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Iowa Child Abuse Figures Surge in 2017

PRESENTED BY: Scott Advocacy and Consulting, LLC
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This presentation will contain a look of data from the Iowa Department of Human Services for Iowa and this county. We hope this information will provide some answers you may have and offer a perspective.

Overview of Child Abuse:

**DEFINITIONS, PROCESS,
AND STATEWIDE DATA**

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We will start by trying to get a basic understanding of what constitutes child abuse in Iowa, how DHS responds to abuse, and the results of assessments it conducts.

The Core Requirements for an Abuse Report

The child protection process starts with a report being received by a centralized intake system of the Iowa Department of Human Services. For the unit to accept a report as a possible case of child abuse, the allegations must involve:

- A victim who is less than 18 at the time of the alleged harm
- A possible perpetrator who is a “caretaker”
- An allegation that one or more of certain specified harms had occurred

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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These are the three core requirements for a case to be accepted. The only exception regarding the caretaker requirement involves cases of alleged sexual abuse, where any household member – not just a caretaker – can be a perpetrator.

A caretaker is defined as “someone responsible for the care of a child.”

Anyone can make a report of suspected child abuse. Some professionals are listed as mandatory reporters under Iowa law and are required to report suspected abuse if perceived during the course of their professional conduct. More than half of all reports to DHS come from mandatory reporters.

A list of mandatory reporters is available at Iowa Code 232.69:
<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/232.69.pdf>.

How DHS Responds to Accepted Reports

Accepted reports are assigned to one of two pathways for assessment.

- All types of abuse, except those alleging *denial of critical care*, are assigned to the traditional **Child Abuse Assessment** pathway
 - *This pathway leads to a determination whether or not abuse occurred*
- Beginning in 2014, denial of critical care cases seen as involving low risk are assigned to a new pathway called **Family Assessment**
 - *These reports do not result in a determination of child abuse*

Higher-risk denial of critical care cases go the Child Abuse Assessment pathway.

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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Iowa's child protection process is called Differential Response. Over half the states have some form of a differential response process. This process leads to accepted reports going one of two paths.

Lower risk cases, which are only for denial of critical care cases, go the family assessment path. The key criteria for family assessment is that the report does not allege imminent danger, death, or injury to a child. That decision is made on the basis of the report made, without any preliminary follow-up or investigation.

The change in 2014 followed a two-year process of working groups and legislative debate.

Categories of Abuse

Iowa's child abuse law contains four categories of abuse common to every state:

1. Neglect (denial of critical care)
2. Intentional physical injury
3. Sexual abuse
4. Mental injury

Iowa law has several other distinctive categories related to drug-related activities, sex offenders, child prostitution, pornography, and sex trafficking. Most notably, in 2017, the Iowa Legislature expanded a proscription against manufacturing meth near a child to include cases where someone uses, possesses, manufactures, cultivates, or distributes a dangerous substance, including meth, cocaine, heroin, and opium or opiates. This expanded category of abuse became the second most common in 2017, even though the law was not effective until mid-year.

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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State, and not federal law, defines what constitutes child abuse. Iowa's child abuse law was first passed almost four decades ago and has undergone multiple changes in the categories of abuse.

Here is the section of Iowa law that defines the categories of abuse:
<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/232.68.pdf>.

We will look more closely at these categories a few slides later.

DHS Response to Accepted Reports in 2017

Reports accepted:
33,418

Assigned to Family Assessment pathway:
7,136 (21.4 % of all reports)

Assigned to Child Abuse Assessment pathway:
26,282 (78.6 % of all reports)

- Cases of confirmed or founded child abuse: 8,558
(32.6 % of Child Abuse Assessments)
- Total children found to be abused: 11,236
- Number of children found abused per 1,000 children: 15.71

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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- Of all the reports accepted, 21.4 percent went the Family Assessment pathway, where there was no determination of whether there was or was not abuse. The remaining cases went the traditional assessment route, which does include a determination of abuse.
- The 32.6 percent of child abuse assessment cases that were confirmed is a little lower than recent years, where the rate has been as high as 35 percent.
- More children are found to be abused than cases confirmed or founded because a case may involve more than one child.
- The rate of abuse equals the number of Iowa children abused divided by the number of children times 1,000. Please note that the percentage of children found to be abused was 1.57% , not 15.71%.

County-specific information is available at: [*Child Abuse in Iowa, 2017.*](#)

Iowa Child Abuse Reports and Assessments, 2014-17

| Year | Reports Accepted | Family Assessments | Child Abuse Assessments | Percent Assigned to FA | Confirmed or founded reports | Percent Confirmed | Abused Children | Children abused/ 1,000 |
|------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 2014 | 23,562 | 7,769 | 15,793 | 33.0% | 5,534 | 35.0% | 7,429 | 10.28 |
| 2015 | 24,298 | 7,469 | 16,829 | 30.7% | 6,042 | 35.9% | 8,298 | 11.43 |
| 2016 | 25,707 | 7,457 | 18,250 | 29.0% | 6,484 | 35.5% | 8,892 | 12.25 |
| 2017 | 33,418 | 7,136 | 26,282 | 21.4% | 8,558 | 32.6% | 11,236 | 15.71 |

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This slide shows state changes in reports, confirmed cases, and abused children for 2014-17.

- The number of abused children in 2017 (11,236) is 26 percent higher than in 2016 and even higher than in 2014 and 2016.
- The rise in the number of abused children is associated with a substantial increase in accepted reports (from 25,707 in 2016 to 33,418 in 2017) and decrease in assignments to the Family Assessment pathway – from 29.0 percent in 2016 to 21.4 percent in 2017.

Number of Types of Child Abuse, 2017

| Types of Abuse | Number | Percent of All Abuse |
|---|--------|----------------------|
| Denial of critical care | 11,431 | 64.6% |
| Exposing a child to a dangerous substance | 1,992 | 11.3% |
| Presence of illegal drugs in a child's body | 1,581 | 8.9% |
| Physical injury | 1,521 | 8.6% |
| Sexual abuse | 964 | 5.5% |
| Allowing Access to a Sex Offender | 148 | 0.8% |
| Mental injury | 40 | 0.2% |

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

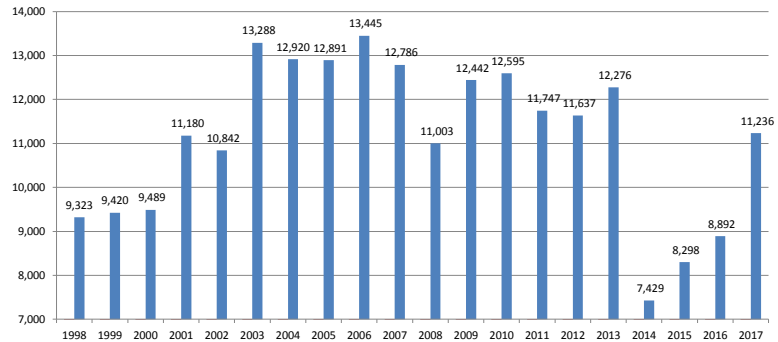
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This table lists the number and types of abuse that DHS confirmed in 2017. Almost two-thirds of confirmed types of abuse in 2017 involved denial of critical care – where a parent or caretaker failed to provide adequate supervision, food, shelter, clothing, or other care necessary for a child's well-being.

Next most common (1,992 cases) involved an abuse category that was revised by the 2017 Legislature that involves exposing a child to cocaine, meth, heroin, or opium/opiates through the caregiver's possession, distribution, manufacturing, use, or cultivation. Other categories of abuse included illegal drugs in a child's body because of caretaker action or inaction (8.9 percent of all abuse), intentional physical injury (8.6 percent), and sexual abuse (5.5 percent), and a parent or caretaker knowingly allowing a sex offender access to a child (1.0 percent). Only 0.2 percent of cases involved mental injury to a child.

County-specific information on types of abuse is available here: [*Types of Child Abuse, 2017.*](#)

Number of Abused Iowa Children, 1998-2017



Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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The large increase in 2017 brought the number of abused children close to the numbers before differential response. The 2017 increase is the biggest jump in a year over this 20-year period.

Trends in Types of Child Abuse in Iowa, 2014-17

| Year | Denial of Critical Care | | Physical Abuse | | Sexual Abuse | | Presence of Illegal Drugs in a Child's Body | | Allowing Access to a Sex Offender | | Exposing Child to Dangerous Substances | |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|---|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|--|----------------|
| | Number | % of all abuse | Number | % of all abuse | Number | % of all abuse | Number | % of all abuse | Number | % of all abuse | Number | % of all abuse |
| 2014 | 7,584 | 70.1% | 1,339 | 12.4% | 719 | 6.6% | 921 | 8.5% | 123 | 1.1% | 123 | 1.1% |
| 2015 | 8,852 | 71.7% | 1,405 | 12.1% | 600 | 4.9% | 1,164 | 9.5% | 158 | 1.3% | 74 | 0.6% |
| 2016 | 9,369 | 71.3% | 1,300 | 9.9% | 773 | 5.9% | 1,522 | 11.6% | 137 | 1.0% | 33 | 0.3% |
| 2017 | 11,431 | 64.8% | 1,521 | 11.6% | 964 | 7.3% | 1,581 | 12.0% | 148 | 1.1% | 1,992 | 0.3% |
| Average | 9,309 | 69.5% | 1,392 | 10.0% | 764 | 5.3% | 1,297 | 8.9% | 142 | 1.0% | 556 | 3.3% |
| Change 2016-17 | 2,062 | | 221 | | 191 | | 59 | | 11 | | 1,959 | |

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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- This table sets forth DHS data on trends in the types of child abuse from 2014-17. The table shows a major jump from 2014-17 in two categories: *denial of critical care*, which increased by 2,062, and *exposing a child to a dangerous substance*, which rose from 33 to 1,992.
- All other types of abuse increased in 2017.
- The rise in sexual abuse figures was probably associated with a 2016 law broadening who may be a sexual abuse perpetrator to include all household members and not just those responsible for the care of a child.

Abused Children by Age Group, 2017

| Years | 0-5 | | 6-11 | | 12-17 | | All Ages |
|-------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|----------|----------|
| | No. | % of All | No. | % of All | No. | % of All | No. |
| 2014 | 3,625 | 48.8% | 2,062 | 27.8% | 1,738 | 23.4% | 7,425 |
| 2015 | 4,091 | 49.3% | 2,304 | 27.8% | 1,900 | 22.9% | 8,295 |
| 2016 | 4,549 | 51.2% | 2,370 | 26.7% | 1,971 | 22.2% | 8,890 |
| 2017 | 5,325 | 47.4% | 3,118 | 27.8% | 2,786 | 24.8% | 11,229 |

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This table shows the number and percent of cases by three different age groups. Those who are between birth can five years old are disproportionately abused, but their percentage declined slightly in 2017.

Counties with the Largest Increases in Child Abuse, 2016-17

| Counties | 2016 Pop 0-17 | 2016 abused children | 2017 abused children | Increase in abuse, 2016-17 | Counties | 2016 Pop 0-17 | 2016 abused children | 2017 abused children | % increase in abuse, 2016-17 |
|---------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Polk | 117,227 | 1,360 | 1,655 | 295 | Ringgold | 1,172 | 4 | 14 | 250.0% |
| Woodbury | 26,399 | 448 | 654 | 206 | O'Brien | 3,225 | 30 | 82 | 173.3% |
| Linn | 51,341 | 546 | 695 | 149 | Jefferson | 2,828 | 31 | 83 | 167.7% |
| Black Hawk | 28,123 | 371 | 499 | 128 | Lucas | 1,922 | 12 | 32 | 166.7% |
| Scott | 40,380 | 594 | 704 | 110 | Audubon | 1,120 | 13 | 34 | 161.5% |
| Marshall | 9,913 | 124 | 200 | 76 | Ida | 1,614 | 14 | 36 | 157.1% |
| Pottawattamie | 21,546 | 387 | 463 | 76 | Emmet | 1,949 | 40 | 98 | 145.0% |
| Johnson | 29,097 | 130 | 205 | 75 | Kossuth | 3,261 | 20 | 49 | 145.0% |
| Story | 15,901 | 177 | 244 | 67 | Madison | 3,935 | 25 | 61 | 144.0% |
| Emmet | 1,949 | 40 | 98 | 58 | Winnebago | 2,302 | 12 | 29 | 141.7% |
| Des Moines | 8,765 | 177 | 233 | 56 | Jones | 4,362 | 25 | 60 | 140.0% |

Data source: Iowa Department of Human Services

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This table shows the counties with the largest numeric and percentage increases in abuse from 2016-17. For information on all counties, download [*Child Abuse in Iowa, 2014-17.*](#)

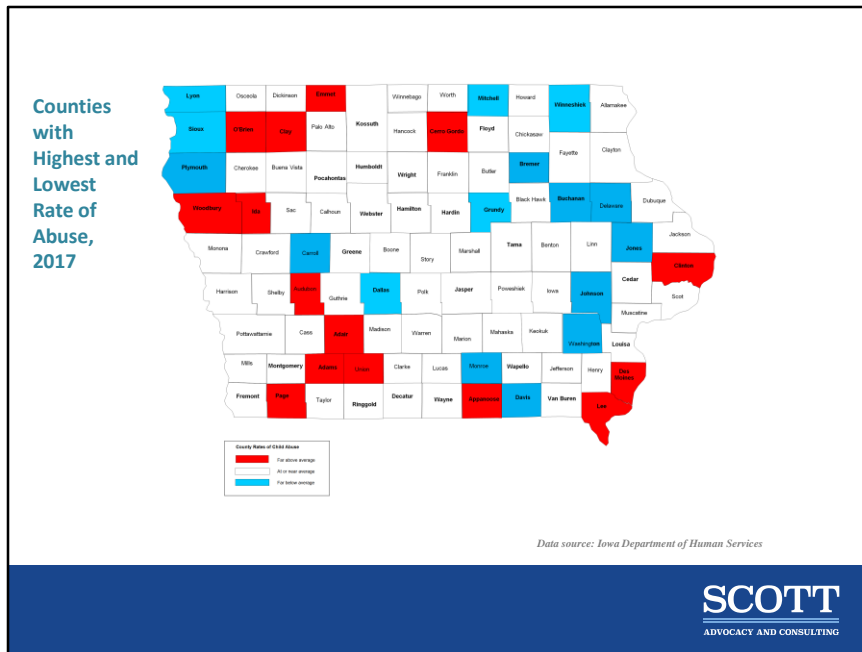
Counties with Highest and Lowest Rates of Abuse, 2017

| County | 2016 Pop 0-17 | Reports Accepted | Percent Assigned to FA | Confirma- tion rate | Ch'n abused/ 1,000 | County | 2016 Pop 0-17 | Reports Accepted | Percent Assigned to FA | Confirma- tion rate | Ch'n abused/ 1,000 |
|---------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Emmet | 1,949 | 170 | 19.4% | 48.2% | 50.28 | Grundy | 2,833 | 95 | 18.9% | 28.6% | 9.88 |
| Union | 2,727 | 208 | 14.9% | 39.5% | 35.57 | Washington | 5,489 | 201 | 24.9% | 25.2% | 9.84 |
| Appanoose | 2,709 | 198 | 18.7% | 32.3% | 32.12 | Mitchell | 2,534 | 69 | 26.1% | 41.2% | 9.47 |
| Audubon | 1,120 | 72 | 12.5% | 39.7% | 30.36 | Plymouth | 6,150 | 190 | 26.8% | 32.4% | 9.27 |
| Lee | 7,199 | 623 | 19.9% | 33.7% | 29.45 | Lyon | 3,301 | 65 | 40.0% | 43.6% | 8.79 |
| Jefferson | 2,828 | 208 | 25.0% | 40.4% | 29.35 | Buchanan | 5,384 | 158 | 20.9% | 28.0% | 8.73 |
| Page | 2,802 | 201 | 24.4% | 33.6% | 28.91 | Carroll | 4,848 | 153 | 27.5% | 28.8% | 8.66 |
| Clinton | 10,585 | 803 | 17.7% | 36.2% | 27.68 | Davis | 2,525 | 63 | 27.0% | 28.3% | 8.32 |
| Adair | 1,486 | 67 | 23.9% | 52.9% | 27.59 | Sioux | 9,328 | 178 | 16.9% | 36.5% | 8.15 |
| Des Moines | 8,765 | 632 | 17.2% | 33.1% | 26.58 | Monroe | 1,810 | 71 | 15.5% | 20.0% | 7.73 |
| Adams | 797 | 44 | 20.5% | 34.3% | 26.35 | Bremer | 5,331 | 137 | 27.7% | 30.3% | 7.69 |
| O'Brien | 3,225 | 182 | 18.1% | 36.2% | 25.43 | Delaware | 4,032 | 125 | 22.4% | 25.8% | 7.44 |
| Woodbury | 26,399 | 1,529 | 20.8% | 36.3% | 24.77 | Johnson | 29,097 | 798 | 26.9% | 26.6% | 7.05 |
| Clay | 3,646 | 200 | 18.5% | 33.7% | 24.14 | Winneshiek | 3,710 | 72 | 16.7% | 30.0% | 7.01 |
| Iida | 1,614 | 68 | 27.9% | 44.9% | 22.30 | Dallas | 23,505 | 415 | 24.1% | 34.0% | 5.53 |
| Totals | 77,851 | 5,205 | 19.6% | 36.2% | 27.49 | Totals | 109,877 | 2,790 | 37.2% | 29.7% | 7.50 |

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However much rates have changed from 2016-17, Iowa continues to have a wide range in rates of child abuse among its counties.

The table lists those counties with the highest and lowest rates of abuse per 1,000 children. As you'll see from the table, the rates in some counties are several times those in others. For a county-specific table with rates, see [Child Abuse in Iowa, 2017](#).



Here's a map showing the 15 counties with the highest and the lowest rates of abuse.

There is some geographic clustering, with pockets of higher rates of abuse in the Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast and of lower rates in Northeast Iowa and the far Northwest.

The End

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