

When Neglect is Neglected

Considerations for Communities
working to prevent child maltreatment
Zoë Breen Wood,
Case Western Reserve University

US Statistics

- Child neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment reported to public child protective services.
- ACF reports that 1.86 million children were reported for maltreatment in 2007, and 459,000 of those cases were substantiated or indicated.

In Ohio 2007

- Of the 38,484 confirmed reports of abuse, neglect and maltreatment made in 2007, 9,233 (24%) were for Physical Abuse, 6,352 (16.5%) were for Sexual Abuse and 19,470 (50.6%) were for NEGLECT.

In Ohio & US 2007

	Total Victims		Neglect	
	N		N	Row %
OH	38484		19470	50.6%
US	740517		443703	60.0%

Effects of Neglect

Difficulties Posed....

- Consequences of neglect not considered to be as severe as those of abuse.
- It is difficult to directly observe a parent actually neglecting.....
- Harm from neglect may take weeks / months to become apparent.
- May lead to severe, chronic & irreversible damage.

Impact of Neglect on Brain Development

- May depend on age of child at time of neglect.
- Duration of neglect

Hypotheses about the Impact of Neglect on Brain Development

- Neglect interferes with effective development of prefrontal cortical regions, & thus ***executive functions***.
 - Can result in inattention, inability to focus, & poor academic achievement.
- Alterations of major stress systems can lead to psychopathology & compromised neuropsychological & psychosocial function.

Effects of Neglect - Infants & Toddlers

- Lack of secure attachment
- Significant deficits in coping skills, more frustration, anger and non-compliance
- Lower self esteem
- Poorer impulse control
- Expressed less positive & more negative affect
- Distractible, hyperactive, least persistent in problem solving

Infants & Toddlers

- Lacked persistence and enthusiasm
- Negative & non-compliant when mother sought to teach new tasks
- More dependent
- More socially isolated
- Engage in less complex play
- Group interventions to improve peer interaction work with abused but not with neglected children.

Effects-Kindergarten & Early School-Aged

- Continued developmental deficits - Most severe developmental consequences of any type of abuse or neglect.
- Less well-prepared for learning
- Teachers describe neglected children as inattentive, uninvolved, reliant, lacking in creative initiative, having great difficulty comprehending day-to-day school work

Kindergarten & Early School-Aged

- Lack persistence, initiative and confidence to work on their own
- Dependent on teacher, somewhat helpless, passive, withdrawn, angry
- Increased risk for being anxious & withdrawn
- Expressive and receptive language deficits; increased risk for low verbal IQ
- Difficulty with cognitive & physical activities; less pro-social behavior

Effects-Older School-Aged

- Serious learning deficits
- Significantly lower on measures of school performance than physically abused or nonmaltreated children especially in reading and math
- Significant language deficits
- Work and learn at below average levels
- More behavior problems
- More school absences; grade repeats

Adolescents

- Eating disorders, sexual problems, alcohol/ substance abuse.
- Academic delays & difficulties
- Continuing IQ & language deficits
- Delinquent & criminal behavior
- Depression, anxiety disorders, increased coping difficulties.

Effects of Neglect

- When combined with other forms of maltreatment...increases child's vulnerability even more.
- Most likely reason for recidivism in families reported to CPS on more than one occasion.
- Neglected children 27% more likely to experience recurrence of maltreatment than were abused children. (USDHHS 2002).

Higher risks for all children

- Bellis *et.al.* (2001) found that maltreated children at much higher risk of developing a mental disorder.
- 85% of maltreated children display PTSD.
- Also display higher rates of mood, anxiety and behavioral disorders.

Types of Neglect

Types of Neglect

- Physical
- Emotional
- Educational
- Medical

Physical Neglect Subtypes

- Mental health care
- Supervision
- Substitute child care
- Housing hazards
- Household sanitation
- Personal hygiene
- Nutrition

Using Attachment Theory: Three types of neglecting families

- **One in which cognition is not perceived or responded to;** Disorganized neglect
- **One in which affect is omitted from processing;** Emotional neglect
- **One in which both cognition and affect are discarded as meaningless;** Depressed neglect

Disorganized Neglect

- “Living from crisis to crisis”
- Defending against Cognition
- Associated with Ambivalent / Coercive patterns of attachment

**Disorganized Neglect Recognizing
the families**

- Multiproblem, disorganized, crisis-prone
- Constant interruptions
- Mother may ask for help with solving immediate problem.
- May appear to need and want professional help urgently
- May be described as overwhelmed but amenable to services.

**Disorganized Neglect
Affect over cognition**

- Feelings motivate behavior
- More intense feelings attract more attention
- Worker may feel agenda become co-opted by family's immediate needs
- Not possible to use logic & cognition to decide about possible consequences of behaviors.

**Disorganized Neglect
Affect over cognition**

- Parent's response to children is unpredictable.
- Family members respond only to most immediate, extreme crisis.
- Child learns that to receive attention, must become the most demanding, most salient stimulus
- "Always a lot of drama going on"

Disorganized Neglect Developmental pathways

- Children learn a pattern of interaction dependent on exaggerated affective information and distrust cognitive information about future outcomes.
- Parents organize their behavior around feelings and not around planning to meet future needs. Will fail to do some things that need to be done but that do not come with intense messages.

Disorganized Neglect Caregiving in...

- Is unpredictable and insensitive (though not necessarily hostile or rejecting).
- Children's distress signals fail to provoke a caregiving response.
- Parents feel anxious, exasperated and incompetent.
- Infants adapt to unpredictably responsive environment by maximizing their expressions of distress.

Disorganized Neglect -Coping strategies learned that carry into adulthood

- High levels of affect, demanding and attention seeking behavior.
- In times of stress, hyperactivate attachment behavior.
- Preoccupied with other people's availability but become dissatisfied with them.
- Others are not to be trusted to be available or to maintain interest
- Become anxiously needy

Disorganized Neglect

And.....

- Constant desire to be in close relationship with attachment figures but an anxiety that they could withdraw or disappear for no apparent reason.
- Feelings of jealousy, emotional competitiveness and possessiveness.

Disorganized Neglect

And.....

- Poor concentration
- Difficult and attention seeking behavior
- High levels of dependency
- Feelings of helplessness, especially during high stress times
- Conflictual relationships
- Impulsivity
- Emotional immaturity

Disorganized Neglect

Case Management

- *Logic* would argue for holding off crises for a while so that families can be taught to organize their lives.
- While family may want to have needs met, cannot trust logic, planning or delay gratification.
- Without intense demands associated with crises, have no way of being important to others.
- *Will CREATE new crises.*

**Disorganized Neglect
Practice Approach**

- Feelings must be dealt with
- Provide structured, predictable environment with no surprises
- Must maintain affective relationship, especially after family begins to gain competency

**Disorganized Neglect
More approaches**

- Help families find environments in which clear, direct, and undistorted communication of feelings, and accurate cognitive information about future outcomes is rewarded, and in which they can learn the value of compromise
- Teach parents how to use cognitive information about the effects of behavior to regulate (w/out denying) affect

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Emotional Neglect

- “Emotional poverty in the land of plenty”
- Defending against Affect
- Associated with Avoidant / Defended patterns of attachment

Emotional Neglect Recognizing the families

- Children provided for materially but there is a failure to connect emotionally
- Family unable to share feelings.
- Must depend on cognitive information as their way of making sense of the world
- Highly structured.
- More rules; Everyone has a role and knows what to do.
- Parents may feel awkward & tense when alone with their children.

Emotional Neglect Children may..

- Seem to be neater, more diligent
- Be comfortable in settings that have clear standards for performance and clearly stated consequences
- May use material things as a substitute for expression of affection
- Have their physical and cognitive needs met but not their emotional needs.

Emotional Neglect Developmental pathways

- Infant who receives no empathic response, experiences painful rejection.
- Protest may lead to further rejection, isolation, psychological abandonment.
- Child learns to block out expression of feeling and later to block out awareness of feeling.
- Learn to focus on performance as a way of blocking out loneliness.

Emotional Neglect - When caregiver consistently rejects child's attachment behavior....

- Child experiences environment as predictably hostile to displays of negative affect and signals of distress.
- Child learns that caregiver's physical and emotional availability is reduced when emotional demands are made.
- Caregiver most available when child is showing positive affect, being self-sufficient, undemanding and compliant.
- Child learns to minimize their expressions of distress.

Emotional Neglect Children may...

- Seem falsely cheerful
- Reverse roles and use "false brightness" to care for/ reassure parent.
- Become compulsively self-reliant
- Act falsely mature and independent of help & companionship from others
- Have difficulty socially...become isolated, awkward.
- Use cognitive rules to guide behavior.

Emotional Neglect - In more dangerous environments..

- Children learn that power and aggression are the basis on which relationships and getting one's needs met appear to work.

Emotional Neglect -Lesson learned carries into adulthood.....

- Although one may show compliance with caregivers who are dominant and physically abusive,
- Show anger and aggression in situations where they feel more dominant.

Emotional Neglect Case Management

- In most all cases, best to keep children with their parents
- In home services to help parents learn to use others as support.
- Teach parents to engage emotionally with their children.
 - Must be highly structured as neither parent or child know how to interact normally & spontaneously.
 - Fear of affect – need clear rules & roles

Depressed Neglect

- “Defending against both affect and cognition”
- Associated with Disorganized / Controlling patterns of attachment

Depressed Neglect Recognizing the families

- Classic image of neglect
- Withdrawn, dull
- Show little interest, emotion in s.w. visit
- Don't seem to understand why we're visiting nor to understand our advice
- May seem mildly retarded, unmotivated
- Don't seem to understand children's needs even when explained to them
- Don't believe there's anything we or they could do to solve problem

Depressed Neglect Developmental pathways

- Parent so withdrawn that he/she does not respond to signals from infant.
- Child gives up; becomes limp, silent, dull, depressed
- Without feedback re: meaning of behavior to others, eventually learn that their feelings and actions have no meaning; they are helpless
- Younger the child, more debilitating the effects

Depressed Neglect - Polansky's Apathy-Futility Syndrome

- Pervasive feeling of futility
- Emotional numbness
- Clingy relationships; superficial, intensely lonely
- Lack of competence in many areas of living; unwilling to risk failure by learning new skills
- Passive-aggressive expression of anger
- Stubborn negativism
- Verbal inaccessibility to others and self

Depressed Neglect - Neglecting Caregivers are generally...

- 1. less able to love,
- 2. less capable of working productively,
- 3. less open about feelings,
- 4. more prone to living planlessly and impulsively,
- 5. more susceptible to psychological symptoms and to phases of passive inactivity and numb fatalism,

Depressed Neglect Neglecting caregivers

- 6. less organized and more chaotic with more family conflict
- 7. less verbally expressive, and
- 8. less positive and show more negative affect.
- 9. experiencing problems with substance abuse

Depressed Neglect
Case management

- Involves much more than teaching appropriate parenting
- All family members must learn that their behavior has predictable & meaningful consequences and that affective states can be shared with empathetic others.

Depressed Neglect
Infants / children

- Must experience responsive and stimulating environments that also provide human comfort for a few hours each day.
- The longer the child is exposed to helplessness, the more intense and longer the intervention needed to remedy the situation.

Depressed Neglect
Parents

- Must learn appropriate expressions of affect
 - Practice smiling, laughing, soothing
 - May be mechanical at first
 - Genuine feelings will emerge with repetition
- Parental affect will increase child's responsiveness; upward cycle

Depressed Neglect - Usual CPS approaches are counter- productive

- Threats / punitive approaches particularly ineffective
 - Parents don't believe they can change so don't even try.
 - Even most reasonable pressure results in "shutting down" / blocking out all info.
- Parent education – may be ineffective because judgment impaired.

Depressed Neglect
These families need....

- Long term involvement
- Supportive approach
- Responsiveness to family's signals and needs.

Messages for Practice: Intervention

- Comprehensive assessment necessary for planning effective intervention
- Multifaceted approaches required
- There must be planning for **long term** approaches.
- Brave decisions must be made about when intervention can improve child outcomes, rather than intervening too late.

Messages for Practice: Prevention

Limited research on effective prevention programs aimed specifically at neglect.
Multitude of risk factors, strong association with poverty .
View from a developmental perspective
Some studies show positive impact from home based early intervention.

Prevention

- Focus on general services that support families as well as targeted services aiming to prevent neglect.
 - High quality child care
 - Family resource centers
 - Programs to promote family & economic self-sufficiency .
 - Effect positive changes in community and societal level risk factors – eg. Violence, isolation, poverty

Taking it to the streets

- What community barriers exist to working with neglecting families?
- What resources are available at present?
- What collaborations might prove helpful in strengthening services?
