



# Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

Working together to enhance the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people.

## The complexity behind child abuse and neglect – supporting statistics

Produced for National Child Protection Week 5-11 September 2010, and to accompany the DVD 'Polly and Me'

### Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect

1. The number of notifications increased by 71% and substantiations increased by 35%<sup>1</sup> over the past six years (2003-2009). On a daily basis approximately 1000 notifications (560 children) are made, and 150 cases (90 children) are substantiated.<sup>2</sup>
2. Out of 54 621 substantiations in 2009, 40% related to emotional abuse, 28% to neglect, 22% to physical abuse, and 10% to sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup>

### Associated factors

#### Domestic Violence

Child maltreatment has been linked with domestic violence (Lazenbatt and Freeman 2006 and NSW DOCS 2004)<sup>4</sup>. According to the Victorian Department of Human Services (VDHS), in 2000-01, 52% of parents involved in substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect had experienced family violence.<sup>5</sup>

Several studies have found that 85-90% of the time when a violent incident took place in a domestic situation, children were present and children were also abused during the violent incident in about 50% of those cases (Queensland Domestic Taskforce, 1998; Cleaver et al, 1999, cited in Fleischer, 2000).<sup>6</sup>

In 2003-04, a total of 1 625 children were recorded as being present at 44% of family violence incidents (n=1,231) in the ACT<sup>7</sup>, with evidence that witnessing domestic violence poses a threat to children's physical, emotional, psychological, social, educational and behavioural wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

#### Substance Abuse

451 621 (13.2%) Australian children aged 12 years or less live in households where at least one adult binge drinks, 78691 (2.3%) children live with an adult who takes cannabis daily and more than 27 370 (0.8%) children live with an adult who uses methamphetamines monthly.<sup>9</sup>

In 2004-05 in NSW it has been estimated that 80% of child protection reports involved drug or alcohol issues.<sup>10</sup>

In a Victorian audit of children in care (VDHS 2002a), 56% of their mothers and 39% of their fathers had substance abuse issues.<sup>11</sup>

#### Parental Mental Health

It is estimated that between 21% and 23% of children living in Australian households have at least one parent with a mental illness with considerable evidence that parents with mental health issues are over-represented among maltreating families.<sup>12</sup>

In Victoria in 2000-01, 19% of parents involved in substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect had a psychiatric disability.<sup>13</sup>

## Parental Support/Parenting Practices

Adverse parenting practices and poverty have been shown to be correlated with emotional and psychological distress in children and to predict behavioural disorders, cognitive disadvantage and later delinquency in children.<sup>14</sup>

Research suggests that substance misuse problems are associated with excessively authoritarian or permissive parenting styles and with unrealistic expectations of children's abilities.<sup>15</sup>

## Poverty

Children who grow up in families experiencing poverty have poorer outcomes and can be more vulnerable to some forms of maltreatment, particularly neglect and physical abuse<sup>16</sup>. Families from low socio-economic groups are more likely to report high levels of stress due to lack of social capital, poor parenting practices, poor neighbourhoods, mental illness, substance misuse and social exclusion, which could result in child maltreatment.<sup>17</sup>

While child maltreatment occurs at every socio-economic level, a Victorian study (2002) found that of all families investigated for suspected child abuse in 2000–01, 77% were low-income families, with 63% in receipt of a pension or benefit.<sup>18</sup>

## Intergenerational Impact (from parents' point of view)

**Child Abuse** – In a regional study of 295 cases requiring investigation Tomison (1996) found that 22% of children had parents who had been abused or neglected as a child (Victoria).<sup>19</sup>

**Out of Home Care (OOHC)** – In a Victorian audit of children in OOHC, 21% had mothers and 6% had fathers who had been in OOHC themselves as children (VDHS, 2002a).<sup>20</sup>

## Possible Adverse Impacts (if preventive measures are not taken)

### Out of Home Care (OOHC)

Queensland research (2007) indicates that the risk of a child suffering substantiated harm is 17.8 times greater where the mother reports using illicit substances compared to children whose mothers do not use illicit substances. The risk of this group of vulnerable children entering foster care is estimated to be 12.8 times greater and the risk of not being reunified with a parent is 16.3 times greater.<sup>21</sup>

Other possible consequences for a child who enters foster care are as follows:

- **Mental health** – There is a nearly 50% chance that s/he will develop hyperactivity and emotional problems (SA)<sup>22</sup>, 61% chance that s/he will have behavioural problems, and 6.7% chance that s/he will attempt suicide (SA).<sup>23</sup>
- **Poor educational attainment** – There is a 50% chance that s/he will score below average in numeracy and literacy with 40% lower scores in numeracy and 22% lower scores in reading (Qld)<sup>24</sup> and will also demonstrate delays in personal development, social skills and behaviour and have frequent episodes of truancy and school expulsion.<sup>25</sup>
- **Homelessness**
  - There is a nearly 54%<sup>26</sup> chance that s/he may become homeless due to domestic violence, 60% due to physical abuse, 42% due to emotional abuse, 48% due to neglect, and 21% due to sexual abuse (USA).<sup>27</sup>
  - Research conducted by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (Victoria) in 2005 showed that young people leaving care are at risk of homelessness.<sup>28</sup> The 2006 national census of homeless school students found that close to 15 per cent of homeless students may have had an experience in state care.<sup>29</sup> A study by the Key Centre for Women's Health of 200 young people entering SAAP services in Melbourne found that about one in five had been in care and protection at some point.<sup>30</sup>

- **Pathway from Juvenile Justice to Adult Corrections**
  - Young people leaving out of home care are 53 times more likely to have been charged with an offence and have a 79% chance of later progressing to adult prison.<sup>31</sup>

**Adult Victimization** – The likelihood of abused children experiencing violence in adulthood is 78% for females and 49% for males, and the chance of abused girls experiencing sexual violence in adulthood is 54%.<sup>32</sup>

**Teenage pregnancy** – Girls who have been abused are 25% more likely than other girls to become pregnant while still a teenager (USA).<sup>33</sup>

### Cyclic Consequences

- **Child Maltreatment** – There is a 30% chance that an abused child will abuse and neglect her/his own children in adulthood, thus continuing the cycle of abuse (USA).<sup>34</sup>
- **Substance Abuse** – abused children are 250% more likely to consume alcohol at risky levels and 380% more likely to develop drug addictions (USA).<sup>35</sup>
- **Domestic Violence** – There is a 40% chance that a child will grow up to be violent after being exposed to domestic violence.<sup>36</sup>
- **Prostitution** – More than 75% of teenage sex workers were sexually abused as children (USA).<sup>37</sup>

### Other:

- **Health (Obesity)** – Children who suffer parental neglect are more likely to become obese during childhood (AMA, 2009)<sup>38</sup> and have an 80 percent chance of remaining obese in adulthood (Department of Health, Victoria).<sup>39</sup>
- **Unemployment** – There is 4.1% chance that a child will ‘underachieve’ as an adult in the labour market because of her/his experience of abuse (USA).<sup>40</sup>

### Costs to Society

The cost of child abuse and neglect in the year 2007 is estimated at \$4.0 billion. Major costs (best estimate) incurred as a result of child abuse and neglect include<sup>41</sup>:

- **Government expenditure on care and intervention programs - ~\$1.897 billion. State and territory government programs including child protection and out-of-home care, intensive family support programs etc.**
- **Value of burden of disease - \$6.7 billion.** Burden of disease refers to fear, mental anguish and pain being suffered by those who are experiencing or have suffered child abuse and neglect and is measured in disability adjusted life years.
- **Health system expenditures - \$383 million.** This includes hospital costs, pharmaceutical costs, treatment costs of depression and anxiety and assaults and physical injuries.
- **Educational assistance for children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect - \$93 million.**
- **Costs of crime**
  - The short term cost of crime corresponds to the prosecution of perpetrators through the legal system - **\$589.3 million**
  - The long term costs correspond to a higher propensity for those who have been abused to be involved in criminal activity - **\$6.7 million**
- **Productivity losses of child abuse survivors**
  - The estimated loss of lifetime earnings for children on an order and in out-of-home care experiencing poorer labour market outcomes - **\$5 million**
  - The estimated loss of lifetime earnings for all children who are abused and neglected experiencing poorer labour market outcomes - **\$24 million**
- **Productivity losses due to premature deaths for children who died in 2007 due to fatal child abuse (males - \$3.8 million; females - \$1.8 million)**

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**Calculation:** No of Notifications:  
2009: 339,454                      2003: 198,355  
% increase since 2003 =  $339,454 - 198,355 / 198,355 * 100 = 71\%$   
No of substantiations:  
2009:            54,621                      2003: 40,416  
% increase since 2003:  $54,621 - 40,416 / 40,416 * 100 = 35\%$
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare AIHW (2009). Child protection Australia 2008-09, accessed at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/cws/35/10859.pdf>  
**Calculations:**  
**Cases:** No of Notifications in 2009: 339,454  
On a daily basis:  $339,454 / 365 \approx 1000$  notifications being made on a daily basis  
  
No of substantiations in 2009: 54,621  
On a daily basis:  $54,621 / 365 \approx 150$  substantiations being made on a daily basis  
  
Children: No of children subject to notifications in 2009: 207,462  
On a daily basis:  $207,462 / 365 \approx 560$  children notified on a daily basis  
  
No of children substantiated in 2009: 32,641  
On a daily basis:  $32,641 / 365 \approx 90$  children substantiated on a daily basis
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