

## Child Abuse & Neglect

During Fiscal Year 1997 (FY 97) more than fifty thousand (51,001) situations were called to the attention of Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) as possible abuse and/or neglect of one or more children.

This year DHS investigated and confirmed record-high numbers of those allegations. Close to fourteen thousand (13,627) of the more than forty-eight thousand (48,399) incidents investigated were found to be actual abuse and/or neglect.

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

During this past year the rate of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma rose to an all-time high (moving from 13.4 to 15.5 confirmations per 1,000 children in the community), with comparable rates worsening in the large majority (51 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

Today, Oklahoma's rate of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect (15.5 confirmations per 1,000 children) is close to double what it was in the mid-1980s (8.5 confirmations per 1,000 children). Such rates also worsened in the vast majority (65 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

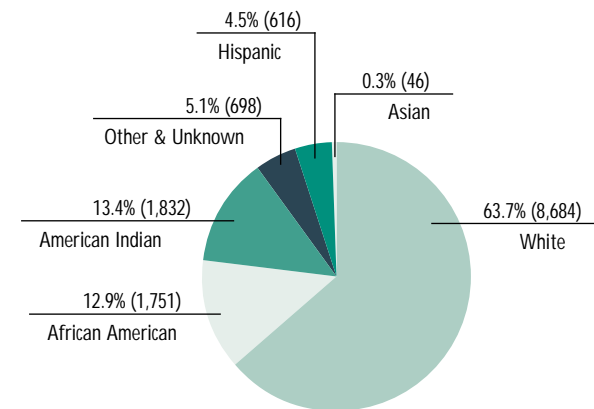
The rates of confirmed child abuse and/or neglect in the majority of Oklahoma counties (43 of 77) were better than the average county rate (17.2 confirmations per 1,000 children in the county). During this most recent period, the highest and worst proportion of children confirmed to be victims of child abuse and/or neglect (40.8 per 1,000) is again found in Garvin County; the lowest and best (2.0 per 1,000) is in Harmon County.

A total of forty-two Oklahoma children died from child abuse and/or neglect during FY 1997. Among the dead were twenty-three girls and nineteen boys of all races. One was a newborn; most were infants and toddlers. The dead also included school age children ranging from preschoolers to children old enough to be in high school. One should have been graduating instead of dying.

The large majority (63.7%) 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 nearly one-third (31.8%, excluding Hispanics) 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 slightly lower proportion of confirmed abuse and/or neglect in Oklahoma (4.5%) involved children counted as Hispanic.

## Impact on Oklahoma

- ▶ ***Child abuse and neglect kills Oklahoma children.*** The number of Oklahoma abuse and neglect related deaths is increasing. Deaths from neglect are more common than deaths from abuse. Infants and toddlers account for about half of Oklahoma's child abuse and neglect deaths. Child abuse and neglect deaths of Oklahoma teenagers are on the rise.
- ▶ ***Child abuse and neglect hurts Oklahoma children and limits their futures.*** Half will suffer delay in their development or serious physical or emotional impairments. Attachment disorders are common. Victims of child abuse and neglect are more likely



Child Abuse  
& Neglect Confirmations  
*By Race of Child,*  
Oklahoma, FY 1997

May not total 100%  
due to rounding

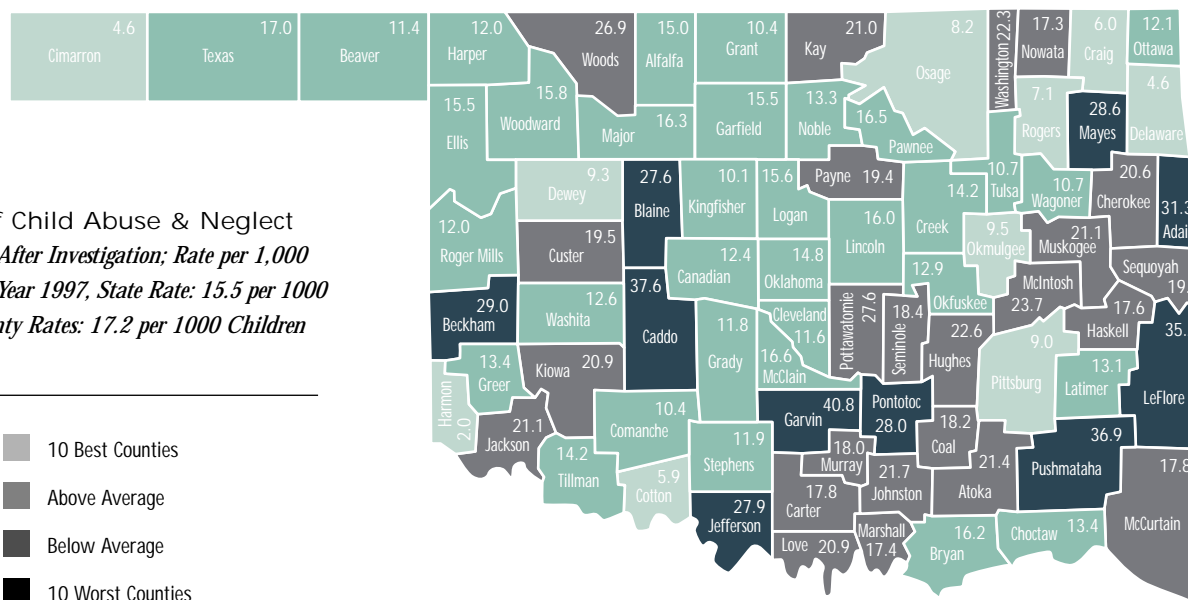
than others to be arrested for delinquent behavior, adult criminality, and crimes of violence and prostitution. Girls who are abused and neglected in childhood are seventy-seven percent more likely to be arrested as juveniles. There is a direct relationship between being a victim of sexual abuse and later teen pregnancy. A large majority of teen mothers report that they had been sexually abused as children. Teen mothers, in turn, face bleak futures.

- **Defenseless children deserve better.** Most abused children are abused by their own parent or parents. In Oklahoma, children are commonly neglected while their caretaker abuses drugs. In Oklahoma, child victims of abuse are most commonly beaten or sexually abused. Mental injuries are on the rise.

- **Risk factors.** Low birthweight infants, infants born premature, and children with disabilities, chronic illnesses or developmental delay are at higher risk of abuse and neglect. Adoptive, foster and step-children are at higher risk of abuse and neglect. 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. Children of single parents are at higher risk of abuse and neglect and are at an 80 percent greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from that abuse or neglect.

- **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  
*Number of Confirmations After Investigation; Rate per 1,000 children; Oklahoma: Fiscal Year 1997, State Rate: 15.5 per 1000 Children, Average of County Rates: 17.2 per 1000 Children*



More than one-fourth (3,941 per year or 28.9%) 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 (36.4%) of Oklahoma's children.

- 10 Best Counties
- Above Average
- Below Average
- 10 Worst Counties