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Virginia Child Protection Newsletter

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Child Neglect: Intervention Strategies

It doesn't have the headline appeal of a severe physical beating, and it doesn't elicit the emotional response of sexual abuse. In Virginia, however, the Central Registry receives more reports of child neglect than child physical abuse and child sexual abuse together. Last year neglect accounted for nearly 67 percent of the founded complaints (see chart).

Neglect is a very broad term, encompassing many facets of child maltreatment. Generally, however, neglect can be defined as an act of omission: something that was not done, a needed service or "thing" that was not provided (Polansky, Chalmes, Buttonweiser & Williams, 1981).

Neglect is often assessed according to symptoms displayed by the children. When talking to various social workers across the state, it becomes clear that neglect can generally be differentiated according to the physical symptoms and the emotional symptoms children display. Without a doubt, physical neglect is the easier of the two to assess.

Physical Neglect

"When assessing physical neglect," says Bonnie Runquist, supervisor of child protective services in Charlottesville, "I try to determine if the child is lacking in medical care, proper education, food, clothing or shelter." Brenda Vizzi, child protective service worker in Spottsylvania County, mentioned the same criteria and added a list of child safety housing standards.

Many of these criteria are easily assessed by the visible conditions of the child: dirty clothes, inadequate clothes for inclement weather, poor medical care, inadequate shot records, teeth in poor condition and poor housing conditions. Anyone coming in contact with the child—a neighbor, the school or the medical community—could see the conditions and report the problem. It is also simple for a visiting social

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Emotional neglect ranges from ignoring a child's need to harsh, consistent criticism that damages self esteem.

Virginia Chapter of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse

The Family Trust Fund Bill passed both houses of the Virginia Legislative by a two-to-one margin thanks to an effective lobbying effort by the Virginia Chapter NCPA and Virginians Against Domestic Violence. The bill will go into effect July 1, 1982, and will provide an approximate \$400,000 per year from the additional surcharge. The distribution of the monies will be through the Department of Welfare and an advisory committee. Details are being worked out as to procedures.

The monies will go for primary prevention programs with regard to child abuse such as education for parenthood, classes in child development, prenatal and perinatal education programs, as well as spouse abuse prevention programs. The programs will focus on supporting and strengthening families in order to help prevent family breakdowns.

Highlights of Virginia Chapter NCPA plans for this year include the following:

- (1) targeting the development of additional perinatal prevention programs across the state. Technical assistance will be offered regarding development.
- (2) developing and printing a guidebook on selected model prevention programs including information on how to implement such programs in localities.
- (3) continuing work on the completion of a directory of existing child abuse prevention programs in Virginia.
- (4) assisting Theatre IV of Richmond with the production of a play dealing with sexual child abuse that could be presented to school groups statewide.

(5) planning either a fall 1982 or spring 1983 conference emphasizing issues of interest to various sectors of the society—judicial, medical, social service and volunteer—concerning child abuse prevention.

(6) Further development of the following committees: conference planning, membership, resource development, public relations and legislation. The Virginia chapter encourages membership on these committees by any member of the Virginia NCPA. Interest in committee membership should be noted on the membership form.

A list of the Board of Directors of the Virginia NCPA is being included so that any interested persons can make contact with representatives in their area.

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NCPA

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Enclosed is my membership fee of \$ _____ I will receive the National Committee's newsletter *Caring*.

Please return this form with your check or money order to the Virginia Chapter for Prevention of Child Abuse, Phyllis Breidenbaugh, 3135 Ashking Drive, Mechanicsville, Virginia 23111.

Child Neglect

"Often it is an intergenerational problem. They are parenting the way they were parented."

worker to see these symptoms and intervene, as the law requires.

For those desiring more objective criteria, Polansky and his colleagues have developed an easily used scale, the Childhood Level of Living Scale (see book review, this issue). The scale includes assessment of both physical and emotional aspects of neglect.

What kind of parent physically neglects their child? According to social workers across the state, the parent is likely to be a person who is poor or lacking in knowledge of the child's needs. Sometimes the parent has a genuine lack of interest in the child, but most often that is not the case. "We are seeing a person who, due to lack of knowledge or poverty, is unaware of or unable to provide for the child's needs," says Vizzi. "Often it is an intergenerational problem. They are parenting the way they were parented."

Because the symptoms are more obvious, the action to be taken can seem relatively simple: make an effort to change the conditions. Though initially a parent may react defensively or anxiously to social service intervention, parents generally become willing to cooperate. Overall, these parents want to provide adequately for their children.

Social workers can generally find services which can help parents. Many communities have homemakers' extension services which Bill Wilcher, protective service worker in Bath County, mentions as important in his neglect cases. For example, local extension agents give instructions in cooking, cleaning and providing proper nutrition. In some areas these services are provided one-on-one in the home, while in others, it may be done as a class.

Rebecca Robinson, a worker in Buchanan, focuses on how slow the process for change can be and mentions that frustration can limit the effectiveness of homemaker service workers. "If they don't feel like they are making headway, they quit," says Robinson. Thus, patience seems to be a key factor when trying to educate parents who neglect their children.

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In addition to homemaking services, parenting classes can be provided. If properly geared to the population in need, they can teach a parent about the medical and developmental needs of the child. Unfortunately, however, most standard parenting classes require more verbal, cognitive and writing skills than many parents possess. Therefore, old programs need to be adapted or new programs devised which use audiovisual aids, group discussions, and, possibly, incentives. This kind of program was developed by Betty Kline in Harrisonburg and was very successful. (See Fall issue, 1981). A key component of such groups is the ability to break the pattern of isolation that many neglectful parents experience.

Counseling is also seen as important when dealing with child physical neglect. Polansky, et. al., suggest that what may appear as resistance to service is actually an ambivalence within the clients. While recognizing a need to change, clients have, during their efforts to deal with their present state of affairs, "found at least some ways to milk what satisfaction they can from the disasters of their lives" (p. 98). The authors go on to suggest that "resistance can be reduced when the intervention includes new gratifications for the client, or things that would help to replace what the client would lose if he were to change his way of operating." Counseling is an effective means of determining how the client is benefiting from the neglectful behavior and assisting that person in more constructive problem solving.

When offered in a supportive manner, most social workers agreed that people are usually willing to accept intervention. In those cases where parents refuse, however, court intervention may be necessary. The court can order parents to take part in services social workers deem necessary. In the most severe of cases, the court may order the child removed from the home and placed in foster care. "This is the last resort," says Sonja Bible, protective service worker in Harrisonburg. "We recommend it only if the child's life is in jeopardy, if severe injury is likely, or the situation is critical without enough time to work with the family."

Emotional Neglect

"Identifying emotional neglect is very difficult," says Nancy Griffen, protective service worker in Rocking-

ham County. "We need clear behavioral symptoms, and then the behavior has to be linked to some omission of care provided by the parent." Her thoughts were also the resounding consensus of social workers across the state. Identifying emotional neglect is extremely difficult.

As in most places, the Virginia Code is vague as to what constitutes emotional neglect. "Necessarily so," says Harrisonburg Attorney, Charles McNulty. "Who is to set the standards?" If the law were so specific as to try to outline all instances categorized as emotional neglect, it would allow no flexibility on the part of the social workers or the court. There would be no room for interpretation according to individual problems. "Because of its flexibility, I like Virginia's law," he says.

"Emotional abuse is intangible. The wounds are internal..."

Social workers have a little more difficulty working with the law. Judith Hill, protective service worker in Prince William County says that emotional neglect often slips by "due to lack of proof." Without clear evidence of maltreatment, it seems very difficult to connect a child's behavioral pattern or self-concept to a parent's attitude toward the child.

"Emotional abuse is intangible. The wounds are internal...Emotional abuse differs from other types of abuse in that the victim may not realize he is being abused, and the abuser may not recognize his abusive behavior." Dean, 1979, p. 19).

A case in point was discussed by Barbara Atkins, counselor at Community Counseling Center in Harrisonburg. Ben and Mary (fictitious names) were middle class parents, very concerned about material goods and physical appearance. Their only daughter, Susan (also fictitious) was, by most standards, lovely. However, the parents were dissatisfied. By the time she was a teenager, Susan had a "nose job," and silicone injections in her breasts bringing her appearance to the standards her parents valued. To social workers and mental health workers, this attitude erodes a child's self-image and identity. The parents simply didn't understand. It is definitely an elusive problem!

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Latchkey Children



Today, two to four million children age 7 to 14 will go home to an empty house. These children are the "latchkey children" named for a time in the early 19th century when children wore housekeys on chains around their necks. These children spend at least some part of each week alone - without adult supervision. This phenomena has been attributed in part to the astonishing increase in single parent homes and the pressing economic demand for both parents to work. (Langway, Abramson & Foote, 1981). The result is that these children must take care of themselves and sometimes younger siblings until their parents arrive home. This seemingly adult responsibility is left to children who have often not even reached their teenage years.

Social workers across the state consider lack of supervision to be a common and widespread problem in their respective areas. "Lack of supervision is reported more frequently than any other type of abuse and neglect," says Jean Bartlett, protective service worker from Washington County. Indeed, inspection of the state statistics shows that lack of supervision is consistently the largest category of all reported abuse and neglect. In recent years it has accounted for approximately 25 percent of total types of abuse and neglect. Last year, lack of supervision was a component with 35 percent of children in founded cases.

Although there is not a single definition which would apply to all cases of lack of supervision, each agency seems to have several criteria by which they make an assessment. Of the several agencies contacted, each used a rather subjective assessment model. While age was a criteria for assessment in most cases, unless a child was very young, age by itself was not the only consideration. The age of the child would most often be considered in addition to many other criteria. One of these criteria involves the level of maturation displayed by the child. "An assessment of maturity would include how well the child is able to think clearly in case of an emergency," says LuElla Howard, coordinator of child protective services in Norfolk. A child's maturity may also depend on a subjective judgement of the child's ability to take care of him or herself.

The level of responsibility required of the child was another criteria mentioned by social workers. "The

responsibility of the child takes into account the child's capability of caring for younger siblings entrusted to him or her and whether the child abides by the rules and safeguards the parents have set up," says Howard.

The availability of a phone and the availability of neighbors were also very important in assessing the problem. "A phone is important if an emergency arises, and having a neighbor nearby to keep an eye on the child helps to provide some degree of safety, too," says Bartlett. In most situations, the watchful eyes of neighbors provide some security until parents arrive home. However, sometimes neighbors become concerned. "If the situation gets to the point where the child is left alone too often, it is the neighbors who call because they fear the child may be in some danger," says Ruth Clark, protective service worker in the Roanoke area.

The time of day and night the child is left alone and how long the child is left alone are also considered. "The longer the child is left alone, the more chance of something going wrong," says Sandra Ryan, protective service worker in Alexandria. "Night is the worst time because the child becomes easily frightened, and the fear could cause irrational actions on the part of the child if an emergency arises."

Referrals for most cases come from neighbors. These people see the child come home from school alone and see them at their homes for long periods of time when the parents aren't at home. Other referrals may come from the police or from schools. Occasionally, the child will contact someone when they become afraid of being at home alone. And, many ex-boyfriends and ex-husbands will make calls about an unsupervised child. "Often this is done just to get even with someone, but we must check out all cases," says Howard.

Once the report is made, a social worker investigates immediately in order to assess the situation. The neighbors, the child, and the parents are all interviewed. However, each agency contacted spends most of the time with the parents. If the parents can't remedy the situation after the social worker has intervened, a case worker will return to work with the family. If the problem continues, a court order may be issued to remove the child for a temporary period. This alternative is avoided whenever possible.

Social workers' views of parents'

attitudes toward the problem vary. "Parents are concerned," says Ryan. "They are scared to leave their children alone, yet they lull themselves into a false sense of security by saying that the child can take care of him or herself." On the other hand, Bartlett thinks that in her area the opposite is generally true. Her perception is that parents seem unconcerned about leaving their children alone. "Parents feel that in a rural setting the dangers that face children are minor and that the children are able to take care of themselves," she says. However, it was generally expressed that parents have a responsibility for providing adequate child care for their children. "In all cases, whether the parents are concerned or not, they must not leave a child alone in inappropriate situations," says Howard. "Most people just don't realize the dangers of leaving children unsupervised."

"Night is the worst time...fear could cause irrational actions on the part of the child."

As the problem of lack of supervision has become widespread, various community programs have been established to deal with it. A few large companies have begun setting up day care for children of their employees, while others have tried to establish flexible hours to help parents provide adequate supervision for their children after school. Awareness programs to help families find alternatives to leaving their children alone have been started in many parts of the country. Community day care centers have sprung up, too. In other words, community groups all over the nation are helping to fill the need for adequate care of latchkey children (Garbarino, 1981).

"It is important for a family to find and use good child care to insure the proper care of their children," says Howard. Day care centers provide care for children for various lengths of time and are usually less expensive than

babysitting services. And, babysitting is often easier to find in urban communities as opposed to more rural parts of the state. Ryan says that she has a list of low cost babysitters for her Alexandria clients. In addition, 14 churches in her area have opened their doors for day care. In the Roanoke area there appears to be several options. "Daycare, homemakers services and babysitting services constitute the main alternatives to leaving the children unattended," says Ruth Clark, protective service worker in the Roanoke area.

Ignorance of services, transportation and funding cuts seem to be the major hurdles in utilization of services. Ignorance is the easiest to overcome. Generally, when parents who aren't aware of services learn about their availability, they are eager to comply. Transportation and funds are not so easy to deal with. "Transportation is the major problem in Washington County," says Bartlett. "It's difficult for parents to get their children to and from day care centers."

Lack of funds is a major problem in other places. "The problem is that parents need services at a relatively low cost," says Clark. "In our community, budget cuts have caused some parents who previously received government funds for child care to withdraw their children from day care centers."

Community support can often be the key to the problem. "The support of the community has helped lessen the severity of the problem," says Clark. Fundraising drives and volunteer work have helped in keeping centers open and at a reasonable cost. It is amazing what a community can do when it is concerned about its citizens. Clark sums it up when she says, "As long as parents are needing ways to provide for their children, community support will continue to grow until the problem can be solved."

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Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics 1975 - 1981

	1975-76		1976-77		1977-78		1978-79		1979-80		1980-81	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Death	31	.6	8	.1	10	.05	18	.09	22	.1	38	.2
Physical abuse	210	5.2	1135	13.9	1984	11.05	2292	10.96	2714	13.3	2558	13.6
Sexual abuse	102	1.9	224	2.8	465	2.6	656	3.2	696	3.4	885	4.7
Other abuse	260	4.9	498	6.1	3284	18.4	2559	12.3	2840	14.0	2740	14.6
Neglect												
Lack of supervision	2484	46.9	3452	42.4	4373	24.4	5289	25.4	5166	25.4	4560	24.3
Emotional neglect	412	7.8	795	9.8	2487	13.9	3310	15.9	3400	16.7	2806	14.9
Lack of food, shelter, clothing	297	5.6	935	11.5	2757	15.4	2978	14.3	2895	14.2	2654	14.1
Medical neglect	—	—	—	—	1109	6.2	1316	6.3	1185	5.8	1107	5.9
Educational neglect	265	5.0	316	3.9	861	4.8	1724	8.3	1106	5.4	926	4.9
Abandonment	572	10.8	238	2.9	324	1.8	384	1.8	345	1.7	328	1.7
Failure to thrive	224	4.2	75	.9	134	.7	116	.6	140	.7	106	.6
Malnutrition	375	7.1	464	5.7	115	.6	142	.7	112	.5	85	.5

Note: % is the percentage of total types of abuse and neglect. The percentage of children affected by each type of abuse/neglect may be higher since some children are reported in more than one category.

These figures taken from the Annual Report, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Welfare.



Child Abuse/Neglect Statistics 1981

	Count	% of Children
Death	38	.3
Physical abuse	2558	19.5**
Sexual abuse	885	6.7**
Other abuse	2740	20.8**
Neglect, Total	12,572	
Lack of supervision	4560	34.6
Emotional neglect	2806	21.3
Lack of food, clothing or shelter	2654	20.2
Medical neglect	1107	8.4
Educational neglect	926	7.0
Abandonment	328	2.5
Failure to thrive	106	.8
Malnutrition	85	.6
	<u>18,793*</u>	

* Represents 13,166 children - Some children are subject to more than one type of abuse/neglect

** % may be inflated if some children suffered more than one type of abuse in this combined category

These figures taken from the Annual Report, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Welfare.

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Barbara Atkins, counselor at Community Counseling Center in Harrisonburg.

When emotional neglect is identified by social workers, counseling seems to be the remedy they most often recommend. Counseling can be recommended by the worker or ordered by the court, again, depending on the cooperation of the parents.

"When families who have been identified as neglectful come to us, we often find a family who is so disorganized they cannot provide for their family," says Joe Jurkowski, coordinator of the children's team at Mt. Vernon Mental Health Center in Fairfax County. He sees the necessity for helping to establish organization in the family structure through family therapy. This includes defining roles, helping clients understand developmental needs of their children, and helping parents feel equipped to provide for their children's emotional needs.

The same idea was expressed by Barbara Atkins. "There are people experiencing a great deal of stress and disorganization," she said.

However, she also adds a new dimension to the problem. "Often I see parents who are incapable of parenting because of unresolved issues in their own adolescence. I need to look at the parent's developmental level. I have difficulty coming down too hard on these people. They are really doing the best they can."

Regardless of the reasons, both Jurkowski and Atkins believe individual, marital and/or family counseling makes a difference. In addition, both

counselors sometimes see a need for parenting education or support groups to further assist neglectful parents.

So far, most of the emphasis appears to be on assisting the parents. What about the children? Most mental health workers agree that children will have difficulty changing their self image without a major change in the parent's behavior. But what about families who are resistant to change or who need more relief from the children through child care, money or relief of fundamental needs? For these families, outreach to the children, in addition to counseling, is very important. "Communities need to be providing services for children such as structured after school activities, Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs, and child care centers," says Barb Puzanskas, a counselor at Valley Mental Health Center in Staunton.

"...parents...are incapable of parenting because of unresolved issues in their own adolescence...."

"There is a way to help the children," says Betty Kline, counselor at Massanutten Mental Health in Harrisonburg, "And it's economic. If parents cannot provide for their children, whatever the reasons, it falls on the shoulders of community resources: churches, school, recreation departments. Sometimes it is a coach or a Big Brother or Sister who can make a difference. Public recreation is very important."

They both added that there are very practical solutions for adults, too: jobs, where needed, and good relief from the children through child care service.

Problems

On the surface, remedies to the problem seem simple: common sense, practical education and jobs for those who need one; counseling for those people lacking knowledge of child development and needs; and community support services for everyone. It's not that simple.

Adults are often resistant to change, and the process is slow under the most cooperative of circumstances. Patience is needed on the part of social workers, counselors, homemakers' services and the clients themselves. Educational services need to be geared to the level of the participants. And, overall, getting participants to the services is a major

"There is a way to help the children."

hurdle, whether it's for the reasons of motivation or for more practical reasons, such as transportation needs.

However, an even larger problem is the problem of money. Money is needed to buy counseling services, even when provided on a sliding scale. Money is needed to provide after-school, weekend or summer recreation and programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

"We need these services, but as funding is cut, these are the first to go," says Betty Kline. An example in the Harrisonburg area came with the recent announcement by the local Department of Parks and Recreation that they are considering a participant fee for Little League programs. "Many kids who need these programs won't be able to participate," says Kline. "It's our children who will be hurting."

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Book Review

Damaged Parents: An Anatomy of Child Neglect

Damaged Parents: An Anatomy of Child Neglect (Norman Polansky, Mary Ann Chalmers, Elizabeth Buttonweiser, and David P. Williams. The University of Chicago Press, 1981) contains the distillation of 15 years of study of child neglect. It seeks to address several interlocking questions: What are the effects of neglect on the personality? Who are the neglectful parents and what forces in their lives have damaged their parenting? From what we know of neglect, what tactics are workable in its treatment?

The authors' caring and concern for the families they study are apparent throughout the chapters. Examples from interview data and insights from subjects are interspersed among data analysis and research tools. The scope of the work is formidable. One large-scale study and several ancillary ones are reported in detail. Their results and observations, especially concerning treatment, will assist all those concerned with child welfare in developing better solutions to the problem of child neglect.

VCPN News Update

Virginia Division for Children (VDC) Study of Child Pornography and Prostitution

In response to the Government Accounting Offices request for data on child pornography and prostitution, the VDC sent a questionnaire to 221 agencies in Virginia. With 74 percent of the agencies responding, 71 cases of child prostitution and 24 cases of children involved in the production of pornography were reported. Though many respondents reported that they provide services (personal counseling, referral, crisis intervention, etc.) to assist these children, none reported special services to deal with the problem.

Due to flaws in methodology and limitations inflicted by the GAO, the VDC believes that their data in no way reflects the extent of child pornography and prostitution in Virginia. It does substantiate the presence of a problem.

Much more needs to be done to determine the extent of the problem.

For more complete information, refer to the April, 1982 issue of *AWARE*, published by Virginia Division for Children, 700 Building, 700 East Main Street, Richmond, VA. 23219.

Age extension in Virginia statute relating to indecent liberties with children

Del. Kenneth R. Plum writes that he introduced legislation to extend to age 18 protection against indecent liberties taken with children by parents, stepparents and others in a supervisory or custodial relationship.

Del. Plum writes, "I introduced this legislation as a result of John Harold, member of the Fairfax County Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Team, bringing to my attention the inability under existing law to prosecute some parents when the child was past 14. Mr. Harold was kind enough to provide

testimony to the legislative committees; Mrs. Sharon Fitch of the Fairfax team also provided assistance."

This legislation was enacted in the last session of the General Assembly.

The staff of VCPN would like to thank Del. Plum for his concern and work toward greater protection of Virginia's children.

Sexual Abuse Training Activities

Michael Murphy of Washington, D.C. was awarded the contract to plan and implement sexual abuse training for professionals and lay people across the state. The curriculum and training activities are in the planning stages at present. Be watching for training activities in your area!

Remember—Child Abuse Prevention Week is June 6-12!



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