

# VALID PHYSICAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

**DEFINITION:** Total number of valid physical abuse allegations in State Fiscal Year 2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007), disaggregated by race. Note that percentages reflect the percentage of allegations that involved children of a given race.

## SIGNIFICANCE

All children need to be physically safe and free from harm in order to thrive. Sadly, some children live in homes where their safety is threatened. Physical abuse can have long-term impacts on children's physical and mental health. Infants and very young children are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of physical abuse. "Shaken baby syndrome," for example, can cause concussions, seizures, permanent brain damage, blindness, and even death in infants.<sup>1</sup> A long-term study of children found that physically abused children were more likely than other children to engage in delinquent or criminal behavior as adults. Physically abused children were more likely than victims of other forms of maltreatment to be involved in a violent crime.<sup>2</sup>

In Louisiana, the number of valid allegations of physical abuse decreased slightly between the 2005 and 2007 state fiscal years, from 2,875 to 2,841. Valid physical abuse allegations accounted for 21% of all valid allegations in FY 2005, but just 17% in FY 2007. This decline was due primarily to the substantial increase in the number of valid neglect allegations during that time, rather than the slight decrease in the number of valid physical abuse allegations.

## RACIAL DISPARITIES

National studies have shown that black children receive differential treatment at every stage of the child welfare decision-making process, including whether or not a specific allegation is substantiated. States can use several strategies to reduce the overrepresentation of black children in the child welfare system. For example, states can minimize bias by developing community partnerships and by using family group and structured decision-making. They can also implement cultural competence training programs for child protective services workers and service providers.<sup>3</sup>

Statewide, black children were overrepresented in the number of physical abuse allegations that DSS Office of Community Services (OCS) determined to be valid. While black children comprised 39% of the child population in 2006, 51% of valid physical abuse allegations involved black children. White children, by contrast, were underrepresented. While white children made up 56% of the child population in 2006, just 46% of valid physical abuse allegations involved



white children. Several of DSS OCS' reform efforts (known as Louisiana Leading Innovations for Family Transformation and Safety or LIFTS) have the potential to reduce the overrepresentation of black children in the child welfare system. For example, LIFTS reforms include the implementation of a uniform intake and decision-making process and an increased focus on developing partnerships with prevention-oriented community-based organizations.

## DATA SOURCE

Department of Social Services, Office of Community Services, by special request.

## DATA NOTE

Note that this measure reflects the number of valid allegations, not the total number of investigations or the number of children involved in investigations. A single child can be the subject of more than one allegation in the course of a single investigation. Additionally, a child can be the subject of more than one investigation in one year. Totals from the parishes do not add up to the Louisiana totals because a small number of cases are handled directly by the state office.

## RATE CALCULATION

$100 * (\text{number of valid physical abuse allegations involving black children} \div \text{total number of valid physical abuse allegations})$

$100 * (\text{number of valid physical abuse allegations involving white children} \div \text{total number of valid physical abuse allegations})$

<sup>1</sup> Jill Goldman, Marsha Salus, Deborah Wolcott, and Kristie Kennedy, "A Coordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect: The Foundation for Practice," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003, retrieved from [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) on 5/1/2009.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Race Matters: Unequal Opportunity within the Child Welfare System," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006.

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FY 2007	TOTAL		BLACK		WHITE	
	No.	No.	%	No.	%	
<b>LOUISIANA</b>	<b>2,841</b>	<b>1,438</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>1,298</b>	<b>46</b>	
Acadia	80	26	33	50	63	
Allen	47	10	21	36	77	
Ascension	36	18	50	18	50	
Assumption <i>see Lafourche Parish</i>						
Avoyelles	30	<5		18	60	
Beauregard	34	<5		31	91	
Bienville <i>see Webster Parish</i>						
Bossier	162	55	34	104	64	
Caddo	220	154	70	61	28	
Calcasieu	284	122	43	141	50	
Cameron <i>see Ouachita Parish</i>						
Cameron <i>see Calcasieu Parish</i>						
Catahoula	44	25	57	19	43	
La Salle <i>see Webster Parish</i>						
Claiborne <i>see Webster Parish</i>						
Concordia	61	10	16	51	84	
De Soto	25	19	76	6	24	
East Baton Rouge	202	171	85	22	11	
East Carroll	8	6	75	<5		
East Feliciana	21	14	67	6	29	
West Feliciana	48	25	52	23	48	
Evangeline	<5	0		<5		
Franklin	38	16	42	21	55	
Grant	46	27	59	18	39	
Iberia	29	12	41	17	59	
Iberville <i>see Webster Parish</i>						
West Baton Rouge	135	65	48	58	43	
Jackson	19	<5		17	89	
Jefferson	102	74	73	26	25	
Jefferson Davis	39	20	51	19	49	
Lafayette	21	5	24	15	71	
Lafourche	81	15	19	62	77	
Assumption <i>see Catahoula Parish</i>						
La Salle	13	13	100	0	0	
Lincoln	43	27	63	16	37	
Livingston	29	21	72	8	28	
Madison	81	67	83	11	14	
Morehouse	124	90	73	33	27	
Natchitoches	0					
Red River	25	15	60	10	40	
Orleans	102	68	67	31	30	
Ouachita	22	7	32	13	59	
Caldwell	18	<5		17	94	
Plaquemines	8	<5		<5		
Pointe Coupee						
Rapides	38	28	74	8	21	
Red River <i>see Natchitoches Parish</i>						
Richland	52	32	62	20	38	
Sabine	30	16	53	13	43	
St. Bernard	22	12	55	10	45	
St. Charles <i>see St. John the Baptist Parish</i>						
St. Helena <i>see Tangipahoa Parish</i>						
St. James <i>see St. John the Baptist Parish</i>						
St. John the Baptist	82	21	26	58	71	
St. Charles	66	33	50	28	42	
St. Helena	0					
Tensas	28	9	32	19	68	
Terrebonne	15	<5		12	80	
Union	47	<5		41	87	
Vermilion	42	7	17	33	79	
Vernon	67	29	43	36	54	
Washington						
Webster	66	35	53	30	45	
Bienville						
Claiborne						
Jackson						
West Baton Rouge <i>see Iberville Parish</i>						
West Carroll	0					
West Feliciana <i>see East Feliciana Parish</i>						
Winn	8	<5		5	63	