

Abuse rates 'higher in step families'

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ABUSE in step families and "blended families" is eight times higher than in families of couples remaining together, a new Queensland report has found.

It also was almost double the rate for families of single mothers, according to the Commission of Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

The commission said emotional abuse and neglect in children belonging to step families or "blended families" – such as those involving children with different fathers or mothers – was also around five times greater.

Just why the rates were higher was a cause of concern, said the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Elizabeth Fraser.

"While what they call intact families comprise about 68 per cent of our population, the blended and step families are becoming more common and this is an area where support services may need to be targeted," Ms Fraser said.

The figures were contained in a report released today entitled *Snapshot: Children and Young People in Queensland 2006* and covers all children in the state.

The report was issued as figures from the commission showed 52 children with links to the Child Safety Department died in the year to June 30, 2006.

The full set of figures is due for release on October 31.

But Ms Fraser said the figures were not necessarily reflective of higher rates of abuse of children in foster care.

They were partly due to higher reporting standards, she said.

"With a lot of the deaths that did occur, the children were not necessarily in the child safety system at the time and the majority of them would have been children who had died from illnesses or from accidental deaths, like transport deaths," Ms Fraser said.

"The fact that these figures are being reported, whilst it is a very sad matter, is about transparency and accountability."

The report found Queensland also had higher rates of teenage pregnancies, with around 22 births per 1000 women, compared to a national rate of 16.3 in both 2003 and 2004.

But it was not all bad news, with drinking rates and illicit drug use down for both young males and

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