

Chapter 7

Child Neglect: The Role of School Counselors

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a groundwork for school counselors. It amplifies their roles and responsibilities to neglected children and also discusses the issues that should be considered in the assessment and treatment of neglected children and their families. The chapter provides professional guides to therapists who specialize in the treatment of neglected children and school counselors who meet with the neglected children occasionally. The methodology adopted for the assessment and treatment of neglect in this chapter is child-centered, family-focused, and culturally receptive. The author posits that dealing with child neglect will be more effective when school counselors leave the four walls of the school to provide support for neglect children and thus integrating them into the school system.

INTRODUCTION

Even though child neglect has been reported as the most common type of maltreatment, its causes, effects, prevention, and treatment are not as explored and discussed frequently compared to physical or sexual abuse. Most sadly, counselors who are better equipped to tackle this menace are usually not recognized in discourses that centers on addressing child neglect. It is against this challenge that this chapter is presented. Child neglect is a form of child maltreatment that covers a range of behaviors which include educational, supervisory, administrative, physical, medical,

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emotional neglect, and abandonment, often convoluted by cultural and contextual factors. Children who are victims of child neglect suffer physical, psychological and emotional abuse. Neglect is seen as a form of negligence from parents, guardians and the government. Child neglect is a social problem, that requires the intervention of school guidance counselors in assisting the affected students. However, this chapter extends the list to the abysmal societal neglect of children who are supposed to be cared for. Children who suffer child neglect are also predisposed to child abuse because it has been observed that a parent who exhibits neglecting behavior can also be abusive at the same time. This chapter looks into child neglect and its attendant effect on school-age children. The age group consists of children from infancy to eighteen.

Child neglect is avoidable and treatable, and as such if the recommendations put forward in this chapter are put to use by school guidance counselors and other mental health professionals the current problem will be put at bay. The objectives of this chapter are to: provide an understanding into the concept, forms, and factors that contribute to child neglect, provide a guide for the assessment of child neglect and most importantly, offer intervention strategies to put the problem at bay.

BACKGROUND

The term child neglect has been used alongside the term ‘child abuse.’ Although child neglect and child abuse vary in definitions, it should be noted that both are connected to the emotional and physical wellbeing of students. Both child neglect and child abuse are forms of child maltreatment. The World Health Organization defines child abuse as “all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity.” While child neglect refers to failure from parents, guardians, government, society to give proper physical, medical and psychological care to the child. Child abuse refers to an action that causes harm to a child; this action could be physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological, spiritual and financial. Neglect occurs when a child is deprived of the underlying physical and psychological needs which are needed for his/her health or overall development. Defining the concept, ‘child neglect’ has always been faced with difficulties across cultures and professions. Factors such as, social and cultural considerations that causes child neglect, how persistent the behavior is, environmental variables, the motive behind the neglect (whether it is intentional or not), what action or inaction can be categorized as child neglect, age and developmental level of the child, basic care that a child is entitled to, the situation of the family (poverty or parental neglect) among others have been factors affecting the definition of neglect. (Watson, 2005)

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