

May 15, 1997

THE CHILD ABUSE CRISIS: THE DISINTEGRATION OF MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

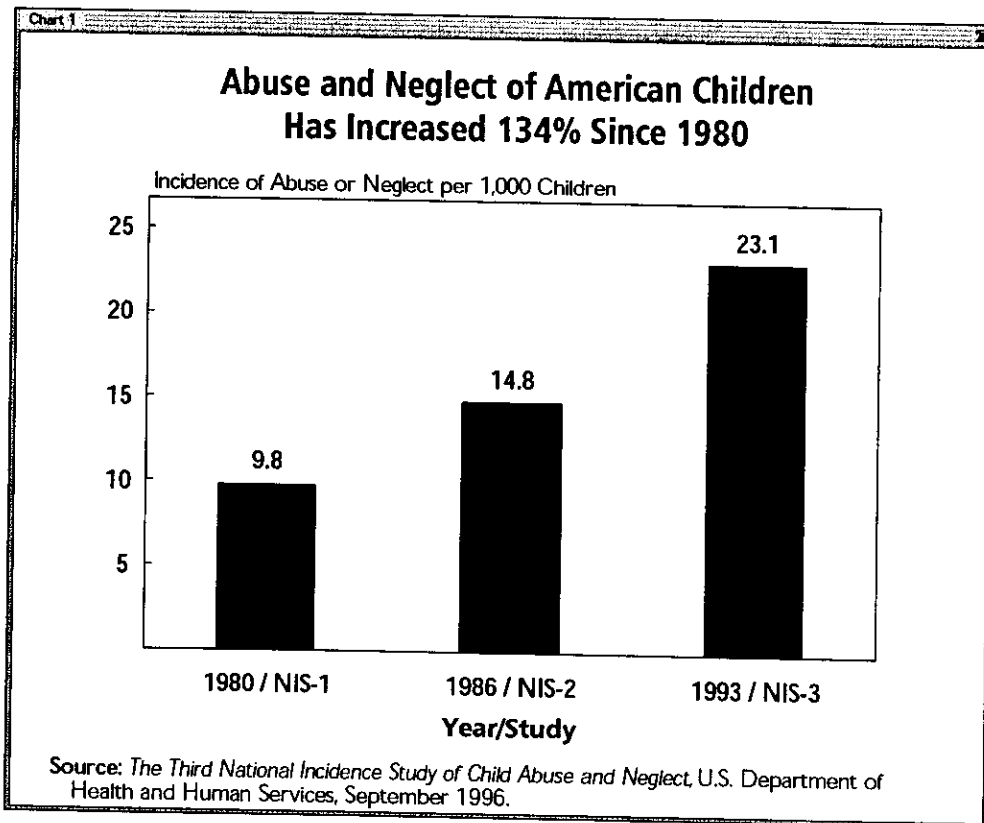
Far too many children are badly abused in the United States today. This disturbing fact—driven home by shocking stories on nightly television broadcasts—appears also in professional literature as analysts try to understand the causes of this problem and find a remedy for it. The growing empirical evidence on child abuse¹ reveals new, alarming, and distinct patterns of familial relationships that contribute greatly to this tragedy. The studies show that, along with a continual rise in the incidence of child abuse in the United States, there has been an increase in the number of children born out of wedlock and abandoned by their fathers, as well as an increase in the number of children affected by divorce. Now, in addition to poverty and community environment, the rising incidence of child abuse in the United States can be linked to one more factor: whether an abused child's parents are married.

The underlying dynamic of child abuse—the breakdown of marriage and the commitment to love—is spreading like a cancer from poor communities to working-class communities. As social scientists, community leaders, and legislators consider ways to stop the spread of this cancer, they must focus their attention on the most upsetting byproduct of the disintegration of family and community: the abuse, maiming, and even death of America's infants and young children, about 2,000 of whom—6 per day—die each year.²

- 1 The data in this paper are drawn from the following studies: Andrea J. Sedlak, Ph.D., and Diane D. Broadhurst, M.L.A., *The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3): Final Report*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, Washington, D.C., September 1996, and Robert Whelan, *Broken Homes & Battered Children: A study of the relationship between child abuse and family type*, Family Education Trust, London, 1993.
- 2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States*, Fifth Report, United States Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1995.

The Alarming Rise in Child Abuse

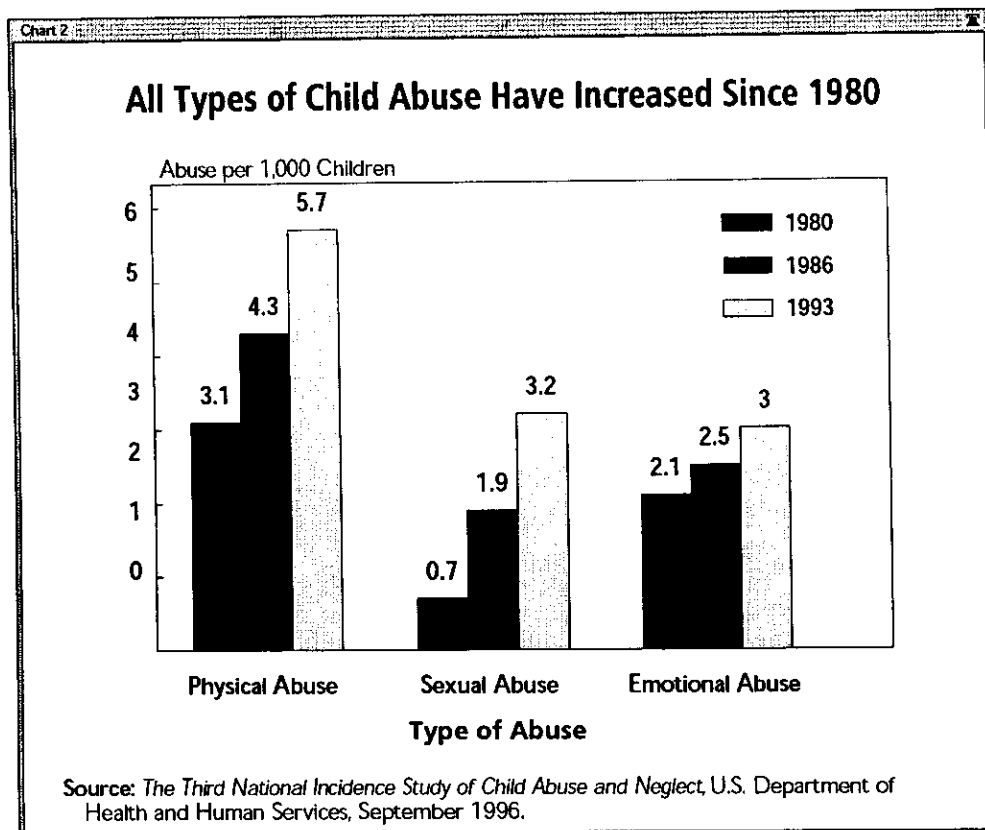
The best available estimates of child abuse in the United States are found in studies conducted by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These National Incidence Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect, conducted in 1980 (NIS-1), 1986 (NIS-2), and 1993 (NIS-3),³ focused on reported and recognized cases of abuse (although they did not measure the actual incidence of abuse). According to NIS-3, child abuse and neglect increased by 67 percent between 1986 and 1993 (an average of almost 10 percent per year) and 149 percent between 1980 and 1993. Some of the biggest increases in recent times were reported in physical abuse (102 percent, or almost 15 percent per year) and sexual abuse (83 percent, or almost 12 percent per year).



Obtaining trustworthy estimates of the degree of abuse and neglect in the United States—situations that perpetrators try to keep hidden for as long as possible—is difficult. Scholars utilize various methods to generate estimates of abuse, and their estimates are not always similar. Consequently, serious disagreements about the true level of abuse exist.⁴ Chart 2 is derived from data obtained from the 1996 NIS-3 survey report and illustrates the continuing rise in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in the United States.

³ The results of the 1993 National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) were released in September 1996.

⁴ For an excellent review of the data available, see Richard Gelles's chapter, "Family Violence," in Michael Tonry, ed., *Criminal Justice Handbook* (National Academy Press, forthcoming).



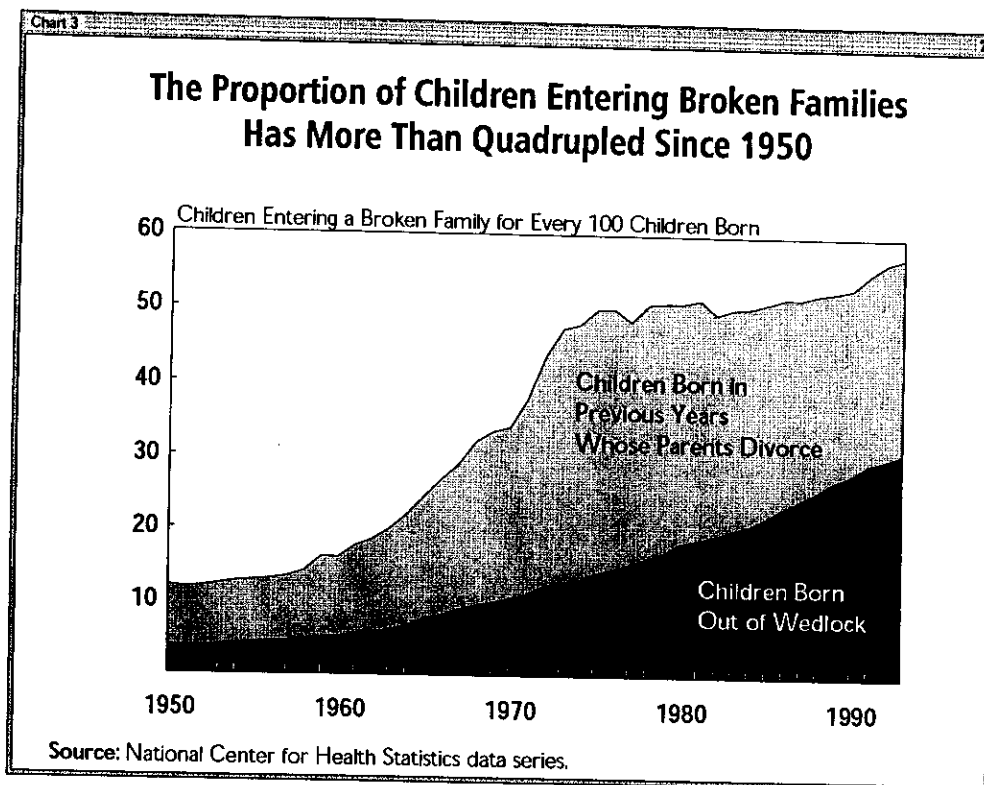
A seminal British study⁵ confirms that a child is safest when his biological parents are married and least safe when his mother is cohabiting with a man other than her husband. Specifically, the Family Court Reporter Survey for England and Wales presents concrete evidence that children are 20 to 33 times safer living with their biological married parents than in other family configurations. This study offers important insights into the profound impact that marriage can have in preventing child abuse; it also is the only one in the literature on child abuse that analyzes abuse by family structure and the marital background of parents. The research on crime and delinquency in both the United States and Great Britain frequently illustrates similar social trends and relationships between family breakdown and social problems. Comparing the results of the British study with the data on child abuse in the United States has been difficult because studies of abuse in the United States are few; but if the relationships in the British study hold true for child abuse in the United States, the implications for social policy are significant.

Society views child abuse as one of the most abhorrent of behaviors. Unfortunately, however, it often remains hidden until it is too late for society to save the child's life or repair the damage. Child abuse also is difficult to define. As measured by the National Incidence Studies,⁶ the four major categories of child maltreatment are physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

The effects of abuse are more readily observable: broken bones and bruises, scars from cigarette burns, swollen faces, and drastic changes in behavior. School teachers and

5 Whelan, *Broken Homes & Battered Children*.

6 Sedlak and Broadhurst, *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*.



doctors are often in a position to see these signs of abuse; but few see the signs of neglect in the passive child who is rarely talked to at home, or who may be locked up and left unfed, unclothed, and unwashed for long periods, or who must fend for himself. Changes in the neglected child's body and behavior are slower and more easily mistaken for ill health or shy personality.

Research on the effects of neglect indicates that it has even deeper and longer lasting consequences than physical abuse. Richard Emery, Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, has noted that neglected children often are more seriously disturbed than abused children.⁷ The neglected child is treated more as if he were not there, or as if his parents wished he were not there, and this insidious and fundamental rejection can inflict deep psychological wounds. By contrast, physically abused children frequently are cared for in other ways by their abusers. They are given food, clothing, playthings, and even enjoy good times with others in the family.

The Demographics of Child Abuse

A survey of the professional literature shows that the three main types of abuse most commonly researched are physical abuse and, to a lesser extent, neglect and the trauma of children who have witnessed violence against their parents.⁸ According to the professional literature, child abuse in the United States exhibits definite demographic patterns:

⁷ Richard Emery, "Abused and Neglected Children," *The American Psychologist*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1989), pp. 321-328.

⁸ Physical abuse in the NIS-3 study includes such activities as punching, kicking, throwing, burning, stabbing, and choking. Sexual abuse includes such things as penile penetration of the oral, anal, or genital organs. Neglect includes physical neglect (failing to keep the child clean, fed, and warm); educational neglect; medical neglect; and emotional neglect, which frequently is coupled with witnessing violence between parents.

- **The safest family environment for a child is a home in which the biological parents are married.** Contrary to current theory about the effects of marriage on children, recent research demonstrates that marriage provides a safe environment for all family members, one in which child abuse and fatality are lowered dramatically.
- **Cohabitation, an increasingly common phenomenon, is a major factor in child abuse.** Cohabitation implies a lack of commitment. The evidence suggests that a lack of commitment between biological parents is dangerous for children, and that a lack of commitment between mother and boyfriend is exceedingly so. The risk of child abuse is 20 times higher than in traditional married families if parents are cohabiting (as in “common-law” marriages) and 33 times higher if the single mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend.⁹
- **The incidence of child abuse decreases significantly as family income increases.** The impression that there is a high incidence of abuse among the very poor is reinforced by the results of research into child abuse. In 1993, the overall rate of maltreatment (abuse and neglect combined) in the United States was lowest in families with incomes above \$30,000 per year; 10 times higher in families with incomes between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per year; and 22 times higher for families with incomes below \$15,000 per year.¹⁰
- **Child abuse frequently is intergenerational.** Another generation of child abusers is being weaned by today’s abusing parents, and many of these children will never know that children can be treated differently.
- **Child abuse is prevalent in “communities of abuse” characterized by family breakdown.** These also are communities of crime, characterized by the absence of marriage, the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse, and a primary dependence on welfare.¹¹ Children who grow up in these “communities” show signs of permanent damage; moreover, as statistics follow them over time, many prove to have been damaged for life. From these communities of abuse come society’s “superpredators” (the psychopathic criminals of tomorrow), violent gang members, and other hostile, depressed, and frequently even suicidal young people.
- **Child abuse is directly associated with serious violent crime.** An increase in the incidence of child abuse precedes an increase in violent crime.

Although a home with biological parents who are married cannot guarantee that a child will be safe and happy, the evidence suggests that it represents the safest of all environments for children; at the same time—and in sharp contrast—the evidence also suggests that a home with adults who decide not to marry and to live together out of wedlock represents the most dangerous environment of all for children.

9 Whelan, *Broken Homes & Battered Children*.

10 Sedlak and Broadhurst, *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*, p. 53.

11 Patrick F. Fagan: “Rising Illegitimacy: America’s Social Catastrophe,” Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 19, June 1994, and “The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1026, March 17, 1995.

Child Abuse: A Precursor to Crime

The increase in severe child abuse has another serious ramification. The evidence suggests that the United States will face increased levels of serious violent crime (murders, rapes, and assaults) at the hands of abused children when they reach their mid- to late-teenage years. According to Cathy Spatz Widom, Professor of Criminal Justice and Psychology at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Albany,

Early childhood victimization has demonstrable long-term consequences for delinquency, adult criminality, and violent behavior... The experience of child abuse and neglect has a substantial impact even on individuals with otherwise little likelihood of engaging in officially recorded criminal behavior.¹²

According to studies of the official records of abused children and arrested offenders, the association between child abuse and crime is significant: between 14 percent and 26 percent.¹³ But this association is roughly three times greater—from 50 percent to 70 percent—when researchers go beyond the official reports of child abuse cases and study the reports of abuse given by the delinquents themselves.¹⁴ In one study, 26 percent of incarcerated delinquents who had committed murder had experienced physical abuse; they also were more likely than those who had not suffered abuse to have directed their violence toward members of their immediate families.¹⁵ In another report, of 14 juveniles condemned to death in the United States in 1986, 12 had been brutally abused as children, and 5 had been sodomized by relatives.¹⁶

Moreover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime offers substantive insight into the background of a killer.¹⁷ The three most frequent factors in the history of a killer are physical or sexual abuse, a failure in emotional attachment to the mother, and a failure to use parents as role models. The connection between child abuse and violent crime should capture the attention of people across the political and social science spectrum. It cannot be ignored. Child abuse is costly to American society. Considering the increase in severe child abuse reported in NIS-3, the United States must be prepared to brace itself for the consequent rise in violent crime in the future.

- 12 Cathy Spatz Widom, "The Cycle of Violence," *Science*, Vol. 244 (1989), pp. 160-166.
- 13 D. O. Lewis, S. S. Shanok, J. H. Pincus, and G. H. Glaser, "Violent Juvenile Delinquents: Psychiatric, Neurological, Psychological and Abuse Factors," *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* (1977), pp. 307-319; Peter C. Kratcoski, "Child Abuse and Violence Against the Family," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 61, Issue 7 (1982), pp. 435-444; F. G. Bolton, J. W. Reich, and S. E. Guitierrez, "Delinquency Patterns in Maltreated Children and Siblings," *Victimology*, Vol. 2 (1977), pp. 349-357.
- 14 C. M. Mouzakis, "An Inquiry into Child Abuse and Juvenile Delinquency," in R. J. Hunner and Y. E. Walker, eds., *Exploring the Relationship Between Child Abuse and Delinquency* (Montclair, N.J.: Osmun & Allanheld, 1981). See also P. W. Rhoades and S. L. Parker, "The Connections Between Youth Problems and Violence in the Home," Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Portland, Ore., 1981.
- 15 Peter C. Kratcoski, "Families Who Kill," *Marriage & Family Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1-2 (1987), pp. 47-70.
- 16 D. O. Lewis, J. H. Pincus, B. Bard, E. Richardson, L. S. Prichep, M. Feldman, and C. Yager, "Neuropsychiatric, Psychoeducational and Family Characteristics of 14 Juveniles Condemned to Death in the United States," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 145 (1988), pp. 585-589.
- 17 Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, *Criminal Investigative Analysis: Sexual Homicide*, 1990.

What Can Be Done?

The underlying community dynamic of child abuse—the breakdown of the family—is spreading like a cancer from poor communities to working-class communities. The underlying demographics of abuse indicate a widening and worsening social infrastructure that is more and more incompatible with social order and for which an increasingly heavy price will have to be paid: serious crime and crime-control costs; addictions and addiction rehabilitation (and related crime costs); robbery, theft, and expanded prisons to contain the robbers and thieves; and a growing demand for drugs and all of the attendant problems associated with the drug culture and industry.

The leading indicator of an increase in these problems tomorrow is their byproduct today: the abuse of young infants and young children. Today's abused children will be among tomorrow's most dangerous criminals. The United States therefore has a serious and escalating social problem, the consequences of which will be borne not only by the children who suffer terribly from abuse, but also by all of society, which will have to deal with their vicious anger, debilitating depression, and various addictions. The country can take little solace from the hope that this is just a passing demographic blip that must be endured until it fades.

State and federal policy makers cannot solve deep moral or cultural problems; but they can illuminate the problems that must be addressed, and they most certainly can improve policies that rescue children from dangerous environments and place them in safe families. Specifically, Congress should:

1. **Sharpen** the debate by improving the quality of federal research. The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) should be directed to review the records of children who died of abuse within the past three years and delineate the family structure involved.
2. **Commission** the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to gather marriage and family background data in the next National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4).
3. **Ensure** that federal statistical agencies gather the marital background data for respondents in all social and economic surveys. These data would provide the best resource for future studies of child abuse and crime.
4. **Enact** legislation promoting the protection and safety of children in positive family environments. One bill that seeks to do so is the Adoption Promotion Act of 1997 (H.R. 867).¹⁸

In addition, state officials should:

1. **Focus** the resources of state social service agencies on ways to separate seriously abused children permanently from continually abusive parents.
2. **Encourage** the formation of separate social service units dedicated solely to the work of terminating the parental rights of abusing parents. At present, this work is expected of social workers who also are tasked with uniting the family unit.

18 Patrick F. Fagan, "It Takes a Family: The Adoption Promotion Act of 1997," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 477, April 23, 1997.

3. **Enact** a strict 12-month timeline for adjudication of the long-term parental status of every child in foster care over the age of three, and a 6-month timeline for those under three.
4. **Set aside** a pool of money to be used as bonus awards for the directors of child protective service units who reduce the incidence of child abuse in their areas the most.
5. **Enact** laws requiring child welfare agencies to initiate adoption proceedings for children abandoned by their parents for 3, 6, or 12 months, depending on the age of the child.
6. **Privatize** adoption services at the state level.
7. **Prohibit** the removal of children from their foster parents if the foster parents are willing to adopt them, unless the children are being returned to their legal parents.
8. **Promote** comprehensive intervention in abusive situations by private social service agencies.
9. **Mandate** drug testing of pregnant mothers who are suspected of drug abuse, particularly cocaine abuse. South Carolina, for example, has reduced this problem by offering these mothers two choices: drug rehabilitation treatment or eventual prosecution.
10. **Stop** the practice by agency personnel of blocking transracial adoptions.
11. **Promote** the use of orphanages where appropriate.
12. **Replace** sex education in the schools with abstinence and marriage education.

THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY INCOME AND FAMILY STRUCTURE ON ABUSE

Something is seriously and deeply wrong with a society that has lost its ability to foster stable environments—especially two-parent families with married biological parents—within which children are loved and protected. The barometer of this failing is a vicious one: the increasing abuse of children and the related increase in violent crime.

Typically, the tendency has been to blame poverty for this increase, but there is more to the picture of child abuse in the United States. Research on the homeless and welfare recipients has found that over 40 percent of homeless mothers and housed welfare mothers were sexually molested at least once before they reached adulthood; nearly two-thirds of the overall sample were subjected to severe physical assault by an intimate as adults.¹⁹

The Data on Abuse in the United States

The National Incidence Studies draw the sharpest distinctions between income groups on rates of abuse: In the United States, the poorest exhibit the highest rates of abuse.

The NIS-3 report, however, did not take into consideration the great differences in family composition across the three income groups it evaluated. At that time, major differences in the incidence of marriage within these same income groups did exist. When data from the second criterion are superimposed on the first, a disturbing picture emerges.

19 Ellen L. Bassuk et al., "The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers," *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, Vol. 276, No. 8 (August 28, 1996), pp. 640-646.

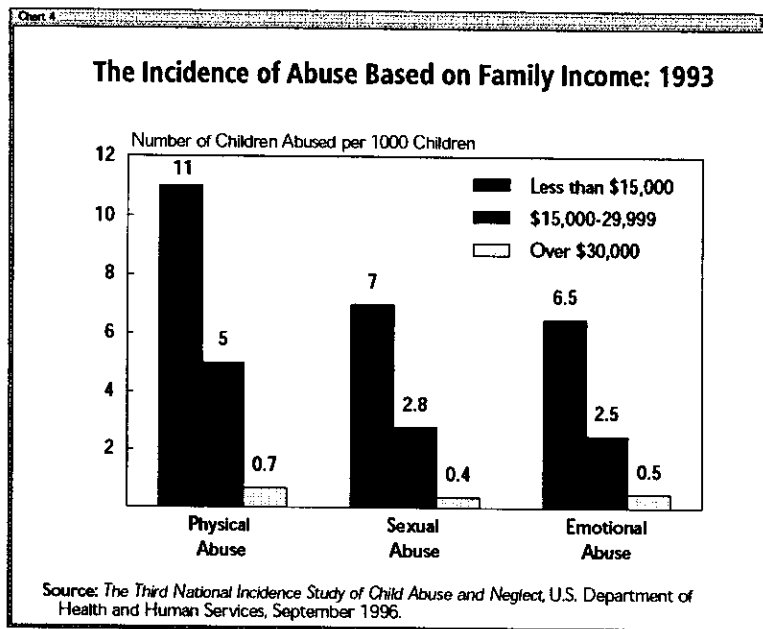
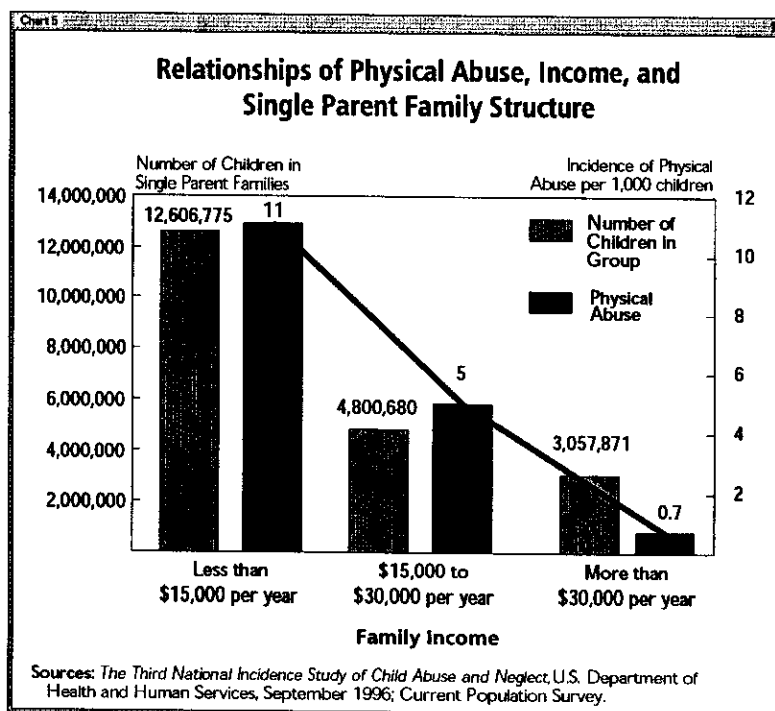


Chart 5 illustrates the relationship for physical abuse; a similar relationship holds for the other types of abuse as well.



The British Data

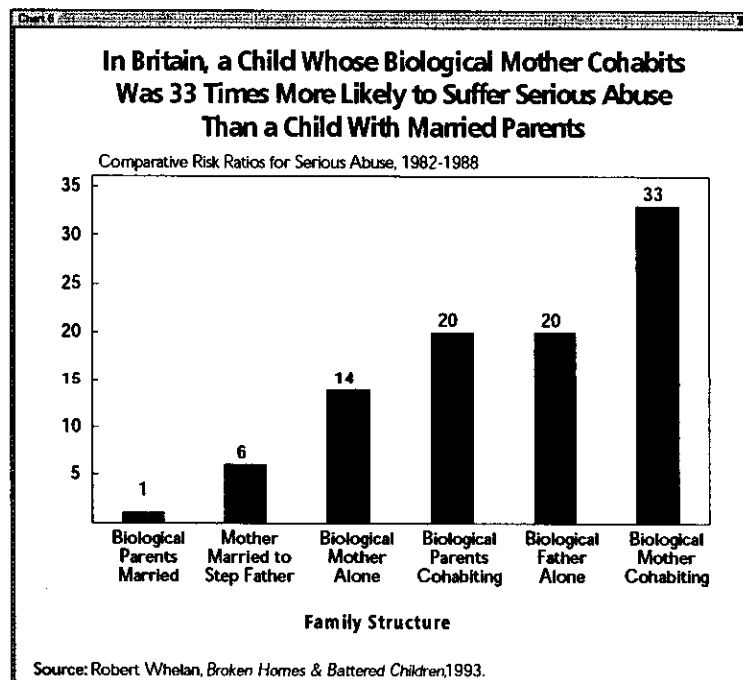
The study conducted by the Family Education Trust in Great Britain meticulously explored the relationship between particular types of family structure and abuse, accumulating clear data on family configuration in actual cases of abuse from 1982 to 1988. The

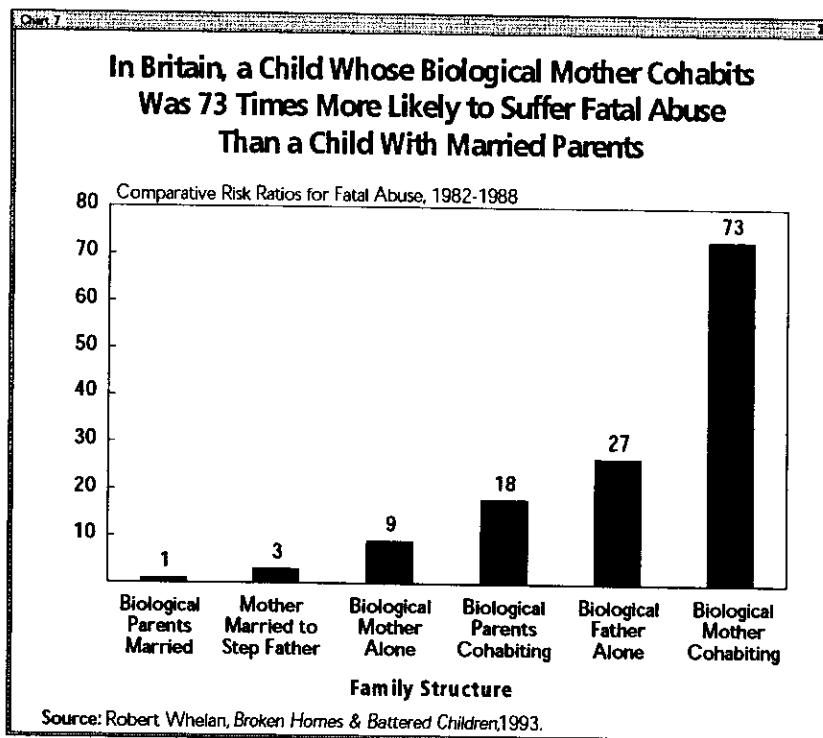
results of this study shed light on a pattern that is highly correlated with child abuse today in both England and the United States: the absence of marriage and the presence of cohabitation.

The evidence from Great Britain is especially significant because, to date, this is the only study to explore the relationship between family structure and abuse. Specifically:

- **The safest environment for a child**—that is, the family environment with the lowest risk ratio for physical abuse—is one in which the biological parents are married and the family has always been intact.
- **The rate of abuse is six times higher** in the second-safest environment: the blended family in which the divorced mother has remarried.
- **The rate of abuse is 14 times higher** if the child is living with a biological mother who lives alone.
- **The rate of abuse is 20 times higher** if the child is living with a biological father who lives alone.
- **The rate of abuse is 20 times higher** if the child is living with biological parents who are not married but are cohabiting.
- **The rate of abuse is 33 times higher** if the child is living with a mother who is cohabiting with another man.

According to the British data, similar risks apply in cases of fatal child abuse. The overwhelming number of child deaths occurred in households in which the child's biological mother was cohabiting with someone who was unrelated to the child.





Cohabitation increases the risk of child abuse immensely, whether the biological parents are cohabiting or the mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend. Both conditions rank very high on the risk scale, but the environment in which a child lives with the mother's cohabiting boyfriend is by far the worst.

Although the marriage of biological parents does not guarantee childhood happiness and security, as the presence of child abuse in these families attests, children are still safest in a married household. Furthermore, an adult decision not to marry but to live with someone out of wedlock provides the most dangerous family configuration for children. Although the most current evidence for this comes from the British study, the situation is more than likely the same in the United States.

Comparing the Studies of Child Abuse

Comparing the specifics of the U.S. and British studies is difficult because the National Incidence Studies did not gather specific data on the different types of family configuration in the United States. The NIS data, therefore, may be misleading. The NIS studies certainly do not illuminate the relationship between family structure and child abuse. For example, NIS-3 has no data on cohabitation and no data on stepfamilies.

There are other major differences on family structure between the British study and the National Incidence Studies. First, the NIS surveys look at child abuse and neglect in only three basic categories of parent presence: both parents, single parents, and neither parent. The British study compares a total of six categories of family configuration. Second, biological parents married and biological parents cohabiting are considered equivalent configurations in NIS-3, whereas the British data indicate a risk of abuse as much as 20 times higher among cohabiting biological parents than among traditionally married biological parents.

On the one point of comparability—the risk ratio between children living with the biological father alone as opposed to children living with the biological mother alone—the results are similar. In the NIS study, the risk of abuse in biological-father-alone households is 1.4 times greater than in biological-mother-alone households. In the British study, the risk ratio for the biological-father-alone households is 1.36 times higher than in biological-mother-alone households.

The data offered by the National Incidence Studies that may be the most misleading are for the either-mother-or-father category. The British category of biological mother cohabiting is not documented in NIS-3, although it is the most dangerous of all family configurations in the British study. Stepfamily configurations (biological mother and married husband) are not reported, although the British data demonstrate that the incidence of abuse in stepfamilies may be as much as six times higher than in the biological-married-parents category. In NIS-3, these categories are collapsed into one. The lack of these distinctions in the U.S. data masks grave risks for children, and therefore may be seriously misleading.

A simple way to correct this shortcoming would be to gather exact data. This could be done quickly by using the police reports for the 2,000 cases of death from child abuse each year. These reports would offer researchers significant information about child abuse and about those who commit this abuse. The first step would be to access the data on family configuration in the most recent year for which records are available. The second would be to ensure that the next National Incidence Study (NIS-4), now in the planning stages, targets these data for its next report on child abuse.

THE BURGEONING SUBCULTURE OF ABUSE

Americans today are gravely concerned about two great problems: the breakdown of traditional institutions and the deterioration of the country's inner cities. Dangerous trends, including a rise in violent crime involving younger and younger children and a resurgence of drug abuse and addiction, afflict communities throughout the country. On top of this, there has been an alarming increase in the amount and intensity of serious child abuse. The subculture of abuse, once hidden behind closed doors, is visible in the breakdown of the institutions that strengthen community.

The High-Abuse Community

Some communities have much higher rates of child abuse than others. In these communities, marriage is less common, individual families are more isolated, alcohol abuse is widespread,²⁰ and drug trafficking is high.²¹ Although men who are abusive tend to be so whether drunk or sober, the abuse is more predictable when they are drunk.²² There is an acceptance among men in high-abuse communities that abusing women is normal, even condoned.²³ As the poverty and family structure data illustrate, family income in these

20 B. Gorney, "Domestic Violence and Chemical Dependency: Dual Problems, Dual Interventions," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, Vol. 21, Issue 2 (1989), pp. 229–238.

21 Almost all the children in news stories in this paper were born with drugs in their blood. See Vicky N. Albert and Richard P. Barth, "Predicting Growth in Child Abuse and Neglect Reports in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Counties," *Social Service Review*, Vol. 70, Issue 1 (1996), pp. 58–82.

22 Gorney, "Domestic Violence and Chemical Dependency."

23 Michael D. Smith, "Male Peer Support of Wife Abuse: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1991), pp. 512–519.

communities generally is less than \$15,000 per year. In addition, vacant housing²⁴ and transience are high.²⁵

Within these communities, stable marriages are being replaced by unstable "families" characterized by frequent changes of partners. For a mother, this results in greater stress and isolation from family and neighbors.²⁶ Frequent family changes also result in frequent role changes for adults in the household, leading to more confusion and more stress for the entire family.²⁷ The neighborhood has an increasing number of third- and fourth-generation out-of-wedlock children who are in poorer health, have lower levels of education and intelligence, achieve less success in school and on the job, and exhibit rising rates of drug addiction, crime, welfare dependence, and out-of-wedlock teen births.²⁸ There is evidence in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, conducted by the U.S. Departments of Labor and HHS, that these patterns are compounding from generation to generation.²⁹

Professor Jill Rosenbaum, Professor of Criminology at California State University, Fullerton, described the family life of a typical female delinquent in 1980.³⁰

In 1980, records were requested on 240 women who had been committed to the California Youth Authority (CYA), the state agency for juvenile offenders.... Very few (seven percent) of these girls came from intact homes families.... By the time these girls were 16, their mothers had been married an average of four times, and there was an average of 4.3 children per family... 76 percent of the girls came from families where there was a record of criminality... violence was present in many of these homes....

In the two parent families (mainly step families)... a great deal of conflict was present. Of these parents, 71 percent fought regularly about the children... Conflict over the use of alcohol was present in 81 percent of the homes.... Many of the girls received very little positive feedback from parents in the home. Of the fathers who were present, 53 percent were viewed by parole officers as rejecting of the girl, as were 47 percent of the mothers. Rejection came in many forms.... The mothers appeared to be not only neglectful, but 96 percent were described as passive and 67 percent as irresponsible....

The mothers of the CYA wards tend to marry young, with 44 percent having had the ward by the time she was 18. These daughters tended to follow in their mothers' footsteps and begin bearing children at an early age.... Parents often encouraged this behavior.... The mothers of the CYA girls did

24 Susan J. Zuravin, "The Ecology of Child Abuse and Neglect: Review of the Literature and Presentation of Data," *Violence and Victims*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1989), pp. 101-120.

25 *Ibid.*

26 D. Kalmuss and J. Seltzer, "A Framework for Studying Family Socialization Over the Life Cycle," *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 10, Issue 3 (1989), pp. 339-358.

27 B. L. Yegidis, "Family Violence: Contemporary Research Findings and Practice Issues," *Community Mental Health Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (December 1992), pp. 519-530.

28 P. Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy."

29 From preliminary analysis by Heritage Foundation staff of intergenerational verbal scores in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1992.

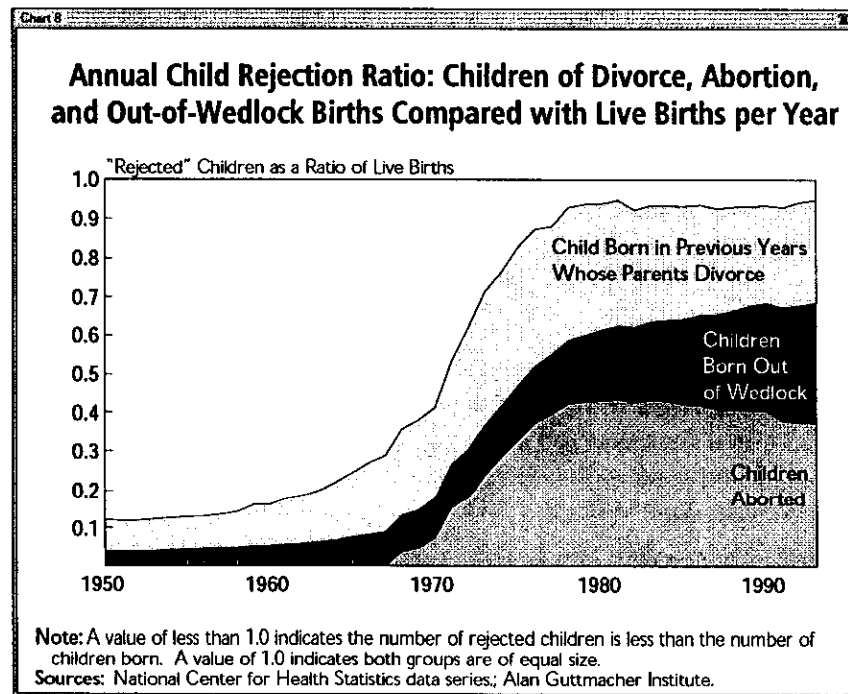
30 J. L. Rosenbaum, "Family Dysfunction & Female Delinquency," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 35 (1989), pp. 31-44.

not know how to be mothers, for they were often children themselves when their children were born, and lacked the emotional resources to instill a sense of trust and security necessary for self esteem and growth. Over time, just trying to survive depleted whatever emotional resources they might once have had.

In the 17 years since this research was conducted, another generation of abused and neglected children has grown up in these conditions. In sharp contrast, the professional literature documents and reinforces what ordinary Americans would expect: that tranquillity and peace in the family and in the marriage help prevent delinquency.³¹

The Abusing Family

Today, more Americans live in a manner that separates the bearing and raising of children from traditional marriage. This undermines the well-being of children. In 1950, for every 100 children born in the United States, 12 entered broken families, either by being born out of wedlock or through their parents' obtaining a divorce that year. In 1992, for every 100 children born in the United States, 60 entered broken families. The picture is even worse if all the children who are aborted each year are taken into consideration. The United States increasingly is becoming a country of second-, third-, and even fourth-generation marriage-less "families." In such circumstances, as the research shows, children are most likely to suffer abuse and neglect, and new subcultures of abuse are more likely to be established.



For example, the British study shows that a child is safest when his biological parents are married and least safe when his mother is cohabiting. In between these two poles are

31 J. Cummings, D. Pellegrini, and C. Notarius, "Children's Responses to Angry Adult Behavior as a Function of Marital Distress and History of Interparent Hostility," *Child Development*, Vol. 60 (October 1989), pp. 1035-1043.

rising rates of abuse for the different family configurations.³² U.S. studies also indicate a significant difference in risk depending on whether the child's mother is married to the biological father or to a stepfather. Children with stepparents are at higher risk for both physical and sexual abuse.³³

According to the professional literature, an abusing family tends not to be the traditional American family—that is, one in which the biological parents are married and raising their own children together. Members of an abusing family often fight over infidelity, and the primary parent frequently will change partners, causing stressful rearrangements of major family responsibilities and conflicts over the children. Other characteristics of these families include poor communication skills, inappropriate expectations of their children, and frequent alcohol and drug abuse. Occasionally the patterns of abuse documented in the professional literature are revealed dramatically in actual occurrences. A 1996 article in *The Washington Post* illustrates how cohabitation can relate to child abuse and the death of a child:

On the night Bridgette was killed it was the child's "sighing" that upset her father's girlfriend, then 20 and a student [who] was studying for an exam. After failed attempts to quiet the child, Davis watched as Meridin, who is not the child's mother, pushed Bridgette's forehead with her finger, picked the child up by her head and flung her toward him. Then he and Meridin stuffed a pair of socks into Bridgette's mouth, placed a hooded sweat shirt backward around the child's head and secured it with duct tape. Bridgette then was placed in a closet and partially covered with clothes. Meanwhile, Davis and Meridin sat down to eat dinner.³⁴

Growing up is much more dangerous with cohabiting couples. So are fights about infidelity and jealousy, a characteristic that may well be key in identifying the abusing family.³⁵ Less able to talk through differences and difficulties and come to agreement,³⁶ cohabiting couples frequently use force and aggression.³⁷ "Normal" and stable families, on the other hand, typically exhibit a high level of agreement between parents and strong affection between parents and children, both of which result in much greater levels of agreement between adolescents and their parents. In addition, there is evidence that stable families participate at a higher rate in religious worship.³⁸ Abuse can be tied to poverty, community, and marital status, even though not all poor, single, inner-city parents become abusers.

32 Whelan, *Broken Homes & Battered Children*.

33 American Medical Association, Council on Scientific Affairs, "Adolescents as Victims of Family Violence," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 270, No. 15 (October 20, 1993), pp. 1850–1856.

34 Robert E. Pierre, "Father Tells of Night He Killed Child; He Says Toddler Upset Girlfriend by 'Sighing,'" *The Washington Post*, September 14, 1996.

35 S. Salzinger, R. Feldman, M. Hammer, and M. Rosario, "Constellations of Family Violence and Their Differential Effects on Children's Behavioral Disturbances," *Child & Family Behavior Therapy*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1992), pp. 23–41.

36 Yegidis, "Family Violence: Contemporary Research Findings." See also Kalmuss and Seltzer, "A Framework for Studying Family Socialization."

37 Linda N. Bly, "Self-Help & Child Abuse: Victims, Victimiziers & the Development of Self-Control," *Contemporary Family Therapy*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1988), pp. 243–255.

38 C. Peek, J. Fischer, and B. Kidwell, "Teenage Violence Toward Parents: A Neglected Dimension of Family Violence," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 47, Issue 4 (1985), pp. 1051–1058. See also Patrick F. Fagan, "Why Religion Matters: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1064, January 25, 1996.

Abusing Men. According to the studies, a boy severely abused by his father is very likely to become a violent adult.³⁹ Men who have witnessed their parents, or a parent and cohabiting non-parent, physically attack each other are three times as likely to hit their own wives or cohabiting females.⁴⁰ Moreover, the effects of these early experiences with abuse and violence begin to show up at the beginning of their relationships with women in later years. Many of the background characteristics of wife-batterers exist in college men who engage in low-level courtship violence.⁴¹ Growing concerns about date rape should lead investigators to explore the early family histories of abusing males in more detail.

For abusing men, violence frequently is a way to regain what they see as their lost control of a relationship.⁴² Conflict over children is likely to provoke this sense of a loss of control, and even to lead a couple to blows.⁴³

Abusing Women. Contrary to public perception, research shows that the most likely physical abuser of a young child will be that child's mother, not a male in the household, although the mother's plight often is complicated by her relationship with a cohabiting male. Abusive mothers frequently are isolated, and lack the parental and extended family or peer support that is necessary to maintain their self-esteem and to buffer the stress of raising children.⁴⁴ Without this support, they often seek care and comfort from their children, treating these children as if they were older than they really are. When children fail to provide this support, the mother can become impatient, angry, and sometimes abusive, even when the child is only a crying infant. Others find any social stimulation from their babies (whether smiling or crying) to be much more irritating than normal mothers do.⁴⁵ Their abuse in turn adds to their anxiety and feelings of helplessness.⁴⁶ If the woman is a second-generation or later generation out-of-wedlock mother, or if she is a teenager, she is less likely to know what the appropriate expectations of a young child should be.

Child-abusing mothers tend to have a distorted view of their children. Not surprisingly, they judge them more negatively than do outsiders and tend to ignore their good points, focusing only on transgressions. Typically, they often see their children's transgressions as more serious than they actually are. The good in their children they ascribe to circumstances, but the bad they ascribe to their character. They tell their children what not to do rather than what to do, and they use force and physical punishment much more frequently than do most other parents.⁴⁷

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- 39 P. Alexander, S. Moore, and E. Alexander, "What Is Transmitted in the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 53 (August 1991), pp. 657-667.
- 40 The U.S. social science literature makes little to no distinction among biological married parents, stepparents, cohabiting biological parents, and cohabiting mother and boyfriend. The layperson needs to be aware that the words "wife," "spouse," and "partner" are used loosely and therefore fail to convey the information that would be helpful in clarifying the picture of the abusing family. See B. Carlson, "Causes and Maintenance of Domestic Violence: An Ecological Analysis," *Social Service Review*, Vol. 58, Issue 4 (1984), pp. 569-587.
- 41 K. MacEwen, "Refining the Intergenerational Transmission Hypothesis," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1994), pp. 350-365.
- 42 Bly, "Self-Help & Child Abuse."
- 43 Carlson, "Causes and Maintenance of Domestic Violence."
- 44 Joel S. Milner, Kevin R. Robertson, and Debbie L. Rogers, "Childhood History of Abuse and Adult Child Abuse Potential," *Journal of Family Violence*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1990), pp. 15-34.
- 45 Ann M. Frodi and Michael E. Lamb, "Child Abusers' Responses to Infant Smiles and Cries," *Child Development*, Vol. 51 (1980), pp. 238-241.
- 46 Philip G. Ney, "Relationship Between Induced Abortion and Child Abuse and Neglect: Four Studies," *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1993), pp. 43-63.

Child-abusing women also lack self-esteem and strength of will (termed “poor ego strength” by psychologists). They are more likely to be guided by their environment than by their own intentions (referred to as “greater external locus of control”). They are more depressed, feel rejecting of their children more often, withdraw from them often, use anger to control them, and in general show less affection toward them.⁴⁸ The child rejected by the mother frequently gets the most abuse. Consider the tragic case of Devonta Young, killed early in 1996 in New York:

During his brief life, little Devonta Young’s mother beat him nearly every day, sometimes twice a day.... She’d use her fists, her shoes and occasionally a belt. Sometimes she would swing him through the air and sometimes she’d throw him onto a hardwood floor.... He weighed 20 pounds and had not gained a pound in the last year.... [He had] severe brain injuries, blows to his face, neck back and stomach.... The little boy was an outcast among Rose Young’s children.... [H]is siblings, who range from 6 months to 9 years were fed before he was and got larger portions.... They also got ice cream and other snacks when Devonta did not. None of the other children has shown signs of abuse.... [A]uthorities have said that Young felt Devonta reminded her too much of a hated ex-lover.⁴⁹

The abusing mother is more likely to function at a lower intellectual level—with less ability to reason and understand her children and with fewer appropriate ways to handle them—than the nurturing mother.⁵⁰ John Bowlby of London’s Tavistock Institute, one of the world’s leading experts on the mother–infant relationship, concluded in a 1986 article that the absence of an early infant attachment between mother and daughter increases the likelihood that the daughter, as an adult, will abuse her own children.⁵¹

The most likely causes of child abuse by a mother, in fact, can be traced to the violence and substance abuse present in the mother’s childhood, followed by the stress and discord in her current household. This is capped by her own victimization,⁵² and leads to increased illness and a hypersensitivity to the annoyances that children cause.⁵³ In the period between her early experience with abusing parents and her later experiences with an abusing “mate,” the future abusing mother frequently becomes more aggressive and deviant, developing a hostile and rebellious way of acting. She will associate more with men of similar hostility and eventually will “marry” them, becoming an abused spouse herself.⁵⁴

47 Yegidis, “Family Violence: Contemporary Research Findings.”

48 Carlson, “Causes and Maintenance of Domestic Violence.”

49 Bill Miller, “Witness Tells of Toddler’s Life of Pain: Judge Rejects Release of Dead Boy’s Mother,” *The Washington Post*, September 10, 1996, p. B1.

50 Milner et al., “Childhood History of Abuse.”

51 J. Bowlby, “Violence in the Family as a Disorder of the Attachment and Caregiving Systems,” *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 44, Issue 1 (1984), pp. 9–27.

52 Salzinger et al., “Constellations of Family Violence.”

53 Milner et al., “Childhood History of Abuse.”

54 Ronald L. Simons, Christine Johnson, Jay Beaman, et al., “Explaining Women’s Double Jeopardy: Factors That Mediate the Association Between Harsh Treatment as a Child and Violence by a Husband,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 55, Issue 3 (1993), pp. 713–723.

Considering this type of family background, it is no wonder that abusing families⁵⁵ and mothers⁵⁶ often are the most isolated. Increasingly, this isolation is most evident in the poorest neighborhoods in the United States. According to the NIS-3 survey, these communities have the highest incidence of serious abuse.

Children are at risk of being abused if they are in families in which they see abuse. Thus, child abuse often is linked closely to abuse of the mother. Significantly, in one study, 90 percent of women residing in shelters for battered women and children said their children were in the same room or the next room while they were being abused.⁵⁷ This is telling because abused mothers were eight times more likely to hurt their children when they were being battered than when they were safe from their violent partners.⁵⁸

Tragically, changes in community moral norms over the past five decades are reflected in the profile of the child-killing mother. As compared with her counterpart 50 years ago, the mother who kills her children today is younger, has more children, and exhibits less of a conscience.⁵⁹ In addition, many of her children are born out of wedlock. The next generation of child abusers is being formed in this environment; many will never know that children can be treated differently.

THE EFFECTS OF ABUSE ON CHILDREN

Abuse affects boys and girls in different ways. Girls are less likely to show the effects in external behavior, but instead will have problems of low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, mood swings, and lower levels of social skills. Boys suffer both internalizing problems and externalizing problems (such as hitting, cruelty to others, truancy, lying, stealing, skipping school, destroying things, and associating with bad friends who get into similar trouble) as well as lower levels of social skills.⁶⁰

Witnessing the Physical Abuse of Parents

Another lesson from the professional literature is clear: Witnessing conflict between parents, even married parents, hurts the child. The now-classic Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study, conducted by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck of Harvard in the late 1940s, found that the incidence of delinquent behavior was higher in intact homes characterized by a degree of conflict and neglect than it was in broken homes without conflict.⁶¹ The more frequent or intense the conflict, the more the child is hurt emotionally, and the more likely he or she is to become delinquent as an adolescent and violent as an adult.⁶² In fact, children who *witness* abuse are more likely to abuse spouses and children when they are

55 Yegidis, "Family Violence: Contemporary Research Findings."

56 Bowlby, "Violence in the Family."

57 Honore M. Hughes, "Impact of Spouse Abuse on Children of Battered Women," *Violence Update*, Vol. 2, No. 12 (August 1992).

58 Jann Jackson, "Intervention with Children Who Have Witnessed Abuse," House of Ruth, Baltimore, Md.

59 R. Weisheit, "When Mothers Kill Their Children," *The Social Science Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1986), pp. 439-448.

60 P. Jaffe, S. Wilson, D. Wolfe, and L. Zak, "Family Violence and Child Adjustment: A Comparative Analysis of Girls' and Boys' Behavioral Symptoms," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 143, Issue 1 (1986), pp. 74-77.

61 Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950).

62 Kevin N. Wright and Karen E. Wright, *Family Life and Delinquency and Crime: A Policymakers' Guide to the Literature*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D.C., 1992, p. 11.

adults than are children who suffer abuse themselves.⁶³ One study indicates that children who saw their mother being abused, compared with those who did not, are 24 times more likely to commit sexual assault crimes, 50 times more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, 74 times more likely to commit crimes against another person, and 6 times more likely to commit suicide.⁶⁴

Witnessing such abuse affects not only future behavior, but also present physical and mental health. Children with their mothers in shelters for battered women show a high incidence of health problems among infants and mood-related disorders among pre-schoolers. Boys have more behavioral "acting-out" problems, and girls tend to have more "emotional" problems (that is, they are more withdrawn and need to stay close to mother). Sometimes these young children are even suicidal.⁶⁵

Physical Abuse by Mothers

The person most likely to abuse a young child is the child's own mother.⁶⁶ Although physical acts of violence by the mother may seem very destructive psychologically, they become most destructive when the mother is not emotionally attached to her child.⁶⁷ This lack of attachment can result in life-long damage to the child's emotional life and capacity for developing social relations, weakening future relationships with peers, spouse, and offspring.⁶⁸

Physical abuse harms the child's emotional and intellectual growth, leads to poor performance in academic areas,⁶⁹ frequently distorts the child's self-image and view of the world,⁷⁰ and leads to depression and a weakened ability to regulate emotions. As a consequence, abused children tend to adopt distorted beliefs about social relations between people,⁷¹ such as the belief that all men are abusers or that the marriage relationship must be exploitative. Abused children tend to know they are different, and knowingly behave in ways likely to get them in trouble with others; they know they are unwanted, and even that they are less healthy physically than their peers.⁷²

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- 63 Laura Crites and Donna Coker, "What Therapists See That Judges May Miss," *The Judges Journal*, Spring 1988.
- 64 Jackson, "Intervention with Children Who Have Witnessed Abuse." See also Javad H. Kashani et al., "Family Violence: Impact on Children," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 31, Issue 2 (March 1992).
- 65 D. Wolfe and P. Jaffe, "Child Abuse and Family Violence as Determinants of Child Psychopathology," *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, Vol. 23, Issue 3 (1991), pp. 282-299.
- 66 Especially if she has aborted previously, according to Philip G. Ney's correlation studies, "Relationship Between Induced Abortion and Child Abuse and Neglect: Four Studies."
- 67 Emery, "Abused and Neglected Children."
- 68 Karen Robert, *Becoming Attached* (New York, N.Y.: Warner Books, 1994). See also Wolfe and Jaffe, "Child Abuse and Family Violence as Determinants," and Richard Gelles and J. Conte, "Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse of Children: A Review of Research in the Eighties," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 52 (November 1990), pp. 1045-1058.
- 69 Rex E. Culp, Ruth Watkins, Harriet Lawrence, et al., "Language Development in Three Groups of Maltreated Children Living in Poverty," National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, Minn., 1991. Notes from National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 15-20, 1991, Denver, Colo. See also David Kurtz, James M. Gaudin, Phyllis T. Howing, et al., "The Consequences of Physical Abuse and Neglect on the School Age Child: Mediating Factors," *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1993), pp. 85-104.
- 70 K. Sternberg, M. Lamb, C. Greenbaum, D. Cicchetti, S. Dawud, R. Cortes, O. Krispin, and F. Lorey, "Effects of Domestic Violence on Children's Behavior Problems and Depression," *Development Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1993), pp. 44-52.
- 71 Wolfe and Jaffe, "Child Abuse and Family Violence as Determinants."

Likelihood That Abused Children Will Become Abusing Adults

The evidence is aptly summarized by SUNY Professor of Psychology Cathy Spatz Widom: "Violence begets violence."⁷³ Witnessing or experiencing abuse and violence increases the likelihood that a child will become a violent adult.⁷⁴ Children react to quarreling parents by disobeying, crying, hitting other children, and, in general, becoming much more antisocial than their peers.⁷⁵

The world does not respond favorably to this type of antisocial behavior, even in the little world of kindergarten. Ronald Simons, Professor of Sociology at Iowa State University, notes that "Ineffective parents produce aggressive first graders who are rejected by their peers and as a consequence must form friendships with other deviant youth."⁷⁶ Likewise, Gerald Patterson of the Oregon Social Learning Center writes that "Poor social skills, characterized by aversive or coercive interaction styles, lead directly to rejection by normal peers."⁷⁷ Patterson, a leading expert on parenting skills, also makes the point that peer rejection tends to be linked to "ineffective parenting": "Specifically, early parent failures contribute to later skills deficits. Parent skills in solving family problems correlate significantly with measures of academic skill and peer relations."⁷⁸ The isolated mother in a very poor neighborhood has little opportunity to encounter and absorb effective skills.

As noted earlier, even men in college who witnessed or experienced domestic violence at an early age often begin demonstrating violent tendencies during courtship.⁷⁹ Luckily, not all children who grow up witnessing abuse between their parents or experiencing abuse themselves go on to become abusers; however, approximately one-third of them do.⁸⁰

Effects of the Duration and Intensity of Child Abuse

Research shows that the longer the child experiences abuse, the more likely he or she is to become an adult abuser,⁸¹ and the more varied the forms of abuse, the deeper the effect will be.⁸² In addition, intense but unpredictable episodes can cause a massive increase in

72 Sternberg et al., "Effects of Domestic Violence."

73 Cathy Spatz Widom, "Does Violence Beget Violence?" *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 106 (1989), pp. 3-28.

74 MacEwen, "Refining the Intergenerational Transmission Hypothesis." See also Patricia R. Koski, "Family Violence and Nonfamily Deviance: Taking Stock of the Literature," *Marriage and Family Review*, Vol. 12 (1988), pp. 23-46.

75 E. M. Cummings, "Coping With Background Anger in Early Childhood," *Child Development*, Vol. 58 (1987), pp. 976-984.

76 Ronald L. Simons and Joan F. Robertson, "The Impact of Parenting Factors, Deviant Peers, and Coping Style Upon Adolescent Drug Use," *Family Relations*, Vol. 38 (1989), pp. 273-281.

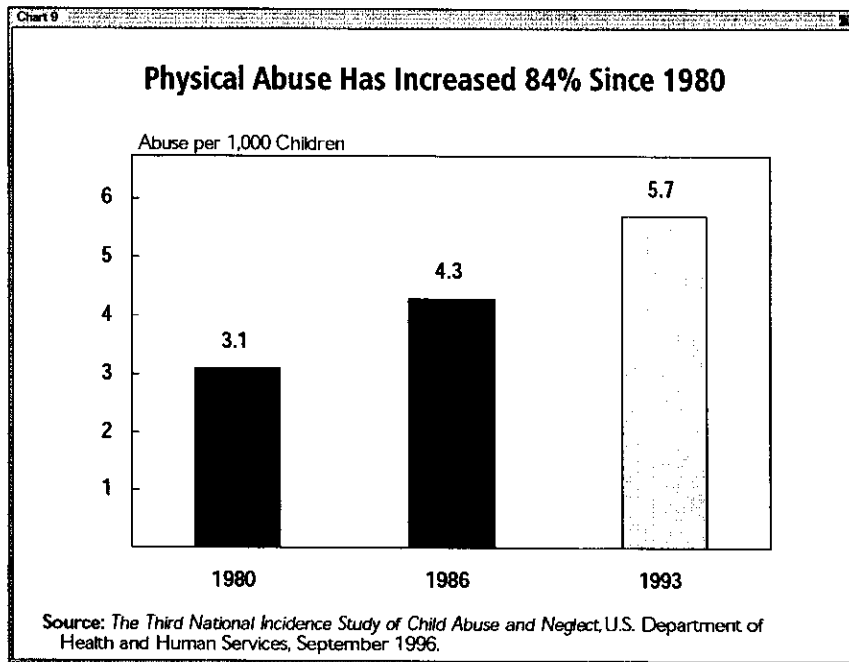
77 John M. Gottman and John T. Parkhurst, "A Developmental Theory of Friendship and Acquaintanceship Processes," *Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology* (1978), cited in Gerald R. Patterson and Thomas J. Dishion, "Contributions of Families and Peers to Delinquency," *Criminology*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1985).

78 Patterson and Dishion, "Contributions of Families and Peers to Delinquency."

79 K. M. Ryan, "Do Courtship-Violent Men Have Characteristics Associated with a 'Battering Personality'?" *Journal of Family Violence*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995), pp. 99-120. See also MacEwen, "Refining the Intergenerational Transmission Hypothesis."

80 For an overview of research and factors, see Sharon D. Herzberger, *Violence Within the Family* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), chapters 4-8. See also Jeffrey Fagan and Sandra Wexler, "Family Origins of Violent Delinquents," *Criminology*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1987), pp. 643-669. For a more detailed overview of the delinquency-abuse literature, see Phyllis T. Howing, J. S. Wodarski, P. D. Kurtz, J. M. Gaudin, and E. Neligan Herbst, "Child Abuse and Delinquency: The Empirical Data and Theoretical Links," *Social Work* (1990), pp. 244-249.

81 Milner et al., "Childhood History of Abuse."



long-lasting fear and anxiety.⁸³ The more these episodes occur, the more likely the child is to see hitting back as a form of reciprocal justice in the give and take of human relationships.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the younger the child is when the abuse starts, the deeper the effects. Severe abuse that began before a child was 46 months old was more likely to induce Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),⁸⁵ while abuse that started after the child was 61 months old was not likely to induce PTSD. Understandably, children who were less than 46 months old also were more likely to have mothers who exhibited symptoms of PTSD from their own past experience of abuse.⁸⁶

There are, it should be noted, circumstances that lessen the impact of abuse. If the consequences of abuse are small, or if the child does not like the aggressive parent or cohabiting adult, then there is less likelihood that a child will become an abuser as an adult.⁸⁷

- 82 Melissa A. Polusny and Victoria M. Follette, "Cumulative Trauma; The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse, Adult Sexual Assault, and Spouse Abuse," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1996), pp. 25-35.
- 83 Wolfe and Jaffe, "Child Abuse and Family Violence as Determinants."
- 84 R. Astor, "Children's Moral Reasoning About Family and Peer Violence: The Role of Provocation and Retribution," *Child Development*, Vol. 65, Issue 4 (1994), pp. 1054-1067.
- 85 "In an apparent attempt to compensate for chronic hyperarousal, traumatized people seem to shut down—on a behavioral level, by avoiding stimuli reminiscent of the trauma; on a psychobiological level, by emotional numbing, which extends to both trauma-related and everyday experience. Thus, people with chronic PTSD tend to suffer from numbing of responsiveness to the environment, punctuated by intermittent hyperarousal in response to conditional traumatic stimuli." B. A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Post Traumatic Stress*, Harvard Medical School, from the Internet at <http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~dvb/vanderk4.htm>.
- 86 Richard Famularo, Terence Fenton, Robert Kinscherff, et al., "Maternal and Child Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Cases of Child Maltreatment," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1994), pp. 27-36.
- 87 MacEwen, "Refining the Intergenerational Transmission Hypothesis."

Effects of Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse, from unwanted kissing and fondling to sexual intercourse, has numerous—and possibly some of the most debilitating—social effects on a child. Most sexual abuse takes place within the family setting, and most child sexual abuse is done by men, not women.⁸⁸ Men who sexually abuse children frequently have histories of impoverished early infant emotional attachment to their mothers, desertion by fathers, family dissolution, and early departure from home. These deficits have increased significantly in recent decades and lead to severe emotional dependence on others later in life.⁸⁹

The social isolation of many at-risk families increases the likelihood of psychosexual distortions because the child has fewer opportunities to experience the good influence of other adults or the friendship of other children.⁹⁰ This isolation also makes it easier for adults to hide even massive abuse. Last year, for example, an indictment with a total of 1,200 counts of abuse was handed down in Chicago against the father and mother of a 5-year-old boy and his three sisters, aged 10, 11, and 12: “Four children [were] beaten, sexually assaulted, injected with drugs and fed rats and roaches, over and over again. . . . At least every child was abused once a week. Everybody had sex with everybody.”⁹¹

Particularly serious or prolonged abuse leads to higher rates of crime and delinquency.⁹² The FBI’s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime has noted that the three factors most frequently present in the development of a killer are (1) trauma in the form of physical or sexual abuse; (2) failure of the child to attach readily to his mother; and (3) failure of the parents to serve as role models for the developing child.⁹³ In an abusing family, the likelihood that all three factors are operating is greater. Child sexual abuse also can play a major role in shaping the future sex criminal. The National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime has confirmed the association between early sexual abuse and later psychosexual disorders.⁹⁴

As in physical abuse, the more frequent and severe the sexual abuse and the longer its duration, the more depressed and self-destructive the abused child becomes as an adult.⁹⁵ This holds true for both boys and girls. Frequently, clinical depression is accompanied by PTSD and its attendant debilities.⁹⁶ Furthermore, a sexually abused child feels less loved

88 Sedlak and Broadhurst, *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*, pp. 6–9.

89 Gabrino and Gilliam, 1980, from Ellen Vevier and Deborah J. Tharinger, “Child Sexual Abuse: A Review and Intervention Framework for the School Psychologist,” *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 24 (1986), pp. 293–311.

90 Vevier and Tharinger, “Child Sexual Abuse.”

91 Maurice Possley and Andrew Martin, “Father Charged in Hellish Abuse,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 6, 1996, p. 1.

92 Lewis et al., “Neuropsychiatric, Psychoeducational and Family Characteristics of 14 Juveniles.” See also Ann W. Burgess, Carol R. Hartman, and Arlene McCormack, “Abused to Abuser: Antecedents of Socially Deviant Behaviors,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 144, No. 11 (1987), pp. 1431–1436, and C. S. Widom, “Child Abuse, Neglect and Violent Criminal Behavior,” *Criminology*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1989), pp. 251–271.

93 Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, *Criminal Investigative Analysis: Sexual Homicide*.

94 *Ibid.* See also M. E. Ford and J. A. Linney, “Comparative Analysis of Juvenile Sexual Offenders, Violent Nonsexual Offenders, and Status Offenders,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995), pp. 56–70.

95 Arne C. Boudewyn and Joan H. Liem, “Childhood Sexual Abuse as a Precursor to Depression and Self-Destructive Behavior in Adulthood,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1995), pp. 445–459.

96 Elena F. Brand, Cheryl A. King, Eva Olson, Neera Ghaziuddin, and Michael Naylor, “Depressed Adolescents with a History of Sexual Abuse: Diagnostic Comorbidity and Suicidality,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1996), pp. 34–41.

and accepted by God, has less trust in God, and is less likely to believe in His purpose for the future.⁹⁷

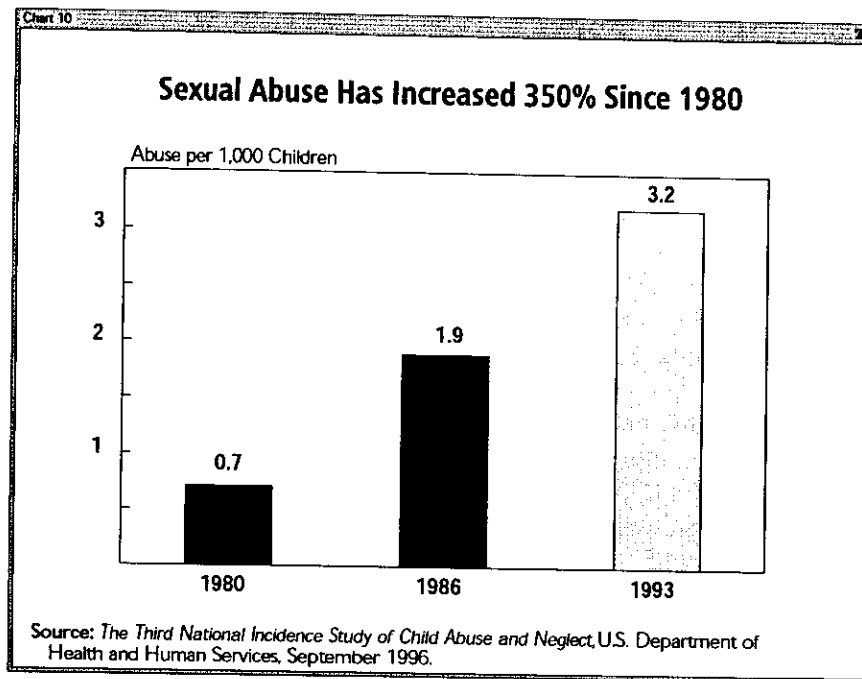
Compared with non-abused adolescents, teenagers who were sexually abused as children are more depressed, more anxious, more self-conscious, and more prone to poor self-esteem.⁹⁸ They are more likely to use drugs and be delinquent, have poor relationships with the rest of their families, feel they have received less emotional support from families and friends, and perform more poorly at school; they also tend to move between domiciles more frequently, thus adding to their levels of anxiety and stress.⁹⁹

Sexual abuse distorts the child's inner psychosexual dynamics, and its effects become more apparent in adolescence and adulthood, particularly if the abuse is forced or violent.¹⁰⁰ Unlike other maltreated children, sexually abused children are much more likely to display behaviors indicative of deviant or precocious sexual development,¹⁰¹ including severe difficulty in establishing and maintaining close friendships¹⁰² and engaging in high-risk sexual behavior.¹⁰³ These behaviors may persist in some form into adulthood,¹⁰⁴ leading to further sexual revictimization.¹⁰⁵ Women who have had more than ten sexual partners (which also puts them at high risk for a number of serious medical problems) are more than three times as likely to have had sexual experiences forced upon them as children.¹⁰⁶ In addition, boys who are victims of incest are inclined to engage in sexually abusive behavior as fathers.¹⁰⁷

Sexual abuse frequently leads to truancy and running away from home. In 1991, the National Association of Social Workers conducted a survey of 360 agencies that provided basic shelter and crisis services to runaway and homeless youths. The responses indicated that more than 60 percent of the youths served had been seriously abused by their parents, and that 23 percent of them had been sexually abused.¹⁰⁸ Although teenage prostitution

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- 97 Terese A. Hall, "Spiritual Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse in Adult Christian Women," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1995), pp. 129-134.
- 98 K. B. Morrow and G. T. Sorell, "Factors Affecting Self Esteem, Depression, and Negative Behaviors in Sexually Abused Female Adolescents," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 51 (1989), pp. 677-686.
- 99 J. B. Lanz, "Psychological, Behavioral, and Social Characteristics Associated with Early Forced Sexual Intercourse Among Pregnant Adolescents," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1995), pp. 188-200. See also Nancy Dodge Reyome, "A Comparison of the School Performance of Sexually Abused, Neglected and Non-Maltreated Children," *Child Study Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1993), pp. 17-38.
- 100 Edward O. Laumann, *Early Sexual Experiences: How Voluntary? How Violent?* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1992).
- 101 Gelles and Conte, "Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse."
- 102 Sidney R. Ornduff and Robert M. Kelsey, "Object Relations of Sexually and Physically Abused Female Children: A TAT Analysis," *Journal of Personality Assessment*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (1996), pp. 91-105. See also Lanz, "Psychological, Behavioral, and Social Characteristics."
- 103 Clare E. Cosentino, Heino F. L. Meyer-Bahlburg, Judith L. Alpert, Sharon L. Weinberg, and Richard Gaines, "Sexual Behavior Problems and Psychopathology Symptoms in Sexually Abused Girls," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 34, No. 8 (1995), pp. 1033-1042.
- 104 Wolfe and Jaffe, "Child Abuse and Family Violence as Determinants." See also Laumann, *Early Sexual Experiences*.
- 105 Melissa A. Polusny and Victoria M. Follette, "Long-Term Correlates of Child Sexual Abuse: Theory and Review of the Empirical Literature," *Applied & Preventive Psychology*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1995), pp. 143-166.
- 106 Laumann, *Early Sexual Experiences*.
- 107 Arlene McCormick, Frances E. Rokous, and Robert R. Hazelwood, "An Exploration of Incest in the Childhood Development of Serial Rapists," *Journal of Family Violence*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1992), pp. 219-228.
- 108 National Association of Social Workers, "Findings from a National Survey of Shelters for Runaway and Homeless Youth," 1991.

often is preceded by a child's running away from home, it has deeper roots in early sexual abuse in the home.¹⁰⁹



In light of all this evidence, the increase in the incidence of sexual abuse documented in the NIS-1, NIS-2, and NIS-3 studies augurs poorly for the country.

Effects of Child Abuse on Teenage Youths

As recounted in the Heritage Foundation publication "The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community," a broken and abusing family is the principal factor in the emergence of the violent criminal. For every 10 percent rise in out-of-wedlock births, serious violent crime increases 17 percent.¹¹⁰ The families of incarcerated teenagers the world over seem to share similar debilitating characteristics: the presence of physical abuse, heightened conflicts, alcohol abuse, and absent or broken marriages.¹¹¹

A young individual's growth in violent behavior could be characterized as part of the violent family cycle: Youths who abuse their parents tend to come from families in which violence, disruption, and discord are everyday occurrences. They learn early that force achieves results. These same teenagers tend to have a low tolerance for frustration and few skills with which to cope with different people in different situations. They are immature, are not very verbal, and find it difficult to understand cause-and-effect relationships. From their earliest years, they have found their parents to be, intermittently, both punitive and lax, using force and violence to control them while at the same time lacking standards themselves. By their teenage years, these children have learned to react to their parents with a similar display of violence and force.¹¹²

109 Magnus J. Seng, "Child Abuse and Prostitution: A Comparative Analysis," *Adolescence*, Vol. 24 (1989), pp. 665-675.

110 P. Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime."

111 E. Osuna, C. Alarcon, and A. Luna, "Family Violence as a Determinant Factor in Juvenile Maladjustment," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, Vol. 37, Issue 6 (1992), pp. 1633-1639.

Teens from abusive families will fight or flee. They become involved in crime, especially violent crime. Almost half of violent teenage crimes occur in homes during family arguments.¹¹³ These young people frequently become involved in gangs or run away from home, and then become homeless or involved in prostitution. Three-quarters of homeless youths seeking services in shelters have problems, from moderate to severe, that stem from physical and sexual abuse, violence in the family, drug and alcohol abuse by parents, depression, and school problems.¹¹⁴

It is important to consider that parents who abuse their children from early childhood through the teenage years probably were abused as children themselves. Parents who begin to be violent with their children when the latter reach their teenage years tend not to have been abused as children.¹¹⁵

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE IN PROTECTING CHILDREN

Child abuse is the opposite of child love. The married family is based deliberately on a decision by the husband and wife to build their lives and family on the love they have for each other, made public in a solemn contract before God and community. That such a decision would have a significant impact on the incidence of child abuse is common sense. That abuse is higher when the structure of family love is rejected or broken likewise makes sense. Measuring the differential impact of these family structures in the national surveys (intended to guide the country and its leaders on public policy) is therefore essential, and will have grave implications for the life and death of many children in the United States.

Although the sexual act can be an occasion of great intimacy and love resulting in new life, it also can be a violent or meaningless act resulting in profound alienation and fragmentation of the family. Among America's poor, the latter is increasingly the case: 72 percent of children whose families have incomes below \$15,000 are living in broken families.¹¹⁶ These poorest of the poor, more than anyone else, need the support of an intimate community and can least afford the community's destruction. The children of the poor have the greatest need for married families, yet they are the least likely to have them.

Traditionally, the variable used to explain a rise in the incidence of child abuse has been poverty. The most recent National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect illustrates this pro-poverty bias.¹¹⁷ However, Richard Gelles of the University of Rhode Island Department of Sociology, a recognized expert on abuse, has shown that it is the presence or absence of adult support that makes the greatest difference in determining whether child abuse is likely to be present or absent within poor families.¹¹⁸

112 Peek et al., "Teenage Violence Toward Parents."

113 Kratcoski, "Child Abuse and Violence Against the Family," pp. 435-444.

114 U.S. General Accounting Office, *Homeless and Runaway Youth Receiving Services at Federally Funded Shelters*, Report to the Honorable Paul Simon, U.S. Senate, December 1989.

115 AMA Council on Scientific Affairs, "Adolescents as Victims of Family Violence."

116 U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of the Census, *Current Population Survey, 1993*.

117 Sedlak and Broadhurst, *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*, p. 55.

118 Richard Gelles, "Poverty and Violence Toward Children," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (1992), pp. 258-274, and "Child Abuse and Violence in Single Parent Families," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 59 (October 1989), pp. 492-501.

There is strong evidence from the British research that the structure of the family is related directly to the safety of mothers and children. The most dangerous place for a woman and her child is an environment in which she is cohabiting with a boyfriend who is not the father of her children. The rate of child abuse may be as much as 33 times higher. Even cohabiting with the children's father may lead to a rate of abuse as much as 20 times higher. Marriage provides the safest environment for children. It therefore truly makes a difference in advancing the safety and well-being of America's children.

WHAT THE DATA MEAN FOR AMERICANS

The United States will face a continuing rise in the incidence of child abuse because too many Americans continue to tolerate the conditions that debilitate the family and weaken the child. The American demographic picture of abusive families could be likened to a population funnel of alienation and rejection: wide open at the top, with out-of-wedlock births, divorce, and abortions; and narrowing down to families with children who suffer serious abuse and neglect. This is particularly true when the compounding effects of two, three, and four generations of broken families have created a subculture of abuse in the local community.

While the United States tries to figure out how to rebuild its broken families and communities, its religious, social, and political leaders must do all they can to keep intact those families that have adhered to a tradition of stable married life. The family environment provided by married biological parents is the primary resource for tomorrow's well-adjusted children, for the future of the country, and for the protection of both women and children.

At this stage of the discussion, considering that U.S. policymakers do not yet have more definitive data on child abuse in different family configurations in the United States, and considering that the British findings violate neither common sense nor the peer review literature synthesized in this paper, the British findings should be used as a benchmark until more accurate numbers can be established.

Congress, however, easily could redress this gap by commissioning the GAO or the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect to conduct further studies of the U.S. data. A starting point might be to look into cases in which children have died of abuse. Police records in such cases will be the most complete because of the necessary criminal investigations that were conducted. As the British data show, the risks of serious abuse and fatal abuse are similar.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Political leaders must ensure that the child protection system works well to defend those most in danger. At present, it does not. Children who have suffered severe abuse need to be rescued and given safe and permanent homes with adoptive families, in good orphanages, or (where these are not available) in stable foster homes. A much bigger task also has to be undertaken, however. This task is nothing less than the turnaround of American society, and it cannot be undertaken successfully without the involvement of community, church, and civic leaders.

Although this goal cannot be accomplished simply through legislation, great political leaders—those who guide society out of deeply troubled times—can make use of

5. **Enact laws requiring child welfare agencies to initiate adoption proceedings for children abandoned by their parents** for 3, 6, or 12 months, depending on the age of the child. Children abandoned for months are children with seriously neglectful parents.¹²⁶
6. **Privatize adoption services at the state level**, following the lead taken by Michigan. Privatizing adoption services by returning them to nonprofit private groups like Catholic Charities, Lutheran Services, and their secular counterparts frees scarce personnel within child welfare agencies to attend to the growing number of seriously abused children. Both the Institute for Children—a group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that specializes in reducing the incidence of foster care and lengths of placement—and the National Council for Adoption have developed expertise in guiding other states, including Massachusetts, Texas, and South Carolina, in their privatization efforts.¹²⁷ The recent enactment of a \$5,000 federal tax credit for adopting parents that can be spent on private adoptions also will help relieve state and local authorities.¹²⁸
7. **Prohibit the removal of children from their foster parents if the foster parents are willing to adopt them, except when the children are being returned to their legal parents.** State legislation should permit foster parents to initiate adoption proceedings. If a responsible state agency determines that foster parents are suitable for a child's foster care, these parents should qualify automatically as suitable for adoption as well. Many foster parents are willing to adopt the children they have fostered once these children become available for adoption; but because of such obstacles as prohibitions on transracial adoptions, they frequently are denied the chance to adopt children who have become attached to them.¹²⁹
8. **Promote comprehensive intervention in abusive situations by private social service agencies.** Mom's Houses—homes for teenage single mothers located in Pennsylvania and New York and founded by Peg Luscik—demonstrate how to help those at risk of abusing their children. By providing a home environment, support for the completion of education, guidance on marriage choices, and friendship and companionship, Mom's Houses give the young mothers who live in them a second chance. Many similar undertakings will be needed if the lives of abused children are to be turned around.
9. **Mandate drug testing of pregnant mothers who are suspected of drug abuse, particularly cocaine abuse.** Because of the high incidence of serious child abuse among drug-addicted mothers and the pain and damage inflicted on cocaine-addicted babies—a condition affecting 350,000 children a year—states should duplicate South Carolina's drug testing program.¹³⁰

126 *Ibid.*

127 For more information, see Conna Craig, "Private Approaches to Foster Care and Adoption," Reason Foundation, Los Angeles, Calif., forthcoming.

128 William L. Pierce, Ph.D., testimony on behalf of National Council for Adoption on H.R. 11 (the Family Reinforcement Act) before Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, 103rd Cong., 2nd Sess., January 18, 1995.

129 Bevan, "Foster Care."

130 Charles Molony Condon, "Clinton's Cocaine Babies: Why Won't the Administration Let Us Save Our Children?" *Policy Review*, Spring 1995.

10. **Stop the practice by agency personnel of blocking transracial adoptions.** One of the solutions to child abuse is the quick rescue and, if judged necessary, expedited adoption of an abused child by a loving family. Besides working to increase the pool of minority parents and to expand the rate of adoptions by pre-screened and ready-to-adopt minority parents, states should ensure that there are no obstacles to transracial adoption when it is in the best interest of the child (for example, when there are no minority parents immediately available to adopt). When the child becomes ready for adoption, his need is immediate and acute. Minority groups concerned about transracial adoption should ensure that a pool of pre-screened, qualified minority parents is ready to adopt all categories of needy children: older children, older male children, sibling groups of children, and medically needy children.¹³¹
11. **Promote the use of orphanages where appropriate.** Despite Hillary Clinton's dismissal of the idea as "absurd" when it was proposed by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, using orphanages for abandoned or abused children makes great sense. A well-run orphanage can do a great deal of good. Prominent leaders—for example, Tom Monaghan, Founder and CEO of Domino's Pizza; Jude Dougherty, Ph.D., the Dean of Philosophy at Catholic University; and Richard McKenzie,¹³² a nationally syndicated columnist who holds the Walter B. Gerken Chair of Enterprise and Society at the University of California at Irvine—have spoken publicly about how much they owe personally to such homes.
12. **Replace sex education in the schools with abstinence and marriage education.** Marriage education, including instruction in what is required to enter into and sustain a lifelong marriage, ought to replace sex education in America's schools. Marriage is the center beam of society, but there are serious signs that more young people today are rejecting it, as sociologist David Blankenhorn discusses in *Fatherless America*.¹³³ This major cultural crisis should command the energies of religious and community leaders looking for ways to reduce the incidence of child abuse along with a host of other social problems.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental changes are needed to correct the social drift toward family and community disintegration in the United States. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned efforts of the past three decades have not stemmed the tide. But they have done one thing: They have shown that the changes that must be made are beyond the capacity of government.

Many of these fundamental changes must take place within the most basic of institutions: the family unit. They must be supported by changes in local communities and reinforced by community institutions like the churches and their ancillary organizations that help the needy, as well as by programs like Big Brothers and Big Sisters. These institutions and organizations can have the greatest effect in reestablishing the centrality of marriage and promoting the married family unit as the best environment for the raising of America's children.

131 Pierce, testimony on H.R. 11.

132 See Richard McKenzie, *The Home: A Memoir of Growing Up in an Orphanage* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1996).

133 David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1995).

If the safest place for children is with their married biological parents, it follows that supporting marriage should be the foremost policy goal of every group concerned with the well-being of children. Local leaders, including members of the clergy and charitable organizations, can direct those who exhibit the characteristics of potential child abusers into intense marriage preparation programs to learn the skills and attitudes needed before they get married or start a family. Religious leaders play a vital role in strengthening the status of marriage and the family in communities of abuse. Not only has involvement in weekly worship been associated with the enduring intactness of marriage,¹³⁴ but church affiliation in general has offered families a community of support. These two conditions have been shown to reduce significantly the incidence of child abuse.

Child abuse and neglect must be added to the long list of grave risks that out-of-wedlock birth and divorce place on the development of America's youth.¹³⁵ In myriad ways (such as physical and mental health, cognitive and work abilities, addiction, crime, economic dependency, and unexpected pregnancy), illegitimacy weakens and warps significant numbers of children. Adult irresponsibility and lack of commitment in matters of sex, love, and marriage result in massive suffering for America's children. A Heritage Foundation study of the real root causes of violent juvenile crime¹³⁶ illuminates how Americans are losing one of their most basic freedoms: the freedom to live and walk around safely in their own communities. Child abuse, after robbing children of a happy childhood, is contributing to the growing numbers of violent young people who diminish these freedoms.

Fatal abuse, serious abuse, and neglect are lowest in households with married biological parents, and highest in households in which the biological mother cohabits with someone who is not the parent.¹³⁷ Cohabitation seems to be the biggest culprit in fostering the subculture of child abuse. That children whose parents are not married would be more at risk, aggressive, depressed, and disturbed is exactly what common sense would predict when parents refuse to build the small communities of love and nurturing called married families. If American society continues to give equal standing to married family life, single-parent family life, and cohabitation, it must expect continued high levels of child abuse. The future looks dismal for the children unless intellectual and cultural leaders recover their respect for the traditional institution of marriage and their courage to defend and promote it. Until that day, the profound love and commitment of adults to raise and nurture their offspring together will continue to decline, and children will continue to suffer.

The prognosis is bleak for the United States. The underlying demographic drift in family structure indicates the continuing breakdown of the American family, which can lead only to a continuing rise in child abuse. Until there is a turnaround in the number of out-of-wedlock births and a downturn in divorces, the United States will continue to build a culture of rejection. Nothing other than the fundamental reform of family life and sexual mores can promise a significant change for the better.

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134 P. Fagan, "Why Religion Matters."

135 P. Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy." See also U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing*, September 1995.

136 P. Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime."

137 Whelan, *Broken Homes & Battered Children*.

