

VALID SEXUAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

DEFINITION: Total number of valid sexual abuse allegations in State Fiscal Year 2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30 2007), disaggregated by race.

SIGNIFICANCE

All children require safe, supportive relationships with caring adults. Sexual abuse can profoundly affect a child's ability to trust others and can have far-reaching impacts on a child's physical and mental health.

Sexually abused children may experience depression, anxiety, withdrawal, and inappropriate sexual behavior. Adults who were sexually abused as children are more likely to have substance abuse problems, and are more likely to be re-victimized.¹

In Louisiana, sexual abuse includes "any one of the following acts that seriously endanger the physical, mental, or emotional health of the child: the involvement of the child in any sexual act with a parent or any other person, the aiding or toleration by the parent or caretaker of the child's sexual involvement with any other person, the aiding or toleration by the parent of the child's involvement in pornographic displays, any other involvement of a child in sexual activity constituting a crime under the laws of the State."²

Sexual abuse is an underreported crime, and many victims do not come forward until many years after the abuse has occurred. One of the reasons sexual abuse is underreported is that adults may be unaware that a child is being sexually abused. While the effects of other forms of maltreatment, such as physical abuse, are often obvious (e.g. bruising, cuts, broken bones, etc.), signs that sexual abuse has occurred may be more subtle, such as being reluctant to change for gym class, experiencing a sudden change in appetite, or having difficulty walking or sitting.³ As a result, the number of valid sexual abuse allegations presented here is likely to be smaller than the actual number of incidents and victims.

Research shows that children are more likely to be abused by a family member or someone else they know, rather than a stranger. Most sexual abusers are men, though some cases involve female perpetrators.⁴

While child abuse of any kind can have negative long-term impacts on victims, researchers have found that certain protective factors can reduce risk, increase children's resilience, and lessen the negative impacts that abuse has on children's well-being. Protective factors include qualities of the individual

child, family factors, as well as social/environmental factors. Some common protective factors for children include high self-esteem, good social skills, healthy peer relationships, and good health. Family protective factors include stable parent/child relationships, supportive family environments, household rules/structure, and family expectations of pro-social behavior. Social/environmental factors include consistent parental employment, adequate housing, good schools, access to health care and social services, and supportive adults in the community who can serve as role models.⁵

In Louisiana, the number of valid sexual abuse allegations scarcely changed between FY 2005 and FY 2007, declining from 901 valid allegations to 894. The rate of victimization increased only slightly between 2001 and FFY 2006 (from 0.7 allegations per 1,000 children to 0.8 allegations per 1,000 children). The corresponding rates for both physical abuse allegations and neglect allegation experienced much larger increases during this time.

RACIAL DISPARITIES

White children made up 56% of the child population in 2006, but 61% of valid sexual abuse allegations involved white children in FY 2007. Black children were slightly underrepresented—while black children made up 39% of the child population in 2006, 34% of valid sexual abuse allegations involved black children in FY 2007.

DATA SOURCE

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

DATA NOTE

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 each 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.

¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway, "Cycle of Abuse," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2008, retrieved from www.childwelfare.gov on 5/1/2009.

² Louisiana Department of Social Services, "Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect," Louisiana Department of Social Services, retrieved from www.dss.louisiana.gov on 5/1/2009.

³ Child Welfare Information Gateway, "Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2007, retrieved from www.childwelfare.gov on 5/1/2009.

⁴ American Psychological Association, "Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: Education, Prevention, and Recovery," American Psychological Association, retrieved from www.apa.org on 5/1/2009.

⁵ Child Welfare Information Gateway, "Risk and Protective Factors for Abuse and Neglect," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2004, retrieved from www.childwelfare.gov on 5/1/2009.

VALID SEXUAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

FY 2007	TOTAL No.	BLACK No.	WHITE No.
LOUISIANA	894	311	545
Acadia	14	<5	12
Allen	7	<5	<5
Ascension	16	<5	12
Assumption <i>see Lafourche Parish</i>			
Avoyelles	9	<5	5
Beauregard	6	<5	<5
Bienville <i>see Webster Parish</i>			
Bossier	36	6	23
Caddo	51	41	10
Calcasieu	115	32	72
<i>Cameron</i>			
Caldwell <i>see Ouachita Parish</i>			
Cameron <i>see Calcasieu Parish</i>			
Catahoula	<5	<5	<5
<i>La Salle</i>			
Claiborne <i>see Webster Parish</i>			
Concordia	<5	<5	0
De Soto	19	5	14
East Baton Rouge	21	16	5
East Carroll	7	0	7
East Feliciana	11	7	<5
<i>West Feliciana</i>			
Evangeline	7	<5	<5
Franklin	0	0	0
Grant	<5	<5	<5
Iberia	17	5	11
Iberville	<5	0	<5
<i>West Baton Rouge</i>			
Jackson <i>see Webster Parish</i>			
Jefferson	27	12	13
Jefferson Davis	7	0	7
Lafayette	32	12	17
Lafourche	19	<5	17
<i>Assumption</i>			
La Salle <i>see Catahoula Parish</i>			
Lincoln	6	<5	<5
Livingston	45	0	45
Madison	<5	<5	0
Morehouse	20	12	8
Natchitoches	9	<5	6
<i>Red River</i>			
Orleans	13	8	<5
Ouachita	32	20	12
<i>Caldwell</i>			
Plaquemines	0	0	0
Pointe Coupee	5	<5	<5
Rapides	9	<5	5
Red River <i>see Natchitoches Parish</i>			
Richland	5	<5	<5
Sabine	5	0	5
St. Bernard	8	<5	7
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	7	<5	<5
<i>St. Charles</i>			
<i>St. James</i>			
St. Landry	22	<5	18
St. Martin	5	<5	<5
St. Mary	14	6	8
St. Tammany	36	<5	28
Tangipahoa	18	10	7
<i>St. Helena</i>			
Tensas	0	0	0
Terrebonne	25	11	10
Union	0	0	0
Vermilion	46	12	33
Vernon	34	<5	32
Washington	34	9	25
Webster			
<i>Bienville</i>			
<i>Claiborne</i>			
<i>Jackson</i>			
West Baton Rouge <i>see Iberville Parish</i>			
West Carroll	0	0	0
<i>West Feliciana</i> <i>see East Feliciana Parish</i>			
Winn	0	0	0