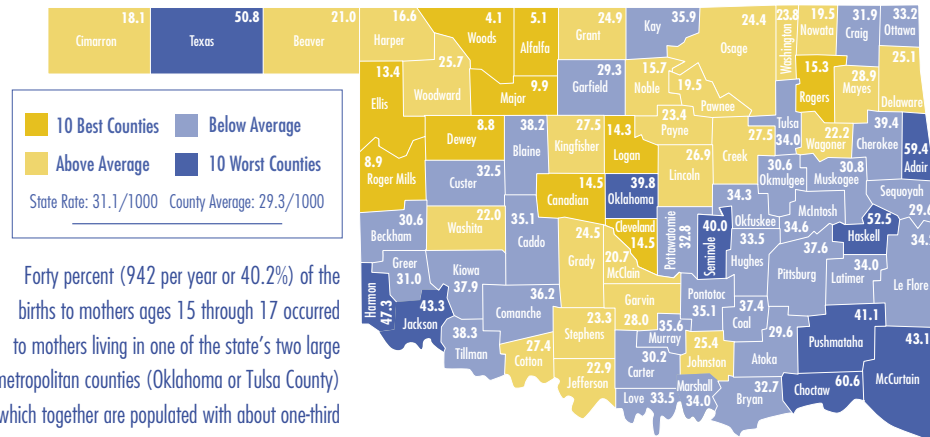
Oklahoma's teen childbearing rate was substantially above other states in 1980, but by the late 1990's, the gap had narrowed. Even so, ranked at forty-one, Oklahoma remains among the worst ten states in the nation during the most recent year (2001) compared.

Births to Teens ages 15-17 Oklahoma, By Race, 2000-2002



Hispanic teen mothers may be of any race and with an average of 347 births annually comprise 14.8% of all 2000-2002 Oklahoma births to mothers ages 15-17.

Three-Year Rate of Births Per 1,000 Female Teens Ages 15-17 (2000-2002)



Forty percent (942 per year or 40.2%) of the births to mothers ages 15 through 17 occurred to mothers living in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with about one-third (33.7%) of the girls ages 15 through 17.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

Child abuse and neglect is part of a cycle threatening Oklahoma’s future generations. Child abuse and neglect often causes other childhood problems. Half of young victims will suffer delay in their development or serious physical or emotional impairments. Attachment disorders are common. Children with problems are often victims of child abuse and neglect. Low birthweight infants, infants born premature, and children with disabilities, chronic illness or developmental delay are at high risk. The cycle continues. Today’s victims often become tomorrow’s abusers.

For the most recent two-year period (Fiscal Year 2002 - Fiscal Year 2003) an annual average of close to sixty-three thousand (62,711) referrals involving possible abuse and/or neglect of one or more children were received by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) and found to warrant further assessment or investigation. Each year, assessments are conducted in about twelve thousand (12,316) situations when the allegations of abuse or neglect were determined to not constitute a serious or immediate

threat to a child’s health or safety. At the same time, investigations are conducted in about fifty thousand (50,395) situations when the report contained allegations of serious threats to the alleged child victim’s safety. On average, over thirteen thousand (13,253) of the incidents assessed or investigated each year were found to be actual abuse and/or neglect.

During the most recent three-year period (Fiscal Year 2001 - Fiscal Year 2003), the rate of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma continued to drop when compared to the three-year period just three years earlier (Fiscal Year 1998 - Fiscal Year 2000). Oklahoma abuse and neglect rates moved from 17.8 to 15.0 confirmations per 1,000 children in the community, with comparable rates also improving in the majority (55 of 77) of Oklahoma’s counties.

While Oklahoma child abuse and/or neglect is declining from the record high rates posted during the late 1990’s, current rates (15.0 confirmations per 1,000 children) remain substantially higher than in the mid-1980’s (9.0 confirmations per 1,000 children). Such rates also worsened in most (66 of 77) Oklahoma counties

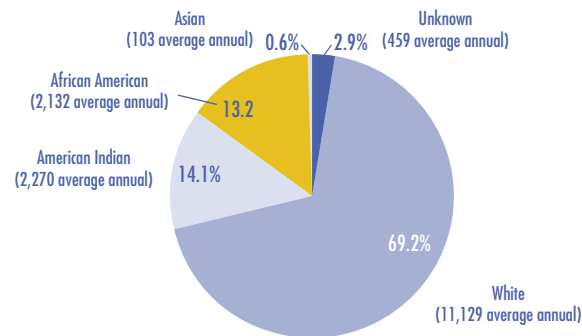
since the mid-1980’s. Currently, the highest and worst proportion of children confirmed to be victims of child abuse and/or neglect (46.6 per 1,000) is found in Coal County; the lowest and best (0.8 per 1,000) is in Cimarron County.

Oklahoma deaths resulting from child abuse and/or neglect are the lowest in the last decade, declining from a record high of forty-eight during FY 2000 to twenty-seven during FY 2003. Among the dead were fourteen girls and thirteen boys of all races. Twelve were less than one year of age; eight were toddlers (ages one through three). The dead also included school age children ranging from kindergartners to children old enough to be in junior high or high school. Deaths resulted from caretaker neglect, caretaker abuse or both.

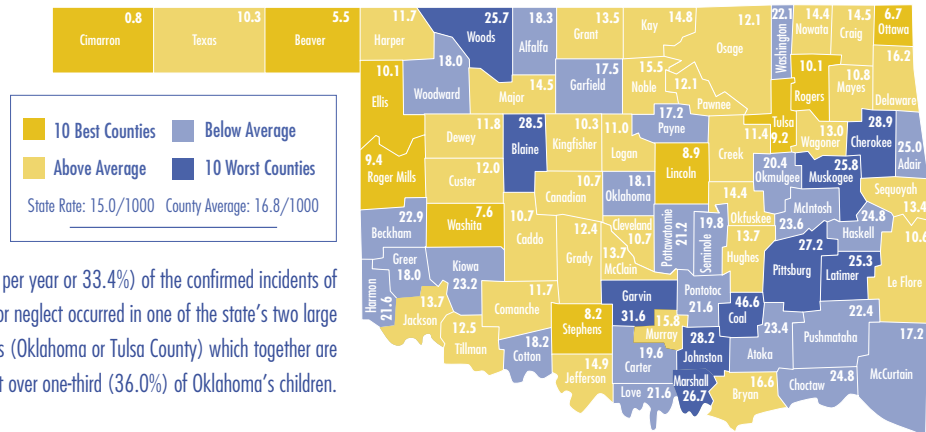
More than two-thirds (69.2%) of confirmations of abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma involve children who are White. However, while non-White children comprise only about one-fifth (21.8%) of the child population, they account for a greater proportion (27.9%, excluding those whose race is not known) of the confirmed child abuse and/or neglect incidents.

Child Abuse & Neglect Confirmations

By Race of Child
Oklahoma, FY 2001- FY 2003



Three-Year Rate of Confirmations Per 1,000 Children (FY2001 - FY2003)



One-third (4,430 per year or 33.4%) 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 (36.0%) of Oklahoma’s children.

CHILD & TEEN DEATH

Disturbing trends have emerged in recent decades. The leading causes of death for children and teens are changing from natural causes, such as illness and birth defects, to injury and violence. Children increasingly imitate the violence they observe on television. Poor children are three times more likely to die during their childhood than non-poor children.

During the most recent three-year period an average of three hundred seventy-five children and youth from the ages of 1 through 19 died each year. About half (48.9% or 194) of these annual deaths are children from the ages of 1 through 14; the remainder are teenagers (ages 15 through 19).

The average annual rate of death among Oklahoma children from the ages of 1 through 14 worsened slightly (from 28.2 to 28.5 per 100,000) during the most recent three-year period (2000-2002) when compared to the three-year period two years earlier

(1998-2000). In a small majority of Oklahoma counties (44 of 77) child death rates also worsened during the year.

A lower rate (28.5 per 100,000) of children from the ages of 1 through 14 die currently than did in the mid-1980's (41.5 per 100,000), with such rates also improving some in the large majority (52 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period. Currently, the highest and worst rate of child death (168.7 per 100,000 children ages 1 through 14 in the county) is found in Harmon County; the lowest and best (0.0 per 100,000) is found in ten Oklahoma counties (Alfalfa, Choctaw, Coal, Cotton, Dewey, Harper, Jefferson, Love, Noble and Okmulgee).

Over half (52.3%) of all child and teen deaths during the most recent three year period were accidental. Oklahoma children and teens are less likely to die of diseases (32.8%) or violence (14.9%).

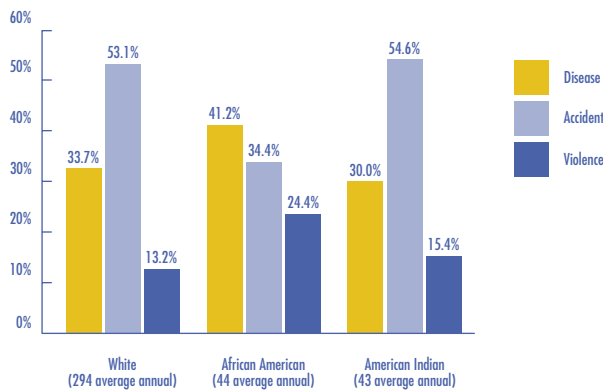
One in four (24.4%) of the African American

children and teens who do not live to adulthood die violently. A young African American is almost twice as likely to die of violence in Oklahoma than his or her White peer (13.2%). Accidental death rates approach fifty-five percent for both White (53.1%) and American Indian (54.6%) children and teens.

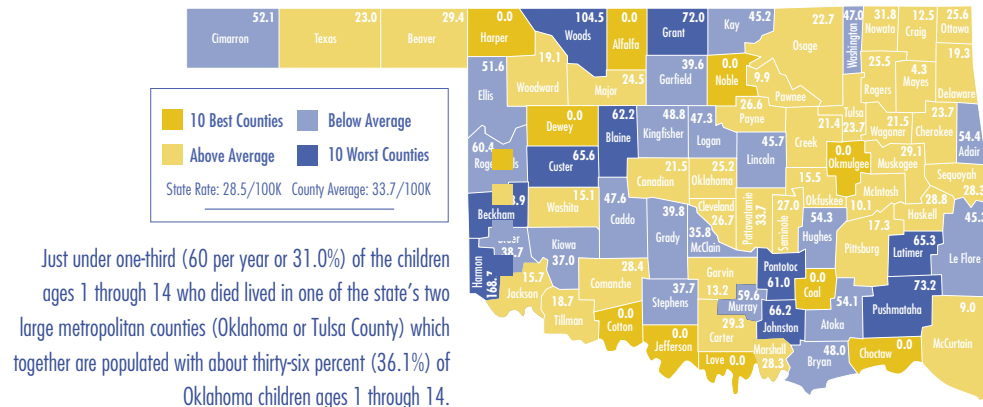
Oklahoma's young people kill themselves at a rate almost twice the national average. An average of twenty-nine young Oklahomans (under the age of 20) commit suicide each year (2000-2002). While most are older White male adolescents, recent Oklahoma suicides have victimized all races, both sexes and children as young as twelve.

Even with the improvement in death rates since the 1980's, Oklahoma's rankings relative to other states for the most recent year compared (2001) remain among the worst (46th in child death; 43rd in teen death) in the nation.

Deaths Among Children & Teens
Three-year Percent, Ages 1-19, By Cause, By Race
Oklahoma, 2000-2002



Three-Year Rate of Death Per 100,000 Children Ages 1 - 14 (2000 - 2002)



HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Lack of education is a cycle threatening current and future generations of Oklahoma children and youth. Youth not completing high school face the possibility of a lifetime of problems, often including poverty, little employment opportunity, poor earning ability, and criminal involvement. Unemployment rates for adult workers are twice as high for dropouts than for graduates. The majority of Oklahoma inmates are high school dropouts. Children of high school dropouts are at a higher risk of quitting school themselves.

During the most recent two-year period (School Year 2001/2002 and School Year 2002/2003) an annual average of more than eight thousand (8,080) young Oklahomans quit school without graduating. About sixty-five hundred (6,528) of those dropping out were age 18 or younger.

One of every four (25.0%) students in Oklahoma who starts high school as a freshman disappear from the roster prior to graduation. While some may transfer out of state, switch to private schools, become incarcerated or even die, logic dictates that dropouts comprise the large majority of

Oklahoma students lost over this four-year period.

The methodology used to calculate Oklahoma high school dropout rates has recently been changed in several ways. The new dropout rates are substantially different, currently preventing comparisons over time. The biggest change is in timing. The schedule for data to be turned in by each school district has been altered in an effort to provide each district more time to determine whether a student transferred to another school district or dropped out. If successful, the new methodology should present a more accurate count of Oklahoma dropouts. After this methodology has been applied without further substantial change for at least two more years, Oklahoma Kids Count can return to comparing changes over time.

Under the new method of calculation, Oklahoma's high school dropout rate averages 3.8% during the most recent two-year period (School Year 2001/2002 and School Year 2002/2003). Currently, the highest and worst rate of children leaving school without graduating (5.4%) is found in Pushmataha County; the lowest and best (0.2%) is in Alfalfa County.

During the most recent two year period (School Year

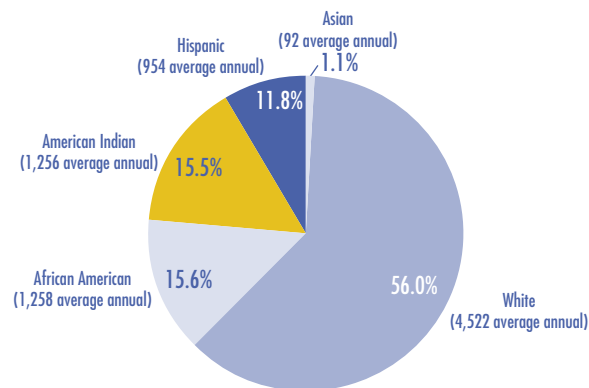
2001/2002 and School Year 2002/2003) the proportion of high school dropouts who were girls (46.1%) and the proportion who were boys (53.9%) changed little from past years. Seventeen is the most common age an Oklahoma dropout leaves high school. Compared to any other grade, the largest numbers currently leave school during the tenth grade.

During the most recent two-year period (School Year 2001/2002 and School Year 2002/2003) the large majority (4,522 per year or 56.0%) of children failing to finish high school are White. However, while African American children comprise less than ten percent (9.5%) of the child population, they account for a higher proportion (15.6%) of the high school dropouts. Similarly, American Indian children make up eleven percent (11.0%) of Oklahoma's child population and more than fifteen percent (15.5%) of Oklahoma's dropouts.

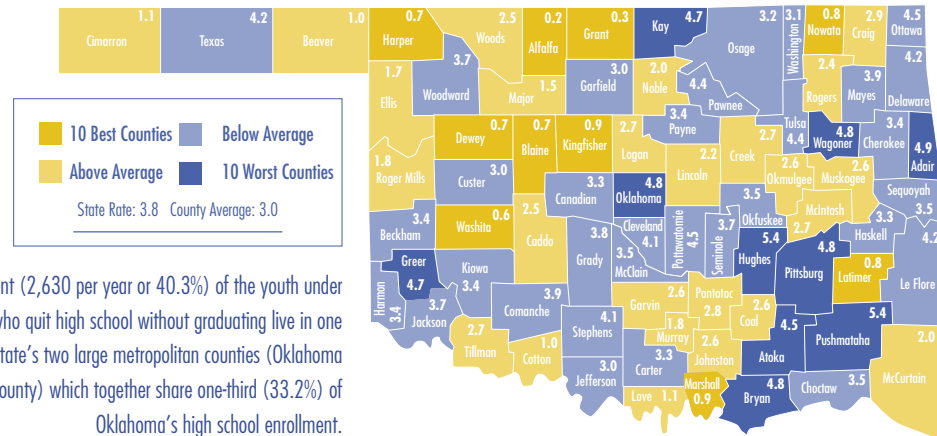
During the most recent year for which comparison data is available (2001), Oklahoma remained at about the middle of all states (24th) in the percent of teens who are high school dropouts (9.0% of those ages 16 through 19).

Students Quitting School Without Graduating

All Ages, By Race
Oklahoma, School Years 2001/2002 and 2002/2003



Two-Year Rate of Youth Under Age 19 Dropping Out of High School (SY 01/02 & 02/03)



Forty percent (2,630 per year or 40.3%) of the youth under age 19 who quit high school without graduating live in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together share one-third (33.2%) of Oklahoma's high school enrollment.

JUVENILE VIOLENT CRIME ARRESTS

Children at higher risk for involvement in violence and crime include boys born to teen mothers, children from families whose parents never completed high school and young people doing poorly in school. Victims of child abuse and neglect are more likely than others to later be arrested for delinquent behavior, crimes of violence or prostitution. A young poor child is more likely than a non-poor one to be a current victim and a later perpetrator of violent crime.

During the most recent year (2002) reviewed, almost twenty-four thousand (23,970) criminal arrests involved juveniles. Oklahoma children and youth accounted for about one of every seven (14.4%) arrests during 2002.

During the most recent three-year period (2000 -2002) about a thousand (1,001) Oklahoma youths from the ages of 10 through 17 were arrested each year for committing violent crimes. Each year an average of twenty were arrested for murder, two for manslaughter, 59 for forcible rape, 189 for robbery and 732 for

aggravated assault. During these three years, four of every five (80.4%) youth arrested for violent crimes in Oklahoma were male.

During the most recent three-year period (2000 - 2002), the proportion of Oklahoma youths from the ages of 10 through 17 arrested for violent crimes decreased slightly when compared to the three-year period just two years earlier (1998 - 2000). Oklahoma violent crime arrest rates for this age group moved from 251.4 to 246.7 per 100,000 youth, with comparable rates staying the same or improving in most (43 of 77) of Oklahoma’s counties.

The current proportion of Oklahoma youths from the ages of 10 through 17 arrested for violent crimes continues to improve from the record highs recorded during the 1990’s. The rate of arrest for these youth (246.7 arrests per 100,000 youth) during the most recent three-year period (2000 - 2002) is substantially improved over that of the comparison three-year period (334.1 arrests per 100,000 youth for 1990 - 1992). Comparable rates also improved or remained the same

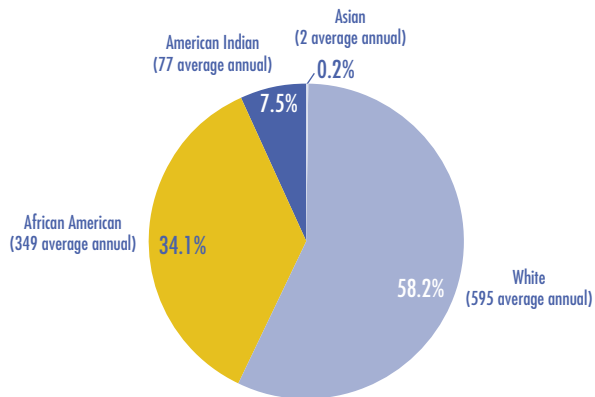
during the same period in just over half (40 of 77) of Oklahoma’s counties. Currently, the highest and worst rate of youths from the ages of 10 through 17 (738.7 arrests per 100,000 youth) arrested for violent crimes is found in Jefferson County. The lowest and best rates (0.0 arrests per 100,000 youth) are in seven Oklahoma counties (Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Ellis, Grant, Harper, and Roger Mills).

While non-White children comprise only about one-fifth (21.8%) of the child population, they accounted for about twice as many (41.8%) of the violent crime arrests of children under age 18 during the most recent three-year period.

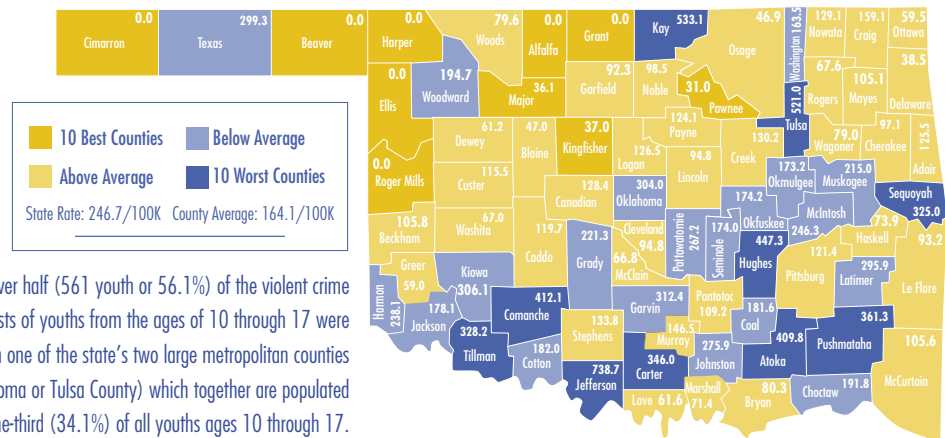
Based on the latest figures available, Oklahoma’s 1998 rate (278 per 100,000 youths ages 10 through 17) of arresting young people for violent crimes continued to remain well below the corresponding national violent crime arrest rate (394 per 100,000 youths ages 10 through 17).

Juvenile Violent Crime Arrests

Under Age 18, By Race
Oklahoma, 2000-2002



Three-Year Rate of Violent Crime Arrests Per 100,000 Youth Ages 10 - 17 (2000-2002)



Well over half (561 youth or 56.1%) of the violent crime arrests of youths from the ages of 10 through 17 were in one of the state’s two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with one-third (34.1%) of all youths ages 10 through 17.

*County
Benchmarks*

When I play my guitar I feel peaceful, like an

ARTIST

with his brush, a sculptor with his chisel, a
carpenter with his hammer, a minister with his
Bible, a man with his purpose.

