

other social and psychological problems that often affect them well into adulthood. The costs of this problem are significant and long lasting.

Child maltreatment encompasses all the ways children are hurt by the people who are expected to care for them. This may include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. Maltreatment can occur in the context of the child's home or outside of the home in the child's neighborhood, school, or the home of a relative or friend.

Social workers often work with children who have been abused and neglected. A teacher who overhears a child talk about being hit by his stepmother refers the child to the school social worker. A social worker in a hospital setting is called in to consult when a doctor questions the possibility of sexual abuse. A child may disclose abuse to a family counselor during a session. Social workers who work in child protective services assess and manage cases of maltreatment every day. Whether through education programs, advocating for policies that value the rights of children, or participating in programs that assess and treat children, social workers play a significant role in the problem of child maltreatment. The investigation and determination of maltreatment is often complex. Box 7.7 presents the complexities of a highly publicized case of child maltreatment.

Box 7.7 Becoming a Change Agent

On April 3, 2008, police raided a compound in Eldorado, Texas, inhabited by a polygamist sect. The raid was prompted by an anonymous phone call to a family violence center by a 16-year-old girl. The girl reported being forced into an underage marriage to a 50-year-old man, whom she claimed beat and raped her. She said she had given birth at age 15. Texas law states that girls under 16 cannot marry, even with parental consent. Authorities removed 463 children between the ages of 6 months and 17 years from the compound. The children were placed in foster homes around the state while their cases were being investigated. This became one of the largest child welfare cases in history.

The case raises a number of challenging questions. The local authorities had known about the group and accusations of underage marriage and sexual abuse for a number of years, however, the state did not intervene until receiving the anonymous phone call. Some authorities stated that they did not intervene because the group's practices were based on their religious beliefs, we all have the right to religious freedom, and the state did not want to violate the group's civil rights. Originally, officials only suspected the abuse of girls living at the compound. They later stated that they had also removed male

children "because they were being groomed to become adult perpetrators in the sect" (Roberts & Castro, 2008). Concerns were later raised that some of the boys might also have been victims of physical and sexual abuse.

Analyzing the Situation

- Go back and look at news stories about this case. Why did the authorities decide to remove all of the girls from the compound rather than only those they suspected had been victims of abuse? What is the practice of Child Protective Services in your area in regard to removing children from the home? If abuse is suspected, do they only remove the specific child who they believe has been abused or all children in the home? Why do you think they do it this way?
- Where do the bounds of religious freedom end and the responsibilities of the state to protect children begin?
- Some civil libertarians were concerned about the reasoning that it was right to take the boys from the home because they were learning practices that might lead them to be abusers. What do you think about this?

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Box 7.7 (continued)

What Can Social Workers Do?

Given your analysis, what might social workers do to address the needs of abused children in more traditional cases involving individual families or in larger cases such as the one reported above? What interventions could you suggest at the individual level? The community level? The institutional level? And the policy level?

What Can You Do?

What one step might you take now, alone or working with others, to prevent abuse or neglect of children in your community? What are the barriers that might keep you from taking this step? What could you do to reduce those barriers?

Foster Care

When a child is in need of a safe place to live, foster care can be a good option. Many foster families are nurturing and supportive of the children in their care. But there are also problems with the foster care system, including too few quality placements, growing numbers of children needing care, high costs, and increasing length of time spent in foster care.

In 2015, there were an estimated 427,910 children in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017). The primary goal for children in foster care is permanency with caring parents. The average length of time a child spends in foster care is 13.5 months; however, 9 percent of children remain in foster care for more than three years (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017). When reunification with their families is impossible, some children may not be adopted. Often, children in foster care have been severely affected by the maltreatment they experienced, are emotionally and physically troubled, and can be difficult to manage. The challenges of needing temporary help while finding permanent solutions for children is the task of social workers in the child welfare system.

Not all populations of children are represented equally in foster care. Until relatively recently, LGBT youth have been ignored in most of the child welfare-related research and policy evaluations (Toner, 2013). This is particularly problematic because LGBT youth have a variety of unique needs and issues that put them at increased risk for spending time in foster care and for mistreatment while in care. Some youth realize they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender at relatively young ages and decide to tell their families. Although some families are accepting, others reject their LGBT children. One study found that 50 percent of LGBT youth received a negative reaction when they came out to their parents or guardians, and 26 percent were told to leave their homes (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, 2000). This places LGBT youth at increased risk of homelessness and of entering the foster care system. Research suggests that LGBT youth are overrepresented in the foster care system, with 24 percent of females and 10 percent of males aging out of the system identifying as LGBT (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). When LGBT youth do end up in foster care, they can be placed into situations in which their foster families and/or staff at group homes are no more accepting of their sexual orientation or gender identity than their families of origin. Studies suggest that LGBT youth in foster care are less satisfied with their