



NEW DIRECTIONS IN CHILD ABUSE
AND NEGLECT RESEARCH

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE AND
NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

New Directions In Child Abuse and Neglect Research

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE AND
NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL **Advising the nation / Improving health**
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2013: Child Abuse and Neglect is a Serious Public Health Problem

§ Past 20 years: 3-fold increase in scientific publications -> new science of child abuse & neglect

§ Large problem: 6 million children reported to child protective services, 75% neglected, most under age 5

§ Effects of child abuse & neglect not limited to childhood, cascading throughout life, significant consequences for victims, families, & society

§ Effects of child abuse & neglect: all aspects of human functioning, yearly cost to society: \$80.3 billion

§ Addressing this public health problem requires an immediate, coordinated response with high-level federal support

Research Landscape

§ Significant progress in child abuse and neglect research; gaps remain

§ Many challenges identified in the 1993 report *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect* remain today

§ For example, research in the area of child abuse and neglect continues to be disjointed and fragmented across multiple fields of inquiry

§ Further, the field continues to be set apart from mainstream studies of child and adolescent health and development

§ Improved infrastructure, support, and coordination needed for research field to be efficient, productive scientific enterprise

Consensus Study: *New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research*

The Committee was tasked to:

§ **Build** on the review of literature and findings from the evaluation of research on child abuse and neglect;

§ **Identify** research that provides knowledge relevant to the programmatic, research, and policy fields; and

§ **Recommend** research priorities for the next decade, including new areas of research that should be funded by public and private agencies and suggestions regarding fields that are no longer a priority for funding.

Expert Committee

Anne Petersen, PhD (Chair) – University of Michigan

Lucy Berliner, MSW – University of Washington

Linda Burton, PhD – Duke University

Phaedra Corso, PhD – University of Georgia

Deborah Daro, PhD – Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

Howard Davidson, JD – American Bar Association

Angela Diaz, MD, MPH – Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Mary Dozier, PhD – University of Delaware

Fernando Guerra, MD, MPH – University of Texas

Carol Hafford, PhD – NORC at the University of Chicago

Charles Nelson, PhD – Harvard University

Ellen Pinderhughes, PhD – Tufts University

Frank Putnam Jr., MD – Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

Desmond Runyan, DrPH, MD, MPH – Kempe Center, University of Colorado

Cathy Spatz Widom, PhD – John Jay College

Joan Levy Zlotnik, PhD, ACSW – National Association of Social Workers

Scope and Recognition of Child Abuse and Neglect: Report Findings

§ NCANDS data reported 3.4 million child abuse and neglect referrals in 2011

§ Incidence trends since 1993: Sexual and physical abuse appear to have declined, while neglect statistics vary significantly across states

Scope and Recognition of Child Abuse and Neglect: Research Priorities

§ Develop a better understanding of trends in the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Why are some forms of abuse going down, whereas neglect may not be?

Causality: Report Findings

§ Risk and protective factors

§ Causal mechanisms not understood well

§ Parental substance abuse, depression, a history of child abuse and neglect strongest evidentiary support as risk factors

Causality: Research Priorities

§ High-quality qualitative and quantitative studies

§ High-quality longitudinal studies

§ Innovative experimental studies that will allow tests of causality

§ Ecological model:

§ Individual, community, family, cultural factors

Consequences: Report Findings

§ Child abuse and neglect affect all aspects of development:

§ Brain development

§ Cognitive development

§ Social development

§ Cascading effects over time:

§ Infancy

§ Attachment and self-regulation

§ Middle childhood

§ Internalizing and externalizing problems

§ Adulthood

§ Arrests, substance use, depression, anxiety

Consequences: Report Findings (cont.)

§ But, individual differences

§ Some children fare better than others

§ Resilience

§ Less chronicity, less severity

§ Support figure

§ Gene x Environment interaction

Consequences: Research Priorities

§ Enhance understanding of separate and synergistic consequences of abuse and neglect

§ Enhance understanding of mechanisms

§ Abuse and neglect have pernicious effects but research demonstrates that change is possible

Interventions and Service Delivery Systems: Report Findings

§ Significant advances in the development of effective programs to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect

§ Prevention: successful and promising programs

§ Early home visiting programs

§ Public awareness campaigns

§ Parenting education programs

§ Professional practice reforms (e.g., screening)

§ Treatment: Successful and promising programs

§ Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy

§ Parent management training programs applied to child abuse and neglect

Interventions and Service Delivery Systems: Research Priorities

§ Dissemination and Implementation

- § Implementing in communities with fidelity
- § Taking interventions to scale
- § Sustaining over time

§ Infrastructure Development

- § Strengthening the workforce
- § Crafting data management systems to support CQI
- § Fostering system integration and collective impact

Child Welfare System: Report Findings

§ Outcomes of interest:

- § Safety
- § Permanency
- § Well-Being

§ Major categories of services

- § Child protection investigation
- § Family-centered services and supports
- § Foster care
- § Adoption

§ Examples of recent system-level reforms

- § Differential response
- § Privatization
- § Parent and family engagement
- § Practice models

Child Welfare System: Report Findings

§ Coordination with other systems is critical to child welfare system performance and outcomes for children

§ Improved empirical data provides a greater understanding of the experience of children involved with child welfare

§ Child welfare systems must have capacity to implement service improvements

§ Multidisciplinary and multi-method experience and expertise is essential

Child Welfare System: Research Priorities

- § Support and undertake rigorous evaluations of effective service models
- § Research highly effective delivery systems
- § Study how to implement evidence-based practices in complex system

Research Challenges and Infrastructure: Report Findings

§ Research Challenges

- § Complexity of child abuse and neglect research.
- § Variability in definitions and measurement of child abuse and neglect
- § Coexisting and confounding risk and protective factors
- § Lack of high-level coordination for research support

Research Challenges and Infrastructure: Research Priorities

§ Dedicated, well-trained, multidisciplinary cadre of researchers using multiple methods

§ High-quality public health surveillance system

§ High-level federal coordination of child abuse and neglect research efforts

§ Sustained funding for rigorous research endeavors

§ Interdisciplinary research centers

§ Research attentive to diverse and underserved populations

Policy: Report Findings

§ Federal laws exist to set national standards for confronting child abuse and neglect issues, but many further standards are derived from state laws

§ Numerous changes have been made to federal and state laws and policies designed to impact the incidence, reporting, and negative health and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect

§ Few research efforts have evaluated the impact of changes to laws and policies and this remains a ripe area for future endeavors

Research Priorities: Policy

- § Evaluate legislative changes and policies at all levels
- § Increase funding for policy implementation research and analysis
- § Examples of research questions to consider:
 - § Is there a relationship between differing state abuse & neglect definitions & child safety? Or well-being?
 - § Are training programs for mandated reporters effective?
 - § What is the effect of different evidence standards on case substantiation & child welfare intervention?
 - § What is the incidence of CAN on Indian Lands?
 - § What is the impact of safe haven laws on rates of infant abandonment?
 - § How effective are CFRTs in changing child welfare policies & preventing deaths?

Cross-cutting Guiding Principles for Recommendation Implementation

§ Move beyond “social address” variables to disentangle cultural processes, social stratification influences, ecological variations, immigrant/acclimation status

§ Apply multidisciplinary, multimethod, and multisector approaches

§ Leverage and build upon existing knowledge base, including large studies, research definitions, designs, and other opportunities

Report Recommendation Outline

- Develop a National Process for Coordinating & Prioritizing Investment in Child Abuse & Neglect Research (1-3)
 - § Create a National Agenda for Research
 - § Develop & Implement a National Plan for Sustaining Research
- § Create Research Infrastructure to Build & Sustain a Field of Child Abuse & Neglect Research (4-7)
 - § National CAN Surveillance
 - § Cadre of Researchers
 - § Multidisciplinary CAN Research Centers
 - § NIH Study Section on Child Maltreatment, Trauma, & Violence
- § Evaluation of Child Abuse & Neglect Laws & Policies (8-9)

Research Agenda and Implementation Plan

Action	Actor	Supporting Evidence
Coordinated research agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All entities that support maltreatment research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in research remain • Findings/Conclusions throughout the report suggest areas of need
National Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FEDIAWG • Assistant Sec. of ACF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level, national coordination for research in this field is lacking • Fragmented nature of research funding • Maltreatment research encompasses a wide range of disciplines and research problems
Accountability for Implementation of Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FEDIAWG • Assistant Sec. of ACF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for accountability for progress in the field as a whole

Research Infrastructure

Action	Actor	Supporting Evidence
National Surveillance System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC • FEDIAWG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A coordinated national public health approach to child abuse and neglect will require a high-quality, population-based surveillance system • The infrastructure needed to support such a system for maltreatment is currently lacking • Current surveillance efforts rely heavily on data reported to child welfare agencies
Professional Development of Child Abuse and Neglect Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All entities that support maltreatment research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a robust workforce is an essential infrastructure component • Overall lack of educational infrastructure to create and capitalize on student interest in the field • Need for investment in child welfare research capacity • Need for interdisciplinary training

Research Infrastructure (cont.)

Action	Actor	Supporting Evidence
Multidisciplinary Research Centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All entities that support maltreatment research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maltreatment research encompasses a wide range of disciplines and research problems, necessitating interdisciplinary collaboration • Centers provide a platform supportive of interdisciplinary collaborations • Existing research collaboratives serve as a model for support of the multidisciplinary research necessary to advance the field • Centers can provide the means to support professional development
NIH Study Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stable mechanism for evaluating and supporting new areas of investigator-initiated research is critically important for the development and progression of the field

Evaluation of Child Abuse and Neglect Laws and Policies

Action	Actor	Supporting Evidence
Mandated Support for Evaluation of Federal Laws Relating to Child Abuse and Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous federal policy changes designed to impact maltreatment • Little work has been done to evaluate the impact of these federal policy changes • An evidence base in this area will provide guidance to future policy and practice initiatives
Mandated Support for Evaluation of State Laws Relating to Child Abuse and Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Legislatures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many maltreatment-related laws and policies are developed and carried out at the state level. • Little research has been conducted on the impact of law and policy change at the state level. • Research opportunity lies in comparing the impact of differences between state policies

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For more information and to
download the report, please
visit

www.iom.edu/childmaltreatment

