La. child abuse statistics ‘shocking, appalling, probably low’

By KAREN DIDIER

Capitol news bureau

The numbers in the state’s first report on child abuse and neglect are “shocking and appalling” and probably low, the state’s executive officer for the Department of Health and Human Services said Monday.

However, until recently cases were not tracked on a statewide basis and there was no way of knowing how many children suffered from child abuse and neglect, said DHHR’s Dr. Robert Casse.

He said 86 children died in Louisiana from child abuse and neglect during 1982 and 1983, but the actual number may have been much higher.

“Perhaps there were 180, we just don’t know,” Casse told a group of law enforcement officers gathered at LSU for a seminar on child abuse and family violence. The seminar, which started Monday and ends Wednesday, is being sponsored by the LSU Law Enforcement Training Department.

Casse presented the state’s first report on child abuse and neglect. Although the report is based on 1982 figures, Casse said it at least provides a starting point to which future reports can be compared.

Casse called the report “shocking and appalling,” mainly because it is the first time the statistics have all been put together for a complete picture.

With each succeeding year of the report — the 1983 figures should be out in the next few weeks and work already has started on the 1984 report — the state will be able to get a better handle on its child abuse and neglect problem, Casse said.

Between 1979 and 1982, the number of child abuse and neglect cases increased 127 percent, which is an average yearly increase of 31 percent for that period, according to the report.

In 1982, there were 3,868 cases of neglect and 1,496 cases of physical abuse.

The study notes that some of the increase reflects an improvement in data gathering procedures as well as an increase in the number of cases notified to authorities.

Among the state’s findings:

- 1,496 cases of physical abuse
- 1,488 cases of sexual abuse
- 2,042 cases of emotional abuse

Casse said that the number of reports of child abuse and neglect has increased by 127 percent since 1979, but the actual number is probably smaller.

“Perhaps there were 180, we just don’t know,” Casse said. “I think we have a problem, but we can’t even quantify it.”

Casse said that the increase in reports is due to a greater awareness of the problem and a better system for reporting it.

Casse said that the state’s system for dealing with child abuse is not working well.

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