



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**  
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

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

## Research Infrastructure

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

## Research Infrastructure (cont.)

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

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

# New Directions In Child Abuse and Neglect Research

For more information and to  
download the report, please  
visit

[www.iom.edu/childmaltreatment](http://www.iom.edu/childmaltreatment)

