

June 2025

# Uncoupling Poverty and Neglect

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# **What do you want to know?**

**Help formulating questions when talking to kids, parents, lawyers**

- **What kind of neglect is involved? How was this determined?**
- **What kinds of supports are available or are being explored?**



**part 1:**

# **Child Neglect & Statistics of Prevalence**

**10.6%** of substantiated child welfare reports in the United States in 2023 were for physical abuse

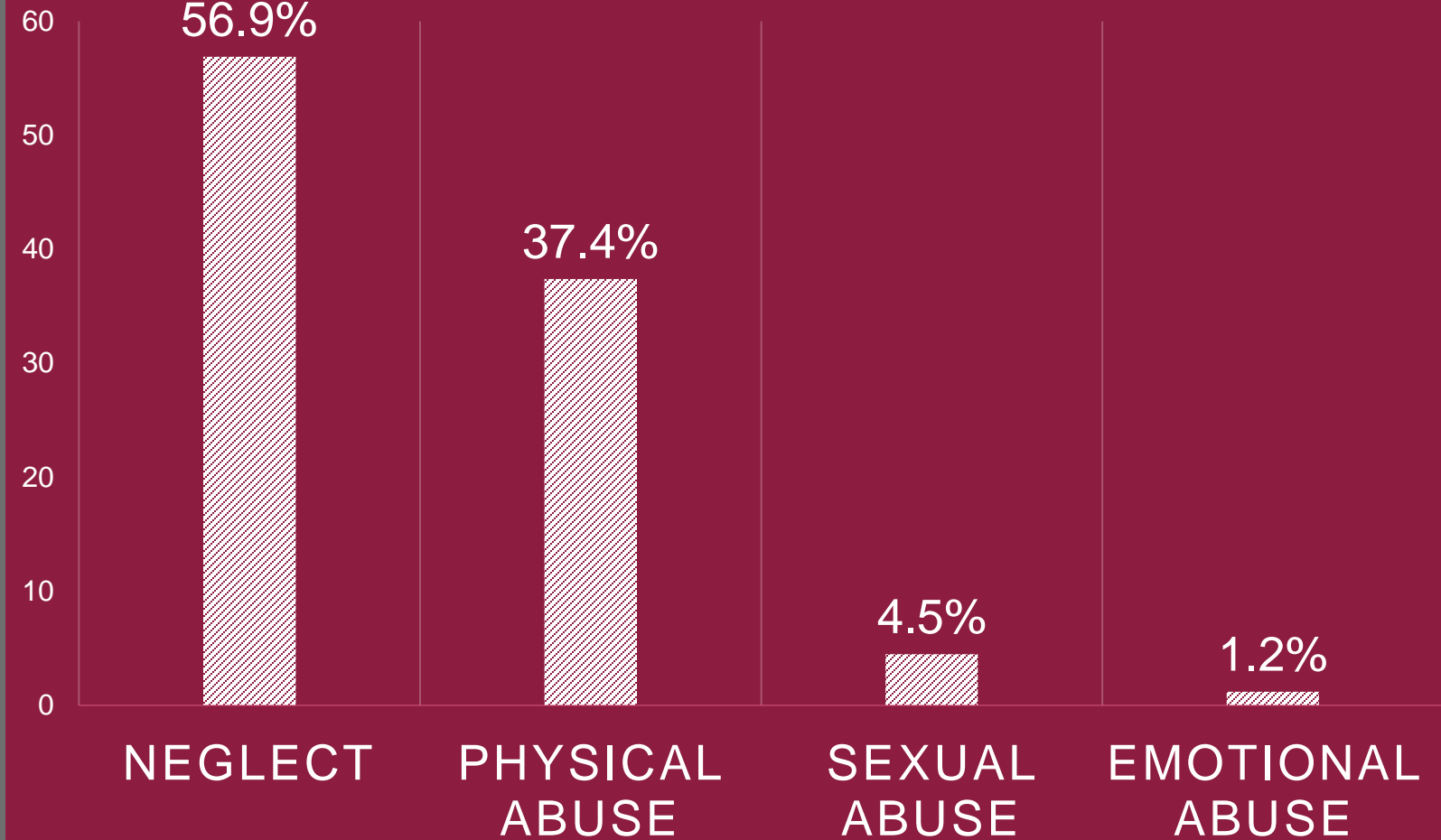
**7.5%** were for sexual abuse

**64.1%** were for neglect

**11.1%** more than one type

# Arizona

## REPORTS



January 1, 2023 – December 30, 2023 N=43,256



**part 2:**

# **Child Neglect: What is it?**

# Child Neglect

“Neglect” or “Neglected” as defined in [A.R.S. § 8-201\(25\)](#) means:

(a) “The *inability or unwillingness* of a parent, guardian or custodian of a child to provide that child with supervision, food, clothing, shelter or medical care if that inability or unwillingness causes unreasonable risk of harm to the child's health or welfare,

***except***

if the inability of a parent or guardian to provide services to meet the needs of a child with a disability or chronic illness is solely the result of the unavailability of reasonable services.”

# Spectrum of Neglect



Single Incident



Chronic Neglect

# Types of Neglect



**Physical**



**Medical**



**Substance  
Exposure**



**Inadequate  
supervision**



**Emotional**

# What Needs to be Answered?

- **Inability or unwillingness?**
- **Risk of harm to the child?**
- **Are resources and supports available?**
  - **In Arizona there is an exception for children with disabilities or chronic illness**
  - **In other states there are clear exemptions for poverty**



## **part 3:**

# **Identifying Neglect within Families**

# Comprehensive Assessment

- **Parenting Capacity**
- **Child Functioning**
- **Parent Functioning**
- **Parenting Practices**
- **Household Composition**
- **Parent Responses**



# Comprehensive Assessment: Looking at Children

## Observations of the child

Child behavior

Physical appearance of the child (clothing, hygiene)

Attachment to adults in the home

Developmental milestones

Educational progress

On-going medical treatment (immunizations)

## Child Functioning

Disability, chronic condition, developmental concern, injury, or illness

Medical neglect

Nutrition

# Comprehensive Assessment: Looking at Caregivers/Parents

Medical illness, substance use/abuse, mental health, physical limitations, developmental limitations?

Cognitive ability to care for vulnerable children

Stable income/household resources

Ability to identify and meet own needs

Support system

Keeping up with everyday needs of the children (social, physical, emotional)

Violence in the home (criminal history information)

# Comprehensive Assessment: Looking at Parenting Practices

## Parenting Practices

Parenting knowledge and skills

Parental perception of the child (bonding)

Patience and available time

Relationship/bonding with the child(ren)

Recognition/concern for the child(ren)s needs

Solution focused

Ability to balance multiple priorities (multiple children)

Household routine

Ability to protect

## Disciplinary Approaches

Expectations and discipline practices (age appropriate)

Are the rules and expectations for behavior and responsibility appropriate?

# Comprehensive Assessment: Looking at the Household

## Household Composition

Who lives in the home, what is their relationship?

Who provides care for the child(ren)

Substitute Caregivers

Household Stability (location, membership, size, length of stay)

## Observations of the home

Suitable place to reside

Household Safety (drugs, toxic substances, domestic violence)

Violence or domestic violence

Neighborhood conditions (safety considerations for children)

Is the home environment stable or chaotic?

Family pet considerations

# Comprehensive Assessment: Looking Beyond Responses

## Parent Caregiver Response :

Parental responsibility and explanation for identified concerns

Is the parent motivated to change?

Does the family have a documented pattern of neglect?

Is the parent defensive or hostile?

Did the entire family cooperate with the assessment?

Was the parent eager to participate in the interview or did they avoid contact?



## **part 4:**

# **Neglect and Poverty are Overlapping**

# How are they related?

- **Material hardship is a predictor of contact with child welfare system**
- **Communities with higher food insecurity have higher child maltreatment reporting rates**
- **Economic shocks like job loss increase the risk for child welfare system involvement**
- **Receiving public benefits buffers against risk of maltreatment**
  - **States that expand access to SNAP see large reductions in reports of child maltreatment and reductions in foster care caseload**
  - **Low-income families that participate in SNAP or WIC have lower rates of substantiated maltreatment reports compared to other low-income families**

# Theories about why they are related

**Overlap in definitions and poor operationalization of distinction (or what to do)**

## **Resource and Investment Model**

- Families may not be able to access material goods and services like food, shelter, childcare, health care
- Family's reliance on free food, used clothing seen as social 'flags', which leads to more monitoring

## **Family Stress Model**

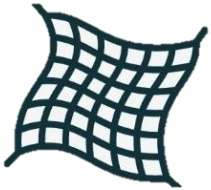
- Economic pressure creates psychological distress which spills over into relationships and parenting (less responsive, inconsistent, more reactive) due to depression and nervous system arousal.

# How do we act on this info?

- Mitigate the effects of economic hardship by focusing on family functioning
  - Improve parent psychological wellbeing, couple relationships, or parenting practices during times of stress
- Parenting that is high in warmth and effective communication has been associated with positive child outcomes even for families facing economic disparity
- Efforts to alleviate economic pressure such as antipoverty programs are important

# Promising Policies and Programs: Poverty

## Safety Net



### Expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Programs

31 states and D.C. offer a state EITC in addition to the federal EITC, with most offering a fully refundable EITC. Arizona is not one of them.<sup>3</sup>

### Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Arizona has some of the lowest benefit amounts and strictest requirements in the nation for families to qualify for TANF. Additionally, Arizona spends 11% of TANF funds on providing basic assistance to families, compared to the national average of 23%.<sup>4</sup>

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## Small-scale Cash Transfer Programs



### THRIVE Cash Transfer in Washington, D.C.

Participants received \$5,500 over 5 months. Evaluation results showed the cash transfers provided a significant boost to recipient's financial stability. Participants reported being able to pay rent and pay for basic needs like food, medical expenses, and utilities, and reported improved mental well-being and reduced stress levels.<sup>5</sup>

### Baby's First Years: Unconditional Cash Transfer

In a randomized control trial in four urban U.S. cities, mothers received an unconditional cash gift of \$333 per month. As a result of this cash transfer, researchers found that mothers increased spending on infants by purchasing items like books, diapers, and children's clothing, and spent more time in early learning activities with their infants.<sup>6</sup>

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## Employment



### Paid Family and Medical Leave

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 11 states offer paid family and medical leave.<sup>7</sup> Arizona voters passed Proposition 206 in 2016 to guarantee employees a minimum of one hour earned sick time for every 30 hours worked.<sup>8</sup> In 2023, Governor Hobbs changed family leave for all eligible state employees allowing for 12 weeks paid leave following the birth of a child or placement of adoptive or foster child and increased accrual of sick leave from 40 hours to 480 hours maximum per year.<sup>9</sup>

# Promising Policies and Programs: Poverty

## Childcare



### Cost Modeling for Childcare Reimbursement Rates

New Mexico and D.C. use cost modeling to set daycare reimbursement rates for state childcare subsidies. Cost modeling allows for states to account for all factors that affect childcare businesses such as rent and utilities, compensation and benefits, staffing requirements and ratios, and local costs of living.<sup>10</sup>

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## Housing



### Outreach to Landlords

To help encourage landlords to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program, local governments can provide incentives. For example, the Housing Authority of Maricopa County and Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler housing authorities offer \$500-\$2,000 bonuses for each unit rented to a tenant who holds a voucher.<sup>11</sup>

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## COVID-19 Programs



### Unemployment Benefits

Expanded unemployment benefits helped prevent 1.4 million children from falling below the poverty line during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

Expanded benefits provided recipients with an additional \$95 per month and helped decrease child poverty by 14% across the U.S.<sup>13</sup>

### Rental Assistance

The \$25 billion distributed to increase housing stability during COVID-19 provided financial assistance and helped to prevent evictions.<sup>14</sup>

### Child Tax Credit

Increases in the Child Tax Credit provided families with anywhere between \$2,000-\$3,000 for children up to 17. This expansion prevented 3.7 million children from falling into poverty.<sup>15</sup>

### Childcare Infrastructure

\$1.3 billion in funding to Arizona benefitted almost 3,000 childcare providers. When stabilization dollars end, more than half of recipients reported they would have to raise tuition.<sup>16</sup>

# How are they related?

Poverty is a risk factor for neglect but poverty does not cause neglect.

Poverty produces hardships for families, resulting in toxic stress, which can impact a parent's capacity to meet the needs of the child.

Incapacity to meet the needs of the child is not the same as unwillingness to meet the needs of the child.

Other states address this nuance in reporting laws – stating that poverty should not be included in determining neglect



**part 4:**

# **Build Protective Capacity**

# Building Protective Capacity

## Five Protective Factors

1. Resilience
2. Social Connections
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development
4. Concrete support in times of need
5. Social and emotional competence of children

# Parental Resilience

## What it looks like:

- ***Resilience to general life stress***
  - Hope, optimism, self confidence
  - Problem solving skills
  - Self care and willingness to ask for help
  - Ability to manage negative emotions
- ***Resilience to parenting stress***
  - Not allowing stress to interfere with nurturing
  - Positive attitude about parenting and child

# Parental Resilience

## Everyday actions

- Demonstrate in multiple ways that parents are valued
- Honor each family's race, language, culture, history and approach to parenting
- Encourage parents to manage stress effectively
- Support parents as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills
- Help parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times

# Child Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from traumatic events

Children who are resilient see themselves as

- Safe
- Capable
- Lovable



# Child Resilience

Factors that can increase in “growing” resilience include:

A strong relationship with at least one competent, caring **adult**

Feeling connected to a **positive role model or mentor**

Having talents/abilities **nurtured**

Feeling some **control** over one’s own life

Having a sense of **belonging**



# Social Connections

## What it looks like:

- Multiple friendships and supportive relationships with others
- Feeling respected and appreciated
- Accepting help from others, and giving help to others
- Skills for establishing and maintaining connections



# Social Connections

## Everyday Actions:

Help families value, build, sustain and use social connections

Create an inclusive environment

Facilitate mutual support

Promote engagement in the community and participation in community activities

# Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development

## What it looks like:

Nurturing parenting behavior

Appropriate developmental expectations

Ability to create a developmentally supportive environment for the child

Positive discipline techniques; ability to effectively manage child behavior

Recognizing and responding to your child's specific needs



# Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development

## Everyday Actions:

Model developmentally appropriate interactions with children

Provide information and resources on parenting and child development

Encourage parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies

Address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective

# Concrete Supports

## What it looks like:

- Seeking and receiving support when needed
- Knowing what services are available and how to access them
- Adequate financial security; basic needs being met
- Persistence
- Advocating effectively for self and child to receive necessary help



# Concrete Supports

## Everyday Actions:

Respond immediately when families are in crisis

Provide information and connections to services in the community

Help families develop skills and tools they need to identify their needs and connect to supports

# Social & Emotional Competence of the Child

## What it looks like:

### *For the parent:*

- Warm and consistent responses that foster a strong and secure attachment with the child
- Encouraging and reinforcing social skills; setting limits

### *For the child:*

- Age appropriate self-regulation
- Ability to form and maintain relationships with others
- Positive interactions with others
- Effective communication

# Social & Emotional Competence of the Child

## Everyday Actions:

- Help parents foster their child's social emotional development
- Model nurturing care to child
- Include child's social and emotional development activities in programming
- Help child develop a positive cultural identity and interact in a diverse society
- Respond proactively when social or emotional development needs extra support

# Questions & Comments



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