

Appendix 2: Technical notes

Calculation of rates

The rates of children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care were calculated using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' most recent population estimates for 31 March 2001 (ABS 1999a).

Rates of children on care and protection orders were calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0-17 years on care and protection orders at 30 June 2001}}{\text{ABS estimated population of children aged 0-17 years at 31 March 2001}} \times 1,000$$

Rates of children in out-of-home care were calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0-17 years in out-of-home care at 30 June 2001}}{\text{ABS estimated population of children aged 0-17 years at 31 March 2001}} \times 1,000$$

The rates of children subject to child protection substantiations during 2000-01 were calculated using the ABS population estimates for 31 December 1999 (ABS 1999b). These rates were calculated for children aged 0-16 years rather than for children aged 0-17 years because there were very few children aged 17 years who were the subjects of substantiations.

Rates of children who were the subjects of child protection substantiations were calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0-16 years who were the subjects of substantiations in 2000-01}}{\text{ABS estimated population aged 0-16 years at 30 December 2000}} \times 1,000$$

Rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were calculated by using the same basic method outlined above. Population projections based on the ABS 1996 Census, however, were used for the denominator. This is because population estimates by age are not available for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

The population estimates for 30 June 2001 were used to calculate rates of children on care and protection orders and rates of children in out-of-home care. The average of the estimates for 30 June 1999 and 30 June 2001 was used to calculate the rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations (ABS 1999c).

Rates for States and Territories with small numbers of children in their child protection data and small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations (notably the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania) should be interpreted carefully. Small changes in the numbers of Indigenous children in the child protection systems, or in population estimates, can have a major impact on rates.

In the Australian Capital Territory, both the small size of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and the likelihood that if one child from a family is notified then all children in that family will be notified contribute to the relatively high rates for Indigenous children in that jurisdiction.

The rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children since 1996–97 should not be compared with the rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children prior to this. Rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children before 1996–97 were calculated using ABS Indigenous population data available at that time: that is, experimental projections based on 1991 Census data. These projections of the population were very different from the ones based on the 1996 Census data used since 1996–97.

Rates for other (non-Indigenous) children

The non-Indigenous population (referred to in this report as ‘other children’) used for the calculation of rates was obtained by subtracting the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the number of children in the total population.

Identification of Indigenous status

Children

The practices used to identify and record the Indigenous status of children vary across States and Territories, with some jurisdictions recording large numbers of unknowns. No State or Territory can validate the data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by other means and the quality of the data is therefore unknown.

In this collection, children are counted as Indigenous if they are identified as such in the State and Territory collections. Children whose Indigenous status is recorded as ‘unknown’ are counted as non-Indigenous and included in the category ‘other children’. The counts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are therefore likely to be an underestimate of the actual number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.

During 1998–99 a new method for counting Indigenous status was implemented in New South Wales, which improved the accuracy of this information. The apparent increase in the rate of Indigenous clients was a reflection of the improved recording of Indigenous status rather than an increase in the number of Indigenous clients. Victoria was not able to provide data on Indigenous status in 1998–99.

Caregivers

In the out-of-home care data collection, the Indigenous status of caregivers was collected as well as the Indigenous status of children in out-of-home care. Carers who are identified as

Indigenous are included in the Indigenous category. Where the Indigenous children were living in facility-based care specifically for Indigenous children, the caregiver was counted as Indigenous. Where children were living in other types of facility-based care, the caregiver was counted as non-Indigenous.