

# Institutional child abuse eyed

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Youngsters confined to mental institutions are twice as likely to be victims of child abuse as other kids, a state panel said yesterday.

The study, prepared by the State Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled, found that abusers at state-run and state-licensed facilities were both staff members and other children.

Abuse ranged from sexual

assaults to excessive use of force, the panel found.

Although 92% of the cases involved either no physical injury or only minor injury, a third of the reports led to findings of child abuse or employe misconduct.

"The findings confirmed that institutionalized mentally disturbed children constitute a high-risk group for abuse and neglect," the report concluded. There are about 3,600 such youngsters

in the state.

The report acknowledged that verifying abuse complaints from disturbed youngsters is difficult, but it said many of the investigations by institutions "were flawed and failed to follow stated guidelines."

In many cases, the institutions failed to interview all the witnesses or to prepare written reports, the study found.

The commission said that

the state's Office of Mental Health and Officer of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities "generally endorsed" recommendations to improve procedures at mental institutions.

The study was based on 80 incidents that took place during a six-month period in late 1985 and early 1986, before the commission was created.

The institutions involved were not named.