

# How the Government Creates Child Abuse

by Stephen Baskerville, PhD

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Just in time for "Child Abuse Prevention Month," the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) publishes its annual contribution to obfuscating the causes of child abuse.

Operatives of the child abuse industry often wax righteous about the "scandal" of child abuse. "We cannot tolerate the abuse of even one child," says an HHS press release. But the real scandal is the armies of officials who have been allowed to acquire -- using taxpayers' dollars -- a vested interest in abused children.

Devising child abuse programs makes us all feel good, but there is no evidence they make the slightest difference. In fact, they probably make the problem worse. Child abuse is largely a product of the feminist-dominated family law and social work industries. It is a textbook example of the government creating a problem for itself to solve.

Child abuse is entirely preventable. A few decades ago, there was no child abuse epidemic; it grew up with the welfare system and the divorce revolution. It continues because of entrenched interests who are employed pretending to combat it.

A few undisputed facts will establish this - facts that are passed over and even distorted year after year by HHS and others whose budgets depend on abused children.

Almost all child abuse takes places in single parent homes. A British study found children are up to 33 times more likely to be abused when a live-in boyfriend or stepfather is present than in an intact family. HHS has its own figures demonstrating that children in single-parent households are at much higher risk

for physical violence and sexual molestation than those living in two-parent homes. Yet this basic fact is consistently omitted from its annual report.

Shorn of euphemism, what this means is that the principal impediment to child abuse is a father. "The presence of the father ... placed the child at lesser risk for child sexual abuse," conclude scholars in the journal *Adolescent and Family Health*. "The protective effect from the father's presence in most households was sufficiently strong to offset the risk incurred by the few paternal perpetrators."

In fact, the risk of "paternal perpetrators" is miniscule. Contrary to the innuendo of child abuse "advocates," it is not married fathers but single mothers who are by far the most likely to injure and kill their children. "Contrary to public perception," write Patrick Fagan and Dorothy Hanks of the Heritage Foundation, "research shows that the most likely physical abuser of a young child will be that child's mother, not a male in the household." Mothers accounted for 55% of child murders, according to a Justice Department report (1,100 out of 2,000, with fathers committing 130). Here again, HHS itself has figures that women aged 20 to 49 are almost twice as likely as men to be perpetrators of child maltreatment: "almost two-thirds were females." Given that "male" perpetrators are not usually fathers but much more likely to be boyfriends and stepfathers, fathers emerge as by far the least likely child abusers.

While men are thought more likely to commit sexual as opposed to physical abuse, sexual abuse is much less common than severe physical abuse and much more likely to be

perpetrated by boyfriends and stepfathers. "Children are seven times more likely to be badly beaten by their parents than they are to be sexually abused by them," according to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The NSPCC found that father-daughter incest is "rare, occurring in less than 4 in 1,000 children," and that three-fourths of incest perpetrators are brothers and stepbrothers rather than fathers. HHS's own figures show that reported sexual abuse is a tiny minority of reported child abuse, and of this little is committed by real fathers. The Journal of Ethnology and Sociobiology reports that a preschooler not living with both biological parents is forty times more likely to be sexually abused.

Yet feminists would have us believe that father-daughter incest is rampant, and conservatives credulously swallow their propaganda. A recent PBS documentary, "Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories," asserts without evidence and contrary to known scientific data that "Children are most often in danger from the father."

Feminist child protection agents implement this propaganda as policy. "One scholarly study concluded that "An anti-male attitude is often found in documents, statements, and in the writings of those claiming to be experts in cases of child sexual abuse." Social service agencies systematically teach children to hate their fathers and inculcate in the children a message that the father has sexually molested them. "The professionals use techniques that teach children a negative and critical view of men in general and fathers in particular," the authors write. "The child is repeatedly reinforced for fantasizing throwing Daddy in jail and is trained to hate and fear him." A San Diego grand jury investigative report found that false accusations during divorce were positively encouraged by government officials. "The system appears to reward a parent who initiates such a complaint," it states. "Some of these involve allegations which are so incredible that authorities should have been deeply concerned

for the protection of the child." Such behavior by officials is driven by federal financial incentives. "The social workers and therapists played pivotal roles in condoning this," charged the grand jury. "They were helped by judges and referees."

Seldom does public policy stand in such direct defiance of undisputed truths, to the point where the cause of the problem -- separating children from their fathers -- is presented as the solution, and the solution -- allowing children to grow up with their fathers -- is depicted as the problem. If you want to encourage child abuse, remove the fathers.

That is precisely what officials do -- not only social workers but also family court judges. It is difficult to believe that judges are not aware that the most dangerous environment for children is precisely the single-parent homes they themselves create when they remove fathers in custody proceedings. Yet they have no hesitation in removing them, secure in the knowledge that they will never be held accountable for any harm that comes to the children. On the contrary, if they do not they may be punished by the bar associations, feminist groups, and social work bureaucracies whose earnings and funding depend on a constant supply of abused children. It is a commonplace of political science that bureaucracies relentlessly expand, often by creating the problem they exist to address. Appalling as it sounds, the conclusion is inescapable that we have created a huge army of officials with a vested interest in child abuse.

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