Bitesize Briefing: Affluent Neglect

GATESHEAD safeguarding children partnership



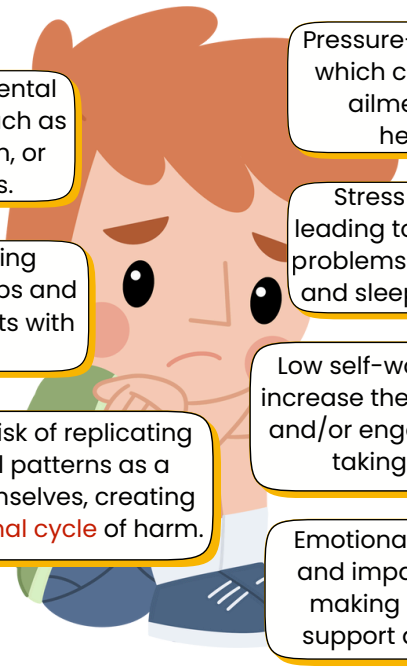
1 What is Affluent Neglect?

Affluent neglect is a type of child neglect that occurs in wealthy or high-income families. Unlike types of neglect that may be linked to poverty or lack of resources, affluent neglect occurs when parents provide financial and material comforts but do not meet their child's emotional, psychological or physical needs.

2 Signs of Affluent Neglect

- The child experiences mental health challenges which are directly linked to pressure to achieve (e.g. perfectionism/ fear of failure), where this pressure is driven by their parent or caregiver's unrealistic expectations.
- The child engages in risk-taking behaviour (e.g. substance misuse, unsafe sexual activity or truancy) as a coping mechanism.
- Parents or caregivers are frequently absent due to work or other commitments, which impacts the child's wellbeing.
- Parents or caregivers rely heavily on delegated caregivers without emotional involvement, which impacts the child's wellbeing.
- Gifts or money are provided as a substitute for genuine affection and attention, which impacts the child's wellbeing.
- The child demonstrates physical symptoms of stress, such as disturbed sleep, headaches, or stomach aches.
- The child reports feeling emotionally unsupported or distant from their parents or caregivers.

3 The Impact of Affluent Neglect



- Increased risk of mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, or eating disorders.
- Pressure-induced stress, which causes physical ailments such as headaches.
- Difficulties forming healthy relationships and secure attachments with others.
- Stress and burnout, leading to physical health problems (e.g. headaches and sleep disturbances).
- Low self-worth, which may increase the risk of self-harm and/or engagement in risk-taking behaviour.
- Increased risk of replicating neglectful patterns as a parent themselves, creating a generational cycle of harm.
- Emotional dysregulation and impaired decision-making due to lack of support and guidance.

4 Myth Busting Affluent Neglect



It is important to consider the role of **unconscious bias** when working with affluent families. Practitioners may overlook concerns by assuming that wealth equals the safety and wellbeing of a child.

Myth #1: If a child has money and opportunities, they cannot be neglected.
Reality: Material wealth does not replace emotional support, guidance or safety.

Myth #2: Abuse in affluent families is rare.
Reality: It is uncommon for affluent neglect to be a standalone issue; it can arise from other factors and types of abuse (e.g. domestic violence, substance misuse, and parental mental health), which can occur in any family.



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Myth #3: Affluent families have access to resources, so problems are easily solved.
Reality: Access to resources doesn't guarantee engagement. Stigma, resistance to involvement and concerns about privacy can prevent intervention.

Myth #4: Neglect in wealthy families is less harmful than in families experiencing poverty.
Reality: A child may be well-dressed and fed, but other basic needs may be unmet. The emotional, psychological and developmental impact of neglect can be severe regardless of income.

Myth #5: Affluent neglect is rare.
Reality: Affluent neglect is less likely to be reported, but it is not uncommon. Cases can be complex and hidden, requiring proactive awareness and intervention from safeguarding practitioners.

5 Barriers to Addressing Affluent Neglect

Consider the barriers. How can practitioners overcome them to improve outcomes for affluent children and families?

Hidden Harm



- *Lack of visible indicators of neglect may mask harm; a child may not disclose directly due to fear or shame.*
- *Harm that manifests in issues such as risk-taking behaviour or mental health may be dismissed or attributed to other factors.*
- *Emotional absence and reliance on delegated caregivers may be normalised; practitioners may view this as a lifestyle choice rather than neglectful.*

Family Dynamics

- Affluent families may resist intervention due to privacy and reputation concerns; they may fear stigma or judgement.
- Families may deny or minimise harm.
- It may be difficult to engage with families effectively due to absence.
- Delegated caregivers may lack the authority or confidence to raise concerns.

Professional Challenges & Systemic Issues

- *Practitioners may be reluctant to challenge families they perceive to be powerful or influential.*
- *Training case studies often focus on families experiencing poverty, resulting in lack of multi-agency awareness.*
- *Services often focus on areas of deprivation, and may not be equipped to support unique challenges faced by wealthy families.*
- *Affluent families may use power and influence to deflect scrutiny or influence outcomes.*

Other Challenges

- Affluent families may restrict access to children or utilise private services to bypass statutory oversight.
- Agencies (e.g. schools) may be reluctant to share information or raise concerns to due to perceived consequences (e.g. loss of funding, complaints/legal action, reputational damage)

6 Learning & Development: Additional Training for Practitioners

Report: Willis Palmer & Goldsmiths University
Challenges faced when working with emotional neglect in children with affluent parents.

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