

**May 1998**

## Trends in Child Abuse or Neglect in Washington State

***Finding: The rate of alleged victims of child abuse or neglect investigated by Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services has declined slightly in the last six years.***

### **Purpose**

In 1994, the Washington State Legislature passed legislation intended to decrease juvenile violence and certain "at-risk" behaviors of youth in Washington.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the 1994 legislation was to achieve measurable, cost-effective reductions in eight specific outcomes.<sup>2</sup> This topic brief focuses on trends in one of those areas: reported child abuse or neglect in Washington State.

### **Child Abuse or Neglect Information in Washington State**

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers Washington's Child Protective Services (CPS) and provides emergency intervention and treatment for children found to be at risk of child abuse. DSHS records both the total number of child abuse cases referred to CPS and the number of alleged victims to be investigated further. Of these alleged victims, some are found to be substantiated cases of abuse. Table 1 shows total intake referrals and alleged child victims in Washington from 1991 to 1997.

*Table 1*  
**CPS Intake Referrals and Alleged Child Victims in Washington State  
Ages 0 to 17 Years Old<sup>3</sup>**

Year	Washington Population Ages 0-17	CPS Total Intake Referrals	CPS Total Accepted Referrals	Alleged Child Victims, Unduplicated Count						
				Total Number	Rate Per 1,000 Youth	Ages 0 to 2	Ages 3 to 5	Ages 6 to 12	Ages 13 to 17	Age Unknown
1991	1,315,346	—	40,225 <sup>4</sup>	35,730 <sup>5</sup>	27.2	—	—	—	—	—
1992	1,358,846	—	41,254 <sup>4</sup>	36,644 <sup>5</sup>	27.0	—	—	—	—	—
1993	1,403,340	70,546	41,141	36,543 <sup>5</sup>	26.0	—	—	—	—	—
1994	1,434,431	73,165	41,281	36,791	25.6	4,373	8,644	16,251	7,089	434
1995	1,463,358	76,447	42,246	37,675	25.7	6,806	8,792	15,336	6,143	598
1996	1,487,813	75,949	42,152	37,408	25.1	6,465	8,275	15,407	6,449	812
1997	1,510,965	79,382	43,698	38,574	25.5	6,519	7,943	16,345	6,949	818

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, May 1998.*

<sup>1</sup> RCW 70.190.050.

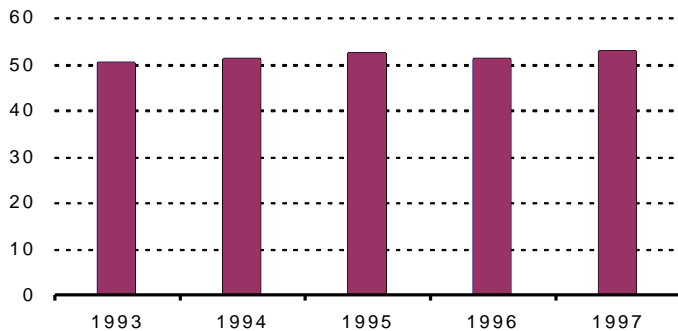
<sup>2</sup> Violent crime, teen substance abuse, teen pregnancy, teen suicide, dropping out of school, child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, state funded out-of-home placements.

<sup>3</sup> Data collected from annual CPS reports, Department of Social and Health Services and the Office of Financial Management. Calculations were made by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

<sup>4</sup> Accepted referral data for 1991 and 1992 are from personal communications with DSHS staff.

<sup>5</sup> The Institute calculated values for 1991, 1992 and 1993 by multiplying the number of accepted referrals for each of those years, by the ratio of accepted unduplicated victims for 1994 to 1997 to accepted referrals.

*Figure 1*  
**Total CPS Intake Referrals**  
 Per 1,000 0- to 17-Year-Olds in Washington



**Figure 1** shows the number of CPS Intake Referrals per 1,000 youths in Washington from 1993 to 1997. A child may have more than one referral in a year, and a referral may involve more than one child.

The overall trend has been steady over the last five years. In 1997, the rate of intake referrals was 52.5 referrals per 1,000 youths.

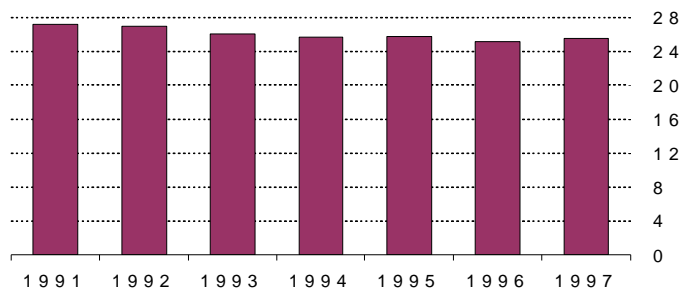
**Figure 2** presents data on the rate of unduplicated alleged child abuse victims accepted by CPS. "Alleged victims" refers to cases currently under investigation. DSHS is currently developing a system to record the number of cases found to be substantiated as incidents of abuse.<sup>6</sup>

Although the rate of alleged child abuse or neglect victims rose slightly in 1997, there has been a moderate decline in the rate of alleged child victims since 1991.

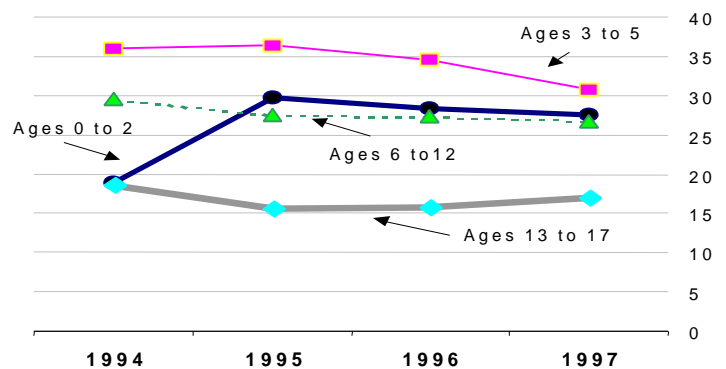
**Figure 3** shows the rate of alleged child victims (unduplicated) by age group from 1994 to 1997.<sup>7</sup>

The highest rate of alleged child abuse victims occurred with children *ages 3 to 5 years old*. The rate for victims *ages 0 to 2* increased in 1995 and then declined slightly. Child victims *ages 3 to 5 and 6 to 12 years old* have been slightly decreasing since 1994. Youth *ages 13 to 17* comprised the group with the lowest rate of alleged child abuse victims.

*Figure 2*  
**Alleged Child Victims**  
 Per 1,000 0- to 17-Year-Olds in Washington



*Figure 3*  
**Alleged Child Victims by Age**  
 Per 1,000 Children in Washington



*The Washington Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1983. A Board of Directors—representing the legislature, the governor, and public universities—governs the Institute and guides the development of all activities. The Institute's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State.*

<sup>6</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, personal communication with DSHS staff, April 1998.

<sup>7</sup> A small number of children whose ages were "unknown" are not included in the graph.