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9.2 million kids remain at risk, study indicates

Parents' economic and marital status is reflected in the outlook for their children.

Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Fewer American children and teens are dying, fewer are getting pregnant, and fewer are impoverished. But 9.2 million still are saddled with circumstances that foreshadow a hardscabble life, according to a national study released Tuesday.

"There's a group of kids who are being left out of the economic boom that most of us are experiencing," said Bill O'Hare, coordinator of the 1999 Kids Count survey. "I think it reflects the kind of isolation that leaves many families stranded, getting farther and farther behind."

The study, an annual inventory sponsored by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation, uses 10 components to determine whether a child is at risk of becoming an unproductive and perhaps troubled adult. They include infant mortality rate, percentage of single-parent families, school dropout rate and percentage of children living with parents who hold part-time or meager-paying jobs.

Using 1996 data and comparing

Oregon rates show decline

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — The well-being of Oregon children has slipped over the last year according to a recent nationwide report on kids, crime, poverty and health.

In a snapshot of all states published in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 1999 annual Kids Count Data Book, Oregon's ranking dropped to 29th place from last year's spot of 23rd.

"We were never a shining star," said Gary Dombroff, director of Children First for Oregon, a nonprofit advocacy group.

In Oregon, the study bears the worst news for teen-agers: Ore-

gon's high school dropout rate has jumped by 33 percent. More than a quarter of Oregon students quit school before they're scheduled to graduate.

According to the study, Oregon children also face some grim death statistics. Nationally, the death rate for children, ages 1-14, dropped from 34 to 26 children per 100,000. But Oregon's rate has remained at about 29 over the past decade.

There is good news regarding infant mortality, which decreased by nearly half from about 10 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1985 to about 6 deaths in 1996.

it to 1985 information, Kids Count also cited six factors particularly ominous for children: absence of a father, an uneducated mother, household income below the poverty level, lack of health insurance, family reliance on public assistance and unemployment.

"Any one of these family constraints poses some risk for a child's future," said Douglas Nelson, foundation president. "But it is staggering to realize the alarming consequences for the 9.2 million children whose families struggle with more than four

of these negative predictors.

For these kids, the odds are truly stacked against their becoming full participants in the promise of the 21st century.

"We've got to pay attention to parents, particularly when we're talking about at-risk kids. I believe that's sometimes honored in word but very rarely in deed in this country."