



Causes: All Children

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I. neglect associated with housing problems...

Studies, for example, have found that children whose families have housing problems are almost twice as likely to enter foster care as children whose families do not have these problems.¹⁵

o "...children are most often placed in foster care because of neglect. As Table 1 shows, neglect, when combined with families' housing problems, has consistently been the principal reason that many children enter foster care."

o "The rate of removals because of neglect, in fact, increased 17 percent between 2000 and 2005, or by nearly 35,000 cases."

o "...it is neglect, not abuse, that accounts for the majority of children's entries to foster care."

A. causes of neglect...

o **Neglect...many forms...**

" "...there is too little income to provide their children with food, health care, and other necessities that their children need."

" "...the lack of affordable quality housing results in homelessness or substandard living conditions that pose risks to their children's and their own safety"

" "...parents must work two or more jobs and struggle to provide their children with appropriate supervision while the parents are at work. Child care for many families is unaffordable."

" "And for some parents, depression and other mental health conditions undermine their ability to provide adequately for their children."

o **"Neglect may also occur when parents struggle with substance abuse, an issue that has become increasingly prevalent over the last several years. In 2005, nearly 75,000 children and youth were removed from their families because of parental substance abuse-a 42 percent increase over the 2000 rate."**

I. parent or caregiver factors

A. Personality characteristics...

"Personality Characteristics and Psychological Well-Being

No consistent set of characteristics or personality traits has been associated with maltreating **parents or caregivers**. Some characteristics frequently identified in those who are physically abusive or neglectful **include low self-esteem, an external locus of control (i.e., belief that events are determined by chance or outside forces beyond one's personal control), poor impulse control, depression, anxiety, and antisocial behavior**.²¹ While some maltreating parents or caregivers experience behavioral and emotional difficulties, severe mental disorders are not common.²²

B. History of maltreatment...

Parental Histories and the Cycle of Abuse

A parent's childhood history plays a large part in how he or she may behave as a parent. Individuals with poor parental role models or those who did not have their own needs met may find it very difficult to meet the needs of their children.

While the estimated number varies, **child maltreatment literature commonly supports the finding that some**

maltreating parents or caregivers were victims of abuse and neglect themselves as children.²³ One review of the relevant research suggested that about one-third of all individuals who were maltreated will subject their children to maltreatment.²⁴ **Children who either experienced maltreatment or witnessed violence between their parents or caregivers may learn violent behavior and may also learn to justify violent behavior as appropriate.**²⁵

An incorrect conclusion from this finding, however, is that a maltreated child will always grow up to become a maltreating parent. There are individuals who have not been abused as children who become abusive, as well as individuals who have been abused as children and do not subsequently abuse their own children. In the research review noted above, approximately two-thirds of all individuals who were maltreated did not subject their children to abuse or neglect.²⁶

It is not known why some parents or caregivers who were maltreated as children abuse or neglect their own children and others with a similar history do not.²⁷ While every individual is responsible for his or her actions, research suggests the presence

of emotionally supportive relationships may help lessen the risk of the intergenerational cycle of abuse.²⁸

C. Substance abuse...

Substance Abuse

Parental substance abuse is reported to be a contributing factor for between one- and two-thirds of maltreated children in the child welfare system.²⁹ Research supports the association between substance abuse and child maltreatment.³⁰ For example:

" A retrospective study of maltreatment experience in Chicago found **children whose parents abused alcohol and other drugs were almost three times likelier to be abused and more than four times likelier to be neglected than children of parents who were not substance abusers.**³¹

" A Department of Health and Human Services study found all types of maltreatment, and particularly neglect, to be more likely in alcohol-abusing families than in nonalcohol-abusing families.³²

Substance abuse can interfere with a parent's mental functioning, judgment, inhibitions, and protective capacity. Parents significantly affected by the use of drugs and alcohol may

neglect the needs of their children, spend money on drugs instead of household expenses, or get involved in criminal activities that jeopardize their children's health or safety.³³ Also, studies suggest that substance abuse can influence parental discipline choices and child-rearing styles.³⁴

Over the past decade, prenatal exposure of children to drugs and alcohol during their mother's pregnancy and its potentially negative, developmental consequences has been an issue of particular concern. The number of children born each year exposed to drugs or alcohol is estimated to be between 550,000 and 750,000.³⁵ While this issue has received much attention, children who are exposed prenatally represent only a small proportion of children negatively affected by parental substance abuse.³⁶

The number and complexity of co-occurring family problems often makes it difficult to understand the full impact of substance abuse on child maltreatment.³⁷ Substance abuse and child maltreatment often co-occur with other problems, including mental illness, HIV/AIDS or other health problems, domestic violence, poverty, and prior child maltreatment. These co-occurring problems produce extremely complex situations that

can be difficult to resolve.³⁸ Because many of the problems may be important and urgent, it can be difficult to prioritize what services to provide. Additionally, identifying and obtaining appropriate resources to address these needs is a challenge in many communities.

D. Attitudes and knowledge...

Attitudes and Knowledge

Negative attitudes and attributions about a child's behavior and inaccurate knowledge about child development may play a contributing role in child maltreatment.³⁹ For example, some studies have found that mothers who physically abuse their children have both more negative and higher than normal expectations of their children, as well as less understanding of appropriate developmental norms.⁴⁰ Not all research, however, has found differences in parental expectations.⁴¹

A parent's lack of knowledge about normal child development may result in unrealistic expectations. Unmet expectations can culminate in inappropriate punishment (e.g., a parent hitting a one-year-old for soiling his pants). Other parents may become frustrated with not knowing how to manage a child's behavior and may lash out at the child.

Still others may have attitudes that devalue children or view them as property.

1. parent/child interactions...

Parent-Child Interaction

Families involved in child maltreatment seldom recognize or reward their child's positive behaviors, while having strong responses to their child's negative behaviors.⁵⁸

Maltreating parents have been found to be less supportive, affectionate, playful, and responsive with their children than parents who do not abuse their children.⁵⁹ Research on maltreating parents, particularly physically abusive mothers, found that these parents were more likely to use harsh discipline strategies (e.g., hitting, prolonged isolation) and verbal aggression and less likely to use positive parenting strategies (e.g., using time outs, reasoning, and recognizing and encouraging the child's successes).⁶⁰

E. Age...

Age

Caretaker age may be a risk factor for some forms of maltreatment, although research findings are inconsistent.⁴² Some studies of physical abuse, in particular, have found that

mothers who were younger at the birth of their child exhibited higher rates of child abuse than did older mothers.⁴³ Other contributing **factors, such as lower economic status, lack of social support, and high stress levels may influence the link between younger childbirth-particularly teenage parenthood-and child abuse.**⁴⁴

F. single parent households...

" **The rate of child abuse in single parent households is 27.3 children per 1,000, which is nearly twice the rate of child abuse in two parent households (15.5 children per 1,000).**

" An analysis of child abuse cases in a nationally representative sample of 42 counties found that children from single parent families are more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than children who live with both biological parents. Compared to their peers living with both parents, children in single parent homes had:

- 77 percent greater risk of being physically abused
- 87 percent greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect
- 165 percent greater risk of experiencing notable physical neglect
- 74 percent greater risk of suffering from emotional neglect

- 80 percent greater risk of suffering serious injury as a result of abuse
- 120 percent greater risk of experiencing some type of maltreatment overall.

G. domestic violence...

Marital Conflict and Domestic Violence

According to published studies, in 30 to 60 percent of families where spouse abuse takes place, child maltreatment also occurs.⁵⁰ Children in violent homes may witness parental violence, may be victims of physical abuse themselves, and may be neglected by parents who are focused on their partners or unresponsive to their children due to their own fears.⁵¹ A child who witnesses parental violence is at risk for also being maltreated, but, even if the child is not maltreated, he or she may experience harmful emotional consequences from witnessing the parental violence.⁵²