



# Child Abuse & Neglect in Mecklenburg County

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## Special Points of Interest in Mecklenburg County:

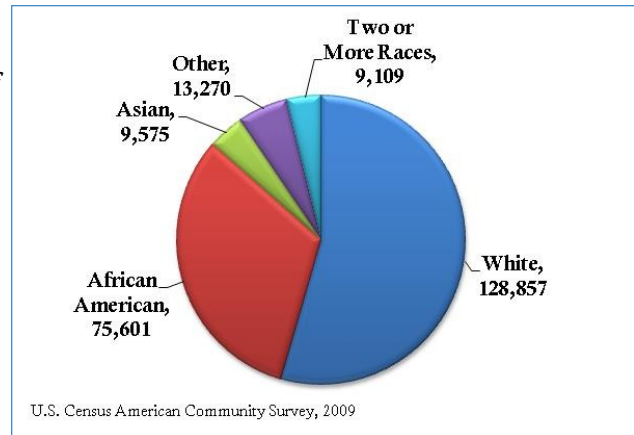
- Children under age 5 accounted for most abused & neglected children
- The total number of children reported abused or neglected increased 22% between 2004-05 and 2008-09
- 9 children under age 18 were victims of homicide by assault in 2008
- The majority of children abused & neglected in Mecklenburg County were African American
- Reports of abuse & neglect come mainly from the Courts, Education Personnel & Human Services

## Youth in Mecklenburg County

As of 2008, nearly 237,000 of the residents of Mecklenburg County were under the age of 18.

Demographically, the youth of Mecklenburg County are reflective of the county's overall population. In 2008, over half of the county's youth were white, roughly a third were African American, just over 15% were Hispanic, and around 4% were Asian (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: Racial Composition Under 18, Mecklenburg County, 2008

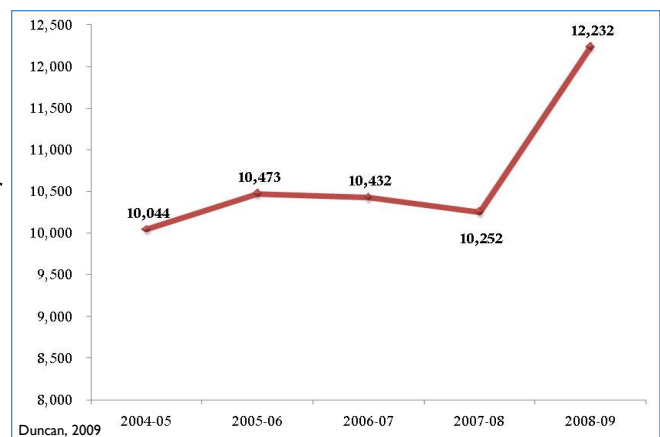


## Child Abuse and Neglect in Mecklenburg County

One of the most significant issues concerning child welfare is that of abuse and neglect. During the 2008-09 fiscal year, over 12,000 children in Mecklenburg County were reported as having been abused or neglected, representing 5% of the county's youth.<sup>2</sup>

Like the entire youth population, the number of children reportedly abused or neglected has been on the rise in the past few years. Nine children were victims of homicide by assault in 2008 in Mecklenburg County.<sup>3</sup> Between 2004-05 and 2008-09 fiscal years, the number of children reported as having experienced abuse or neglect increased by 22%, a total of 2,200 children, outpacing the overall growth of the youth population. This percentage growth for Mecklenburg County was much larger than the 3% rate experienced statewide during the same period. The majority of this increase occurred between 2007-08 and 2008-09 fiscal year, accounting for 1,980 victims while little change was seen between 2004-05 and 2007-08.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2: Total Child Abuse & Neglect Victims



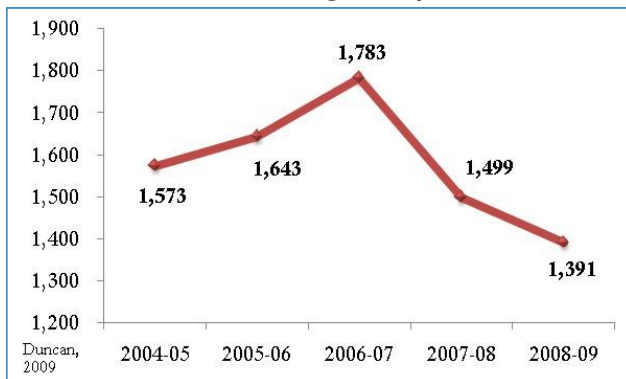
## Children in Foster Care

Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for abused, neglected and dependent children who need a safe place to stay when their parents or other relatives are unable to take care of them. When the Department of Social Services in Mecklenburg County believes that a child is not safe and a judge has agreed, the Department takes custody of that child and finds him or her a foster home.

The number of children taken into foster care custody in Mecklenburg County in 2008–09 was 1,391, accounting for less than 1% of the youth population under age 18. From 2004–05 to 2008–09 Mecklenburg County saw a decrease of 12% in the number of children taken into foster care custody under the Department of Social Service (Figure 3).<sup>2</sup>

In 2008–09, over 73% of children in foster care were African American and 11% were white in Mecklenburg County, while 40% were African American and 52% of foster children were white for the State. The incidence of children in foster care varies little by gender, with males comprising 51% of children in care. This mirrored findings of gender differences for North Carolina which had the same percentages for 2008–09.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3: Children in Foster Care Custody, Mecklenburg County**



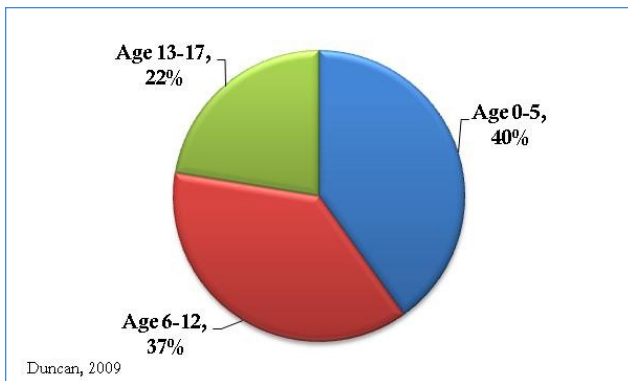
## At What Age are Children Most Vulnerable?

In Mecklenburg County, the youngest children comprise the most vulnerable population concerning victims of child abuse and neglect (Figure 4). During the 2008–09 fiscal year, 40% of children reported abused and neglected were under the age of 5<sup>2</sup>, even though this age group comprised 36% of the youth population.<sup>4</sup>

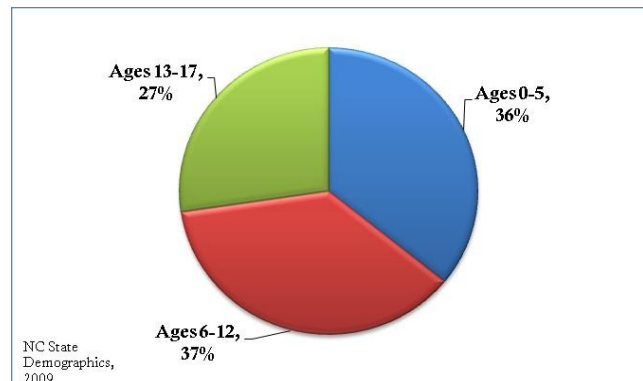
The next youngest age group, ranging from 6 to 12 years, was the second largest group of youth reported abused or neglected at 37% which is in proportion to their representation in the population. Older children comprised the smallest contingent of child abuse and neglect. Youth ages 13 to 17 comprised 27% of the population<sup>4</sup> but accounted for only 22% of reported victims of abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup>

Like Mecklenburg County, the children comprising the largest proportion of victims of abuse and neglect nationally are the youngest. In 2008, roughly one third of all victims of maltreatment were under four years old. Children ranging from 4 to 7 years of age made up 23.6% of victims of abuse, victims 8 to 11 years old made up almost 19% and youth from 12 to 17 years of age accounted for 24.4% of victims nationally.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 4: Child Abuse & Neglect Victims by Age, Mecklenburg County 2008–09**



**Figure 5: Age Composition of Youth Population, Mecklenburg County 2008**

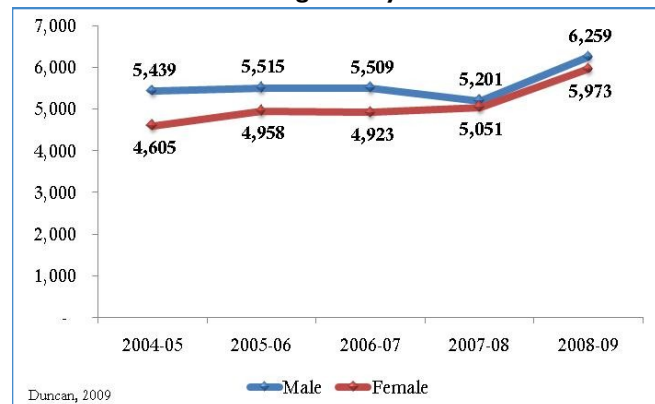


## Does Gender Make a Difference?

Little difference is seen when comparing victims of abuse and neglect by gender in Mecklenburg County and across the state. In the 2008–09 fiscal year, males made up 51% of the population under age 18 while also accounting for 51% of all reported child abuse and neglect victims.<sup>2</sup>

As Figure 6 illustrates, males accounted for a larger portion of children reported abused or neglected in 2004–05, but this difference had gradually narrowed by 2008–09. This narrowing however is not due to the decrease in male victims, but rather an increase in the number of female victims of abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 6: Child Abuse & Neglect Victims by Gender, Mecklenburg County**



## Do Reports of Abuse Differ by Race?

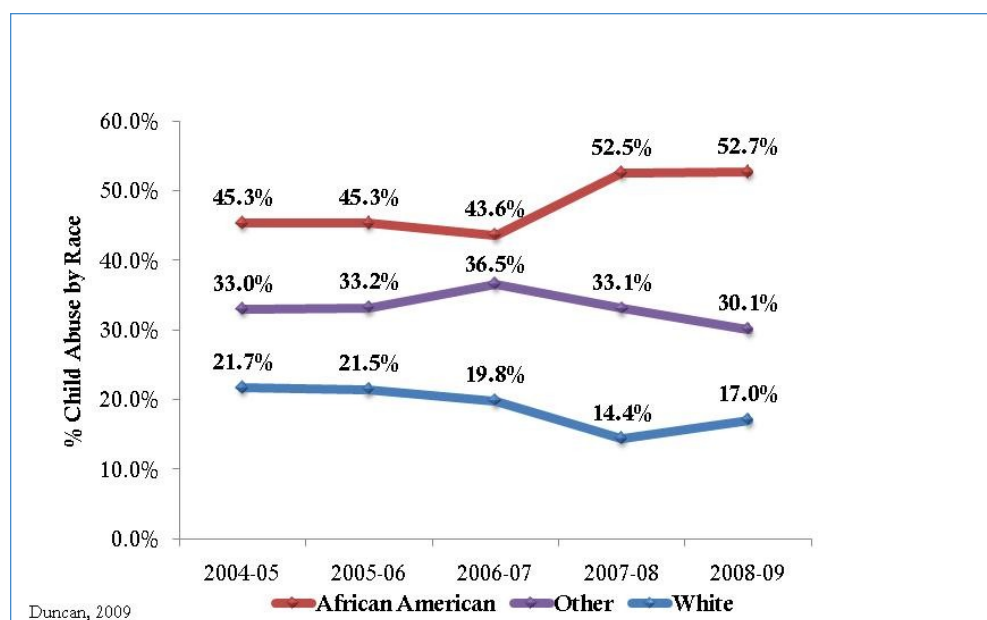
Like age, race is a distinguishing factor when looking at victims of child abuse and neglect in Mecklenburg County. Analysis of the number of children abused and neglected from 2004–05 to 2008–09 in Mecklenburg County showed a staggering difference in the race of victims. Minority children consistently experienced higher rates of child abuse and neglect compared to their white counterparts, as seen in Figure 7.<sup>2</sup>

African American children reported abused or neglected had the highest rates, accounting for slightly over 50% of victims of reported child abuse and neglect in 2008–09. Children of other minorities, excluding American Indians, experienced the second highest incidence of reported abuse and neglect, accounting for around 30%. White children comprised less than a quarter of victims reported abused or neglected.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the relative racial composition of children reported as having been abused or neglected, the change in the number of victims over time differs by race as well. From 2004–05 to 2008–09, the number of African American children in Mecklenburg County reported as victims of abuse and neglect increased 47%, while the number of white children reported abused or neglected decreased slightly during this time.<sup>2</sup>

African American children are disproportionately represented at the County, State and National levels. Fifty percent of children reported abused or neglected in Mecklenburg County were African American<sup>2</sup>, while African Americans make up just over a third of the population under 18.<sup>1</sup> Over 35% of reported abuse and neglect victims were African American in North Carolina<sup>2</sup>, while African Americans made up 24% of the population under 18.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, African American children accounted for 22% of all victims in 2008<sup>5</sup> but only made up 15% of the youth population under age 18.<sup>1</sup> White children made up the largest racial structure of victims comprising 45.1% of all victims in 2008<sup>5</sup>, while accounting for 74% of the youth under age 18.<sup>1</sup>

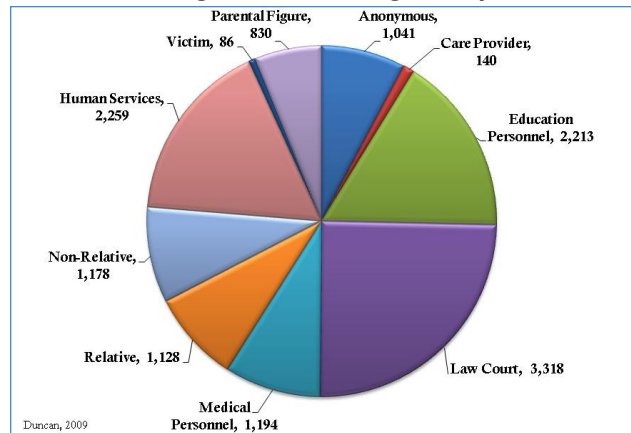
**Figure 7: Child Abuse & Neglect Victims by Race, Mecklenburg County**



## Who Reports Abuse?

Reporting acts of abuse and neglect is critical to protecting youth. In Mecklenburg County, reports from the court system, education personnel, and human services together comprised 58% of all reports of abuse and neglect in 2008–09 (Figure 8). These groups also account for the majority of reports statewide and nationally. Medical personnel and non-relatives, such as neighbors, were also an important source for reports in Mecklenburg County while parental figures and victims themselves accounted for less than 7% of all County reports in 2008–09. Alleged victims and alleged perpetrators accounted for the fewest reports of abuse and neglect nationally.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 8: Referral Sources of Child Abuse & Neglect Mecklenburg County 2008-09**

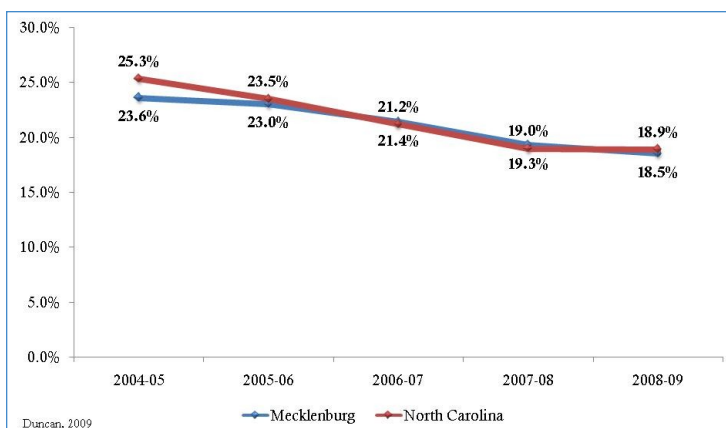


## How Many Reports are Substantiated?

When talking about child abuse and neglect, it is important to distinguish reports that have been substantiated and those that have not. The act of filing a report does not constitute a definitive case of abuse and neglect. Substantiated reports represent cases in which claims of abuse, neglect, or dependency have been verified by the Department of Social Services.

Consistently, less than a quarter of child abuse and neglect reports in Mecklenburg County are substantiated. As illustrated in Figure 9, the percentage of reports categorized as substantiated has decreased somewhat from 23.6% in 2004–05 to 18.5% in 2008–09. North Carolina also saw a decrease in the percentage of reports substantiated, with the percentage of reports similar to Mecklenburg County for the same period. Mecklenburg County (18.5%) was below the national average (21%) for 2008 statistics on the percentages of reports substantiated.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 9: Percent of Child Abuse & Neglect Reports That Were Substantiated**



Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 2008. (2009). 8 Feb. 2010. <[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds\\_name=ACS\\_2008\\_1YR\\_G00\\_&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=290345747908](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_&_lang=en&_ts=290345747908)>.
- <sup>2</sup> Duncan, D.F., Kum, H.C., Flair, K.A., Stewart, C.J., Van Busum, K. and Huang, S.P. (2009). Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services in North Carolina. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families. 31 Jan. 2010. <<http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/>>.
- <sup>3</sup> NC State Center for Health Statistics, Leading Causes of Death in North Carolina. (2010). 26 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/data/lcd/lcd.cfm>>.
- <sup>4</sup> North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management. (2009). 08 Sept. 2009. <[http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/demog/countytotals\\_singleage\\_2008.html](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/demog/countytotals_singleage_2008.html)>.
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2010). *Child Maltreatment 2008*. 5 April 2010. <[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/index.htm#can](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can)>.

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