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# Oregon kids' lot worsens

**A 1999 study reports some gains, but the overall picture is darker.**

A growing number of Oregon's children are slipping between the cracks.

They are growing up in poverty, failing to get adequate parental support, dropping out of school, giving birth while still in their teens and sometimes dying before they reach adulthood.

The grim portrait is contained in the 1999 Kids Count Data Book, an annual study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation of Baltimore. The foundation ranks the well-being of America's children — and produces comprehensive state reports — based on such factors as infant mortality, crime, the percentage of single-parent families, school dropout rates and poverty.

The report emphasizes the need for adequate support for public schools, increased funding for programs intended to produce and sustain healthy children and strong families, and the necessity for new juvenile delinquency strategies.

The good news from the study is that the state's infant mortality rate has decreased by nearly half, from about 10 deaths per 1,000 births in 1985 to about 6 deaths per 1,000 births in 1996. The state has fewer low-weight births and teen suicides. In

addition, there were 29 teen births per 1,000 females in 1996, compared with the national rate of 34 births per 1,000 females.

However, the state lagged behind the nationwide average in important categories:

- The national school dropout rate dipped by 9 percent from 1985 to 1996, but it jumped by 33 percent during that period in Oregon. More than 12 percent of the state's teens are high school dropouts.

- More than one-third of children are living with parents who do not have full-time, year-round employment.

- About 27 percent of families with children are headed by a single parent.

- There are 29 deaths per 100,000 children in Oregon, compared with a national average of 26.

Overall, Oregon's national ranking in child well-being dropped from 23rd in 1998 to 29th this year. In the early 1990s, Oregon ranked 18th.

At a time of such economic prosperity, it is shameful that so many children in Oregon are suffering to such an extent.

Parents, church and nonprofit groups, schools, state and local governments share the responsibility to work together to address the problems that have been so clearly identified in the Kids Count study.