

POLICY FORUM

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

Introduction

Gordon H. DeFries, PhD, and Kristie Weisner Thompson, MA

Issue Brief: Preventing Child Maltreatment in North Carolina: New Directions for Supporting Families and Children

Michelle Hughes, MA, MSW, Marian F. Earls, MD, FAAP, Carmen Hooker Odom, MRP, Kristen L. Dubay, MPP, Anne R. Sayers, MSW, Jennifer Tolle Whiteside, MA, and Pam Silberman, JD, DrPH

“Preventing child maltreatment will necessitate a shift in policy toward maximizing and normalizing early assistance to parents to support family environments that nurture and protect children from physical and psychological harm.”

COMMENTARIES

The Impact of Maltreatment on the Developing Child

Dana M. Hagele, MD, MPH

Building an Effective Child Maltreatment Surveillance System in North Carolina

Adam J. Zolotor, MD, MPH, Brenda McAdams Motsinger, MS, RD, LDN, Desmond K. Runyan, MD, DrPH, and Catherine (Kay) Sanford, MSPH

Risk and Protection in the Perpetration of Child Abuse

Kenneth A. Dodge, PhD

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Becky A. Wrisley

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Marian F. Earls, MD, FAAP

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Wanda M. Hunter, MPH

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Marcia E. Herman-Giddens, PA, DrPH, and Thomas J. Vitaglione, MPH

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Henrietta J. Zalkind, JD, and Pat W. Allen, MS

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Katrina D. Gay, BSPH, MPH

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Rhett N. Mabry

INTRODUCTION

Policy Forum: *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect*

"If child maltreatment were a communicable disease, it would long ago have been declared an epidemic!" This is a quote from Tom Vitaglione, Senior Fellow of the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, in his letter to the editor of the *Raleigh News & Observer* (Sunday, September 25, 2005). Vitaglione was writing in response to series of articles in the *News & Observer* describing the alarming rate of "shaken baby syndrome." Child abuse and neglect have enormous consequences for the health of infants and children and great cost implications to the state of North Carolina as abused children's problems evolve into medical, social, legal, and other needs.

Despite the enormous social and economic consequences of child maltreatment, most of our attention and state resources focus on investigating cases of abuse and neglect and providing child welfare services, rather than on prevention strategies. For this reason, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, a private, nonprofit organization, with support from The Duke Endowment, partnered with the North Carolina Institute of Medicine in a year-long task force effort to create a state-wide plan to prevent child maltreatment.

The Task Force addressing these issues was co-chaired by Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, and Marian Earls, MD, FAAP, Medical Director of Guilford Child Health, Inc., in Greensboro. Building on evidence that families with adequate support systems are less likely to abuse their children, the Task Force developed strategies and recommendations by which North Carolina could address this enormously complex and heart-wrenching set of problems. These recommendations are summarized in this issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*.

We have invited a number of the state's leading authorities on child maltreatment to contribute to this issue of the Journal. They bring the perspectives of state and local government, health professionals, social service agencies, law enforcement and juvenile justice, academic researchers in the field of child development, legislators, and the faith community. Even before the Task Force was convened in September of 2004, there was widespread consensus that "something had to be done" to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment in our state. With over 113,000 children reported to child protective services agencies each year, and at least 27,000 substantiated as cases "in need of services," this issue is one of our most significant health problems. As Vitaglione points out, this means more than 75 children per day are abused by a parent or caretaker. The report of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, developed in partnership with Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, offers a number of sensible, cost-effective proposals for what can be done about this escalating set of problems affecting the health and lives of our children. If we fail to take these recommendations seriously, we have only ourselves to blame for what will surely become an even larger problem with many consequences for the health and well-being of all North Carolinians.

We look forward to the reactions of our readers to these important ideas communicated through the Journal's Policy Forum.

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