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We warned on incest family 20 years ago, says relative

By Alan O'Keeffe

FEARS for the Roscommon incest family were first raised when the eldest child was less than six months old, a relative has claimed.

Concerns were expressed in 1989 and nine years later to a GP who then contacted the Western Health Board. But very little was done, claimed the relative in a radio interview. The HSE, as the successor of the health board, should have no part in the inquiry into the scandal, claiming that a 'cover-up' has gone on long enough.

The mother of the family's six children was jailed for seven years last week after admitting years of neglect and cruelty, including her raping her 13-year-old son. The children were not put into care until 2004, despite being on a register since 1996. New figures reveal that children in the western region are the least likely in the country to be taken into protective care. The rate of children being removed from families and placed in State care is lowest in the HSE's western region.

Yet, in a single year, HSE officials had concerns over the welfare of 1,464 children, the highest of all health regions. The figures come amid growing concern over the failure of the then Western Health Board to rescue the children in the Roscommon scandal sooner.

The delay will be part of the inquiry into the case which has been set up by the HSE.

The HSE report on child protection found the rate of children in care in HSE West is the lowest in the country, at 43 per 10,000 under-18 population, compared to 60 per 10,000 in Dublin north east. The Western Health Board, covering Roscommon, Galway and Mayo, was taken over by the HSE in 2005.

The report, which relates to 2006, conceded that staffing and availability of services can affect decisions to place children in care. Other factors are income, deprivation and demographics, it says.

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