

World and Nation

Reports of child abuse, neglect rise 55 percent within four years

WASHINGTON (AP) — Reports of child abuse and neglect jumped nearly 55 percent from 1981 to 1985, while resources to help such children increased only a fraction of that amount, according to a state-by-state survey by a House committee.

States attributed the rise in reports primarily to increased public awareness of child abuse and severe economic hardships on some families, said the survey by the House Select Committee on Children, Families and Youth.

The shortfall in resources was due largely to cuts in federal assistance, the states reported, with services further hampered by staff problems and the difficulty of coordinating the effort of several different agencies.

Committee Chairman George Miller, D-Calif., said the survey documents "for the first time, on a state-by-state basis, the inadequate response to this national tragedy."

"Absent an active role by the federal government, neither the states nor the charitable organizations will have the capacity to respond fully to this growing problem," Miller said.

The committee staff sent letters and questionnaires last spring to the governors of all 50 states and the mayor of Washington, D.C. It then conducted extensive follow-up interviews.

The report was scheduled for formal release today with the approval of the 18 Democrats on the committee.

The dozen Republican members

complained about the survey's methodology and its claim of comprehensiveness.

According to the survey, cases of child abuse and neglect reported to state child welfare agencies rose 54.9 percent from 1981 to 1985. The only state to report a drop was Wyoming, with a 10.4 percent decrease.

"Neglect is the most common form of maltreatment, affecting more than half the children reported," the survey said. Sexual abuse accounted for only 14 percent of the cases reported, the report said, but showed the most dramatic and quickest increase — from 25,677 cases in 1981 to 70,767 in 1985 in the 19 states reporting complete information.

Forty-five states linked the rise in child abuse reports to greater public awareness, while three-quarters of the states ranked deteriorating economic conditions in the top three factors affecting the reporting rate.

Federal program cuts since 1981 have resulted in a loss of \$131.5 million in child welfare funds in the 31 states that provided complete information, the committee said.

Overall, taking federal, state and local financing into account, there was a \$37.7 million gain in resources available for child abuse prevention and treatment from 1981 to 1985, the report said.

"This 1.9 percent increase amounted to a little more than \$1 million per state," it said.

Storm report accidentally 'destroys' city

CHICAGO (AP) — A National Weather Service bulletin that erroneously said the city of Rockford had been demolished by a tornado was sent to hundreds of Midwest radio and television stations Monday and read on the air by some announcers.

Five minutes later, a disclaimer was sent explaining that the bulletin was transmitted by mistake, said meteorologist Steve Kahn.

The bulletin was part of a test conducted to prepare for the upcoming tornado season, he said.

He blamed a change in computer software at the service's Chicago office for letting the bulletin get out.

One broadcaster whose station used the bulletin said, "That's very upsetting to find out you may have panicked thousands of people needlessly."

Senator goes undercover, calls mental patient abuse 'shocking'

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — A lawmaker who got a job at a state mental institution, although he used the name of a dead convicted rapist, said Monday he found patient abuse and incidents that "made 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' look like a picnic."

State Sen. Richard Codey said he watched employees corral and prod patients with a pointer, heard a co-worker brag of assaulting sleeping female residents and was ordered not to intervene when a disturbed patient stuffed cigarette ashes and butts into his mouth.

State officials responded by launching an investigation of hiring practices and conditions at Marlboro Psychiatric Hospital, where Codey spent six days as an orderly last month.

"If in fact the picture he described is an accurate one, it's an unacceptable, if not outrageous, situation," said Human Services Commissioner Drew Altman.

Codey said he proved his guess that applications of prospective workers at mental facilities are rarely scrutinized.

In 1985, he alleged, more than 300 of the nearly 4,000 employees at New Jersey's seven psychiatric hospitals had criminal records. Under a policy in effect since October 1985, the Department of Human Services requires background checks, including checks of fingerprints and Social Security numbers, for all prospective employees of state psychiatric hospitals.

To determine if hiring practices had improved since then, Codey applied for a job at Marlboro, which has about 800 adult residents, using the name, address and birthdate of a dead convicted rapist and the Social Security number of a dead convicted armed robber. He described himself as an unemployed restaurant worker.

Codey, 40, said he was hired as an orderly after interviews with two ad-

ministrators that took 30 minutes, and began work Feb. 17.

He said he was shocked by cavalier attitudes among fellow employees and in witnessing the abuse of patients. He said one worker told him he couldn't wait until evenings, when he would sexually assault sleeping female residents.

Codey said some employees not only condoned beatings, but also learned how to administer them without getting caught.

"One person said 'If you hit them and someone sees you, you get fired. So what you have to do is put them in a closet and then give them a beating,'" Codey said.

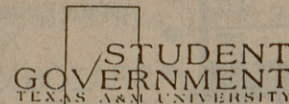
There was no immediate comment from the hospital's executive director, David Sorensen.

Codey, chairman of the Senate Institutions, Health and Welfare Committee, said he plans to draft legislation that would force state psychiatric units to better screen applicants.

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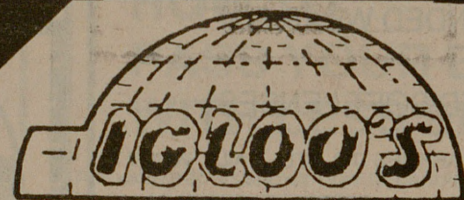
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