

The articles in this issue of *Focus on Poverty* draw from a November 2020 volume of the *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, edited by IRP affiliates Lawrence Berger and Kristen Slack. Here, we highlight aspects of the edited volume's central theme: finding better approaches to preventing, identifying, and addressing child maltreatment.

While child maltreatment rates have declined significantly in recent decades, child neglect rates have remained steady and high. While no single cause is directly responsible for either child maltreatment or neglect, the strong and persistent relationships between maltreatment, neglect, and poverty are undeniable. Just as the root causes of maltreatment and neglect differ, so do effective interventions and treatments.

Darcey Merritt of New York University considers links between families with lived experience of child welfare system interaction and associated parental behaviors and decision-making among mothers in New York City. Merritt provides interview-based data and analysis from the important perspective of CPS-impacted families. Direct insights from CPS-impacted parents are rarely considered by agency administrators, researchers, or policymakers; this line of inquiry may help to create more efficient avenues of understanding and communication as well as more effective policy.

Brenda Jones Harden and colleagues at the University of Maryland, Cassandra Simons and Richard Barth, collaborated with Michelle Johnson-Motoyama of The Ohio State University to sketch the landscape of child maltreatment prevention and offer paths forward for a more effective and efficient public health approach. This approach includes seeking to expand organizational capacities among child welfare service providers while addressing adverse community conditions which foster the conditions for maltreatment. Early childhood care and education, home visitation, clinic-based programs, school-based programs, and community education and mobilization initiatives are all offered as proactive rather than reactive options for enhanced child well-being.

Megan Feely and Kerri Raissian, both of University of Connecticut, William Schneider of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Lindsey Bullinger of Georgia Tech contribute a vision of “systems synergy,” where the safe and consistent care of children is placed at the philosophical and pragmatic center of all human services agency and program work. Failing to acknowledge economic hardship as a causal factor in child neglect, the researchers suggest, allows federal and state policy to omit the alleviation of financial hardship as a strategic solution.

We also preview two examples of current research looking to improve the experiences of low-income families impacted by CPS involvement. Kristen Slack and Lawrence Berger, both IRP affiliates and professors in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work, are working to understand how access to more and better economic resources might reduce involvement with CPS. Initial results from Project GAIN (Getting Access to Income Now) are expected this fall. Likewise, as a follow-up to research described in this issue, Professor Darcey Merritt of NYU's Silver School of Social Work is advancing a mixed-methods approach to understanding relationships between the decision-making processes of CPS-impacted mothers and the contexts in which they are parenting, including socio-economic constraints and experiences of systemic disenfranchisement.