



96°  
70°

Mostly sunny

## 'IT'S BETTER TO TALK'

Conservative Sen. John Cornyn will appear at fund raiser of gay and lesbian political group in effort to find common ground.



STATE, 3A

## COUNTDOWN TO KICKOFF

San Saba head coach feels Armadillos have talent to make another strong playoff run.

SPORTS, 1B

## COLTS HAPPY TO SNAG RAM

Manager Doc Edwards wanted Isaac Garcia to join Colts "from the first day we sat down and talked."

SPORTS, 1B

## Sunday

### New's journey so far

Taking a look back at mayor's first few months in office.

## Opinion

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# Silent suffering: Child abuse



■ The greater Concho Valley area averaged more cases than the state; authorities think issue understated

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Even with an average rate 19 percent higher than the Texas average, local authorities believe child abuse in Tom Green County is understated by the statistics.

"There's tons more child abuse than I think the numbers can ever tell us," said Deidre McCoy, director of community resources for the Children's Advocacy Center of Tom Green County.

From 2000 to 2009, Tom Green County and rural Concho Valley counties averaged higher rates of child abuse—11.6 and 11.1—than the state average of 9.3 victims per 1,000 children, according to research conducted and released recently by Community Development Initiatives, a program of the Angelo State University Center for Community Wellness, Engagement and Development.

According to those findings, five of the Concho Valley counties ranked in the top 40 of all 254 Texas counties in 2009 for highest child abuse rate — after Schleicher, where data was skewed by cases originating in the Yearning for Zion Ranch raid, Menard ranked fourth, Concho ranked 13th, McCulloch ranked 17th and Kimble ranked 37th.

The figures become more acute with the realization that families typically reach out for help only when they're desperate.

McCoy said the center has focused on prevention services over the past five years to strengthen and educate families before they find themselves in the court system, and outlying areas are a particular concern.

Please see ABUSE, 7A

**TOM GREEN COUNTY**  
Confirmed cases per week:

**10 in 2009**  
**7 in 2008**

Confirmed cases per year:

**516 in 2009**  
**373 in 2008**

## Misconceptions about abuse all too common

KEN STEWART AND LAURENCE JONES

Special to the Standard-Times

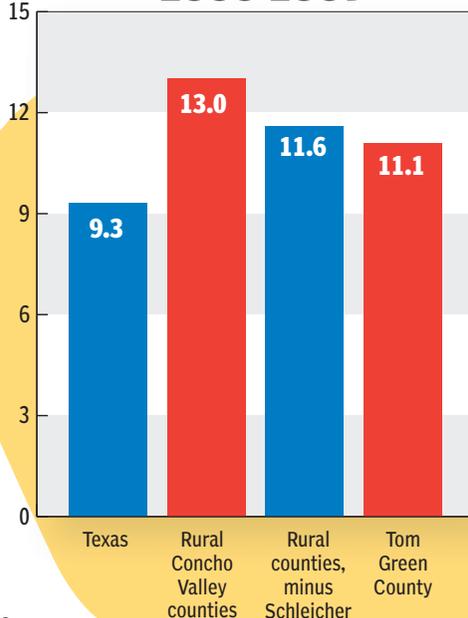
Consider the following statements about child abuse. Then decide if they are fact or fiction.

- The most common form of child abuse is violent in nature.
- Child abuse by a stranger is more likely than abuse by someone a child knows.
- Males are more likely to abuse a child than females.
- Big cities have higher child abuse rates than rural areas.

Many believe that some or all of these

Please see CASES, 7A

2000-2009



**Average rate of child abuse: Victims per 1,000 children**

## FROM THE COVER / TEXAS

### ABUSE from 1A

Rural communities have limited access to the types of prevention services that strengthen families, McCoy said. Through state and national funding, prevention service activities have been held in Crockett, Runnels and Concho counties for more than a year.

The center has hired staff in the regions, who post flyers and posters in laundromats and child care facilities and speak at schools to get the organization's name out in the public arena. McCoy said that because the whole point is to build rapport with communities, staff members may start going door to door talking to residents about the classes and services the center provides.

A higher number of people reporting incidents of abuse could mean that the prevention services work.

McCoy said that until people start addressing the smaller issues in their homes and strengthening their families, there will still be a need for CAC's intervention services — Hope House, where children are brought for an interview after abuse is suspected, and Court Appointed Special Advocates, who work on behalf of children during legal proceedings.

■ ■ ■  
Few parents are willing to speak publicly about their families' experiences with child abuse. One who did is a 31-year-old San Angelo single mom of two, whose name the Standard-Times is withholding to ensure the confidentiality of her children's identities.

She suffered verbal and physical abuse at her husband's hand but never imagined her children were at risk until one was physically hurt.

She is in the process of divorcing her alcoholic husband, who she said injured their daughter, who was 4 years old at the time.

Although the husband had not previously physically harmed his daughters, he was neglectful, the woman said — drinking until he fell asleep out outside, or in the garage, and leaving girls, who are now 5 and 11, left to fend for themselves.

She would come home some mornings and find

the door open and her husband passed out. She said her husband talked to several doctors and tried rehab, but nothing worked.

"I think unfortunately a lot of the times drugs and alcohol are to blame," she said. "I think in a lot of situations we make excuses for (abusers). We excuse their behavior."

On December 27, 2008, the two got into an argument, and her husband wrestled her to the ground and started choking her while her youngest daughter watched.

She got away, ran into the other room, and when she came back her daughter had blood running from her mouth from being hit with an artificial Christmas tree.

"I had tolerated it, but seeing that was enough to know — you will not hurt my baby like that," she said.

Members with the Children's Advocacy Center, an organization she vaguely knew about, suddenly became a major part of her life through the organization's crime victims services. Molly Thurman, a victim's coordinator with the Tom Green County district attorney's office, remains in touch with news about her husband's upcoming court hearings.

He was given five years probation for the December incident, but is scheduled to appear in court next month on a motion to revoke probation charge.

"It's sad it took something so concrete for me to see the abuse was there instead of recognizing it before for the abuse it was," the woman said. "I think I was in denial. There's a lot of shame that goes with it."

■ ■ ■  
In 2009, Tom Green County reported 516 confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect — 10 cases a week — according to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

That's an increase of 37 percent from the 373 confirmed cases in 2008.

The numbers are confirmed cases of child abuse, those investigated by Child Protective Services and entered into the court system. Child abuse prevention authorities say there are many more cases

than those reported and confirmed.

Neglect is the foremost type of abuse, and one of the easiest for outsiders to spot; poor personal hygiene, malnourishment and ignored medical needs can be seen and reported by teachers, police officers or family members.

Physical and sexual abuse cases, which are reported on a regular basis in San Angelo and across Texas, can be harder to detect, McCoy said. Bumps and bruises aren't always seen as red flags for abuse, but they still could indicate a more serious underlying more serious problem. On the other side of that argument, McCoy said, one injury doesn't mean a child is being abused.

The Concho Valley Family Alliance, which works through the advocacy center, provides a parent mentor program that places parents and professionals in the home. There they assess the family's needs and provide information about appropriate methods of discipline, child development and other areas of need. Counseling is provided free of charge, as well as advice on getting electricity turned on, making sure there's food in the house or even getting a bus pass.

"That's a form of prevention," McCoy said. "That can sometimes just change the whole dynamic that is going on between a father and son or mother and daughter."

Other problems have clearer resolutions. If a family, for example, lives on a busy street and the parents let small children play unsupervised in the front yard, the problem can be reported and experts can go to the home and offer education and advice to the parents.

The 31-year-old mother said the most difficult part of the whole situation is having to explain to her daughter why the abuse happened.

While her family provided a strong support system for her and her daughters over the past few years, she would have looked further into preventive services if she knew more about them.

"In the beginning it's an overwhelming experience," she said. "Your life is just turned upside down."

### CASES from 1A

statements are true. In fact, each statement is false.

According to Child Protective Services, almost 73 percent of Texas child abuse cases confirmed in 2009 resulted from neglectful supervision. A little over 78 percent identified a parent as the perpetrator, and 57 percent were female. The data also reflect lower child abuse rates in more densely populated areas than in rural areas.

Through the fog of misconceptions about child abuse glimmers the need to protect children, and that need stands out in Tom Green County and the Concho Valley.

From Sept. 1, 2008, through Aug. 31, 2009, CPS investigated 283,922 alleged instances of child abuse across Texas. The agency confirmed 68,326 of these allegations, and Tom Green County contributed more than its fair share to this picture.

The 25,926 children of Tom Green County in 2009 comprised only about four of every 1,000 children living in the state in 2009. Yet the county's 1,738 alleged victims of child abuse made up a little more than six of every 1,000 allegations across the state. Only 26 of 254 Texas counties had a higher number of confirmed abuse victims than the 516 reported for Tom Green County.

A deeper look reveals that, starting in 2006, the 12 rural counties of the Concho Valley collectively had a higher rate of child abuse than Texas as a whole, and the rural counties have had higher rates than Tom Green County

### HOW TO GET INVOLVED

**To report child abuse:**  
Call the state hot line at 800-252-5400 or visit [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org)  
**To donate to the Children's Advocacy Center:**  
Visit [www.firstgiving.com/cactomgreen](http://www.firstgiving.com/cactomgreen)  
**To volunteer:**  
Call 325-653-4673 and ask for Deidre McCoy

since 2008.

Of course, cases associated with the Fundamental Church of Latter Day Saints in Schleicher County drive up the recent rates for the 12 rural counties. After all, the 2008 rate for Schleicher was 68.1, and it was a staggering 159.5 per 1,000 children in 2009.

Despite these extreme recent numbers for Schleicher County, it would be a mistake to chalk up the high overall rates for rural counties solely to FLDS practices.

The 10-year average (2000-2009) child abuse rate for the rural counties of the Concho Valley is 13 victims per 1,000 children. Even excluding the extreme Schleicher County numbers for 2008 and 2009, the average remains at 11.6 victims per 1,000 children. This compares with a 10-year average of 11.1 for Tom Green County and 9.3 for Texas overall.

The fact is that five rural Concho Valley counties ranked in the top 40 of all 254 Texas counties in 2009. After Schleicher, Menard ranked fourth with a 43.6 rate of child abuse, Concho ranked 13th with a 28.6 rate, McCulloch ranked 17th with a 26.7 rate and Kimble ranked 37th with a 20.2 rate per 1,000 children.

The way San Angelo and the Concho Valley fit in this statewide picture on child abuse is startling because so many residents consider our communities to be a great places to raise children. It is surely the case that rates of child abuse in the region are higher than wished for by our local residents and leaders.

The toll on individuals, families and communities arising from child abuse is significant. For example, Tom Green County had 424 children in 2009 (1.6 percent of all children in the county) who were wards of the state. CPS distributed almost \$3.8 million to care for these children. Without federal and state funds, each Tom Green County resident would have spent \$34.92 to care for these kids.

All types of child abuse and neglect leave lasting physical and emotional scars and damage to children's self-esteem, the capacity to have healthy relationships and the ability to function at home and at school.

Our communities have faced rising child abuse across this decade. That should ring an alarm bell if we truly desire our communities to be great places to raise children. We need to take the necessary steps to keep our children safe.

Research for this article was conducted at Community Development Initiatives, a community engagement program at the Angelo State University Center for Community Wellness, Engagement and Development. Laurence F. Jones is program director of Community Development Initiatives. Kenneth L. Stewart is director of Community Development Initiatives.

## Gunman kills three, self in San Antonio

**PAUL J. WEBER**  
Associated Press

**SAN ANTONIO** — A 69-year-old man pulled two handguns from a briefcase and killed his stepfather, another man and a mother — then himself — as the woman's children played nearby, in an upscale gated

community in San Antonio, authorities said Thursday.

The children escaped through the front door, San Antonio police Sgt. Chris Benavides said.

The shooter was identified as Joseph Ray McDonald, the stepson of the homeowner, Arthur DeBaun. Debaun, 88, was

found dead alongside Heather Monroe, 40, and 41-year-old Jeffery Monroe.

The shooting happened Wednesday on the city's affluent north side, behind the gated entry of a small neighborhood.

Neighbor Eugene Goldman said: "This is why we live in a gated community."

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