

NEWS REPORTS LINK WEAK ECONOMY TO ABUSE INCREASES

In recent months, as the U.S. economy has worsened, newspapers and other media outlets have reported on a perceived relationship between a weakened economy and reports of child abuse. In a Cincinnati news story, officials at Children's Hospital there said the number of child abuse cases they have seen has gone up by 300 in the last year, and in the first three months of this year, the hospital saw eight cases of shaken baby syndrome.

"People are losing their jobs. I think the economy creates a stress for families that puts them over the edge," said a representative of Children's Hospital. At the same time that child abuse cases are up, Cincinnati is seeing a reduction in service workers and law enforcement officers who are needed to investigate cases.

In Florence, South Carolina, the Morning News Reporter on April 1 in a story titled "Economic Woes May Lead to Child Abuse, Neglect" quoted a representative of a child abuse prevention program citing "life stressors such as unemployment, loss of savings, vehicle repossession and home foreclosure" which have left parents "unable to properly care for their children."

In March 2009, Oregon Public Broadcasting in an item headed "Weak Economy Means More Child Abuse, Say Police" reported that police in rural Klickitat County, Washington have seen a rise in child abuse since the recession started last year. In addition, emergency rooms at four hospitals in the area recorded "a sharp jump in deliberate beatings to children."

The New York Times, on April 12 in a story headlined "States Slashing Social Programs for Vulnerable", reported that "Ohio and other states face large cutbacks in child welfare investigations, which may mean more injured children and more taken into foster care." Citing a recent report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Times says that the economic stimulus package is helping to bolster state budgets, but "the money will offset only 40 percent of the losses in state revenues, and programs for vulnerable groups have been cut in at least 34 states." The Times article offers examples from several states:

- Arizona, with one of the nation's highest deficits in relation to its budget, has taken across-the-board cuts forcing the child protection agency, with layoffs of 15 percent of its investigators, to stop investigating every report of potential abuse or neglect, and sharply reduced counseling of families deemed at risk of violence.
- New York is using stimulus money and a tax increase to avoid most of the large cuts in child care and home visitation services that were originally proposed.
- The governor of Illinois has proposed scaling back funds for home visitation services.
- Ohio's proposed budget would decrease the state's ability to investigate reports of abuse and neglect with some counties losing 75 percent of their investigators.

An Associate Press story appearing in the New York Post on April 10 cited hospitals experiencing “more than twice as many shaken babies as a year ago...Workers at Children's Hospital Boston and Massachusetts General Hospital reported seeing nine infants with shaken baby syndrome in three months, compared with four in the same period last year. The chairman of pediatrics at Schneider Children's Hospital on Long Island said his facility has had five cases in the past six months; only one or two cases arose during the previous year.”

In a March 2009 news report in the Boston Globe headlined “Shaken Baby Cases on the Increase: Specialists Link Rise to Economic Stress,” the medical director of the Boston Children’s Hospital's child protection team told the Globe reporter that several of the recent shaken baby cases at the hospital involved parents who had recently been laid off or faced other stresses such as the utilities being turned off.

The AP story also reports that eighty-eight percent of law enforcement officials surveyed nationwide believe the economic crisis has led, or will lead, to more child abuse and neglect, according to top police officials from Los Angeles, Boston, Milwaukee and Philadelphia at a news conference in Washington.

Finally, in late December last year, the Washington Post published a story titled “Child Neglect Cases Multiply As Economic Woes Spread: Lost Jobs and Homes Exacerbate Family Stress Across Region” with this lead: “As the economic downturn takes its toll on struggling families, child welfare workers across the region are seeing a marked rise in child abuse and neglect cases, with increases of more than 20 percent in some suburban counties.”

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