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The Movement to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

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The historical roots of the social movement to prevent child abuse and neglect will be examined in this paper. One must understand the definition of child abuse and neglect to understand the scope of this paper. It is important to note that The Federal Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) is a part of the historical timeline of preventing child abuse because it was signed in 1974 by President Nixon. According to CAPTA (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g), as amended by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, child abuse and neglect is defined 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, sexual abuse or exploitation," or "An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm," (The Child Abuse Prevention, n.d.). The movement to prevent child abuse dates back to 1873 and was a "pragmatic blend of religious faith, humane concern, private initiative, and public partnership transcending political, sectarian, and economic differences" (*History*, 2022).

The researcher will explore the four different types of child abuse and neglect. "Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. Sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviors. Non-touching behaviors can include voyeurism or trying to look at a child's naked body, exhibitionism, or exposing the child to pornography" (Peterson, 2018). Physical abuse is an intentional use of physical force that results in death or injury. Emotional abuse, is non-

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physical behavior that is intended to ingrain fear from mechanisms of control, isolation, and humiliation. Neglect is when a parent or caretaker fails to meet the basic needs of the child such as food, water, clothing, adequate shelter, education, and/or medical care. Now that the reader understands the depths of child abuse and neglect, the researcher wants to further examine the history of it. Child abuse and neglect was happening all around us for centuries, but it wasn't until the first recognized child abuse case in 1874 of Mary Ellen Wilson also known as Mary Ellen McCormack that prevention was initiated in the United States. Mary was adopted by Thomas and Mary McCormack after her father was killed as a Union soldier and her mother couldn't financially support her. Mrs. McCormack was widowed, later married Francis Connolly, and this is when the abuse started to occur. .

This paper will examine Blumer's Four Stage Model in relation to the social movement to prevent child abuse and neglect. To comprehend the scope of this paper, one must understand what a social movement is. According to the Four Stages of Social Movements, Social movements can thus be seen as organized but informal social units that focus on injustices by engaging in goal-directed, non-institutional conflict. These goals are either aimed at specific, narrow policies or at more general cultural changes. One of the earliest scholars to study social movement processes was Herbert Blumer, who identified four stages of social movements. The four stages he described were: social ferment, popular excitement, formalization, and institutionalization. Since his early work, scholars have refined and renamed these stages, but the underlying themes have remained relatively constant. Today, the four social movement stages are known as Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization,

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and Decline. In the emergence stage, social movements are very preliminary and there is little to no organization (Christiansen, 2009). I will analyze the Mary Ellen McCormack case and how it relates to past laws and current policies in place. The coalescence stage is when individuals participating in the mass behavior of the preceding stage become aware of each other. This is also when leadership emerges and strategies for success are worked out (Christiansen, 2009). Here I will analyze the leadership that brought awareness to preventing child abuse and neglect. The bureaucratization stage is when individuals can no longer just rely on mass rallies or inspirational leaders to progress towards their goals and build constituencies; they must rely on trained staff to carry out the functions of organizations (Christiansen, 2021). The political leaders that advocated for Mary Ellen also fought to prevent child abuse and neglect for all children thus leading to the first child protection agency in the world.

The final stage in Blumer's four stage model is decline. Note that Decline does not necessarily mean failure for social movements though. Instead, Miller (1999) argues there are four ways in which social movements can decline: repression, co-optation, success, failure, and establishment with mainstream. The two that correlate with this movement are success and establishment with mainstream. Success can be described as an organization that achieved its goals. Establishment with mainstream can be described as declined when their goals or ideologies are adopted by the mainstream and there is no longer any need for a movement. The movement to prevent child abuse and neglect has declined due to there being federal, local, and state laws in place. However, abuse still occurs and social workers are working diligently to combat this issue because it is society's responsibility to protect children. There is a dichotomy here

because one can conclude that the reason for decline of this movement is success, while others conclude the reason is the establishment with mainstream. This dichotomy will be addressed later in this paper.

Emergence

Between the 1820s and 1870s child abuse and neglect was something that occurred often but nothing was done about it federally or locally. This was the infamous padrone system whereby desperate, well-intentioned families were duped into sending their children to America to a sponsor of their own nationality who promised jobs, training, and care for a specified time period after which the children were to be sent home. Instead, like *Oliver Twist*, the children were brutalized and forced to beg, entertain, or steal to support the padrone (NYSPCC, 2022). Although this was something that occurred often it was not until 1873 when Etta Wheeler was informed of the case of child abuse and neglect against Mary Ellen McCormack. Frustrated by the lack of child-protection laws, Wheeler approached the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York where Henry Bergh was the founder. There were more laws in place to protect animals than there were children. Bergh recruited a prominent lawyer, Elbridge Gerry, who took the case to the New York State Supreme Court. They argued that children should be protected in the same way that we protect animals. Within forty-eight hours of Wheeler's initial report, an investigation was conducted, a petition filed, a protective removal effected, a hearing commenced, a temporary placement arranged, and a criminal prosecution initiated (NYSPCC, 2022).

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Ms. Connolly was charged and found guilty of several counts of assault and battery and the court ruled for the child to be removed from the home. Connolly was sentenced to a year in jail. It was not until pediatrician C. Henry Kempe later explicitly detailed and examined child battering at length in a 1962 medical discovery paper, thus leading child abuse to be recognized as a regular and recurring aspect of family life, not a sensational exception but a common syndrome (Wolff, 2013). This offered clinical evidence that child abuse was happening around us all the time. This led to popular excitement in the topic of child abuse and neglect and inspired others to be like Bergh, Gerry, and Wheeler and fight for the safety of children like Mary Ellen. On April 27, 1875, the SPCC was incorporated as the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which was recognized as the first child agency in the world.

Coalescence

People usually don't believe in a movement unless it happens to them or their communities. Mary Ellen's case is an example of abuse and neglect occurring for a long period of time before neighbors started to complain. As noted earlier there were no child protection laws in place which led the community to address their concerns to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (also called ASPCA). Human beings had to report child abuse to an animal prevention agency because animals had laws, policies, and procedures in place before human children. Although this was known, there was no uproar that led to any riots or rallies. The movement was largely top-down using government- based legal approaches rather than a groundswell coming from the community demanding change, although there have always been small groups of advocates including many early social workers regularly fighting to protect children.

Bureaucratization

Bergh and Gerry lamented the fact that no government agency or non-governmental organization existed for child protection. In response to this advocacy, over 300 nongovernmental charities formed in the country by 1922. The Great Depression caused a demobilization of funding for these charities because they relied on donations to protect children. As a result of this economic crisis, society shifted its focus from child abuse and neglect being a state issue to a shared responsibility between state and federal levels. By 1967, the 300 nongovernmental that were formed reduced to about 84 because of this. Prevent Child Abuse America (1972) is one of the oldest organizations that was formed. Prevent Child Abuse America works hard to realize their vision of a world where all children grow up happy, healthy, and prepared to succeed in supportive families and communities. Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for policies and services that strengthen families and communities, promote healthy child development, and prevent child abuse and neglect before it happens. (Prevent Child Abuse America, 2021). There are also federal agencies in place that support this cause. The Children's Bureau also called CB partners with federal, state, tribal and local agencies to improve the overall health and well-being of our nation's children and families. CB aims at strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect, protecting children when abuse or neglect has occurred, and ensuring that every child and youth has a permanent family or family connection. The Children's Bureau seeks to improve outcomes in the following key areas: Safety, preventing and responding to maltreatment of children; Permanency, stabilizing children's living situations and preserving family relationships and connections; and Well-Being,

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enhancing families' capacity to meet their children's physical, mental health, and educational needs (The Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). Due to the bureaucratization of this movement, every state in the country now mandates the creation of child protection laws. All states have enacted roles and responsibilities through their local governments to address these issues.

This section will examine the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, a government agency that advocates preventing child abuse and neglect. Their mission is to provide high-quality prevention and support services to children and families that promote safety, permanency, and well-being with a vision "to create safe and healthy environments for children where they can live with supportive families and engaged communities (Tennessee State Government, n.d). Having so many institutions working on this cause has resulted in the decline of preventing child abuse and neglect movement.

Decline

According to Blumer's model, decline does not necessarily mean failure. Since the movement emerged decades ago, the establishment of the mainstream has caused the decline because not only are there state/local policies in place, but there are also federal policies that are in place to enforce national standards for child protection. There was never a major uproar with this movement, and now this issue has the support of federal and state agencies. Even though children are losing their lives daily to child abuse and neglect, society has moved forward thinking that the state government has this under control. However in reality, funding to DCS funding has been severely cut.

For example, the department's emergency request, which is in addition to their annual request for an increase in next year's budget, includes \$20.4 million to provide a pay boost to private facilities in Tennessee that provide mental health, substance abuse and other care (Wadhvani, 2023). A constant request for budget increases certainly indicates a need for funding. In 2019, state agencies identified an estimated 1,840 children who died because of abuse and neglect — an average of five children a day. However, studies also indicate significant undercounting of child maltreatment fatalities by some state agencies by 50% or more (Childhelp, 2021).

In order to get society involved with this movement, the civil and criminal statutes that are in place need to be revised and publicized so that people can be made aware that there is a problem. In the news and media today, child abuse prevention agencies are under public scrutiny as they are regularly blamed for the children that suffer harm while in their care. However, there is little to no news about how and why child protection agencies are struggling, namely their being chronically underfunded due to continuous budget cuts. This is a form of repression. The intended consequences for what was a public system for child protection becomes privatized so that agents in control receive a profit to benefit a company and its shareholders, not necessarily the people. One can argue that privatization, does not save taxpayers' money, creates the potential for conflicts of interest and corruption, degrades public responsibility for the protection and care of children, preferences the needs of private business owners over all others, causes policymakers and government managers to lose control over services, diminishes accountability of government, compromises quality because of the profit motive, negatively impacts the morale of state employees and contributes to the

staffing crisis in child welfare. Further, the way the system is being privatized does not guarantee market competition and can result in private monopolies (Freundlich, 2012).

Traditionally low-income families of color are most likely to be subject to child abuse and neglect which is a predictor of Adverse Childhood Experiences (also called ACEs). Poor families of color are affected by this cyclical, generational curse since child protection agencies cannot render services if they do not have the resources to do so. It is good that civil and criminal statutes are in place and civil statutes provide definitions of child maltreatment to guide individuals and to identify those who are mandated to identify and report suspected child abuse. It is also good there is a consistent process to determine the grounds for intervention by state child protection agencies and civil courts. Criminal statutes define those forms of child maltreatment that can subject an offender to arrest and prosecution in criminal courts (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). One can infer that since the majority of the protection is needed for poor people of color, and that these people are more likely to suffer while in state custody, that there is systemic racism occurring as outcomes regularly reflect implicit bias. Consistent policy enforcement is required for an environment to be set up for success in protecting children, but services also need to be funded. We really need to consider if child protection should be occurring in a for-profit system and create a new vision for child protection that is more relevant for today's day and age. At some point, we have to do the work to break the cycles of family violence and this is going to take a renewed and dedicated effort between law makers and community members and improved supports for families.

Conclusion

Social workers have fought throughout history to prevent child abuse and neglect. Social workers as a profession are systematically oppressed because they are expected to carry out their jobs without the resources required. Nonetheless, social workers still to this day strive to protect children, even with the bare minimum and ongoing lack of support. This social movement is consistent with social work values and ethic because social workers that prevent child abuse and neglect value dignity and worth of the person, even children. Social workers also value social justice with the ethical principle stating that social workers challenge social injustice (NASW, N.D). The bigger picture examines whether our public policy and regulatory agents understand and support the mission and values of child protection agencies. More importantly, do their missions of these agencies align with the public's ideas of what it means to protect children. It appears bureaucracy may be hampering this movement because they are defunding the cause and reproducing systemic racism. Extensive research has documented consistent inequities in child protective services (CPS) involvement between Black and White children in the US, such that Black children make up a substantially larger proportion of children in CPS cases as compared to their share of the child population (Kim et al., 2017; Lanier et al., 2014). Hence, these inequities are considered a product of systemic racism. There is no inherent relationship between race and maltreatment of children, this data serves to document racial oppression.

Law and policy changes will help social workers to accomplish the recommended duties so that this social movement can move towards revitalization and resurgence. One major policy solution is to ensure that efforts focused on federal financing for child

welfare services include provisions that maintain a stable and well-qualified child welfare workforce with maximum case loads and supports to ensure all case workers are properly trained and supervised (NASW, n.d). By far this is not the only solution but it is a start for change. Having a qualified and competent workforce is at the core of all human efforts. While not all child protection workers are social workers, social workers should take up more leadership positions within child protection agencies and we must stand up for our professional ethics. By impressing social work values upon the entire child welfare system, we can ensure that micro services support children in a culturally competent way, coordination and cooperation occur across the mezzo level agencies involved in the continuum of care, and we can lobby the government to fully fund the care that is needed. But I believe that as social workers, we must continue the struggle to ensure healthier outcomes and enhanced well-being for children and families.

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