

Services

Child Protective Services

Protective Services for Families and Children

Services

The major focus of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services is providing services. The department's functions are divided into three programs, child protective services, adult protective services, and child-care licensing. The programs serve different populations but share many administrative and organizational functions. They also share a common goal: to provide the best possible services to our clients.

Child Protective Services

Child abuse and neglect are among the most tragic and costly problems facing our state. In fiscal year 1996, there were nearly 45,000 confirmed victims of child abuse or neglect in Texas.

These are the children whose families were reported to authorities by concerned neighbors, teachers, doctors, relatives or friends. There is reason to believe that many other cases go unreported.

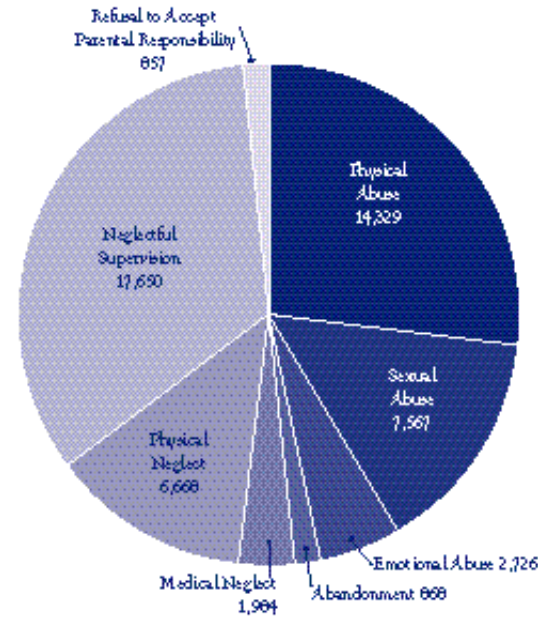
PRS is charged with investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect and providing services to the victims. In many cases, PRS is able to work with the family to solve the problems which put children at risk. But when it is necessary to remove children from their homes to protect their safety, the department provides temporary homes for them with foster families or in licensed residential facilities. When children aren't able to return safely to their own homes, the department, with court approval, arranges for them to live permanently with a relative or to be adopted by another family. Some children remain in foster care until age 18.

In 1996, PRS received more than 106,000 reports of child abuse and neglect. The department continues to improve the quality and effectiveness of investigations and to increase public awareness of the responsibility to report suspected abuse.



PRS is also working to reduce the time children spend in care and remove barriers to resolution of child protective services cases. Long periods spent in foster care and being moved from one home to another while in care can harm children.

The department is increasing efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. This means promoting awareness among parents, offering parent training and mentor programs to at-risk populations, encouraging the development of support systems for families in local communities, and early intervention in troubled families. Innovative projects and unique collaborative efforts with local communities are bringing new hope for the future.



Types of Abuse
Types of child abuse and neglect reported for confirmed victims, fiscal year 1996. Some victims may have experienced more than one type.

Child Abuse and Neglect
Child protective services workers investigated 99,780 cases of suspected child abuse and neglect in fiscal year 1996. Of these, 28,489 cases involving

44,704 victims were confirmed. Victims of abuse and neglect ranged in age from infants to teens, but young children were most vulnerable. Nearly 30% of all victims were 3 years old or younger and more than half were six or younger.

The people responsible for the abuse were most often parents: 48 percent were the child's mother and 22 percent the father. Other perpetrators included relatives, step-parents, caretakers, and parents' boy-friends or girlfriends.

	Anglo	African-American	Hispanic	Other	Total
Under 1					
Female	658	695	636	48	2,037
Male	796	761	686	56	2,299
1-3 Years					
Female	1,776	1,047	1,356	126	4,305
Male	1,861	1,179	1,542	145	4,727
4-6 Years					
Female	1,811	1,119	1,655	144	4,729
Male	1,821	1,254	1,715	126	4,916
7-9 Years					
Female	1,644	957	1,533	115	4,249
Male	1,534	995	1,411	132	4,072
10-12 Years					
Female	1,481	763	1,398	69	3,711
Male	1,061	683	845	67	2,656
13-17 Years					
Female	2,058	974	1,725	108	4,865
Male	994	494	608	42	2,138
Total					
Female	9,428	5,555	8,303	610	23,896
Male	8,067	5,366	6,807	568	20,808
Grand Total	17,495	10,921	15,110	1,178	44,704

Children's Safety

The department's first priority is the immediate safety of the child. PRS maintains a toll-free, 24-hour hotline for reporting (1-800-252-5400). All reports which meet the statutory definitions of abuse and neglect are assigned a priority based on the level of risk to the child, so that the most urgent cases receive immediate attention. Law enforcement agencies are also alerted.

Reports

Reports come from many sources. About half of all cases investigated were reported by professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, clergy, child-care workers and others who work with children. Other frequent sources of reports were parents (about 9 percent), other relatives (11 percent), and friends and neighbors (11 percent).

Investigation

Child protective services workers interview the child, the parents, and any witnesses. They must determine whether child abuse or neglect has occurred and assess the continuing risk to the

child. The department must then determine what civil action to take, if any. If criminal misconduct is involved, law enforcement will conduct an investigation at the same time and will determine if criminal charges should be filed.

Children's Advocacy Centers

In many areas, interviews and examinations of children in abuse and neglect cases may be

conducted at a children's advocacy center. The centers provide a non-threatening, child-friendly setting where professionals from child protective services, law enforcement, the prosecutor's office, and others work together. Medical and mental health professionals and social workers are also part of the team that provides services to victims.

PRS supports the development of child advocacy centers

and provides matching funds for communities to start new centers. By the end of 1996, there were 16 centers operating around the state and 8 more in development.

In-home Services

In addition to protecting the immediate safety of children, PRS provides services to reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect in the home. Sometimes it is possible for children to stay at home while the department works with the family. In other cases, it is necessary to find a safe place for children to live, with a relative or in foster care, while the family addresses its problems.

In fiscal year 1996, 8,203 families received in-home services per month. Others received services while the children were in care outside the home. The result is that 63% of all children in child protective service cases were able to return home.

Child protective services workers and other professionals develop a service plan to address the factors which cause abuse or neglect or place the child at risk. Parents may be required to attend parent training classes,

participate in counseling or drug and alcohol abuse treatment, find stable housing, or fulfill other requirements to ensure the safety of the child. The department contracts with community organizations to provide many of these services.

Intensive Family Services

Separation from their families can be a traumatic experience for children. In some cases, it is possible to avoid removal of the children or return them home sooner through intensive intervention efforts. Specially trained caseworkers with small caseloads work with these families. In 1996, the department expanded availability of these services to include many rural areas, and nearly doubled the number of units operating around the state, from 17 to 33.

Foster Care

When it isn't safe for children to live with their own families, the department finds another place for them to stay. They may be placed temporarily with relatives or a foster family, in an emergency shelter, or in an

assessment center. At the end of fiscal year 1996, there were 11,808 children in foster care.

Of these, 8,490 were living in one of the state's 6,293 licensed foster family homes. Foster families are volunteers who provide a place for children to live while they are in PRS care. Foster parents offer a loving, supportive environment for children. They are reimbursed for a portion of the costs of caring for children and are part of a team which includes the child's caseworker, attorneys, and others and help to promote safe return of the child.

Some children have special medical needs or other disabilities that would be difficult to care for in a family home. These children may be placed in group homes, residential treatment centers, or other facilities. The department contracts with providers offering a wide variety of programs designed to meet the special needs of children. During fiscal year 1996, PRS stepped up efforts to monitor the quality of care provided in these facilities, and on September 1, 1996, new contracts with stricter performance measures and enforcement provisions went into effect.

Children with Disabilities

A special team of staff is dedicated to addressing the unique needs of children in the department's care who have disabilities. The team develops cooperative agreements with other agencies that serve these children and consults with caseworkers about care options. The department's objective is to place children with disabilities in the least restrictive setting possible.

In February, PRS began a federally-funded project in Corpus Christi and Edinburg to help families caring for children with disabilities. Nurses assess the home care needs of children who are medically fragile, chronically ill, or developmentally-disabled. These children may require special care, sometimes around the clock, such as tube feeding. Nurses work with each child's medical team to plan treatment. They provide training to parents and help the family find resources in the community.

Permanency Planning

While a child is in the state's custody, a special team of staff

and others involved in the case meets regularly to review the progress made in the case. The goal of permanency planning is to ensure that children do not linger in foster care and that they live in a stable, nurturing environment. Whether the plan for a child is to return home or be adopted, the team works to avoid unnecessary delays in the process. Teams now meet in all regions.

Adoption

When it is not possible for a child to return home, the court may terminate the parents' rights, freeing the child for adoption. At the end of fiscal year 1996, there were 1,393 children in the department's custody who were legally free for adoption. During the year, 862 children were placed in adoption.

PRS is involved in a number of activities to recruit adoptive families and improve adoption services. Recruiters in each region promote public awareness and coordinate specific efforts to find families for each of the children waiting in that region.

Texas Adoption Resource Exchange

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange helps to bring waiting children together with families who can meet their needs. The exchange maintains a database of available children and families interested in adopting. Through computer matching, workers are able to identify potential adoptive families. The goal of the exchange is to find at least three potential families for each child.

Every month, the exchange distributes a listing of available children, with photographs and a brief profile of each child, to more than 500 agencies and individuals in Texas and throughout the nation. Since 1995, the listing has also been available on the Internet's World Wide Web (<http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us>). Families considering adoption

can see pictures of the children and read about them on their home computer. In the first year that the listing appeared on the Internet, adoption inquiries increased significantly.

Private Adoption Agencies

In 1996, PRS began an open enrollment process, contracting with private adoption agencies to register children available for adoption through the department. This will allow the department access to many more families interested in adoption throughout the country and

increase potential matches between children with special needs and families who can meet those needs.

Recruiting Minority Families

In recent years, the department has increased efforts to recruit minority adoptive families. The One Church, One Child project seeks to find one family from each participating congregation to adopt a child or sibling group. The Metropolitan One Church, One Child project has been operating in Houston since 1994. Projects are in development in Dallas, Beaumont, Abilene, and El Paso.

Dare to Love

“Dare to Love” is the theme for many of the department’s recruitment efforts. National Adoption Awareness Month in November marks the beginning of a yearlong campaign to promote adoption of special-needs children in Texas with activities and events in every region. In 1996, these included public service announcements, adoption fairs, and media events. The department’s efforts have been

supported by communities, with local newspapers and television stations in some cities running “Wednesday’s Child” profiles of children waiting to be adopted and businesses sponsoring campaign activities. In Houston, billboards donated by Eller Media and sponsored by Wendy’s International resulted in a 54 percent increase in inquiries to the foster and adoption hotline during the three months that they appeared.

Removing Barriers to Adoption

Children need stability and a permanent, loving family. Unfortunately, some spend years in foster care, waiting to be adopted. As the department continues efforts to reduce the time children spend in care, state leaders are becoming more aware of the problem and the need to improve the adoption process.

The Governor’s Committee to Promote Adoption, appointed by Governor George W. Bush in May 1996, recommended significant changes in laws and policies affecting adoptions. Among these are proposals to expedite termination of parental rights in extreme cases of abuse or neglect

and create a registry that requires fathers to claim their parental rights within a designated time after birth or waive those rights. Similar recommendations were made by the Sunset Advisory Commission during a review of the department’s operations conducted earlier in the year.

Texas Court Improvement Project

The Texas Court Improvement Project, directed by the Texas Supreme Court with administrative support from PRS, is a four-year effort to reduce court delays in child abuse cases. In 1996, the project completed a survey of judges and attorneys which indicated a need for more training in child abuse issues and consistent policies across counties for handling continuances. The task force heading the effort released its recommendations in November 1996.

Post-adoption Assistance

Children who have suffered abuse or neglect often continue to need help coping with the effects even after adoption. PRS provides mental health and ther-

apeutic services to children and parent training, support groups, and respite care for adoptive parents. In acute cases, inpatient residential treatment may also be available. Services are provided through contracts with private child-placement and social services agencies. In 1996, 3,137 people received post-adoption services.

Preparation for Adult Living

About 15 percent of all foster children remain in the system until they become adults. Making the transition to adulthood is difficult for any child, but for children who have been in the state's care for much of their lives, it can be especially frightening. The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program helps teens in foster care learn skills to become responsible, independent adults.

During fiscal year 1996, 2,596 youths, ages 14 to 20, participated in the PAL Program. Services include independent living assessment, skills training, and group and individual counseling aimed at preparing youths for adulthood. PAL offers training in money management, job skills,

educational planning, health and interpersonal skills.

The program sponsors a statewide teen conference every year, attended by youths and adult sponsors, and a college weekend at Texas A&M University's Commerce campus, featuring seminars and financial aid workshops for participants who plan to attend college. The Statewide Youth Leadership Committee, an advisory board of youths representing every region, makes recommendations for improving the foster care system and submits them to the Board of PRS. The committee is also asked to give their ideas about policies affecting youths in foster care.

College Tuition Waivers

In 1993 the Texas Legislature increased opportunities for children leaving foster care to go to college. The law exempts these youths from having to pay tuition and most other fees at state-supported universities, colleges, and vocational schools. During the 1995-1996 academic year, 217 young adults took advantage of the waiver program. ■

Runaway Hotline

Each year, an estimated 120,000 children in Texas run away from home. Many end up on the streets, homeless and vulnerable to assault, illness, and predatory criminals.

The first nationwide runaway hotline was established by the governor of Texas in 1973 after a series of tragedies involving runaways. Called "Operation Peace of Mind," the hotline was operated by community volunteers and served as a message relay service to promote communication between runaways and their families.

Today, PRS operates the 24-hour, toll-free Texas Runaway Hotline (1-888-580-HELP). The Hotline offers crisis intervention and counseling services to youths and families anywhere in the state. Volunteers provide information and referrals to callers in need of food, shelter, medical assistance, and transportation home. Runaways and families continue to use the hotline's message relay service as a first link in communication.

In the past two years, the number of calls received by the hotline increased more than 175 percent. In fiscal year 1996, hotline staff and volunteers handled an average of 2,571 calls each month and made more than 7,800 referrals to community services. ■

The Texas Children's Justice Act Project

The Texas Children's Justice Act (CJA) project promotes activities to improve the way child abuse cases are handled by investigating agencies and the courts in order to limit additional trauma to the child victim. CJA projects focus on a multi-disciplinary approach, bringing together professionals from the fields of law enforcement, social work, and medicine. In the past six years, the project has supported development of children's advocacy centers and child fatality review teams. CJA also fosters training for child protection investigators.

The Children's Justice Act Task Force, whose members include judges, attorneys, medical and mental health practitioners, police, caseworkers, and child advocates, works with PRS to develop and implement initiatives. The CJA project is administered jointly with the Court Improvement Project, a federally-funded project designed to improve judicial handling of foster care and adoption cases.

Among CJA's current projects is the Texas Telemedicine Peer Review Network. The network uses special software to capture images and transfer information between medical experts in the field of child sexual abuse. The system will enable professionals to obtain an immediate second opinion on a finding or to consult with other practitioners. ■

Child Abuse and Neglect in Texas

Texas law requires anyone who suspects that child abuse or neglect has occurred or may occur to report it immediately to PRS or a law enforcement agency. Failure to report suspected abuse or neglect is a punishable offense. Individuals who make reports in good faith are protected by law from liability. The Texas Family Code provides definitions of child abuse and neglect:

Child abuse includes the following acts or omissions by a person:

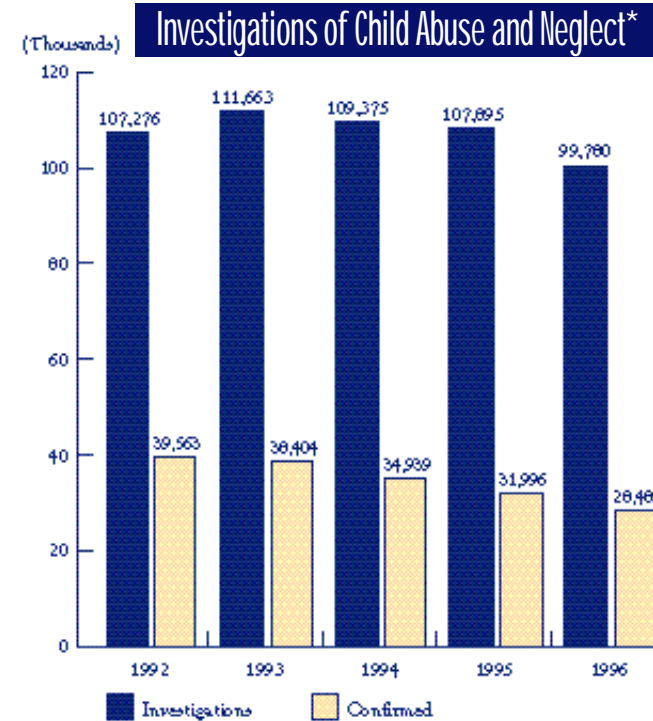
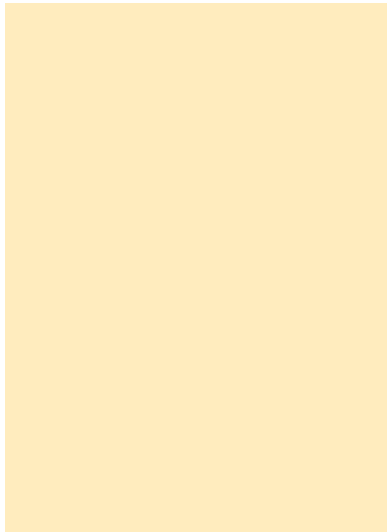
- ◆ mental or emotional injury to a child that results in observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning;
- ◆ causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in such impairment;
- ◆ physical injury that results in substantial harm or the genuine threat of substantial harm to the child, including an injury at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding

an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm;

- ◆ failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child;
- ◆ sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare;
- ◆ failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to the child;
- ◆ compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct as defined by Section 43.01, Penal Code; or
- ◆ causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene (as defined by Section 43.01, Penal Code) or pornographic.

Child neglect includes:

- ◆ the leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm, without arranging for the necessary care for the child, and the demonstration of an intent not to return by the parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator of the child;
- ◆ the following acts or omissions by a person:
 - a) placing a child in or failing to remove a child from a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or



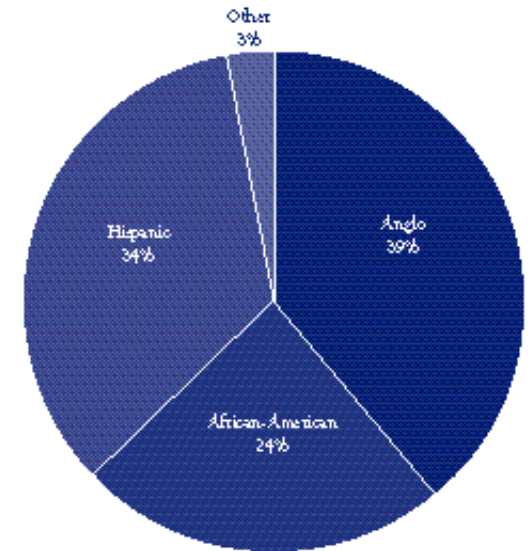
* Does not include investigations in child care facilities

mental abilities, or that results in bodily injury or a substantial risk of immediate harm to the child;

- b) failing to seek, obtain, or follow through with medical care for a child, with the failure resulting in or presenting a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or bodily injury or with the failure resulting in an observable and material impairment to the

growth, development, or functioning of the child;

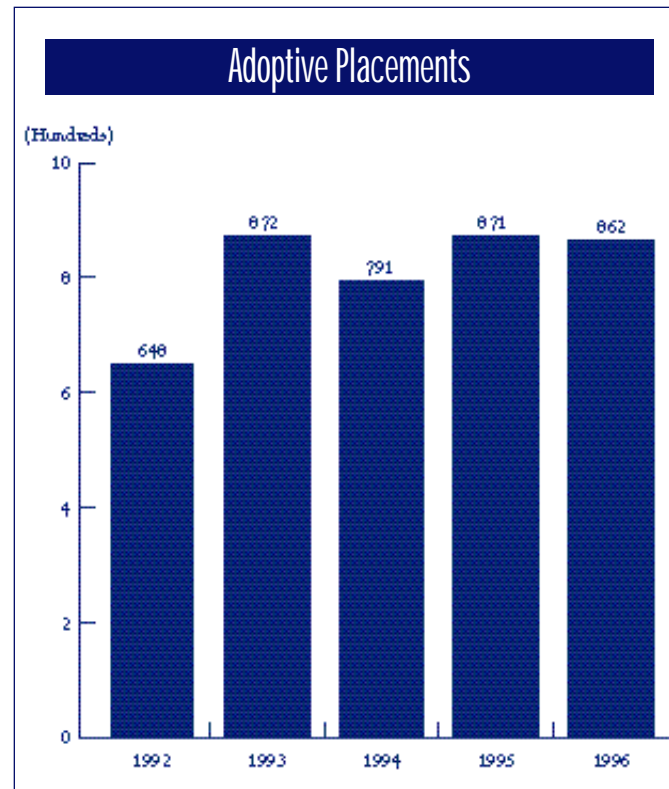
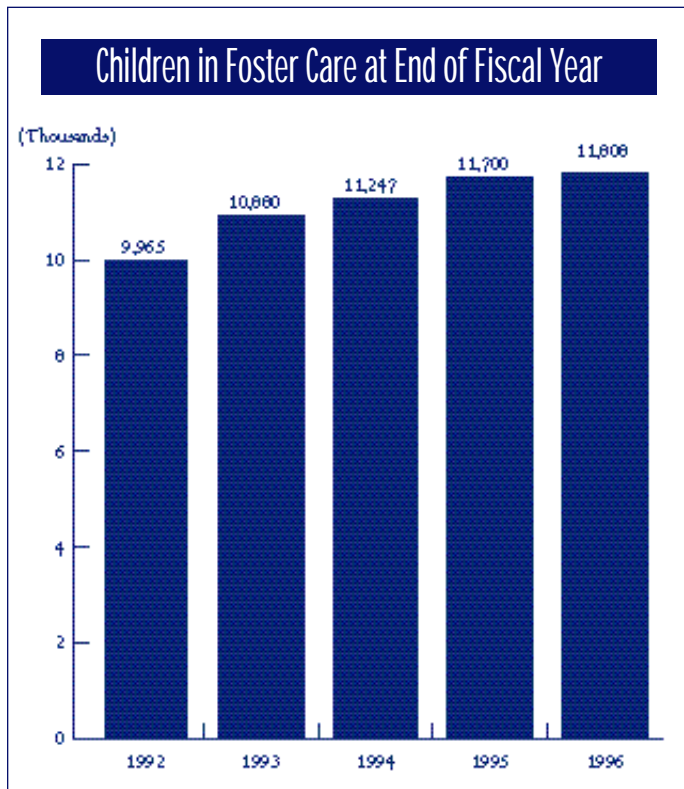
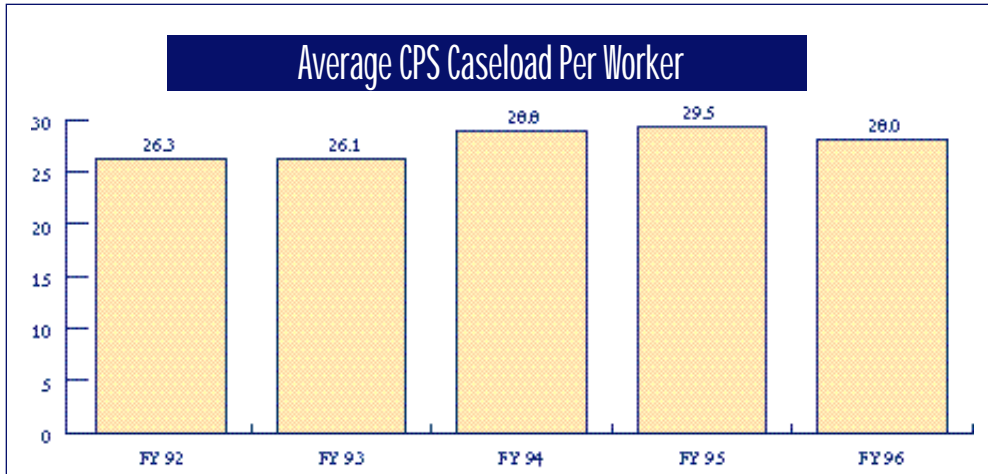
- c) the failure to provide a child with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services had been offered and refused; or
- d) placing a child in or failing to remove the child from a situa-



Ethnicity of Victims

tion in which the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of sexual conduct harmful to the child; or

- ◆ the failure by the person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare to permit the child to return to the child's home without arranging for the necessary care for the child after the child has been absent from the home for any reason, including having been in residential placement or having run away. ■



Stages of a Child Protective Services Case

