

Editorial

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

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Received: March 23, 2018; **Accepted:** April 05, 2018;

Published: April 12, 2018

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The public is unaware of the fact that child abuse and neglect result in 22% of state and 50% of county expenditures. In economic terms, parents who raise children who become productive citizens contribute \$1.4 million to our economy for each child they raise. In contrast, parents who neglect and/or abuse their children cost our economy \$2.8 million for each child they damage. They feed the Cradle to Prison/Welfare Dependency Pipeline so well described by the Children's Defense Fund.

Underlying this tragedy in human and economic terms is the hidden prejudice of juvenile ageism which regards newborn babies as the personal property of their biological parents to do with as they wish until they come to public attention as seriously damaged from abuse and/or neglect.

The physical and mental health repercussions of child abuse and neglect warrant dealing with them as public health issues that warrant primary, secondary and tertiary prevention interventions. Primary

prevention would prevent the formation of struggling families. Secondary prevention would assist struggling families. Tertiary prevention would reduce the extent of harm to the affected children through Child in Need of Protective Services Interventions.

Wisconsin Cares, Inc., a family advocacy organization, has proposed that the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect be implemented by setting a simple standard for the legal and physical custody of a newborn baby, namely that the parent cannot be under the custody of another person, as is the case with minors and developmentally disabled adults. In those instances, the custodian of the parent would have custody of the newborn baby if willing and able to assume it by fulfilling the criteria for Kinship Care until the biological parent no longer required a custodian.

Professionals in the health care and social services sectors need help in seeing the big picture. They currently are overwhelmed by the quantity and severity of mental health, criminal, drug addiction and unemployment problems resulting from child abuse and neglect.

Politicians with a genuine interest in improving our society also need to understand the long-range consequences of child abuse and neglect. They need professional public health help in counteracting the effects of racism, juvenile ageism and feminism that permeate our society. Parents in struggling families need to see the big picture and what they can do to help themselves.