The Incorporation of Service Learning as a Treatment Approach for School-aged Children and

Adolescent Victims of Neglect

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Lastly, may we always remember child victims and forever engulf them with abundant love, guidance, protection and support.   Our future rests upon those who we teach and who witness our behaviors.

Abstract

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Stephen J. Bedwell Jr.

Under the Supervision of Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller

<u>**Statement of the Problem**</u>

Child maltreatment transpires at astounding rates each day and its repercussions are devastating to both the child victims and the future of society. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2009), there were an estimated 794,000 victims of child maltreatment and nearly six million children referred to child protection agencies in the year 2007. Child victims were neglected at the highest rate (59%), followed by physical abuse (10.8%), sexual abuse (7.6%), and emotional abuse (4.2%). Although child neglect is the most common type of maltreatment, its causes, effects, prevention, and treatment are not as prominently discussed and explored as are those for physical and sexual abuse (DePanfilis, 2006). Neglect has been understudied because it is very difficult to locate well documented neglectful experiences (Perry, 2001). As a result of being understudied, adequate treatment approaches for child neglect have not been made available and more research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of various interventions (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Child neglect leads to numerous consequences for the child victim and community. These consequences include delinquent behaviors, future child neglect, and developmental

deficits. As a result of child neglect, children do not participate in critical experiences and this

deprivation may be the most destructive area of child maltreatment (Perry, 2001). Once the

critical consequences of child neglect are fully understood then it becomes possible to adequately

implement treatment that can fully handle addressing these precise consequences. Current

treatment methods for child neglect center on parent-focused and child-focused approaches.

Most approaches seek to alter the parents or home environment, and have not shown to

significantly reduce the number of children being neglected each year (Panel on Research on

Child Abuse & Neglect, 1993). Statistics from the United States Department of Health and

Human Services (2009) show a consistently high number of child victims since 2002. In order

for the rates of child neglect to greatly decline, greater attention must be directed toward the

issue and more research must be completed to evaluate the effectiveness of treatment.

Interventions with proven effectiveness must be available for neglected children (Allin, Wathen,

& MacMillan, 2005).

<u>Methods of Approach</u>

Secondary data will be utilized to gather information regarding child maltreatment, most

notably child neglect, past research on its causes, risk factors, and program and policy

implementations. The United States Department of Health and Human Services releases child

maltreatment statistics yearly and these statistics will be analyzed and appropriately documented.

Numerous studies have been completed that analyze causes, consequences, and theories of child

neglect. Several of theses studies will be cited giving information on the seriousness of child

neglect and how it is treated. A framework of service learning will be provided as well as data

that demonstrates its effectiveness at combating issues surrounding child neglect. Additionally, a

theoretical application of social bond theory and developmental theory will be utilized to more thoroughly exhibit and develop recommendations for a more successful approach to treating child victims of neglect.

Results of the Study

First, statistics and secondary research provide support to the notion that child neglect is a cycle of high continuance that is costly to society. Unfortunately, this data shows the ineffectiveness of treatment approaches that have allowed for years of continuation. Secondly, the collected evidence contained in this study shows that service learning successfully addresses key issues that plague child victims of neglect. Empirical data demonstrates the potential for positive outcomes when child victims of neglect are provided with service learning as a child-focused treatment intervention. Neglected children who participate in service learning will display fewer incidents of violence, improved personal development skills, and a less likelihood to continue the cycle of child neglect. Through this, communities become more safe and children more successful.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The lives of children become disrupted when they are victimized. Children often experience different forms of victimization, sometimes in combination. One of the greatest forms of victimization that children experience is maltreatment. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, and neglect. The results of child maltreatment are damaging. Children grow up to participate in criminal activities and have a greater potential to abuse and neglect their own children (English, Widom, & Brandord, 2002; Fagan, 2005; Cohen, Kasen, Smailes, & Fagan, 2002; Lisak & Besztercze, 2007).

Neglect is the most common occurring form of child maltreatment. In fact, known cases of child neglect occur nearly six times more often than physical abuse (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2009). Children who experience neglect do not participate in critical experiences and this deprivation may be the most destructive area of child maltreatment (Perry, 2001). Neglected children are at-risk for impaired brain development which can potentially result in poor physical, mental, and emotional development. "The brain of a child who has been maltreated may develop in such a way that it is adaptive for the child's negative environment, but is maladaptive for functional or positive environments" (DePanfilis, 2006, p. 22).

Acquiring a complete and comprehensive understanding of child neglect is imperative so that adequate treatment implementation can occur. With child neglect rates remaining high and stable (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2008) and treatment approaches seeking to alter the parents or home environment (Panel on Research of Child Abuse & Neglect, 1993), a new direction and idea is needed for addressing child neglect and providing successful treatment. Interventions with proven effectiveness must be made available for neglected

children (Allin, Wathen, & MacMillian, 2005). In addition to child neglect rates remaining high and stable, neglect has been understudied because it is very difficult to locate well documented neglectful experiences (Perry, 2001). As a result of being understudied, adequate treatment approaches for child neglect have not been made available and more research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of various interventions (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Furthermore, society must discover and develop ways that divert neglected children from becoming criminals and future perpetrators of neglect.

This paper will focus on understanding the understudied issue of child neglect, its consequences, and current treatment efforts. Most notably, this paper will investigate and demonstrate that providing service learning as a treatment approach to child neglect will successfully address neglect's harmful effects and bring significant declines to neglect rates. Service learning has the potential of being a successful child-focused treatment approach to child neglect. It provides children with the skills necessary for success and greatly decreases their chance of becoming delinquent or neglectful parents. Neglected children are at risk for displaying aggressive and criminal behaviors, future poor parenting skills, poor intellectual and cognitive development, emotional and psychological problems, and low academic achievement (DePanfilis, 2006). McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter (2004) recognized that through life and coping skills prevention and early intervention, young people who have acquired the knowledge and skills have the ability to avoid problematic behaviors. According to McWhirter et al. (2004, p. 263), "training programs to teach these skills need to be instituted early and universally for all youth in order to prevent problems." Children with good social and life skills are able to develop friendships, work cooperatively with others, demonstrate tolerance toward others who are "different," and develop concern for the well-being of others. Service

learning is essential in providing environments that nurture young people's personal development. This is extremely imperative for neglected children who often lack in essential personal development skills such as coping skills and self-esteem (DePanfilis, 2006). Service learning curriculums will develop a young person's life skills and coping skills and will essentially help in eliminating future negative outcomes such as crime and future neglect.

Numerous scholarly works will be utilized to gather information regarding child maltreatment, most notably child neglect, past research on its causes, consequences, and program and policy implementations. Many studies have been completed that analyze causes, consequences, and theories of child neglect. Several of these studies will be cited to provide information on the seriousness of child neglect and society's response. Additionally, a framework of service learning will be provided that demonstrates its effectiveness at combating issues surrounding child neglect.

An understanding of the nature of child neglect will focus much needed attention on appropriate program implementation. Program implementation, by means of service learning, will demonstrate the effectiveness of such an intervention for child victims of neglect. This paper will be both educational and informational for professionals in human services, child protection, psychology, and educators, including government agencies and non-profit service-providing agencies. The ultimate goal in achievement of the recommendation to incorporate service learning as a child-focused treatment approach to child neglect will be the drastic decrease in the high rates of child neglect and delinquency. In addition, this paper will provide the intended audience with a comprehensive understanding of child neglect, an often overlooked issue.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section consists of a review of the literature pertaining to child neglect and child neglect treatment. The term "child neglect" will be examined and defined, recent data will be reported, and current treatment approaches inspected to provide a comprehensive understanding into the neglect of children in the United States. The literature on child neglect demonstrates that a very high number of children are being neglected each year. The research also shows that, as a result of neglect, both children and society suffer grave consequences. Furthermore, the literature illustrates an ineffective means of treating victims of child neglect.

A. Identifying child neglect

Child maltreatment has been recorded in literature, art and science for many years and violence against children dates back to ancient civilizations. English (1998, p. 40) recognized that "children have long been murdered, abandoned, incarcerated, mutilated, sexually exploited, beaten, and forced into labor by their parents and caregivers." Once emerged, definitions of unacceptable treatment of children have helped to trigger and sustain efforts to protect children. Legislation defining child maltreatment was introduced into many state statutes by the mid-twentieth century. Child maltreatment is a general term used to describe all forms of child abuse and neglect. Federal legislation provides a foundation for states by identifying a minimum set of actions and behaviors that define child abuse and neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, as amended by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, or sexual abuse; or, an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm to a child. Each state is

responsible for providing a definition of child maltreatment within its civil and criminal contexts. The legal definitions describing the different forms of child maltreatment are found mainly in State Statutes, and definitions vary from state to state.

Most states recognize four major types of maltreatment: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional/psychological abuse. The following are general definitions for these types of maltreatment:

- Physical abuse – non-accidental physical injury as a result of caretaker acts. Examples include shaking, punching, beating, and burning.

- Neglect – when a caretaker fails to provide for a child's basic needs. Examples include inadequate food, housing, clothing, medical care, and education.

- Sexual abuse – involvement of children in sexual activities in which a child does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent. Examples include touching, fondling, penetration, and causing a child to view pornographic material.

- Emotional/psychological abuse – continuing verbal harassment of a child. This includes behavior that threatens or intimidates a child. Examples include threats, name calling, and belittling.

Child neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment. Unfortunately, neglect often goes unreported and unacknowledged (DePanfilis, 2006). Neglect, unlike abuse where bruises and scars are visible, can be difficult to detect. The effects of neglect; however, can be just as detrimental. In fact, Garbarino & Collins (1999) discovered that neglect can be more detrimental to a child's brain development than physical or sexual abuse.

Over the years, neglect has often been difficult to define. As a result, this has led to inconsistent policy, practice, and research (DePanfilis, 2006). There have remained several

unanswered questions regarding neglect such as establishing minimum requirements of providing care for a child, whether a caretaker's actions must be intentional, and the role that poverty plays. Additionally, neglect "varies based on the age and the developmental level of the child making it difficult to outline a set of behaviors that are always considered neglect" (DePanfilis, 2006, p.10).

To better understand the extent of neglect, it may be broken up into several categories (DePanfilis, 2006 & Mignon, Lason, & Holmes, 2002):

- Physical neglect – abandonment, nutritional neglect, clothing neglect

- Medical neglect – denial of health care

- Inadequate supervision – lack of appropriate supervision, exposure to hazards, inappropriate caretakers

- Emotional neglect – inadequate nurturing, exposure to spousal abuse, allowing for drug or alcohol abuse

- Environmental neglect – living situations that expose a child to injury or life-threatening illness

- Educational neglect – allowing truancy, failing to attend to special education needs

- Newborns addicted or exposed to drugs

A strict interpretation of neglect definitions would make it nearly impossible for a parent not to neglect their child. A strict interpretation would be unrealistic as children are mobile and they may be found getting into cabinets or running down a street. Wallace (2005, p.93) noted that the most useful interpretation is "a continuum that stretches from momentary inattention to gross inaction." For purposes of this paper, neglect will be recognized as the general definition provided by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003.

B. Data & Trends

Child maltreatment is a far too often occurrence in the United States. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2009), there were an estimated 794,000 victims of child maltreatment and over 5.8 million children were referred to child protective service agencies in 2007. Child victims were neglected at the highest rate (59%), followed by physical abuse (10.8%), sexual abuse (7.8%), and emotional abuse (4.2%) (See figure 1).
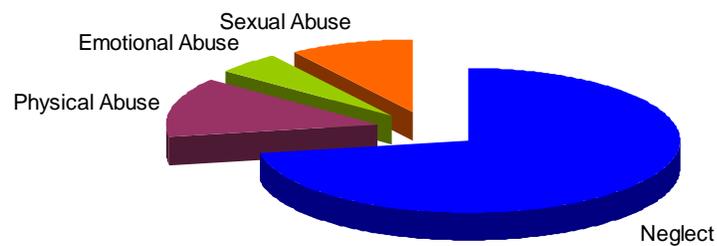
Figure 1. Victims of child maltreatment in United States, 2007.

Since 2002, the number of children that have been victims of maltreatment has remained fairly consistent and extremely high (see figure 2). This consistency also applies to the rates of neglect. Neglect remains roughly nine times greater than all other types of maltreatment.
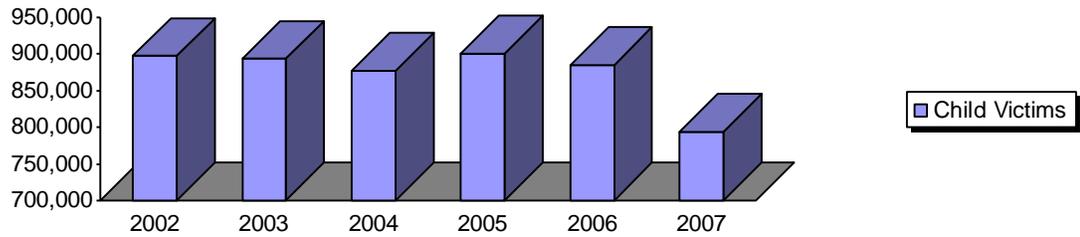
Figure 2. Number of child victims in the United States, 2002-2007.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2009), in

2007, parents constituted eighty percent of perpetrators of child maltreatment. A review of child

maltreatment literature by Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer, and Higgins (2006) found that mothers are

most frequently the maltreaters of neglect. Child neglect by mothers is often associated with

poor coping skills and is often not deliberately intended. It is not always apparent that a child is

being or has been neglected except in extreme cases. Children are neglected at all ages and in

2007, child victims age four to seven experienced the most neglect (United States Department of
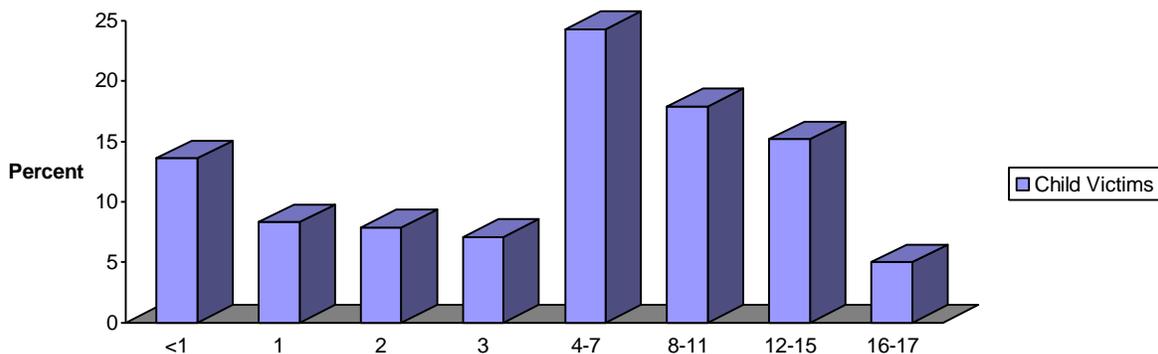
Health & Human Services, 2009) (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Neglect Occurrences by age, 2007.

There is no single known cause of child neglect. It occurs across all areas of society and no specific causes have been directly identified that lead an individual to neglect a child. Research has acknowledged several risk factors that are commonly attributed to and associated with child neglect, including prior history of abuse, personality and behavioral characteristics, family size and household composition, and family structure and resources (Runyan, Wattam, Ikeda, & Ramiro (2002); English et al. (2002); Fluke, Shusterman, Hollinshead, & Yuan (2005). Children within environments where these risk factors are present are at greatest danger of becoming victims of neglect.

C. Consequences of Child Neglect

The effects of neglect are harmful and have the potential of being long-lasting. Its impact can increase in severity as a child ages and is visible across several areas, including delinquency and crime, developmental deficits, and future maltreatment. These areas are often interrelated. For example, the experience of neglect for a child may create delayed brain development that may manifest into social and behavioral problems (DePanfilis, 2006). Children exposed to neglect are "more often depressed, unhappy, socially isolated, or they showed eating disorders, inadequate or under-nutrition, suicidal tendencies, lack of concentration, disturbed behavior, or they expressed a strongly felt wish to leave home" (Chistoffersen & DePanfillis, 2009, p. 38). Child neglect is more common, lasts longer, and the consequences are longer-term than physical abuse (Berry, Charlson, & Dawson, 2003).

Children's lives are disrupted when they are victimized (Wilson 2000). They experience feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, fear, and aggression. The long-term affects are

overwhelming. Far too often child victims experience difficulties in school, work, and relationships.

Delinquency and Crime

Child victims of maltreatment add immensely to the toll of criminals in the United States. Through empirical research, it has been found that a strong relationship exists between child neglect and criminality. English et al. (2002, p.50) concluded that there are "potentially serious criminal consequences for children who are abused and neglected." Fagan (2005, p. 279) recognized that "victims of child maltreatment are significantly more likely than non-victims to become offenders."

The correlation between child maltreatment and criminal behavior was observed in a study that evaluated cases of child abuse and/or neglect from court records during 1980-1984 from the State of Washington. English et al. (2002), as a result of studying the court records, as well as juvenile and adult arrest data from law enforcement agencies through 1998, found that abused and neglected children are 4.8 times more likely to be arrested as a juvenile and twice as likely to be arrested as an adult. Additionally, by observing placement status of children, English et al. (2002) established that abused and neglected children removed from their parents and placed into non-relative foster care were significantly more likely to be arrested for a juvenile and adult crime.

In a study conducted by Lisak & Beszterczey (2007), forty-three death row inmates were examined and it was found that childhood neglect was endemic. Over eighty percent of the inmates had been witnesses of violence and one hundred percent suffered some form of neglect. Lisak & Beszterczey (2007) concluded that the inmates' adaptation into adulthood was impaired

due to the abuse, neglect, and violence they experienced during their childhood. Over one-third of the inmates had relationship and employment difficulties, more than half participated in criminal behaviors, and almost seventy-five percent had a history of incarceration or institutionalization.

Developmental Deficits

Research has shown that neglected children are more likely to experience cognitive deficits and severe academic and developmental delays than non-neglected children. Neglect has serious psychosocial and emotional consequences for children. The emotional impacts of neglect, such as fear and an inability to trust, can lead to lifelong problems, such as low self-esteem. Neglected children experience insecurity, anxiety, and avoid attachments moreso than non-neglected children. When unable to form attachments, children are at greater risk of becoming mistrustful of others, having difficulty understanding and regulating emotions, forming and maintaining healthy relationships, and developing poor social and coping skills (DePanfilis, 2006). In addition, children who experience neglect are at a significant risk for school failure, mental disorders, and display more anger, aggression, and non-compliance (Berry et al., 2003).

Neglect has pervasive and chronic impact and alters the potential of a child. The actions, symptoms, and resulting damages of neglect are uniquely related. They directly effect a child's brain development. When the brain is developing it is at the greatest period of sensitivity in life. Experiences in the developmental stages in life have a tremendous impact on the brain and the future of the brain (Perry, 2001). At birth, the brain has developed to the point where environmental cues play a major role in determining how neurons will differentiate, sprout

dendrites, form and maintain synaptic connections and create the final neural networks. By

adolescence, according to Perry (2001), the majority of the changes that are taking place in the

brain of a child are determined by experience, not genetics. A young person's language, beliefs,

cultural practices, and cognitive functioning are primarily experienced-based. All experiences

change the brain. The brain is designed to change in response to repetitive stimulation. If there

is a stimulation of fear and trauma, the brain changes and a person's experiences in childhood

has a greater impact on the developing child than experiences later in life (Perry, 2001). The

experiences of childhood define the adult.

When a child experiences neglect, his or her brain becomes affected and altered. Teicher

(2002) witnessed, through the treatment of patients, that various forms of child maltreatment had

altered the development of the patients' limbic systems of the brain. The limbic system plays a

pivotal role in the regulation of memory and emotion. Additionally, Teicher (2002) discovered

that child maltreatment has effects on the left hemisphere of the brain. The left hemisphere is

specialized for perceiving expressive language. Teicher (2002) acknowledged that a large

amount of stress is put on the brain of a child that has been maltreated. As a result, stress sculpts

the brain to exhibit antisocial behaviors. "Stress can set off a ripple of hormonal changes that

permanently wire a child's brain to cope with a malevolent world" (Teicher, 2002, p. 73). Stress

during childhood can impact a child for life. When a child becomes exposed to chronic,

traumatic stress the child develops a state of hyper-arousal (Perry, 2001). The brain adapts to a

world that is unpredictable and dangerous. During a state of hyper-arousal, a child's brain

becomes threatened by environmental cues, causing the child to act aggressively. Children who

experience the stress of neglect will focus their brains' resources on survival and responding to

threats in their environment (Perry, 2001). The experiences of childhood provide the organizing

framework for the expression of children's intelligence, emotions, and personalities. When those experiences are primarily negative, children may develop emotional, behavioral, and learning problems that persist throughout their lifetime, especially in the absence of appropriately targeted interventions.

The aftermath of child neglect can manifest itself at any age in a variety of ways. It can appear as depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress. In addition, it can appear as aggression, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, or substance abuse. Child neglect impairs development and has serious long-term consequences. Tyler, Allison, & Winsler (2006) recognized that maltreated children experience attachment issues that may lead to unhealthy relationships, poor coping strategies, and negative interactions with others. Additional consequences include low levels of self-esteem, social withdrawal, poor academic performance, and language and cognitive development delays (Tyler et al., 2002). Widom & Maxfield (2001) recognized poor education performance and low levels of achievement as characterizations of childhood neglect.

Cycle of Neglect

Children who experience neglectful and violent environments will replicate what they witness and learn. Child victims have a predisposition toward neglect and violence, especially within their own family. Society has a never-ending chain of neglect that is passed from one generation to the next and a strong link exists between victimization in childhood and later involvement in neglectful behaviors. Research has found that parents neglected as children are significantly more likely to have been maltreated when they were children (Polonko, 2006). In fact, Erickson & Egeland (2002) discovered that seventy-eight percent of mothers who were

neglected as children maltreated their own children and the majority of the maltreatment was neglect. Having been maltreated as a child is related to a parent's neglect of their own children, not only as a direct factor, but also "indirectly through its effect on a parent's cognitive impairments, low achievement, elevated psychopathology and substance abuse" (Polonko, 2006, p. 274). In addition, parents who neglect their children often have lower IQ and educational attainment, higher rates of mental illness, higher levels of aggression, are more likely to abuse substances and be arrested, and have inappropriate expectations for their children (Polonko, 2006). Each factor is related to having been maltreated as a child and, as a result, is related to the maltreatment of one's own child. A parent's experience as a child plays a critical role in the upbringing of their own children.

Children learn from what they witness and experience. They are a product of their environment and when the environment in which they are raised is filled with neglect and violence the likelihood that they learn neglect and violence as a means of life and engage in its negative fulfillment is drastically elevated. The cycle of neglect recognizes that children who are victims of neglect or witnesses of violence will grow up and react in a similar manner. This is passed down from one generation to the next and creates an inability to adapt to the adult world. Neglect victims have few inner resources needed to cope with challenges that confront them as adults, including relationships, employment, and responsibilities. When children are neglected they are entered into a cycle that has and will continue to be past on from each generation.

D. Current Methods of Treatment

Statistics from the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2009) illustrate that a consistently high number of children have been neglected for numerous years. In

order for the rates of child neglect to greatly decline there is a need for greater attention to be

directed toward more research that evaluates the effectiveness of different treatment

interventions. Interventions that demonstrate effectiveness and success for neglected children

must be made available (Allin et al., 2005). Most treatment approaches to child neglect seek to

alter the parents or home environment and have not shown to significantly reduce the number of

children being neglected each year (Panel on Research on Child Abuse & Neglect, 1993). Figure

4 outlines the current approaches that are utilized to treat child neglect cases and it is clear that

child-focused interventions are lacking.

Neglect Interventions					
Concrete Support	Social Support	Developmental	Cognitive & Behavioral	Individual	Family-based
* Assistance for housing, transportation, food, clothing, medical care, & child care * Hands on assistance * Accessibility to community resources	* Parent aid & volunteer assistance * Faith-based activities * Neighborhood & recreation programs * Social networking	* Parent mentoring & role modeling * Child therapy * Afterschool programs	* Social skills training * Teaching of home management, parent-child interactions, meal preparation & other life skills * Individual or group therapy for parent * Parenting education * Financial & employment training	* Substance abuse counseling * Mental health counseling * Crisis intervention * Stress management * Play therapy	* In-home family strength building services * Family therapy

Figure 4. Neglect interventions. Adapted from DePanfilis (2006).

Parent-focused Approaches

Parent-focused treatment for child neglect operates to meet the needs and ensure for the safety of the family. It focuses on enhancing parenting skills, providing information regarding appropriate child care, teaching stress management, and working to eliminate self-defeating thoughts and beliefs (DePanfilis, 2006). It is the method of treatment most commonly utilized. Unfortunately, these treatment efforts do not seek to alleviate the effects of the neglect on the child. Parent-focused treatments are not always successful at achieving their intended goals. For example, high rates of depression, substance abuse, and antisocial behavior visible in parents will likely decrease the effectiveness of parent-focused training and social support interventions (Kaplan, Pelcouitz, & Labruna, 1999). Additionally, it is clear that difficulties lie in relying on such an approach to assuage past and future neglect. For example, treatment for substance abuse is "under pressure and at risk of failure in many areas, particularly for rural, uninsured, and undeserved populations" (Hubbard, Simpson, & Woody, 2009, p. 162).

Child-focused Approaches

Child-focused treatment approaches seek to dispel the trauma and other damages resulting from neglect. Therapy is most often utilized for child victims and child care and Head Start programs are not typically considered in most interventions (DePanfilis, 2006). Furthermore, a legal response is often the only means for a child victim to enter into the child welfare system of services. This leaves many neglected children untreated. A legal investigation and assessment generally focus on what might occur in the future and what types of interventions will best meet the needs of the family (DePanfilis, 2006). Such a primary response fails to acknowledge any harm already inflicted onto a child.

If a child is fortunate to be provided with treatment it typically comes in the form of therapy. Such a response; however, has not proven to be effective and has not been evaluated empirically (Kazdin, 2003). Talk therapy has shown to be extremely difficult to utilize as a treatment approach for children and, as a result, many therapists seek to utilize other forms of therapy to best relate to the child (United States Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2008). According to the United States Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (2008), no scientific evidence is available to support the use of art therapy, drug therapy, and psychological debriefing for children. Additionally, more than seventy-five percent of mental health professionals in the United States are utilizing therapies that are not known to be effective for the treatment of children and teenagers with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (United States Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2008).

Professionals may encounter difficulties when providing treatment for children who enter into therapeutic settings. First, whether a child is referred for behavioral or emotional problems, the child may not see their symptoms as a problem or in need of treatment. As a result, children are not very motivated to attend therapy. In addition, it is not established whether or not young children are capable of reporting on the severity and scope of their emotional and behavioral problems (Kazdin, 2003). Second, in order for therapy to be successful children must attend on a regular basis. Despite this, retaining children and families in treatment is a major challenge. Between forty and sixty percent of children, adolescents, and adults who begin treatment drop out early (Kazdin, 2003).

It is very difficult to treat child neglect due to its high prevalence and lack of being reported and acknowledged (DePanfilis, 2006). Incidents of neglect that are reported and acknowledged often lead to intervention from social service agencies, namely, child protective

services. Despite this intervention, social services agencies and juvenile courts refer only a

minority of victims for treatment (Kaplan et al., 1999). As a result, the developmental and

behavioral problems commonly associated with neglect will likely go untreated. If social service

agencies intervene soon after neglect occurs then subsequent episodes of neglect can be

prevented and an opportunity exits for services to be delivered to children to minimize their

trauma. Without intervention, traumatized children bring their trauma into adolescence and

adulthood (Sechrist, 2000). As supported by research, current treatment efforts are not very

successful and allow many negative gaps unfulfilled. Parents often become the focus of

treatment efforts and the neglected child is forgotten. When children are provided with

intervention options they are placed into treatments that have not been evidenced as effective or

successful. Adequate treatment approaches for child neglect have not been made available

(United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2001). The goal of this research is to

present a new treatment approach, service learning, that has been evidenced as successful at

addressing key issues that plague child victims of neglect. When utilized, service learning has

the potential to decrease the high rates of child neglect and delinquency, as well as improve

developmental deficits. The following review of social bond theory and developmental theory

will provide a theoretical framework to solidify the need for service learning to be utilized as a

child-focused treatment approach to child neglect.

III. THEORETICAL APPLICATION

This section will provide a theoretical explanation as to why neglected children suffer

developmental deficits and antisocial behaviors. The literature exploring occurrences and

consequences of child neglect can be best explained by the social bond theory and developmental

theory. The social bond theory demonstrates that neglected children form weak or no

attachments, minimal to no participation in positive activities, and do not respect societal norms.

The developmental theory demonstrates that neglect of children interferes with healthy

development resulting in problems experienced throughout the life course.

A. Social Bond Theory

The importance of adolescence and the effects that neglect has on children can be

recognized when an understanding is made of the social bond theory. Childhood is a critical

time in life where individuals need strong and positive social ties. If an individual's social ties

are negative, there is a greater likelihood that deviant behavior will transpire. Hirschi (1969)

formulated the social bond theory noting that criminal behaviors and social bonds are related.

Social bonds consist of four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. These

four elements are what restrain criminal conduct. The social bond theory attempts to create an

understanding of how criminal behavior can be prevented. According to the social bond theory,

the stronger the presence of social bonds, the least likely an individual will become involved in

criminal behavior (Hirschi, 1969, as cited in Cullen & Agnew, 2006). The social bond theory

asserts that attachment restricts deviation from norms. Individuals are more likely to violate a

norm when they do not care about the wishes and expectations of others. Commitment, the

second of the four elements, provides individuals with the opportunity to consider the costs of

deviant behavior. An individual that is devoted to an activity will calculate the risk potential

their behavior has. When individuals participate in conventional activities they are not as likely

to find time for engagement in deviant behavior. Their involvement does not provide an

opportunity for deviant behavior. Additionally, there becomes a greater likelihood of deviant

behavior when an individual believes he should not obey the rules of society (Hirschi, 1969, as cited in Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

Adolescents and children that have been neglected are unable to positively develop the four elements of the social bond theory and, as a result, will have a greater likelihood to engage in deviant behavior. Neglected children often have weak social bonds and do not form attachments, participate in conventional activities, and maintain a lack of respect for societal norms. As previously explored, research has found that a strong relationship exists between child maltreatment and criminality. English et al. (2002, p.50) were able to conclude that there are "potentially serious criminal consequences for children who are abused and neglected." Maltreated children are lacking social bonds and are unable to acquire the necessities of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.

B. Developmental Theory

Incorporating a developmental perspective into efforts to understand child neglect brings about promising potential in interventions for child maltreatment (Cicchetti & Toth, 1995). The developmental perspective points to life experiences that mold individuals and send them along routes or pathways. The developmental theory, in this case, focuses on the physical, social, and psychological development of victims of child neglect. Children have specific stage-salient developmental needs that, if unmet, prevent successful adaptation within and between developmental stages. The neglect of children interferes with healthy development and leads to problems that can be experienced throughout life. Bloom (2000) noted that research has discovered that neglected children develop learning and academic problems, often becoming inattentive and uninvolved in learning. As a result, neglected children perform poorly on

intelligence and achievement tests. Additionally, neglected children's development is affected to the point where they often have severe language delays or disorders, difficulty maintaining positive self-esteem, are often socially isolated, expect to fail and give up trying to succeed, do not develop necessary conceptual skills, do not know how to establish healthy and sustaining relationships, have poor communication skills, and lack the capacity to delay gratification. Research conducted by English, Thompson, Graham, & Brigs (2005) examined the long-term effects of maltreatment on two hundred twelve children. Children that did not receive medical and psychological care from their caregivers had problems with residence safety, delays in language, and behavioral problems.

The neglect of children is a source of brain injury in individuals who have a history of delinquency and neuropsychological impairments. Neglect leads to antisocial behavior and children who are antisocial suffer from neuropsychological / developmental deficits. Two key deficits areas are verbal and executive functions. The verbal deficits affect listening, reading, problem solving, expressive speech, writing, and memory abilities. The executive deficits are inattention and impulsivity. The developmental deficits, as a result of neglect, are "independent of social class, race, test motivation, and academic attainment" (Moffitt, 2006, p. 505). In addition, these deficits not only establish themselves in childhood, but become sustained for long periods.

It is important to note that not all children suffer deficits as a result of neglect, but may be born with them. Unfortunately, neglectful environments continue and aggravate the deficits. Often, children born with deficits are born into families already troubled with developmental deficits and antisocial behaviors (Moffit, 2006). In nurturing environments the deficits are often

corrected; however, "in disadvantaged homes, schools, and neighborhoods, the responses are more likely to exacerbate than amend" (Moffit, 2006, p. 511).

Once entered into the later stages of life, individuals with developmental deficits have a limited chance of acquiring prosocial behaviors. It now becomes necessary for adequate and effective treatment to be implemented early on in an individual's life so that the potential for antisocial behavior may be confronted. "If social and academic skills are not mastered in childhood, it is very difficult to later recover lost opportunities" (Moffit, 2006, p. 510). As will be addressed in Section IV, an approach exists that will effectively address the consequences of child neglect. A theoretical perspective created an understanding of how neglect prevents a child from leading a prosocial life. It has been shown that child neglect results in developmental deficits, weak or no social bonds, criminal behavior, and continuation of neglecting behaviors. Now is the time to stop this train ride of devastation. Service learning offers a roadblock to the oncoming consequences of neglect.

IV. EXAMINING SERVICE LEARNING

For child-focused treatment of child neglect to be effective it must adequately address the concerns that have been provided by theory. Service learning, as will be demonstrated in this section, will offer a new and successful means for treatment. Service learning enhances key social bonds and developmental skills necessary for a productive, positive, and crime-free life.

A. Definition & Purpose

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2005) defines service learning as a "teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction

and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." Service learning is a hands-on educational strategy/approach that combines service objectives and learning objectives to bring about measurable change to the recipient and provider of a service. Service learning activities, most often utilized in school settings, provide students with the opportunity to connect curriculum studies to activities. Some examples include tutoring younger children, adopting a river, creating a museum exhibit, or conducting oral histories with senior citizens. By doing such activities, children learn to service and serve to learn. As a result, they become better students and better citizens.

Service learning is a key strategy for accomplishing self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Hecht's (1999, p.35) evaluation of service learning noted that "service learning is reported to help reduce violence and at-risk behaviors, improve attendance, and engage students in their own learning." Problem solving and decision making skills are developed through service learning. Children engaged in service learning face a variety of situations and experiences that encourages them to use critical thinking skills and that help in the building of personal development skills (i.e. coping and life skills). Hecht (1999, p.35) explained that service learning can have a positive impact on personal development areas: "students view their work as meaningful, develop a sense of self-confidence, report they care about others and understand differences, and generally 'feel good' about themselves."

Service learning also helps to bring together students and community. It will engage students who are often distant, secluded, and disengaged from traditional learning. When service learning is utilized, children feel useful and challenged. Children experience a sense of

competence, hold more positive attitudes about others and communities, and have a greater sense of responsibility (Hecht, 1999).

B. Case Examples & Proven Success

Service learning is essential in providing environments that nurture a child's need for attachment, commitment, involvement, belief, and developmental growth. Service learning curriculums will develop a child's life skills and coping skills and will essentially help in eliminating future negative outcomes. A specific example of service learning in action can be taken from a high school in Oklahoma near one of the nation's worst toxic waste clean-up sites. Students learned that children in the community had high levels of lead in their blood so they formed a volunteer society to increase public awareness. Service learning was utilized within school classrooms. Biology students conducted water, fish, and plant monitoring and testing. Language art classes participated in creative writing and research projects related to toxic waste. Computer science and journalism classes focused on creating community awareness. Additionally, service learning students educated the community by providing tours [National Commission on Service Learning (NCSL), 2002]. While service learning has a large goal of increasing child engagement in school, it actually accomplishes much, much more. As a result of the service learning activity illustrated above, one teacher noted that "students are working side by side with tribal leaders, teachers, specialists, and community leaders and learning effective communication and social skills" (as quoted in NCSL, 2002, p. 13). Imagine the benefits such as service learning project could have on a neglected child that has limited positive experiences, developmental deficits, and lacks necessary social bonds.

Another example of service learning in action took place in the city of San Francisco. Here, six-grade students helped create a historical mural. For the project, students developed a budget and grant proposal, learned interview techniques from news reporters, interviewed community members, researched written work, wrote letters to the community, created graphs for their drawings, and even volunteered summer vacation time to finish the project. The mural now stands on a street in the children's school district and depicts the lives of those who have influenced the community (O'Connor, 2009).

Service learning proved to be effective yet again when sixth through eleventh grade students in southeastern Idaho utilized service learning to create a community entrance into the city. The students worked closely with the Idaho Transportation Department, as well as engineering and construction companies. Once the design work was complete, the students presented their finished design to the city counsel. As a result of participating in this service learning experience, one child wrote that she has gained awareness that her opinion counts and that she can make a difference in her community (NSLC, 2005).

Service learning has demonstrated a great deal of success. Despite research on service learning being in its infancy, as well as having limited numbers of schools offering service learning and few teachers participating in service learning, there has been a solid base for the successes of service learning to stand. Research that has been completed has shown service learning to demonstrate the following in children (NCSL, 2002):

- Increase academic performance and attendance

- Increase knowledge of community needs and commitment to service

- Develop a more sophisticated understanding of morality

- Increase desire to be an active contributor to society

- Become more responsible

- Show greater empathy

- Show less alienation

- Exhibit fewer behavior problems

- Participate in less sexual activity

- Reduce violent behavior

- Increase awareness of career possibilities

- Develop positive peer and teacher relationships

- Impact development of complex cognition and critical thinking skills

Studies have been completed that evaluate the effectiveness of service learning and they provide a positive foundation for the use of service learning. Lee (2009) discovered that service learning maximizes academic learning, promotes personal growth, and instills a commitment to lifelong civic engagement. Billig (2000) found service learning to have a positive relationship with self-efficacy, respect for diversity, self-confidence, collaborative skills, avoidance of risky behaviors, and resilience. Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier (2000) utilized a racially and socioeconomically diverse sample of students in six through eighth grades in three middle schools and found that service learning students maintained concern for the social welfare of others while a control group declined in their concerns. Additionally, Scales et al. (2000) discovered the service learning students to engulf a greater commitment to school and helping behaviors. Through an explanatory methods design, Simons & Cleary (2006) evaluated the influence of a service learning course and the effects it had on a child's personal development. Children that were evaluated showed improvements in diversity, community self-efficacy,

political awareness, and civil engagement. The improvements were noted in one semester. In addition, children improved their personal and interpersonal development and community engagement. Simons & Cleary's (2006) findings suggest that service learning contributes to the personal development of children. Children were able to better understand social problems and identify solutions to resolve the problems.

C. Implementation

Neglected children that are lacking social bonds and key developmental abilities are at a much greater risk for displaying violent criminal behaviors and to continue the cycle of neglect. Creating children that possess positive social bonds and developmental skills is no easy task. Cassel (2001) recognized that the best crime prevention involves personal development at the educational level. Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elisas (2003, p. 466) expressed that "a comprehensive mission for schools is to educate students to be knowledgeable, responsible, socially skilled, healthy, caring, and contributing citizens." Additionally, "there is a solid and growing empirical base indicating that well-designed, well-implemented school-based prevention and youth development programming can positively influence a diverse array of social, health, and academic outcomes" (Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 470). It is imperative for educational setting to incorporate an approach that can positively guide and influence children. Research results from Jenkins & Sheehey (2009) indicated that service learning is an effective instructional strategy for teaching content and social values. Too often, "adults provide children with an environment that demands nothing of them and teaches them nothing" (McWhirter et al, 2004, p.31). It is time to provide children, especially those who have been neglected, with an opportunity for acquisition of social bonds and developmental skills.

Service learning research has shown the ability to bring about success in these much need areas within the lives of neglected children.

There are four key processes that create successful initiation of service learning within the education setting (O'Connor, 2009):

1. Preparation: Hold brainstorming sessions with students and identify community problems and possible solutions.

2. Planning: Have students organize the project to provide them with practice in planning, collaboration, and personal responsibility. Define roles, responsibilities, and learning objectives. Identify community partners. Form a plan of action.

3. Carry out the project: Provide structured opportunities for students to document and discuss.

4. Reflection: Provide structured opportunities for students to reflect on the significance of the project after it has been completed. Analyze, with students, the academic, community, and personal significance of the project.

Additionally, Service learning must involve several key elements to allow for its success (NCSL, 2002):

- Projects have clear educational goals.
- Projects challenge students' cognitive and developmental tasks.
- Tasks meet community needs.
- Students have a voice in selecting, designing, implementing, and evaluating projects.
- Projects foster communication, interaction, and partnerships.
- Students reflect before, during, and after projects.

The use of service learning in schools needs widespread implementation. Educational

settings that utilize service learning may target children that are known to have been

neglected so as to ensure their acquisition of social bonds and developmental skills; however,

one of the greatest successes of service learning when fully utilized by educational systems is

that all children are provided with opportunities to develop the necessary skills to become a

positive, successful member of the community. Most importantly, unreported victims of

child neglect would be a part of such a positive quest. No child will be forgotten and

neglected children will no longer be neglected.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Acquiring an understanding of the consequences of child neglect makes it possible to

adequately implement appropriate and effective treatment that can fully handle addressing these

precise consequences. Current treatment methods for child neglect often focus on correcting the

behaviors of the parent and forget that the child has suffered ill-effects. When children are

provided with opportunities to succeed, the interventions offered, typically therapy, have not

proven to be effective and have not been evaluated empirically (Kazdin, 2003). The result is the

inevitability that the neglected child will experience significant ongoing consequences,

particularly, violent behaviors, developmental deficits, and neglectful behaviors.   The literature

has made it apparent that interventions with proven effectiveness must be available for neglected

children (Allin, Wathen, & MacMillan, 2005). The future of neglected children, nearly a half

million each year, and of society can not be risked. This section will reiterate the importance of

directing attention toward the issue of child neglect and recommends the utilization of service

learning as a child-focused treatment approach to child neglect. Service learning will provide

child victims of neglect with the opportunity to eliminate the disastrous consequences that the neglect placed onto them.

A. Greater Exploration of Child Neglect

Child neglect is the most common type of child maltreatment; however, it is often unreported, understudied, publicized less than child abuse, and professionals direct less attention to it than to child abuse (DePanfilis, 2006). Child neglect's causes, effects, prevention, and treatment are not prominently discussed and explored. As a result, adequate treatment approaches have not been made available and greater amounts of research are necessary to investigate the effectiveness of various interventions. The ongoing neglect of child neglect will only serve to continue raising children that do not foster key social bonds and personal development skills. Greater attention must be directed toward the issue of child neglect if high occurrence rates are to diminish and if the acquisition of effective treatment approaches is to be gained.

B. Service Learning as Child Neglect Treatment

Neglected children do not participate in critical life experiences and the result, without effective intervention, is a lifetime of negative consequences (Perry, 2001). Delinquency, the first of the consequences, adds immensely to the number of incarcerated individuals. Victims of child neglect are far more likely to become criminal offenders than non-victims (Fagan, 2005). Second, child neglect has serious psychosocial and emotional consequences for children. Child neglect causes fear, an inability to trust, low self-esteem, anxiety, unhealthy relationships, poor coping skills, mental disorders, school failure, anger, and aggression (DePanfilis, 2006 & Berry

et al., 2003). The developmental theory explains how neglected children are unable to meet stage-salient developmental needs. This inability drastically affects healthy development throughout life and without effective treatment that provides nurturing environments the consequences will only continue. Lastly, child victims are more likely to replicate the neglectful environments that they experienced (Polanko, 2006 & Erickson & Egeland, 2002)..

Presently, society has approached child neglect with weak intent. Not only is neglect understudied, but interventions and treatment methods have not proven to be effective (Kazdin, 2003). In addition, social service agencies and juvenile courts refer only a minority of victims for treatment (Kaplan et al., 1999). Parent-focused treatment approaches do not address the neglect already experienced by a child or the child's emotional well-being. Child-focused treatment, when utilized, typically occurs in the form of therapy; however, professionals are utilizing therapies that are not known to be effective. Take, for example, a child that has been placed into therapy for the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to the neglect he experienced. Treatment, in this form, becomes very difficult. The child may not see his symptoms of PTSD as a problem or need for treatment. This makes the child unmotivated to attend or participate in the therapy. Additionally, the child may not even be capable of reporting on his emotional and behavioral problems. Furthermore, therapy requires an ongoing commitment and up to sixty percent of those who begin treatments drop out (Kazdin, 2003). Both parent-focused and child-focused treatment approaches being utilized do not take into consideration the high prevalence and lack of reporting of child neglect. Establishing effective treatment that focuses on the high number of child neglect victims and the consequences of child neglect is of extreme importance. Failing to provide a treatment approach that is effective at combating these areas will merely result in a continuation of what communities unfortunately

experience everyday: ongoing neglect, crime and violence, and individuals with developmental deficits.

Service learning, when utilized as a child-focused treatment approach to child neglect, has an exciting potential for unlimited success. Service learning will improve the lives of child neglect victims and decrease future neglect. It provides children with the skills necessary for success and greatly decreases the chance that they will become delinquent or neglectful parents. It brings about self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. In addition, service learning reduces violence, at-risk behaviors, poor school attendance, and engages children in learning (Hecht, 1999). These attributes are vital to the positive growth of children. Hirschi (1969) recognized a strong correlation between criminal behaviors and weak social bonds. Service learning can provide children with critical social bonds so that criminal behaviors may be diverted. Children are able to ascertain attachments to others and their community, commitments to activities, and respect for societal norms.

When children are neglected they do not formulate healthy development and the result is crime, developmental deficits, and future neglect. Fortunately, through nurturing and positive learning environments, these consequences can be diverted, and if present, corrected. With service learning research only in its infancy it has already proven to significantly improve the lives of children by steering them clear of criminal behaviors and by enhancing their personal development skills. Now it becomes imperative for service learning to be implemented universally and directed toward children that have been neglected and that have suffered the ill-effects of neglect. "Schools have one of the best opportunities to act positively in the lives of neglected children and can be key in ameliorating the effects of attachment deficits, behavioral

disorders and limited cognitive processing" (Wilkerson, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008, p. 346).

Educational settings provide excellent opportunities to improve the lives of child victims of

neglect and, ultimately, communities.

VI. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Child neglect, the most common form of child maltreatment, occurs at rates that should

not be acceptable to communities. It is also unacceptable for communities to allow child neglect

to go unacknowledged. All neglected children should be provided with resources and efforts

from their community to alleviate the resulting consequences that neglect has brought upon

them. Failure to acknowledge and shine light on child neglect leaves communities with an

unpromising future consisting of individuals suffering from developmental deficits and engaging

in criminal behaviors.

Research has provided a significant amount of evidence that child neglect victims often

become criminals and engage in antisocial behaviors. It has also shown that neglected children

have a greater likelihood of experiencing cognitive deficits and severe academic and

developmental delays. Child neglect manifests into depression, suicidal ideations, anxiety,

posttraumatic stress, aggression, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and substance abuse. Child neglect

also leads to unhealthy relationships, poor coping skills, and negative interactions with others.

Research has additionally evidenced that children who experienced neglectful environments will

often replicate what they have witnessed and learned. This, unfortunately, creates a cycle of

neglect that occurs from one generation to the next.

An evaluation of theory provides an explanation as to why neglected children suffer

developmental deficits and antisocial behaviors. These consequences of neglect are explained by

the social bond theory and developmental theory. The social bond theory shows that child

neglect results in minimal to no attachments, participation in negative activities, and distance

from societal norms. The developmental theory shows how child neglect interferes with the

healthy development of a child. An understanding of theory has demonstrated the serious

consequences that accompany child neglect.

In order to eliminate the negative, ongoing consequences of child neglect communities

must provide the child victim with proper treatment. This; however, has not been the case.

Communities have been focusing treatment efforts on parents and often fail to acknowledge the

damages caused to the child. If the child is acknowledged, ineffective treatments have been

utilized. By properly understanding child neglect, including its consequences and through the

establishment of a theoretical framework, effective treatments can be proposed, examined, and

successfully utilized.

The employment of service learning as a child-focused treatment approach to child

neglect is very promising and has demonstrated the ability to provide children with key personal

development skills and social bonds. Through the use of service learning, neglected children

learn to serve and serve to learn. Service learning engages the child in learning, encourages them

to use critical thinking skills, and builds coping and life skills. Service learning allows the child

to view their work as meaningful and develops self-confidence and acceptable behavior patterns.

Service learning fills the void that exists among current treatment approaches for neglected

children. If appropriately implemented in schools, neglected children will not be left untreated

despite the fact that in the majority of cases a legal response is needed to initiate treatment and,

even with a legal response, few child victims are referred for treatment (Kaplan et al., 1999).

Service learning additionally is capable of treating neglected children in a manner in which

therapy has been unable to. Service learning builds the skills needed for success in life. It does not require a child victim to see their symptoms as a problem, it does not create the want for discontinuance of treatment, and it does not require a child victim to be capable of reporting the severity and scope of their problems.

Communities owe it to every neglected child to be provided with the greatest opportunities for a successful life. When neglected even further by communities, neglected children become criminals, neglectful parents continuing the cycle, and individuals incapable of building a positive community. New and improved methods of treatment must be acquired that have the ability to achieve success and push communities in a direction that is not toward crime and neglect. Service learning is an approach that can effectively direct a neglected child down a safe and positive path.

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