

CHILD MALTREATMENT: ITS CONSEQUENCES, RISK FACTORS AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Child maltreatment -- physical, sexual and psychological abuse and neglect -- is a serious public health issue in the U.S. In 2008, 3.3 million cases of child abuse and neglect were reported to Child Protective Services and over 770,000 children were confirmed cases of maltreatment. Moreover, some experts argue that these numbers may be gross underestimates. One nationally representative study found that in 2008 alone, 10% of all U.S. children experienced some type of maltreatment.

Child maltreatment is associated with substantial morbidity and mortality. On average, three children a day die as a result of abuse, and studies have documented the link between abuse and a range of long-term adverse consequences. Children who have been the victims of abuse or neglect are more likely to:

- suffer from chronic health issues, cognitive deficiencies and language disorders
- struggle with self-esteem and have difficulty establishing relationships
- experience problems with academic achievement, substance abuse and mental health as they age
- repeat violent acts on their own children -- perpetuating the cycle of child abuse

Finally, in addition to the long-term adverse effects that children who have been maltreated endure, the economic consequences to society are substantial. Child abuse results in millions of dollars annually in direct costs in the form of expenses paid to child welfare agencies, hospitals and rehabilitation facilities. Prevent Child Abuse America estimates that the total annual cost of direct and indirect costs associated with longer term effects of maltreatment may be as much as \$94 billion annually.

CHILD MALTREATMENT IN TEXAS AND BEXAR COUNTY

- In Texas, 176 children are confirmed victims every day, and 7 children are abused or neglected every hour.
- Texas ranks first in the nation in the number of child abuse fatalities. On average, more than 4 children die from abuse or neglect every week. Fatalities increased 122% from 1997 to 2012.
- The state spends approximately \$5.2 billion each year in indirect costs related to child abuse and neglect – an amount in excess of what the state spends annually on its prison system.

Bexar County

- In 2012, 20 children died of child abuse and neglect-related fatalities, making Bexar County second in the state in number of fatalities.
- Bexar County led the state in number of confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect (6,205), exceeding even Harris county (5,383), which has over twice as many children.

RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

While there is no single risk factor that is common in all families where children are victims of abuse or neglect, the following risk factors are often associated with child maltreatment:

Parents or Caregiver Risk Factors - Individuals who did not have their needs met when they were children or whose own parents were poor role models may find it difficult to meet the needs of their own children. Parents who are less affectionate with their children, as well as those who use harsh discipline rather than positive parenting techniques, are more likely to be abusive. Substance abuse, likewise, impairs decision-making and may influence parental discipline choices that contribute to maltreatment.

Familial or Household Risk Factors - Family structure also plays a role in abuse and neglect. Abuse is more likely to occur in single parent households, for example, perhaps because the parent bears the sole burden of caring for the child. Chaotic households, such as when large numbers of people live under one roof or when rotating adult figures move in and out of the home, are likewise, associated with child maltreatment.

Child Risk Factors - Some children are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Because they are unable to defend themselves and require constant care, babies and young children are often victims of maltreatment. Children with special needs, likewise, are almost two times as likely to experience abuse or neglect as compared to other children. Parents may be overwhelmed by the caregiving demands or lack respite services. The child may not understand that the abusive behavior is inappropriate.

Environmental Risk Factors - Unemployment and poverty, in particular when parental substance abuse or depression are present, can increase the possibility of child maltreatment. Some evidence suggests that children living in rural areas are at greater risk for abuse than those who live in urban areas, as well.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Child maltreatment prevention generally occurs at three levels – primary, secondary and tertiary:

- Primary activities are aimed at the general public and seek to raise awareness of the scope and consequences of maltreatment such as public awareness campaigns to alert the public about how and where to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect.
- Secondary activities target families at risk for abuse and before maltreatment occurs. Examples include parenting education programs, prenatal classes, substance abuse treatment programs, home visits and respite services.
- Tertiary activities are provided after abuse has occurred. Efforts are designed to prevent recurrence and to reduce the negative consequences of maltreatment. Mental health counseling or peer support with non-abusive parents as role models to families in crisis are examples.

MODEL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Family Connections – Baltimore, Maryland – Home and community-based program connects families to resources (food, housing, etc.) and increases positive interactions between caregivers and children.

Circle of Security – Spokane, Washington - 20-week parent education program that increases empathy among caregivers, strengthens emotional attachments with children and enables parents to reflect on experiences that shaped their caregiving patterns.

Hui Makuakane – Honolulu, Hawaii – Program that uses home visits, group activities, crisis support and referral services and “Father Facilitators” to engage fathers in the lives of their children.

Parenting Partnership – Tacoma Washington – Program that serves families of medically fragile infants whose parents have childhood histories of abuse. In addition to parent support groups, clinicians conduct weekly home visits for the first three years of the child’s life to build parenting skills.

PROGRAMS IN SAN ANTONIO WORKING TO PREVENT CHILD ABUSE AND TO ASSIST FAMILIES

Bexar County Blue Ribbon Task Force that seeks to advocate for children, provide parent support and educate the public - <http://www.blueribbontaskforce.com/index.html>

Child Advocates San Antonio recruits and trains court-appointed volunteers who advocate for children who have been abused or neglected - <http://www.casa-satx.org/>

The Children’s Shelter provides emergency shelter, foster care, adoption, child abuse prevention and teen pregnancy programs - <http://www.chshel.org>

ChildSafe provides services to children who have been abused, neglected or sexually abused. Conducts advocacy and builds awareness - <http://www.childsafe-sa.org/about-us/what-is-childsafe.html>

Family Service Association offers counseling to heal the effects of maltreatment, parenting education and educates the community about preventing abuse - <http://www.family-service.org/index.html>

Methodist Healthcare Ministries’ parenting education programs target young parents and parents of children with special needs. <http://www.mhm.org/mhm-team/what-we-do/community-programs>

St. Peter-St. Joseph’s Children’s Home provides short-term emergency shelter for children and youth who are victims of abuse and human and sex trafficking. <http://www.stpjhome.org>

RESOURCES

ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center - <http://archrespite.org/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway – www.childwelfare.gov

Healthy Families America – http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/about_us/index.shtml

National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome - <http://dontshake.org>

Prevent Child Abuse America - <http://www.preventchildabuse.org/index.php>

The Texas Association for the Protection of Children - <http://www.texprotects.org/site/PageServer>

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services - <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>

ADDITIONAL READING

2012 Annual Report and Data Book issued by Texas Department of Family and Protective Services - http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Books_and_Annual_Reports/2012/default.asp

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study and ongoing research project between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente - <http://acestudy.org/>

Child Maltreatment 2011 – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau. Available - <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>

Children’s Data Report San Antonio – Bexar County 2013, Voices for Children San Antonio - http://media.wix.com/ugd/43733d_24a64b7ea3d6451ea70f60b2f7394586.pdf

Solutions to our Texas Challenge: 30 Ways to Build a Better Future for Our Kids and Our State, Texans Care for Children - <http://txchildren.org/Images/Interior/reports/solutions-for-texas-challenge-compressed.pdf>

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