

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO
Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 30 May 2011

Question: E11-534

OUTCOME 0: Whole of Portfolio

Topic: REPORTING OF 'CHILD NEGLECT'

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Senator Boyce asked:

Can you provide information related to the AIHW's national reporting on 'child neglect' and the status of relevant national definitions and standards?

Answer:

Definition of child neglect

The current definition of 'child neglect' for the purposes of the National Child Protection Data Collection is: *Any serious omissions or commissions by a person having the care of a child, which, within the bounds of cultural tradition, constitute a failure to provide conditions which are essential for the healthy, physical and emotional development of a child* (AIHW, *Child Protection Australia, 2009–10*. Child welfare series no. 51. Cat. no. CWS 39. Canberra).

This definition is currently under review by the national child protection technical advisory group. The above definition is for the purposes of national data collection and is currently the best available definition, reflecting the diversity of legislation, policy and practices across states and territories.

Published definitions of 'neglect' for each state/territory are provided below for further information.

Definitions of 'child neglect' across Australian states and territories

Australian Capital Territory

Neglect can be defined as any passive or active omission/s of a parent or carer that constitutes a failure to ensure that the fundamental needs of the child or young person in their care are adequately and appropriately met, if the failure has caused or is causing significant harm to the wellbeing or development of the child or young person. The harm caused by neglect can be defined as cumulative in nature and distinct from other forms of child maltreatment.

Western Australia

Neglect is when children do not receive adequate food or shelter, medical treatment, supervision, care or nurturance to such an extent that their development is damaged or they are injured. Neglect may be acute, episodic or chronic.

Some examples are:

- leaving a child alone without appropriate supervision;
- not ensuring the child attends school, or not enrolling the child at school;
- infection because of poor hygiene or lack of medication;
- not giving a child affection or emotional support; and
- not getting medical help when required.

Victoria

Neglect is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

South Australia

Abuse or neglect, in relation to a child, means—

- (a) sexual abuse of the child; or
- (b) physical or emotional abuse of the child, or neglect of the child, to the extent that—
 - (i) the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, physical or psychological injury detrimental to the child's wellbeing; or
 - (ii) the child's physical or psychological development is in jeopardy, and abused or neglected has a corresponding meaning.

Northern Territory

Neglect

This occurs when a parent is unable or unwilling to provide for a child so that the child can develop normally. A child can be neglected in the following ways: when a child does not have enough food, clothing is not clean, does not have a place to live; when a child is not provided with the necessary medical, dental and/or other health care including not providing medication for health conditions; when young children are left alone, not adequately supervised, or when parents fail to remove dangerous things from their environment or do not watch them closely, particularly in dangerous circumstances; constantly ignoring a child's need for attention and how they feel or failing to spend time and listen to a child; failing to send a child to school and/or not providing them with learning opportunities; abandoning a child (by not organising the necessary care for them).

Queensland

Neglect occurs when a child's basic necessities of life are not met, and their health and development are affected. Basic needs include:

- food;
- housing;
- health care;
- adequate clothing;
- personal hygiene;
- hygienic living conditions;
- timely provision of medical treatment; and
- adequate supervision.

Tasmania

Child neglect is the failure to meet a child's essential needs through inadequate parenting and lack of responsibility which may have an impact on the child's development. The following brief descriptions cover the main categories of neglect:

- Physical neglect is the failure to provide the necessities to sustain the life or health of the child: the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter;
- Medical neglect occurs when the adult in the parenting role fails to provide adequate health care. It includes refusing or delaying in seeking medical treatment, failing to give regular medication for chronic conditions such as diabetes or asthma, and failing to take normal preventative measures;
- Supervisory neglect occurs when carers fail to supervise their child, or to arrange for proper supervision in their absence. Supervisory neglect often occurs where children are left in the care of another child who is not old or mature enough;
- Emotional neglect is failing to provide adequately for a child's emotional and psychological developmental needs. This includes not spending enough time with the child, or not providing the experiences a child needs for their mind and emotions to develop in a healthy and balanced way;
- Educational neglect occurs when the child is not provided with learning opportunities. Even before a child goes to school, some parents or carers do not provide the stimulating objects and experiences which very young children need; and
- Abandonment involves leaving a child alone or without arranging appropriate care.

New South Wales

Child neglect is the continued failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision.