

Child Neglect and Emotional Maltreatment - Cumulative Harm

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- ◆ Definitions, epidemiology, concepts
- ◆ Classification
- ◆ Forensic evaluation – it all seems too hard..?
- ◆ Outcomes and cumulative harm



Love

Warmth

Shelter & clothing

Food

Education

Health & Wellbeing

Play & social connection

Protection/safety

Medical treatment

Emotional enrichment, moral/spiritual guidance/stability

Appropriate stimulation



Individual Child

- ◆ Secure attachment to consistent caregiver
- ◆ Maternal mental/physical health

Family

- ◆ Income
- ◆ Parenting style
- ◆ Parental health
- ◆ Parental education

Community

- ◆ Crime & overcrowding
- ◆ Green spaces
- ◆ Policing
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Family supports

Society

- ◆ National economics
- ◆ Population income
- ◆ Employment & immigration issues
- ◆ Cultural attitudes
- ◆ Racism

THE AGE

‘House of Horror mastermind Tania Staker
jailed for 10 years’



A MOTHER left her neglected children at home in "appalling" conditions with dead animals as she went out drinking.

Her house in west Hull was found to be covered in dog faeces, rotting food and rubbish.

‘After a whirlwind wedding, a Florida couple was whisked away to a romantic honeymoon—behind bars. The couple were arrested Tuesday for alleged child neglect: They'd left their one-, two-, and three-year-old children at home alone while they were tying the knot, police say....’



Siblings, 5 and 11, Found Living on School Bus

Mar 8, 2012 8:15 AM CST

‘Couple Who Never Treated Son's Cancer Gets 8 Years’

Primary substantiated harm types Australia 2010-2011

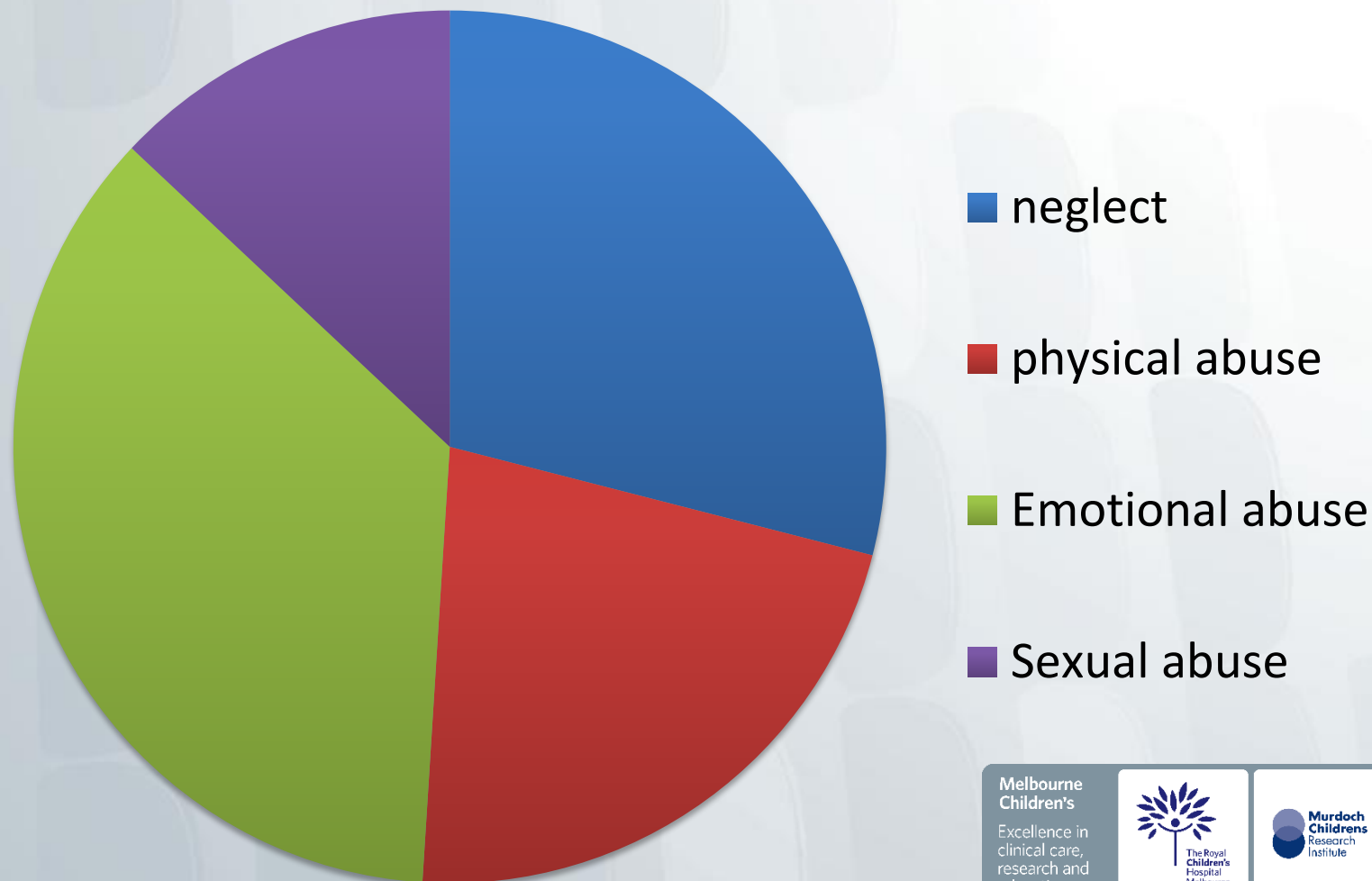
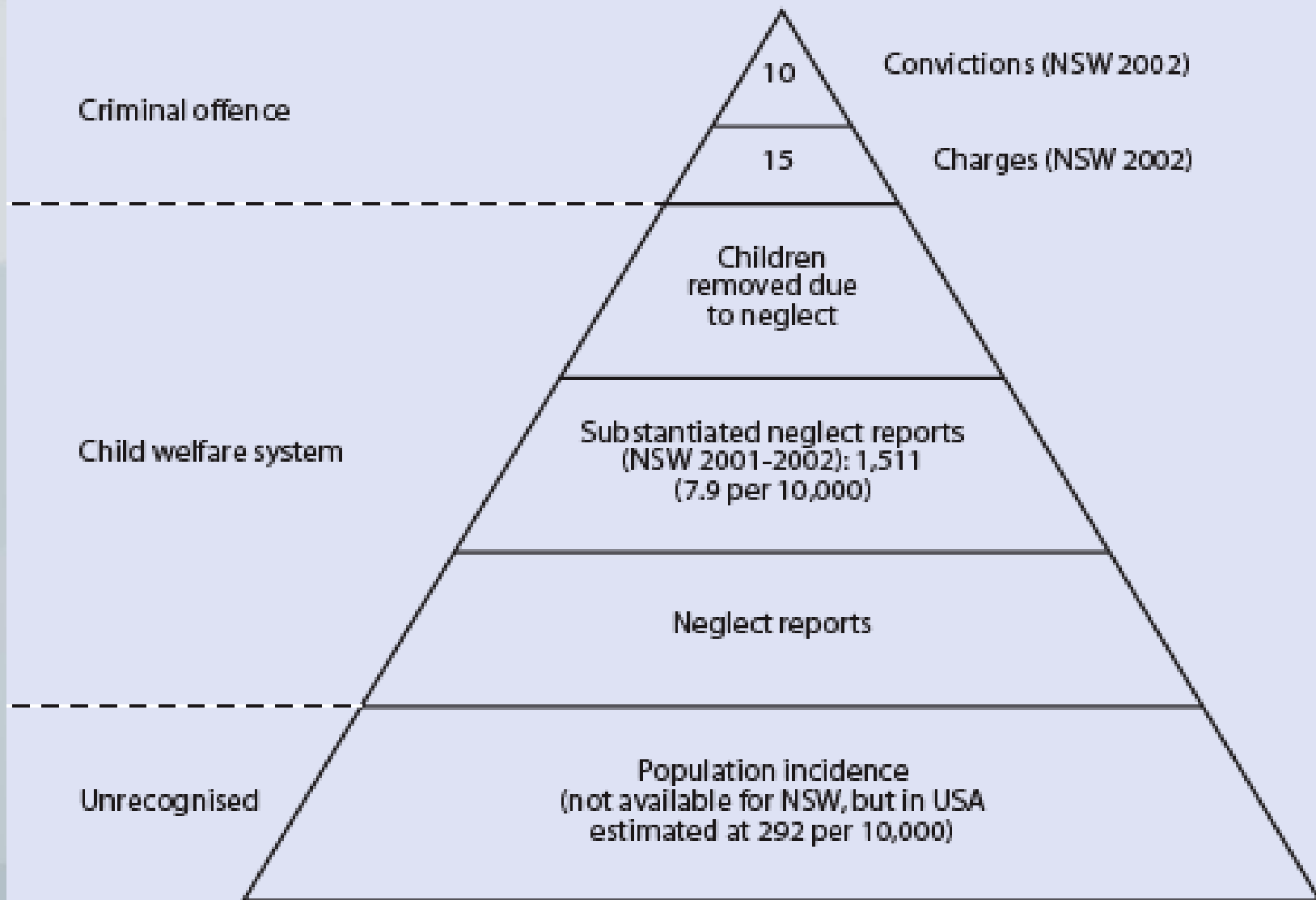


Figure 1

Child neglect



Sources: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, unpublished data; AIHW 2003; Sedlack and Broadhurst 1996.

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Indigenous Australians



- ◆ 6-8 times substantiated allegations
- ◆ 6 times more in OOHC
- ◆ Higher proportion neglect
- ◆ “unresolved grief associated with multiple layers of trauma spanning many generations” – neglect legislation used to mandate the Stolen Generation

Neglect – WHO definition



“The failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of **resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers**, and **causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child’s** health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible.”

WHO Report of the consultations on Child Abuse Prevention. Geneva, Switzerland. March 1999

Consequences for child rather than parental behaviour.....

Intention to harm not required

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Emotional Maltreatment –AAP definition



- Acts of omission or commission that inflict harm on the child's wellbeing, which may then be manifested as emotional distress or maladaptive behaviour in the child.
 - Verbal/non-verbal
 - Active or passive
 - With or without intent to harm
 - Negatively affect cognitive, social ,emotional or physical development

- Involves a 'relationship' between the child and parent – a repeated pattern of damaging interactions that becomes typical of the relationship
 - Feeling unloved, worthless, flawed, unwanted
 - Serves instrumental purpose in meeting parental needs
 - Endangered
 - Undermines development and socialisation
- Chronic, pervasive or triggered by alcohol/drugs
- Isolated behaviours do not necessarily constitute emotional abuse – single painful event may



Concepts surrounding neglect and emotional abuse

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The 3 Axis

- **Types** - classification
- **Degrees & severity** – 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree, continuum of harm, Chronicity, urgency of intervention, type of intervention
- **Outcome** – likelihood of harm

Danya Glaser 2011

Types of Neglect



Developmental neglect

Physical neglect

Medical neglect

Emotional/psychological neglect

Educational neglect

Failure to provide guidance

Abandonment

Environmental neglect

Supervisory neglect

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Types of Emotional Maltreatment



Unreliable/inconsistent parenting

Exploiting/corrupting

Terrorising

Rejecting

Witnessing IPV

Mental health neglect

Isolating

Denying emotional responsiveness

Spurning

Degrees



1st

2nd

3rd



Continuum of child/caregiver interaction

Satisfactory (“good enough”) → **Undesirable** → **Harmful**

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Outcomes



- **No current or future harm likely** – undesirable behaviours/interactions...
- **No current harm, future harm likely**
- **Current harm but no future harm** – single adverse act...
- **Current and future harm**



Why does evaluating neglect and emotional maltreatment seem so hard?

Neglect – the “diagnosis”

- ◆ What does this child require?
- ◆ What resources can you reasonably expect?
- ◆ Has the failure of provision caused harm or is there a high probability of it causing harm in the future?

.....“sub-optimal” professional response

Emotional maltreatment – the “diagnosis”



- Characteristics/behaviours raise concern
- Requires collateral reporting/informants
- Statements from child, family – interview the child
 - Relationship with caregivers
 - Experiences of discipline
 - Feelings of self-worth, safety, being loved
- Describe parent-child interactions
- Behaviour changes in response to situations?
- Mental health evaluation
- Delayed reporting/intervention are not in child's best interest



What are the 'symptoms'?



Children's emotional, behavioural & interpersonal/social functioning

- Emotional & behavioural states, self-harm, abdominal pain, disturbances in eating and feeding behaviour, body rocking, wetting & soiling, sexualised behaviour, runaway behaviour, dissociation

Parent-child interactions

- including negativity, hostility, & rejection; developmentally inappropriate expectations or interactions; exposure to domestic abuse; using child to fulfil parent's needs

Be alert to...



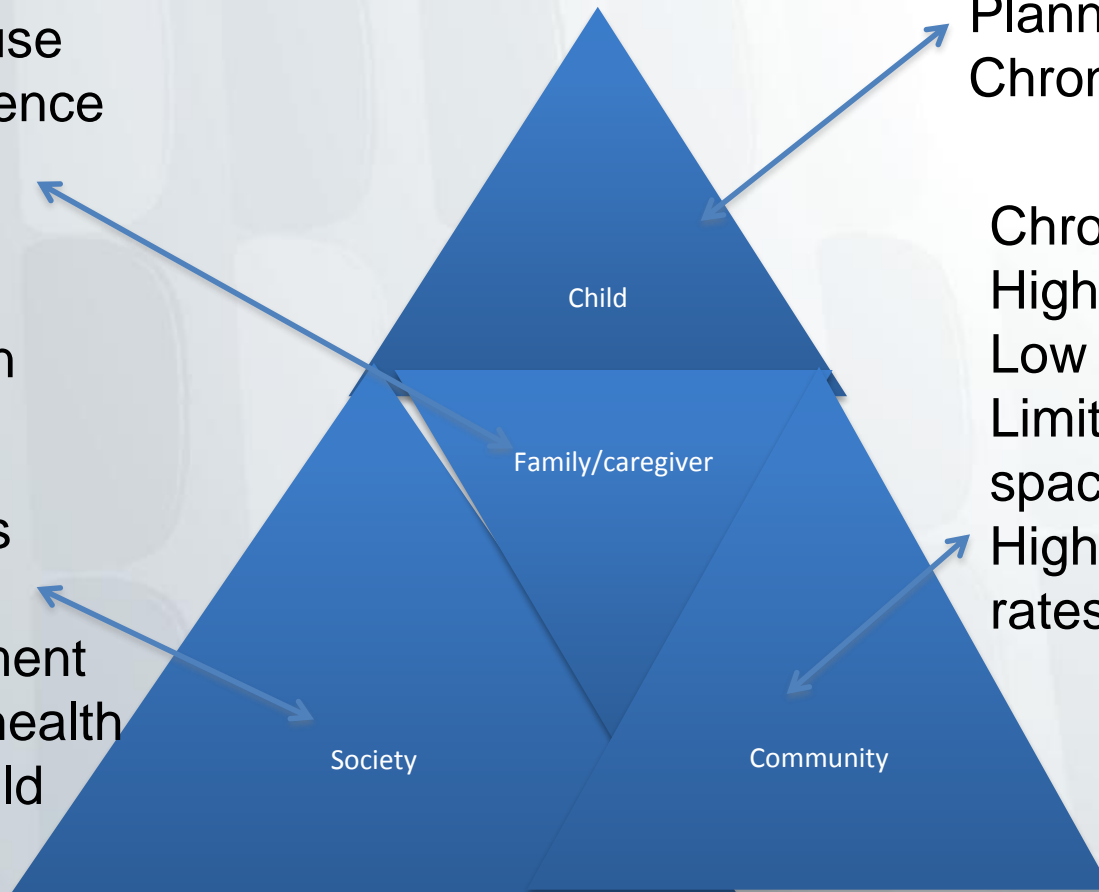
- Marked change in behaviour or emotional state not expected for child/young person's age & developmental stage (e.g. recurrent nightmares with similar themes, extreme distress, becoming withdrawn, markedly oppositional behaviour or withdrawal of communication) in the absence of a medical explanation or known stressful situation unrelated to maltreatment.

Mental/emotional state/stress
Abuse history
Etoh/drug abuse
Domestic violence
Young age
Single parent
Isolation
Low education

Age, prematurity
Behaviour
Disability/delay
Planned/unplanned
Chronic illness



Chronic poverty
High unemployment
Low education
Limited green spaces
High crime/drug rates



Cultural attitudes
Low income
High unemployment
Poor access to health
Underfunded child welfare system

Remember resilience-promoting and protective factors



Resilience factors

Child related factors

- Genetic endowment
- Temperament
- Innate abilities for resourcefulness
- Age
- Disabilities

Protective factors in the child's environment

- Trusted non-maltreating person

Gene-environment interactions

Tiers of concern

Tier 0

Society/
Community RF

Tier 1

Caregiver RF

Tier 2

Harmful interaction

Tier 3

Child's functioning
of concern



Must be present

A case of neglect

- Jack and Craig
- 4 and 3 years old
- Assessment requested by DHS Child Protection following police raid on the family home
- 6 previous notifications
- Poor parental supervision
- Substance misuse
- Environmental neglect
- Intimate partner violence

Acknowledgment Dr Andrea Smith

31st August 2011



- Police raid;
- “removed drug paraphernalia, used needles, weapons, 9 bags of cannabis and 7g of heroin rocks”
- “the toy box contained used needles as well as toys and there were piles of money around the house”
- “the cereal was kept behind the cannabis supply in the cupboard and the boys had to get their own breakfast”

1st September 2011



Child Protection visit the home to remove the children.....

Other concerns...

Childcare workers;

- Mother “slurred and incoherent”, unwashed
- Jack “that’s how mummy and daddy do it. They put stuff in the syringe and put it in their neck”
- Developmental delay, no language

VFPMS assessment

- Methadone use during pregnancy
- Failure to thrive (catch up demonstrated)
- Global developmental delay
- Generally filthy with dental caries
- Evidence of maternal drug use (thrombosed external jugular veins)
- Morphine in urine toxicology screen
- Physical neglect
- Developmental neglect
- Supervisory neglect
- Medical neglect
- Emotional abuse
 - Unreliable/inconsistent parenting
 - Corrupting
 - Denying emotional responsiveness
 - Witnessing IPV, terrorising

Recommendations

- “As a matter of urgency the case should be re-examined in court to ensure that the boys are placed in a safe, clean, caring and stimulating environment, to maximise emotional, psychological, educational and physical development and to arrest the harm that has already been done”

Cumulative harm - what may happen to these children?



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Emotional development

- Anxiety
- Unhappiness
- Depression
- Low self-esteem

Interpersonal relationships

- Insecure attachment
- Social isolation
- Low empathy

Physical symptoms

- Growth
- Faecal soiling
- Non-organic pain

Behavioural problems

- Oppositional
- Aggression
- Antisocial
- Drug misuse
- Eating disorders



Learning

- Low IQ
- Educational underachievement
- Developmental delay

The biological model – the child's developing brain

- What are the effects of
 - Extreme deprivation
 - Maladaptive experiences
 - Stress ('toxic stress')?
- Brain growth maximal 0-4 years, synaptic pruning, expectant and dependent development of brain, experience-adaptive programming

The meaning of living with maltreatment

- Deprivation of experiences
- Lack of empathy
- Models of aggression
- Exposure to fear and trauma, insults
- Pain
- Lack of affect regulation
- Unpredictability

The effect on the brain



- Reduced brain size
- Reduced brain activity (enduring)
- Reduced brain development
- Less hemispheric differentiation
- Deficits in processing facial emotion

Framework for paediatricians



– **NO action is not an option**

- Ecological approach
- Well-structured medico-legal report
- Chronology (tell the story of the child's life)
- This child needs....?
- The child obtained.....?
- What has been achieved/what failed and why?
- If this child does not obtain then..... **harm and potential harm analysis**

**Multiple sources of information
needed**

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NEGLECTING

A practical
approach.....

- **N**urture
- **E**motional responsiveness
- **G**rowth and nutrition
- **L**earning and development
- **E**nvironment at home
- **C**lothing
- **T**eeth
- **I**mmunisations, infections, infestations
- **N**ormal social opportunities
- **G**eneral health

Intervention

“Effective intervention to remedy child neglect must be based on a comprehensive assessment of the neglectful family, with attention to the type of neglect and to the contributing causes at the individual, family, neighborhood and community level”

Gaudin 1993

Conceptual framework Glaser 2011

Strategies



Evidence base limited – therapeutic intervention mainstay

- Therapeutic trial of capacity to change
- Community based programs - positive parenting skills education
- Therapeutic day care
- Address parental factors – drug/alcohol/mental health/IPV
- Out of home placements - last resort

The message..

- “Neglect of neglect”
- Life-long adverse consequences
- And it’s really not too hard.....

References & acknowledgements

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- The Psychological Maltreatment of Children – Technical Report Kairys et al Paediatrics Vol 109 Np 4 April 2002
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- The effects of child maltreatment on the developing brain
- ***Thanks to Anne Smith and Andrea Smith***