



The Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect among Children with Disabilities

Jennifer Noelke

April 29, 2009

University of Minnesota School of Social Work



Incidence Rates:

- Westat, Inc. (1993): NIS-2 data
 - Children with disabilities were 1.7 times more likely to experience maltreatment compared to children without disabilities
- Sullivan & Knutson (2000): Epidemiological study
 - 9% rate of maltreatment for children without disabilities vs. 31% rate for children with disabilities
 - Children with disabilities were 3.4% more likely to be abused
- Benedict, White, & Hall (1990): Children with “multiple disabilities”
 - Rates of abuse among a sample of children with mental retardation and cerebral palsy was not higher than what is found in the general population of children.
- Sobsey, Randall, and Parilla (1997): Effects of gender and disability status on type of abuse
 - Boys with disabilities showed a greater likelihood of being neglected and physically abused compared to the non-disabled sample of abused children
 - Twice as many boys with boys disabilities were victims of sexual abuse than what was expected on the basis of the non-disabled sample (girls with disabilities still more at risk for sexual abuse overall)

Prevalence of Maltreatment by Disability Status

(Sullivan & Knutson, 2000)

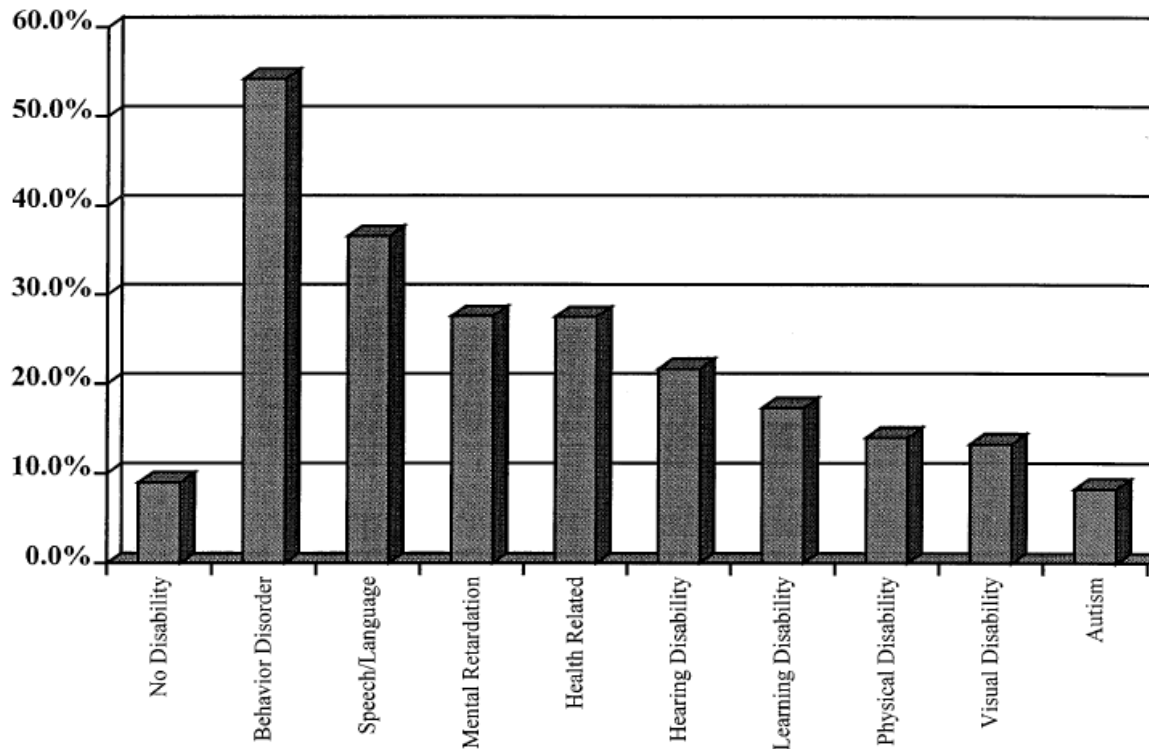


Figure 2. Prevalence of maltreatment by disability status.

Relative Maltreatment Risks for Specific Disabilities

(Sullivan & Knutson, 2000)

1266

P. M. Sullivan and J. F. Knutson

Table 4. Relative Maltreatment Risks for Specific Disabilities

	Visual Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Speech/ Language	Mental Retardation	Behavior Disorder	Learning Disability	Health Impairment	Autism	Physical
Neglect	1.5	2.3	4.7	3.7	6.7	2.0	3.4	1.3	1.8
Physical Abuse	**	3.8	4.7	3.8	7.3	2.0	3.3	**	1.2
Emotional Abuse	2.0	2.0	6.6	3.8	7.0	2.0	3.4	**	2.5
Sexual Abuse	1.2	1.2	2.9	4.0	5.5	1.8	2.0	**	2.0

**No increased risk.



Explanatory Factors

- Child abuse and neglect can be a cause of disability and a response by the caregiver to disability status
 - Westat, Inc. (1993): Estimated by CPS workers that disability contributed to the abuse in 47% of cases
 - 37% of cases the abuse contributed to or caused the disability
- Familial stress:
 - Burrell et al. (1994): families with children with disabilities experience more stress which heightened their "child abuse potential."
 - Benedict, White, Wulff, & Hall (1990): more severely disabled children who needed help with feeding were less likely to be abused than children with less severe disabilities who had age-appropriate feeding skills
- Cultural factors may mediate the potential between child disability status and abuse
- Other factors: attachment, heightened contact with hospital professionals, substance abuse of caregiver, social devaluation of disabilities



Prevention Efforts

(Child Welfare Information Gateway)

- Respite and Crisis Care
- Family Resource Centers
- Home-visiting programs
- Parent-Education
- Parent Support Groups
- Early Childhood Education



Challenges for Child Protective Services

- Orellove, Hollahan, & Myles (2000): Training Needs for Child Protection Workers
 - Child protection workers showed “significant limitations in knowledge” about how to respond to and recognize maltreatment among children with disabilities
 - Training needed on how to interview children with developmental disabilities
 - Training needed on resources available for children with disabilities
- Shannon & Agorastou (2006): Identifying Children with Developmental Disabilities by Child Protection Services
 - Found that less than one-half of states identified children with developmental disabilities
 - Few states used disability information in developing the service plan, which can lead to a failure of services to meet the “unique needs” of children with disabilities and their families
 - 20 states offer mandatory training on identification of disability to CPS workers

Actions Taken by CPS

(Prevent Child Abuse America, 2002)

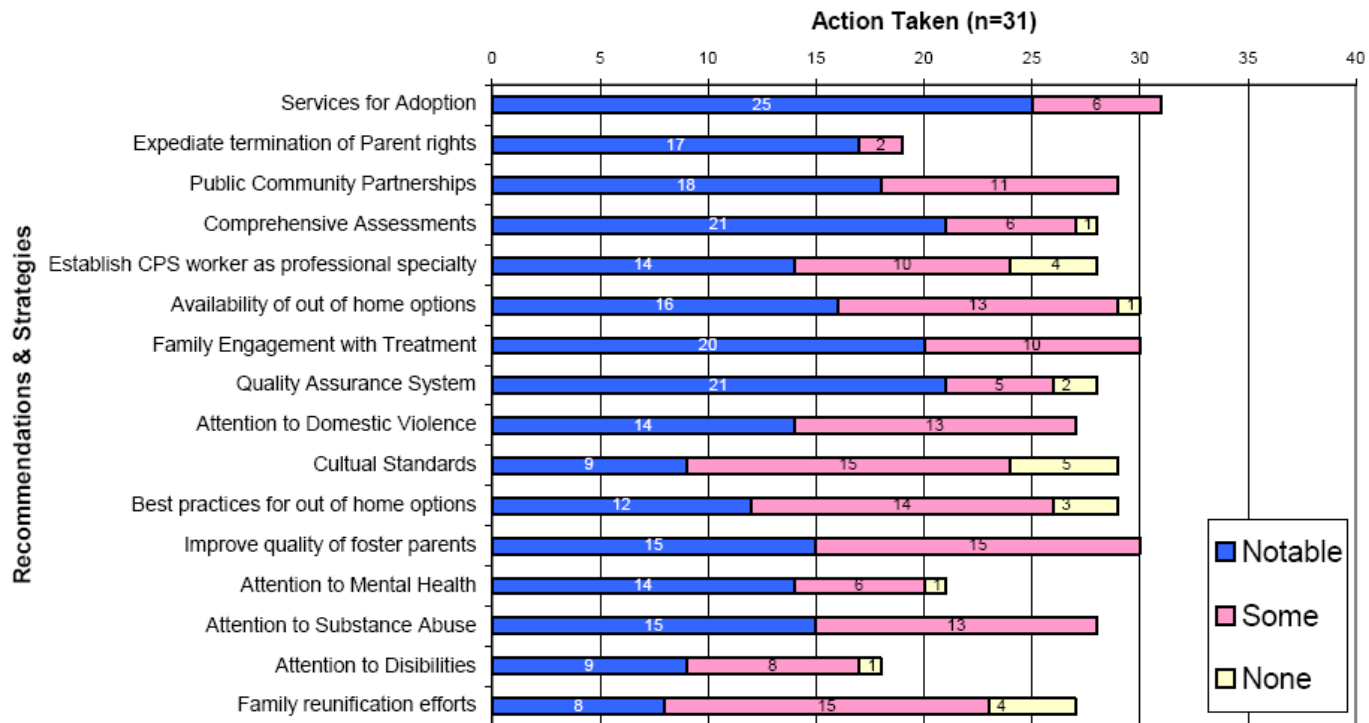


Figure 2. Actions taken by CPS to *Call to Action* Recommendation and Strategies, 2000



Conclusions

- More research on explanatory factors that influence the relationship between disability status and risk for child abuse and neglect needed, and would greatly improve service delivery
- Prevention strategies should integrate education, support, and training for parents of children with disabilities
- Child protective services needs include identification of disability status in assessment, more training for CPS workers, and services plans implemented to meet the needs of children with disabilities



References

- Benedict, M. I., White, R. B., Wulff, L. M., & Hall, B. J. (1990). Reported maltreatment among children with multiple disabilities. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 14, 207-217.
- Burrell, B., Thompson, B., & Sexton, D. (1994). Predicting child abuse potential across family types. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 18 (12) 1039-1049.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.) Types of Prevention Programs. Retrieved Jan, 15, 2009, from <http://childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/types>
- Kapitanoff, S. H. Lutzker, J. R., & Bigelow, K. M. (2000). Cultural issues in the relation between child disabilities and child abuse. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. 5 (3) 227-244.
- Westat, Inc. (1993). A report on the maltreatment of children with disabilities. Washington, DC: National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.
- Orelove, F. P., Hollahan, D. J., & Myles, K. T. (2000). Maltreatment of children with disabilities: Training needs for a collaborative response. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 24 (2) 185-194.
- Peddle, N., Wang, C. T., Diaz, J., & Reid, R. (2002, Sept.) Current trends in child abuse prevention and fatalities: The 2000 fifty state survey. National Center of Child Abuse Prevention Research, Prevent Child Abuse America, Retrieved January 10, 2009 from http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/2000_50_survey.pdf?docID=143
- Shannon, P. & Agorastou, M. (2006). Identifying children with developmental disabilities receiving child protection services: A national survey of child welfare administrators. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 87 (3) 351-357.
- Sobsey, D., Randall, W., & Parilla, R. K. (1997). Gender differences in abused children with and without disabilities. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 21 (8) 707-720.
- Sullivan, P. M. & Knutson, J. F. (2000). Maltreatment and disabilities: A population-based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 24 (10) 1257-1273.
- Thomas, D., Leicht, C., Hughes, C., Madigan, A., & Dowell, K. (2003). Emerging practices in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from <http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/whatworks/report/report.pdf>