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Ch. 5 "Child Neglect"

I. Dr. Johnson

Topic Establishment

I. [The Story of Jordan Heikamp...](#)

The preceding video not only presented the tragic story of one child, it also served to provide the foundation for much of the information that we will examine in our discussion of the most frequent form of child maltreatment...child neglect.

During that discussion we will examine the existing information concerning child neglect on the following topics:

- a. Definitions & Indicators
- b. Incidence Data & Sources
- c. Characteristics of Victims and Perpetrators
- d. Risks & Causative Factors

- e. Impact
- f. Intervention & Prevention

Unfortunately, you will learn that while child neglect is the most frequent form of child maltreatment, it is also the most difficult to define, investigate and prevent.

Dr. Johnson

Lecture Information

I. Definitions & Indicators...

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..."In contrast to physical and sexual abuse, child neglect is typically viewed as an act of *omission* rather than an act of *commission*.

...an act that while perhaps unintentional, is none the less extremely detrimental to the child

"...scholars often refer to child neglect as the most forgotten form of maltreatment...several reasons...

1. Some erroneously believe that neglect does not result in serious consequences.
2. Many may feel that it is inappropriate to judge parents involved in poverty-related neglect.
3. Many may be reluctant to become involved in the problem of child neglect because it seems insurmountable.
4. Some may find other forms of child maltreatment more compelling.
5. Some may be confused by the vagueness of many definitions of child neglect.
6. Some may be uncomfortable with the topic of child neglect because it provokes negative feelings."

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..."child neglect is the most frequently reported form of child maltreatment."

..."*child neglect* refers specifically to a failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional,

medical/dental, or educational needs."

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..."The penal codes of several states include definitions of child neglect that exclude neglect associated with limited financial resources."

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..."One problem with including a criterion of demonstrable harm in a definition of child neglect is that some negative outcomes of neglect are difficult to measure."

Given this information, let's look at the state definitions of child neglect by going to the following Web site: [Child Welfare Information Gateway: State Statutes](#)

Consider that definition of child neglect as you watch the following video concerning [three children who were locked in a trailer](#)

...does this situation meet the definition of abuse?

As indicated in the video, some people in the community (including the police) thought that it did, others did not.

What does child physical neglect "look like?"

One source of the "indicators" of child neglect can be found at [ChildHelp - Speak Up Be Safe Child Abuse Prevention Curriculum - Signs & Symptoms of Child Abuse & Neglect](#)

While the "indicators" of child neglect may appear to be easy to recognize, this is not the case.

This difficulty to observe, understand and respond reflects the facts that child neglect occurs over an extended period of time, i.e., the changes may be slow to appear

+ the behaviors may be "relative," i.e., it is a matter of degrees and patterns of 'x,' not simply that 'x' is occurring (e.g., a child coming to school hungry...)

+ most individuals do not know what to look for

+ most individuals do not know what to do

+ most individuals do not want to get involved

+ as children grow older and become aware their "realities," they are embarrassed, ashamed, and try to hide their shame from others.

Our tasks in this course is to increase awareness, understanding, and "willingness" to address the problems of child maltreatment.

The next sections of the lecture information on this topic explore why child neglect is such a difficult topic to define, investigate, and prevent.

A. Incidence Data & Sources...

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...a critical point in considering if a child is experiencing neglect concerns the frequency, duration, and pattern of "omissions" of the parent(s) to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional, medical/dental, or educational needs.

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..."Societal reactions largely determine the point at which child care moves from adequate to inadequate."

...the younger the child, the more dependent the child upon the parent, the greater the expectation for the parent

...the older the child, the more independent the child, results in reduced expectations for the parent.

[The Story of Jordan Heikamp](#)...that you saw in the opening for this class provided a clear example of how the mother did NOT meet the societal expectations for her infant.

...research...U.S....diverse cultures...expectations..."about house-hold cleanliness, appropriate medical and dental care, and adequate supervision vary little across demographic categories."
= there is a great deal of consensus re. what constitutes an adequate setting in which for children to grow up....but still VERY difficult to legally define and study

...different parental perspectives re. a lack of supervision...low-income vs. middle-income parents...harmful for reasons of:

low-income = child's physical safety

middle-income = child's developmental needs

...differences very likely reflect different contextual realities, i.e., where the children live, vs. differences in cultural values

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Neglecting the Unborn Child

...rights and responsibilities of the mother for her unborn child

...societal awareness concern the impact of drugs upon the unborn child + expectation that mothers will do nothing to intentional harm their child

...in spite of this awareness and concern, the majority of "newborn infants exposed to drugs and alcohol are not tested."

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..."Successful criminal prosecutions of prenatal neglect (conducted under child abuse and neglect statutes) are rare."

...reasons...debates about the rights of unborn infants...

+ "ambiguity of state statutes re. the circumstances under which pregnant woman can be legally sanctioned for causing possible harm to her fetus."

+ inconsistent testing and reporting by hospitals

+ insufficient investigative protocols by CPS "for determining parental substance exposure."

= even this form on neglect, one on which there is a great deal of societal consensus, is very difficult to define, observe, record and prevent

...four categories, or types of child neglect

...1. **physical neglect** = "generally defined as failure to provide a child with basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, and shelter."

= there is the greatest agreement/consensus upon this type of neglect

...let's look at an instance of such neglect that was found to have occurred in relation to [a four year old child](#)

= the younger the child, the more dependent the child upon the parent, the more likely the parent will be held responsible...unfortunately most children suffer neglect without anyone knowing

p. 159

...2. **Educational or developmental neglect** = "generally defined as a failure to provide a child with the experiences necessary for growth and development, such as intellectual and educational opportunities."

...the next video shares an instance of neglect that certainly included a lack of opportunity for experiences needed for intellectual and educational development.

...The video also demonstrates that children experience multiple forms of neglect at the same time.

...Finally, the video demonstrates how a child's personality/view of life affects the impact of the maltreatment

[The story of a young girl who was locked in a closet...](#)

...as you read about the different forms of neglect, please keep in mind that the issue is not "good," or "OK," or even "poor" parenting, but just about the lack of any parenting at all before a determination of neglect.

...3. **Emotional Neglect** = type of neglect that "has stimulated the greatest disagreement among scholars" considered to "include failure to provide a child with emotional support, or security, and encouragement" although this is a lack of agreement re. "the specific operationalization of such behaviors."

..."considerable overlap between the definitions of emotional neglect and psychological maltreatment."

...given the ambiguity of this category of neglect + the fact that the text devotes an entire chapter to "psychological abuse," I will not cover the topic of emotional neglect in this lecture.

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...4. **Environmental Neglect** = "a lack of environmental safety, opportunities, and resources associated with living in a neighborhood by crime, lack of civility, and few resources for children and families."

...in consideration of these four types of neglect, please keep in mind that they are often "clustered," i.e., a child will very likely experience several types of neglect.

...data concerning the relative occurrence of the various types of abuse is often lacking, instead, all forms of neglect are simply grouped into one category called "neglect"

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Estimates of Child Neglect

...rates have steadily increased

...incidences of child neglect account for 78% of all reported cases of child maltreatment

[Child Maltreatment 2010: Summary of Key Findings](#) = incidence data

...During FFY 2010, an estimated 3.3 million referrals involving the alleged maltreatment of approximately 5.9 million children were made to CPS agencies.

...During FFY 2010, the number of estimated duplicate victims of abuse or neglect was 754,000; the number of estimated unique victims was 695,000.

...More than 75 percent (78.3 percent) of victims suffered neglect.

1. Characteristics of Victims & Perpetrators...

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Characteristics of Neglected Children

...the risk to experience neglect declines with age, as the child developed increasing ability to meet their own basic needs for food, shelter, clothes, etc.

...children from birth through three years are the most dependent, and therefore most likely to experience neglect and the resulting consequences.

...both boys and girls experience neglect at essentially the same rate

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Characteristics of Neglectful Parents

..."birth parents account for 91% of reported cases [of neglect], and the majority are identified as mothers."

= mothers spend more time with their children

= mothers may be held more accountable for the welfare and safety of their children

..."neglectful parents generally interact less with their children, and when they do interact, the interactions are less positive." + "are involved in more negative behaviors with their children, including issuing commands and engaging in verbal aggression." + "are characterized by less empathy."

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..."mounting evidence that substance abuse contributes to child neglect." = parents that abuse drugs are "four times more likely to neglect their children than parents who did not abuse such substances."

(recall the video of the three children who were locked in a trailer and died in a fire...the parents were thought to be using drugs)

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Social Ecological Factors

...children living with one parent are more at risk to experience neglect than children living with two parents

...younger mothers, teenagers, who had low birth weight infants, were more likely than older mothers with healthy babies to neglect their children

= younger mothers usually lack the maturity, knowledge, skills, resources, resilience, and support systems of older mothers

..."the strongest predictors of child neglect across all studies were economic factors, including economic hardship and lack of resources."

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..."child neglect may not *occur* more frequently in low SES groups, it may simply be *reported* more often among the disadvantaged."

..."The availability of assistance and advice with regards to child care may be more salient for neglectful parents than the availability of confidants."

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...two protective factors for the prevention of child neglect

...1. "higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with lower rates of self-reported or CPS reports of child neglect."

...2. "parental involvement in their child's activities also served as a protective factor against the occurrence of child neglect."

II. Risks & Causative Factors...

Information concerning this aspect of child neglect was covered in the previous segment of the lecture.

A. Impact...

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Consequences Associated with Child Neglect

...difficult to determine the unique effects of child neglect on children's functioning.

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...this is due to the fact that children usually experience more than one form of maltreatment...therefore determining the unique impact of neglect, in comparison to the other forms of maltreatment is difficult

...Table 5.3 lists an array of effects associated with child neglect

...these include the following:

1. social & attachment difficulties, e.g., "child is passive and withdrawn"
2. cognitive & academic deficits, e.g., "deficits in language comprehension and verbal abilities."
3. emotional & behavioral problems, e.g., "physical and verbal aggression"
4. physical consequences, e.g., "death, failure to thrive, & obesity"

...I would like to share with you [the story of a child who died as a result of neglect](#)

...this child "paid" the ultimate "price" of neglect

5. long-term consequences, e.g., "violence against a partner"

...the negative realities of neglect are without question, so too is the possibility that children can effectively "deal" with their neglect experience as was the case of the young girl who was locked in her closet for a year.

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..."One of the most frequently cited problems associated with child neglect is difficulty in social attachment." = "deficits in peer interactions" "social adjustment" "socially withdrawn" "greater conflicts with friends" "fewer reciprocated friendships than non-neglected children."

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...neglected children..."significantly poorer overall school performance and math skills than their non-maltreated peers."

..."neglected children generally display more severe cognitive deficits than do children who have been physically abused."

..."Neglected children have also been found to have difficulty in recognizing and discriminating the emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness) of others."

1. Intervention & Prevention...

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Practice, Policy, and Prevention

..."few intervention that are unique to child neglect vs. other forms for abuse."

..."very few evidenced-based treatments available to address child neglect."

..."Available interventions for neglected children focus primarily on improving their social interaction skills."

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...gradual shift away from simply legal punishments/consequences for parents that neglect their children to approaches that focus upon developing parents skills, coping strategies and resources.

...focus upon developing positive, appropriate emotional attachments of parents with their

children

Home Visitation Programs

...support provided to parents in their homes with the goals that mirror the "Five Protective Factors" that were previously shared with you, i.e.,

[Working with Families: The Five Protective Factors](#) = these factors are both logical and "doable," if "at risk" families can be identified and served.

An example of how these factors can be used with parents within a home visitation program is demonstrated by the work of [Bromwich...](#)

+ a setting in which such factors are currently used to enhance the lives of over 10,000 children a year can be found via the [National Exchange Club Foundation](#): Child Abuse Prevention Program - [CAP Centers](#)

Remember our previous statement..."preventing child abuse is not rocket science," but it is just as important..."

Required Activities

I. to be completed before 8:00 a.m. on 7/30...

read Ch. 8 of the text

Remember that Team Report #2 due 8 a.m. EST on 8/1.

Suggested Activities

I. Search YouTube for videos where the victims of child neglect share the impact of the abuse upon their lives. Post the resulting information, insights, and questions on this chapters discussion board.

A. Share information from this chapter with a friend. Then post the resulting information, insights, and questions on this chapters discussion board.