





abuse” (Ciaramella 1). These numbers show how drastically the substance abuse crisis affected the number of children entering the foster care system in 2017. The fact almost 36% of cases were a direct result of substance abuse shows how extreme the substance abuse crisis is and it has only increased in recent years as the substance abuse crisis continues to progressively become stronger. The substantial amount of substance abuse crisis victims is in direct alliance with the drastic increase of children in foster care.

Consequently, the high number of children within the foster care system has led to social care caseworkers being overloaded with cases that they have to manage. According to Jennifer L. Matjasko, “the dramatic rise in opioid misuse and drug overdose deaths over the past several years has overwhelmed child welfare agencies with increasing caseloads” (2). When the number of children placed in foster care is so high, as it is now, the caseloads that the social workers see are way more than what one person can handle. This overwhelming amount of work can lead to caseworkers becoming disgruntled with the job that they have previously loved and leaving the job. If they leave that can only lead to more cases for the ones who stay who already have an all-consuming amount of work, which causes an unending cycle of overworking and exhaustion. According to Matthew DeFour, “[t]here are plenty of social workers out there but child protective services has always been an extremely stressful field.” This field is already a stressful field that requires individuals to experience high levels of traumatic events. Now that the number of cases they have to cover because of the extreme amount of substance abuse cases, they have to experience these traumatic events on an even greater scale. These amounts of cases can take a toll on these workers, which could eventually lead to neglect of their cases.

As a direct result of the overworked social workers, many cases are not being treated with the absolute and utmost care that they deserve leading to the children becoming neglected. One

report states that “[t]urnover [or burnout] also disrupts relationships with families...and may have deleterious effects on child well-being” (Kothari 1,2). When a caseworker becomes overwhelmed with the devastating number of cases they are given, they often do not focus on all the cases they have. This quote proves that the overwhelming number of cases that these employees face can lead to the downfall of the children placed within their care. According to Steven Hoffler, “because child welfare workers are often overburdened by the demands of work...they find it difficult to consistently provide empathic and caring behaviors for their clients.” This information that Hoffler provides successfully explains how the overwhelming number of cases that each social worker handles leads to most of the cases being neglected. Due to the amount of care and attention, each case needs and deserves, a social worker cannot possibly handle the drastic number of cases with that much care. Instead, most of them get put off if they are considered to be less dangerous situations and the child is left to suffer. A caseworker’s workload not only leads to the burnout of said worker but also the neglect of the children placed under their supervision.

Many people, however, believe that the substance abuse crisis causing the system to become overcrowded is not the ultimate reason for children being neglected within the foster care system. One alternate cause is children being placed in institutional placements instead of within their own families. According to one report, “As the...class action lawsuits against state foster care systems demonstrate, too many children in foster care are deprived of the safety, stability, and connectedness of family life” (Font, Gershoff 2). This study explains that the placements that the foster care system provides are not safe and welcoming places, instead, they are harmful and deteriorate a child when placed within them. It also shows that the child does not get the same love and care that they would receive from being placed with their family. Sixto

Cancel writes in his article, “I saw how workers [at the institutional group home] restrained [my brother], took away his visiting “privileges” when he misbehaved and how he ate cafeteria food for every meal.” Cancel’s personal story about how his brother was treated horribly inside these institutional placements also further explains how neglect is a direct result of institutional placement. However, the people who believe that these institutional placements are the major cause of neglect within the system fail to consider why the systems are failing. As I have previously stated, the overcrowding of these facilities due to substance abuse is the main reason why they do not run as they initially did. These systems were not created to house the drastic number of children that have flooded the system as of late, so they cannot successfully and sufficiently provide them the care they require. Even though the institutional placements for the children within the foster care system are not stable and oftentimes lead to neglect, the most significant cause of neglect is the overcrowding in the system due to substance abuse.

The best way for the number of children in the foster care system to decline is for new and improved substance abuse programs to be enacted. Parents will be able to receive the treatment they need to help finally fight back against their addictions. The children will have a safe and nurturing home to belong to. As a nation, there needs to be action taken to reform the programs that are offered to victims of substance abuse. More money needs to be allocated and



