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Economic Reform is About More Than Money; It's About Strengthening Families

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In 2014, over 700,000 children under age 18 were victims of child abuse and neglect.¹ Over a child's lifetime, one out of every eight U.S. children will experience confirmed maltreatment by child protective services before their 18th birthday.² These numbers are unacceptable and demand action. President Trump and his administration need to be acutely aware of the connection between events like the Great Recession and the current opioid epidemic and the recent increases in maltreatment reports nationally. The decisions they make regarding fiscal policy will impact more than a family's pocketbook.

1 in 8 children will experience maltreatment by age 18



SOURCE

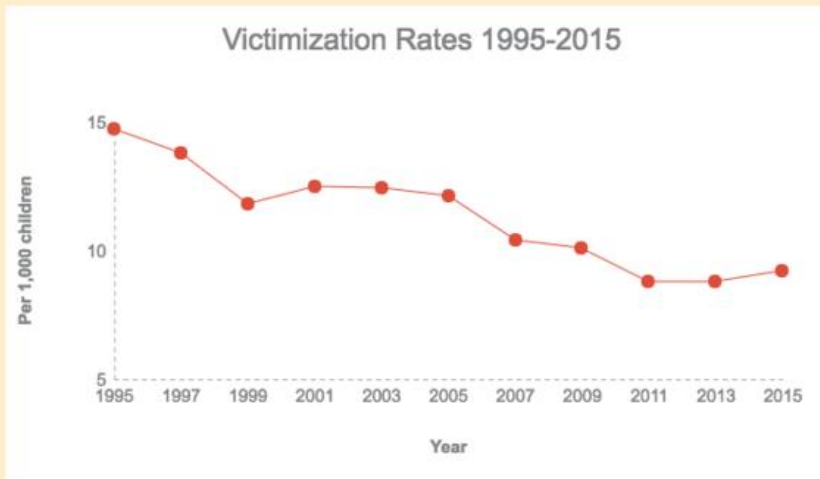
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau,
National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>



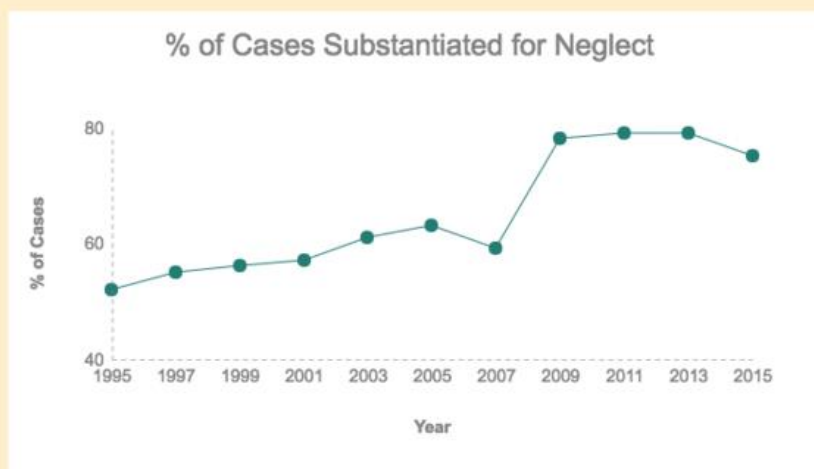
The most powerful predictor of child maltreatment is poverty, and nearly 15 million children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold. This new administration has an opportunity to help strengthen families and communities and protect children from maltreatment through economic policy. We encourage President Trump to aggressively pursue economic policies that promote child well-being and strengthen communities. History and research indicate that such reforms are needed to address the multiple ways economic hardship increases risk for maltreatment.

Maltreatment rates decreased greatly through the 1990s and into the 2000s mainly due to a strong economy and reductions in child poverty.ⁱⁱⁱ However, during the Great Recession, there were increases in some types of maltreatment, attributable largely to increases in child poverty.^{iv} Economic inequality also increases maltreatment rates. U.S. counties with higher income inequality have higher rates of maltreatment regardless of income.^v Policies that support family income, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, are directly related to reductions in financial stress, leading to safe and stable homes.

Since 1995, maltreatment rates have declined overall.....



But the proportion of cases related to child neglect have increased 30% since 1995, particularly post-Great Recession



SOURCE

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau,
National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>

Poor families are more likely to live in neighborhoods that are impoverished, with fewer employment opportunities, greater exposure to traumatic violence, and families that are more isolated from extended support systems. These realities erode the social fabric of communities, schools, and families. Children residing in these high-risk communities are disproportionately represented in child protective services.^{vi} Impoverished neighborhoods are more sensitive to economic policies that fail to prioritize child well-being. Continuing to fund research-supported programs that reach families most in need will complement any economic reform policy by supporting families facing the biggest challenges.^{vii}

What we need is more comprehensive economic and social policy that prevents family poverty and disrupts its pernicious links to maltreatment. Policies designed to create jobs and spur economic growth are important components, yet we must take additional steps to directly target building safe, stable, and nurturing families. Child well-being is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our nation, and we encourage President Trump to invest in children as a top priority.

The effects of economic inequality on children can even be detected at the individual biological level. The experiences of poverty and maltreatment have been shown to alter brain volume in regions critical for academic success^{viii} and to alter activity in areas responsible for emotional reactions,^{ix} disruptions that may prepare children for surviving in adverse environments but interfere with social and academic achievement. Essentially, poverty and maltreatment alter the brain in ways that create *more* disadvantage. If we know that poverty and maltreatment lead to disruptions in brain development that beget even greater economic disadvantage, then we must address maltreatment through economic policy. The good news is that children's brains are remarkably plastic and responsive to intervention in a variety of settings.

Sample Tweets

- Disrupt #childmaltreatment, support #EITC @dorisdukefellows
- givepovertytheboot @dorisdukefellows
- Stand with families, demand better economic policies @dorisdukefellows

References

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