The Impact of Substance Abuse on Children

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse in conjunction with the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information relate the following information in their article *Substance Abuse and Maltreatment*:

- It is estimated that 9 percent of children in this country (6 million) live with at least one parent who abuses alcohol or other drugs (Office of Applied Studies, 2003).

- The basic needs of children, including nutrition, supervision, and nurturing, often go unmet due to parental substance abuse, resulting in neglect. Additionally, families in which one or both parents abuse substances, and particularly families with an addicted parent, often experience a number of other problems including mental illness, unemployment, high levels of stress, and impaired family functioning, all of which can put children at risk for abuse.

- Research has demonstrated that children of substance abusing parents are more likely to experience abuse—physical, sexual, or emotional—or neglect than children in non-substance abusing households (DeBellis, Broussard, Herring, Wexler, Moritz, & Benitez, 2001; Dube, Anda, Felitti, Croft, Edwards, & Giles, 2001; Chaffin, Kelleher, & Hollenberg, 1996; Kelleher, Chaffin, Hollenberg, & Fischer, 1994).

- In a recent survey by the National Center on Child Abuse Prevention Research, 85 percent of States reported substance abuse was one of the two major problems exhibited by families in which maltreatment was suspected (National Center on Child Abuse Prevention Research, 2001).

- Maltreated children of substance abusing parents are more likely to have poorer physical, intellectual, social, and emotional outcomes and are at greater risk of developing substance abuse problems themselves (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Data indicates that abused or neglected children from substance abusing families are more likely to be placed in foster care and are more likely to remain there longer than maltreated children from non-substance abusing families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

- Because of the severity of problems experienced by maltreated children of substance abusing parents, and the fact that they are often in the foster care system longer than maltreated children from non-substance abusing families, expenditures related to substance abuse among families in the child welfare system are significant. One study estimates that of the more than $24 billion States spend to address different aspects of substance abuse, $5.3 billion (slightly more than 20 percent) goes to child welfare costs related to substance abuse (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2001).