



# Promising Approaches in Child Neglect:

Protecting Children  
and Helping  
Families in Hard  
Economic Times

Boise, Idaho

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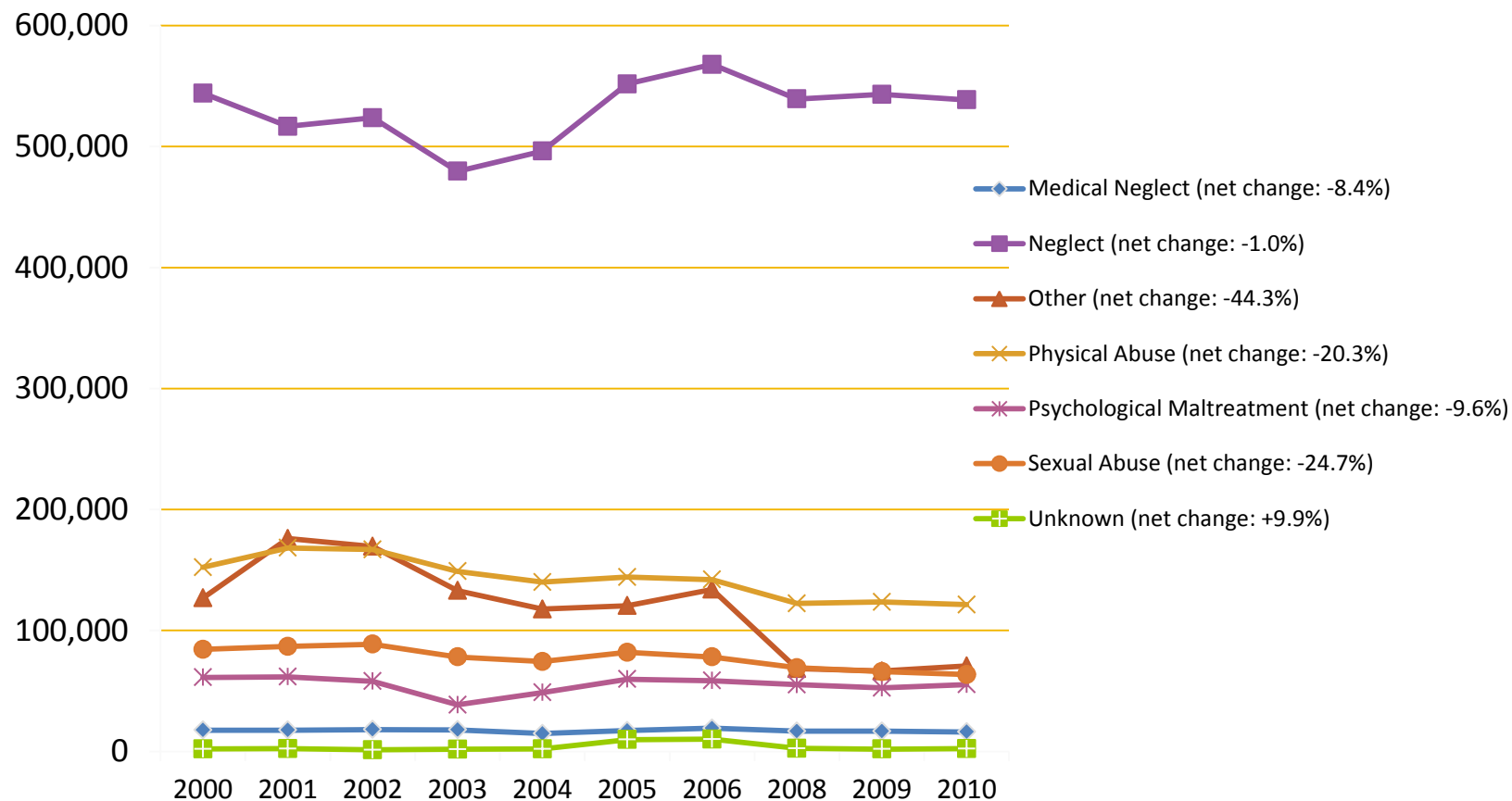
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## **Neglect: Most Common Type of Maltreatment**

During the past decade, the percentage of accepted CPS referrals alleging neglect and the percentage of substantiated child victims classified as neglected has increased from a little more than 60% to almost 80% nationally. In 2009-2010, in some states, 90 – 100% of child victims were neglected.

# National: Maltreatment Types of Children Determined to be Victims



Data source: Child Maltreatment Reports

Notes: Data is not presented for 2007 because it was reported differently that year. More than one maltreatment type may have been reported for each child.

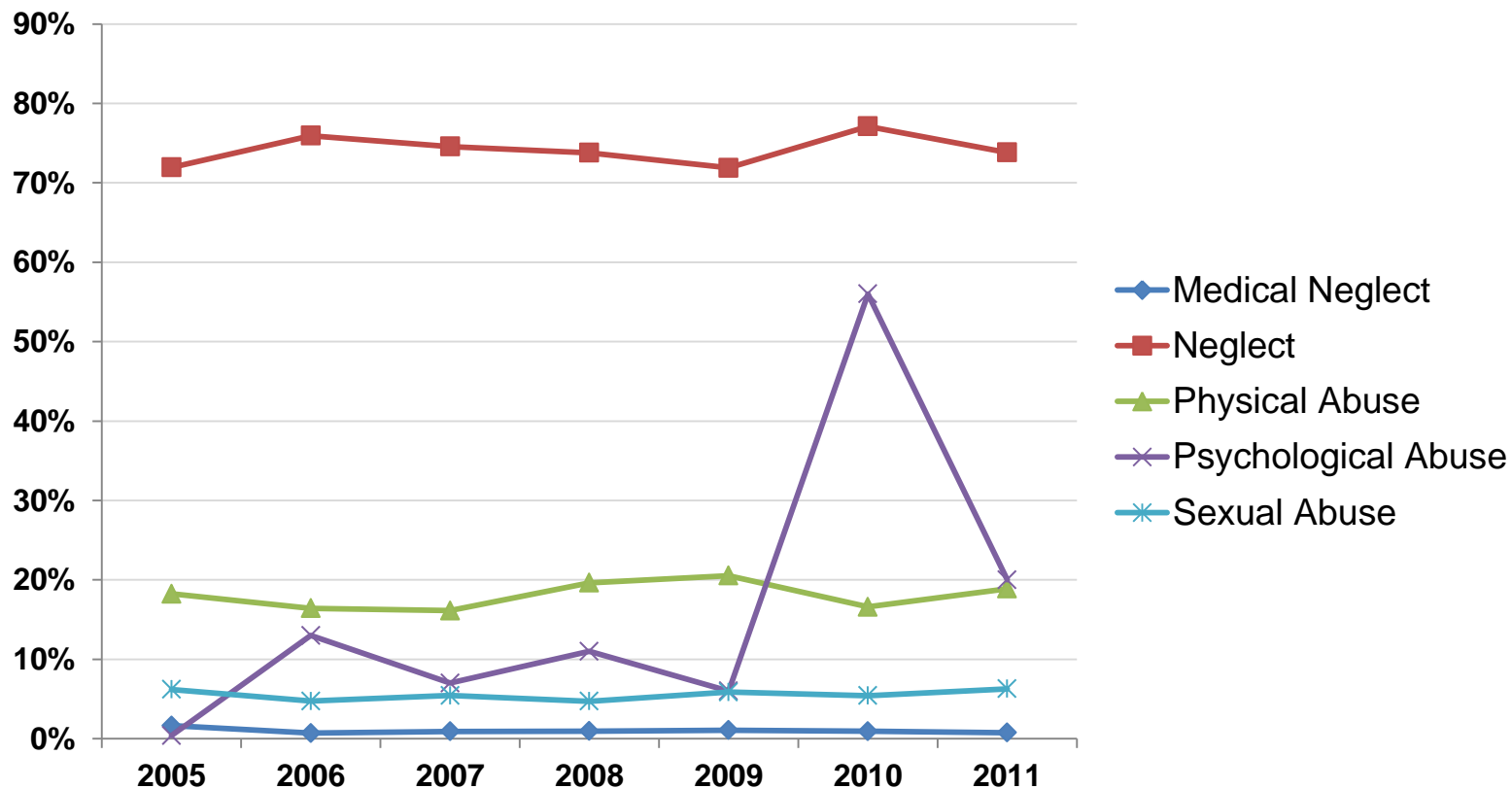
# The Decline in Child Maltreatment

Nationally, substantiated cases of physical abuse and sexual abuse continued to decline between 2005-2009 at a much higher rate than cases of substantiated neglect.



# Idaho:

## Maltreatment Types of Children Determined to be Victims



## **NIS-4 Confirmed the Decline in Maltreatment**

The Fourth National Incidence Study (NIS-4) found large statistically significant reductions in sexual abuse and physical abuse between 1993 and 2005-2006, but much smaller non-significant reductions in most forms of neglect, except for emotional neglect which greatly increased.



# Intolerance for Severe Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse

Arguably, community and public child welfare agency intolerance for physical abuse and sexual abuse, in combination with partnerships between child welfare and law enforcement agencies, has led to a steady decline in these forms of child maltreatment. Changes in social attitudes appear to have had a powerful effect on rates of physical abuse and sexual abuse over a period of a few decades.

## Tolerance for Neglect

Neglect has been a much tougher form of child maltreatment to combat due to this country's high rate of child poverty, community/agency tolerance for neglect even in its chronic forms and lack of time limited effective interventions. A CPS system organized around investigations of allegations of maltreatment is probably not the best approach to most neglecting families.



# Typology of Neglect

- Situational
- Sporadic
- Chronic
- Chronic Maltreatment




# The Need for Early Intervention

To intervene in neglecting families more effectively, it is important to provide families help before situational and sporadic neglect becomes chronic, and before chronic neglect is combined with physical abuse or sexual abuse. Chronic neglect and chronic maltreatment are much more difficult to stop than situational or sporadic neglect.

## Poverty and Chronic Neglect

Neglect is enmeshed with poverty, often long-term severe poverty. Social norms around parenting in some impoverished families begin to collapse under the pressures of material deprivation, economic insecurity, substance abuse, mental health problems and/or domestic violence. It is much easier to maintain parenting standards in the midst of episodic poverty than when poverty is long-term and severe.



## Severe Poverty


Slightly less than 10% of children in the U.S. are growing up in severely poor families, i.e., families whose annual incomes are \$10 - \$11,000 per year or less. Many of these families are destitute or on the verge of destitution.



# Substance Abuse, Mental Health Problems and Family Violence

The effects of poverty on child abuse and neglect are indirect; it is the indicators/symptoms of family breakdown, i.e., substance abuse, mood disorders (especially depression) and family violence that lead to child maltreatment.

It is not poverty per se that leads to child abuse and neglect, but the response to hardship that includes drug/alcohol abuse, depression and family violence.



# Co-occurring Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disorders

Co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders are the rule, not the exception, among chronically neglecting and chronically maltreating parents.



# Trauma Histories


Women with co-occurring disorders usually have histories of childhood trauma and have often been the victims of domestic violence as well.



# Depression Treatment is Low Hanging Fruit

Major depression that includes hopeless/helpless attitudes regarding the future is common among chronically neglecting families, and is one reason these families are difficult to help.

Depression treatment is a low hanging fruit in the prevention world because depression has a causal influence on rates of both physical abuse and neglect, and because effective time limited treatments for depression are widely available.





# The Common Element in Depression

Groups that have elevated rates of depression include the poor, the elderly, women and trauma victims. What do these groups have in common?



# Effects of Depression on Parenting

Severe and chronic depression have a powerful negative impact on the capacity for emotionally responsive parenting. One reason that chronic neglect has such a large impact on children's development is that it almost always includes lack of nurturance.




# Depression Treatment

Programs that make depression screening and treatment available and accessible to low income women have the possibility of preventing neglect.



# Cumulative Harm

One main reason chronic neglect has been tolerated by public child welfare agencies is that the harmful effects on child development are gradual and cumulative instead of immediate. However, there is now ample research regarding the effects of all forms of chronic maltreatment on children's development and on health and well being across the life span.




# Demoralization of Parents

Demoralization, i.e., hopeless/helpless attitudes regarding the possibility of coping with challenging conditions, is pervasive in chronically neglecting families, and is one reason these families are often difficult to help.



# Indicators of Demoralization

- Poor self care
  - Indifference to condition of home
  - Apathy in the face of threat
  - Acceptance of demeaning descriptions and attributions
  - Unwillingness to take steps that have a reasonable chance of helping oneself or one's family
  - Cannot “regroup” in the face of adversity
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# Parental Engagement

Good engagement skills are of the utmost importance when working with demoralized and depressed youth or adults.



# Hope Makes a Difference

Governmental responses and community responses to hard times effects the morale of low income families and their hope in the future.

When impoverished families lose hope in the possibility of a better future, a variety of social problems follow.





# Community Empowerment

Currently, some of the most promising prevention initiatives around the country involve various forms of community empowerment, along with investment in early childhood education.

In hard times, community agencies, churches and neighborhoods can pull together to support the development of children in poor families.




# Communities Can Help

Programs that sustain morale in tough times will

- (a) provide concrete emergency assistance to families on the verge of destitution;
- (b) offer ongoing emotional support, especially to single parent families;
- (c) involve parents in creating a better future for their children; and
- (d) make a sustained investment in poor children's intellectual and social development.


## Increase in Emotional Neglect

NIS-4 found a fivefold increase in the incidence of emotional neglect between 1986 and 2005-2006. An increase of this magnitude suggests that community and cultural expectations for the care and nurturing of young children have changed to incorporate new understanding regarding the effects of early traumatic stress on brain development and the potential negative effects of growing up with family violence.



# Typology of Services

## Four Groups of Neglecting Parents

- Parents who can be helped with poverty-related services
  - Parents who can benefit from poverty-related services combined with skill based parenting interventions
  - Parents who require substance abuse and/or mental health treatment and who will struggle with relapse
  - Parents who are chronically mentally ill and/or severely cognitively impaired and who will need ongoing case management for several years
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## **Offer Help Before CPS is Involved**

Communities that have the capacity to respond to troubled parents and their children early in children's lives and prior to a CPS report have an opportunity to reduce the need for foster care and expensive and lengthy court interventions.



# Mobilizing the Community

It is difficult to mobilize communities around prevention of neglect because of the large variety of behaviors viewed by child welfare agencies as neglectful. It is easier to excite public interest and concern regarding children's need for nurturance and emotionally responsive care required for normal brain development and social development. Every child deserves safe, nurturing and emotionally responsive care.



# Every Baby Deserves to Be Nurtured

Babies and young children need emotionally responsive care for physiological regulation and emotional regulation.

