

**Prevention** from 1A

Types of abuse typically fall under four categories: physical, sexual, psychological (or emotional) and neglect.

Like neglect, psychological abuse is fairly nebulous in its definition and characterizing it can pose a challenge. The psychological and emotional well-being of a child is complex in

contrast to physical health and its effects are not always immediately obvious.

Indeed, the WHO has lamented in its World Report on Violence and Health that psychological abuse is given less attention worldwide than physical or sexual abuse.

Locally, the prevalence of the problem is unclear.

Though OHDS keeps a record of "mental injury,"

Oregon holds a separate, broad category for "threat of harm," which under national criteria may qualify as psychological, physical, sexual abuse or neglect. Endangering a child by leaving them in a life-threatening situation, for example, may be recorded under the same category as exposing them to domestic violence.

Representing 41.6 percent of incidents, this form of abuse is second only to neglect in Lane County.

Mann-Heintz points out that verbal abuse and threats of violence play no small part in this.

"I hear people say things to children that they would never say to another adult," she said. "And yet they talk to their kids that way."

Though the effects of psychological abuse are not always apparent, it is no less insidious. The consequences are wide-ranging and vary from person to person. Often, the victim's interpersonal relationships suffer in a myriad of ways, and the victim may later turn to substance abuse or self-harm to dampen overwhelming emotions such as anxiety or depression.

Physical abuse, which accounts for only 6 percent of cases in Lane County, is not the most prominent of abuse types, yet remains a controversial issue due to disagreements

about discipline.

Forms of corporal punishment which do not cause physical injury or "substantial pain" are legally accepted in Oregon. ODHS has stated, "Although not recommended, spanking is not abuse. However, a spanking that leaves marks or bruises on a child might be abuse. Spanking a baby is always a concern."

Mann-Heintz comes down firmly on one side of the argument.

"I personally think that hitting children is never a good option," she said. "It only maintains an abusive cycle."

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires states to protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence" while under care. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has affirmed that corporal punishment is incompatible with this requirement.

Mann-Heintz stressed that parents should know their children well enough to choose corrective methods that are the most effective yet mild.

"Adults need to learn that discipline is a conscious act, not a reaction," she said.

In the worst cases, physical health consequences of abuse on small children include brain damage, central nervous sys-

tem injuries and bone fractures, all of which could lead to life-long disabilities.

Accounting for the fewest cases across data sets is sexual abuse. There were 61 incidents in Lane County for the 2017 fiscal year, making up just over 4 percent of the county's total abuse and neglect cases.

Though relatively rare, sexual abuse is no less serious as it can cause reproductive health problems, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies — all this before the potential psychological damage and resulting difficulties imposed upon the child's life.

Fatalities resulting from abuse or neglect are even rarer, but also cause for concern. There were 30 deaths attributed to abuse or neglect in Oregon during 2017, with 20 being determined as the result of neglect; more than half of all victims were under the age of five.

Numbers like these reflect a trend across data sets. Neglect is far more common than other forms of abuse and data suggest the risk of victimhood increases with youth — the younger the child, the higher the victim rate. Nationwide, children less than one year old constitute nearly 25 percent of cases.

Though that number is just 12.4 percent in Oregon, there

is a marked drop in victimhood rates after a child reaches his or her first birthday, highlighting the vulnerability of this age group and the importance of parental education.

The issue of child abuse pervades nearly all cultures and communities worldwide. Its prevalence has deep-running implications for any social fabric. Abused children are more likely to grow up with heavier burdens in their lives and consequently project those burdens onto others and into their community in various ways.

Increased rates of child abuse have been linked to poorer health, both physically and psychologically. A 2012 systematic review found that emotionally abused subjects were three times more likely to develop a depressive disorder than non-abused individuals.

The same study concluded a strong causal relationship between non-sexual maltreatment and a range of mental disorders, risky sexual behavior and drug use.

Rising health concerns inevitably bring financial burden. Besides health costs, funding must also be diverted to such areas as child welfare services, foster care and the criminal justice system.

See PREVENTION 11A

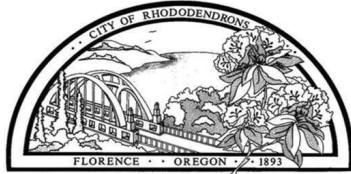
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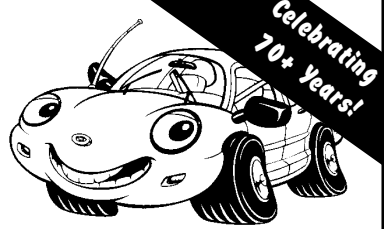
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