



# How Neighborhoods Influence Child Maltreatment: Multiple Pathways & Policy Implications

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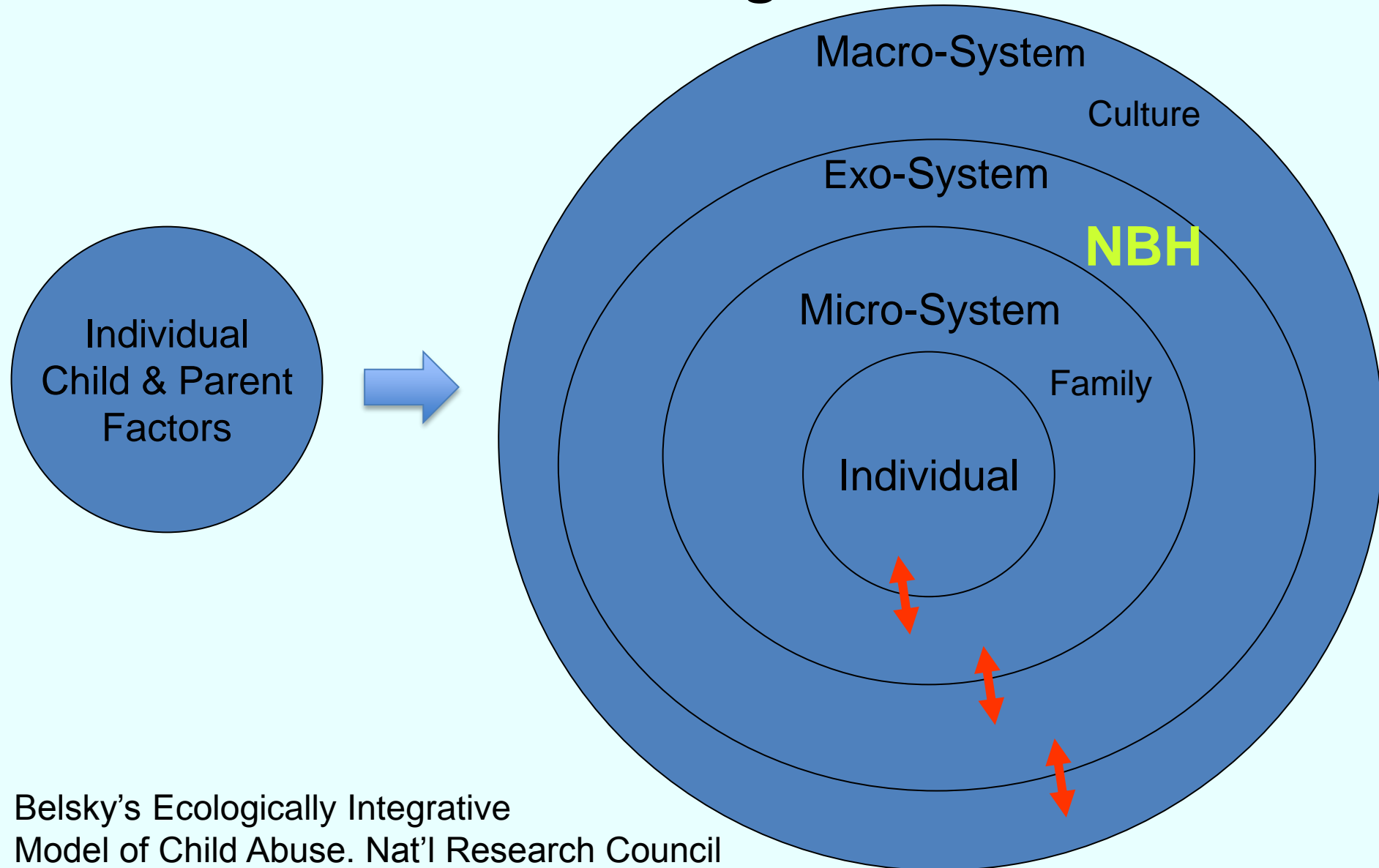
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# Major Messages

- Neighborhood and Community are important contexts (among multiple contexts) that shape maltreatment
  - Influence involves multiple pathways & elusive mechanisms
  - Context is complicated but measurable
  - Measurement requires mixed methods and multiple perspectives
- Important from scientific standpoint (identifying mechanisms) & in applying findings to prevention and intervention efforts

# Understanding Causes of Maltreatment: An Evolving Focus



Belsky's Ecologically Integrative  
Model of Child Abuse. Nat'l Research Council  
(1993) *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect*, p. 110

# How Do Neighborhoods Influence Maltreatment?

- Research suggests neighborhoods may shape maltreatment through different pathways
- To help identify and characterize these pathways, we examined all 25 studies in scientific literature that investigated neighborhood effects
- Studies all used geographically designated neighborhoods
- Developed a conceptual framework to synthesize results and to organize and identify needed research on links between neighborhood and maltreatment

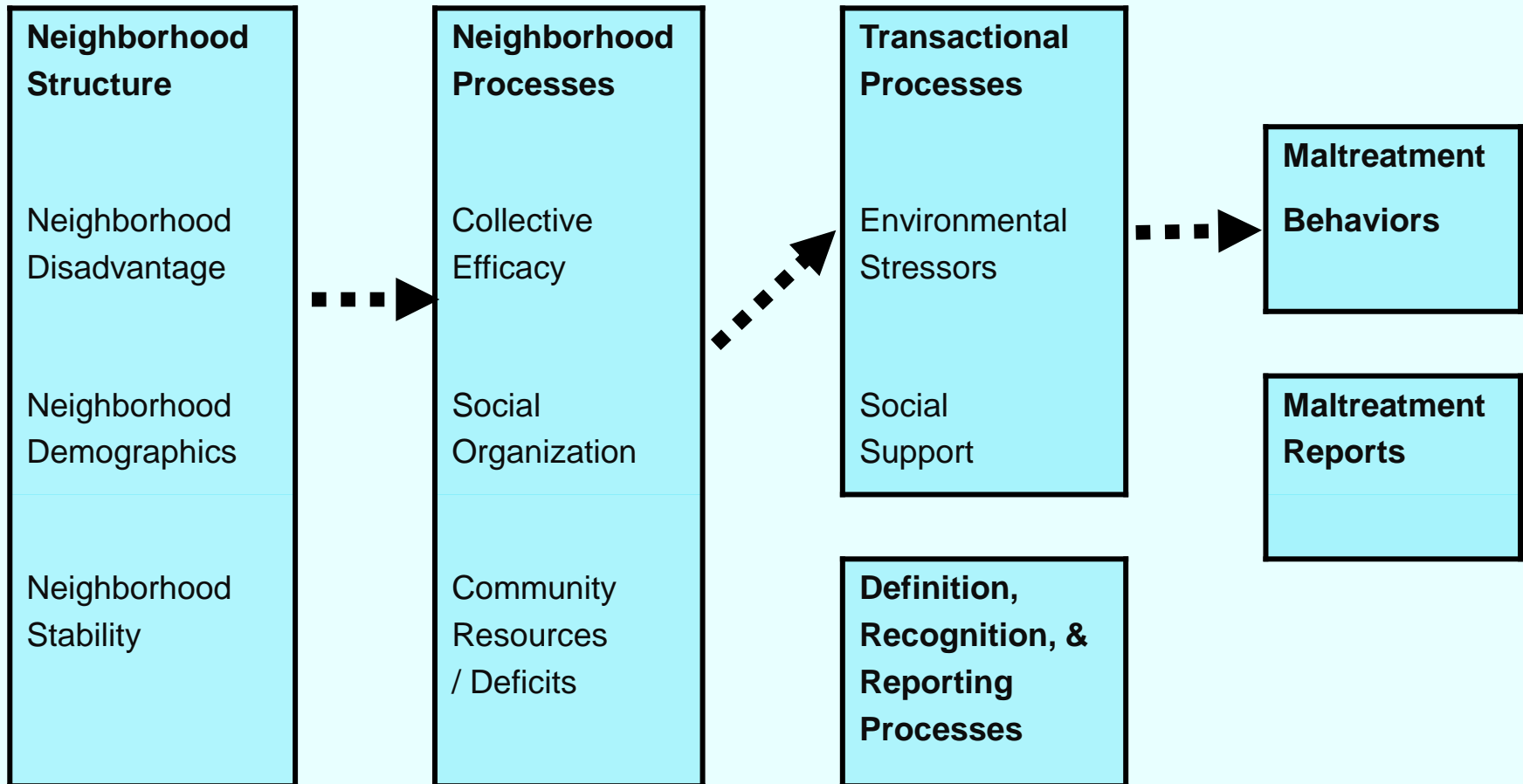


# Conceptual Framework: Key Aspects



- Three potential pathways linking neighborhood & maltreatment:
  - Neighborhood influences on **maltreatment behavior**
  - Neighborhood influences on **definition, recognition and reporting** of maltreatment
  - Family and child characteristics
- Pathways may influence one another
- Each pathway has implications for research, practice and policy;

# Pathway 1: Neighborhood Influences Actual Child Maltreatment Behavior

Family and Child Characteristics

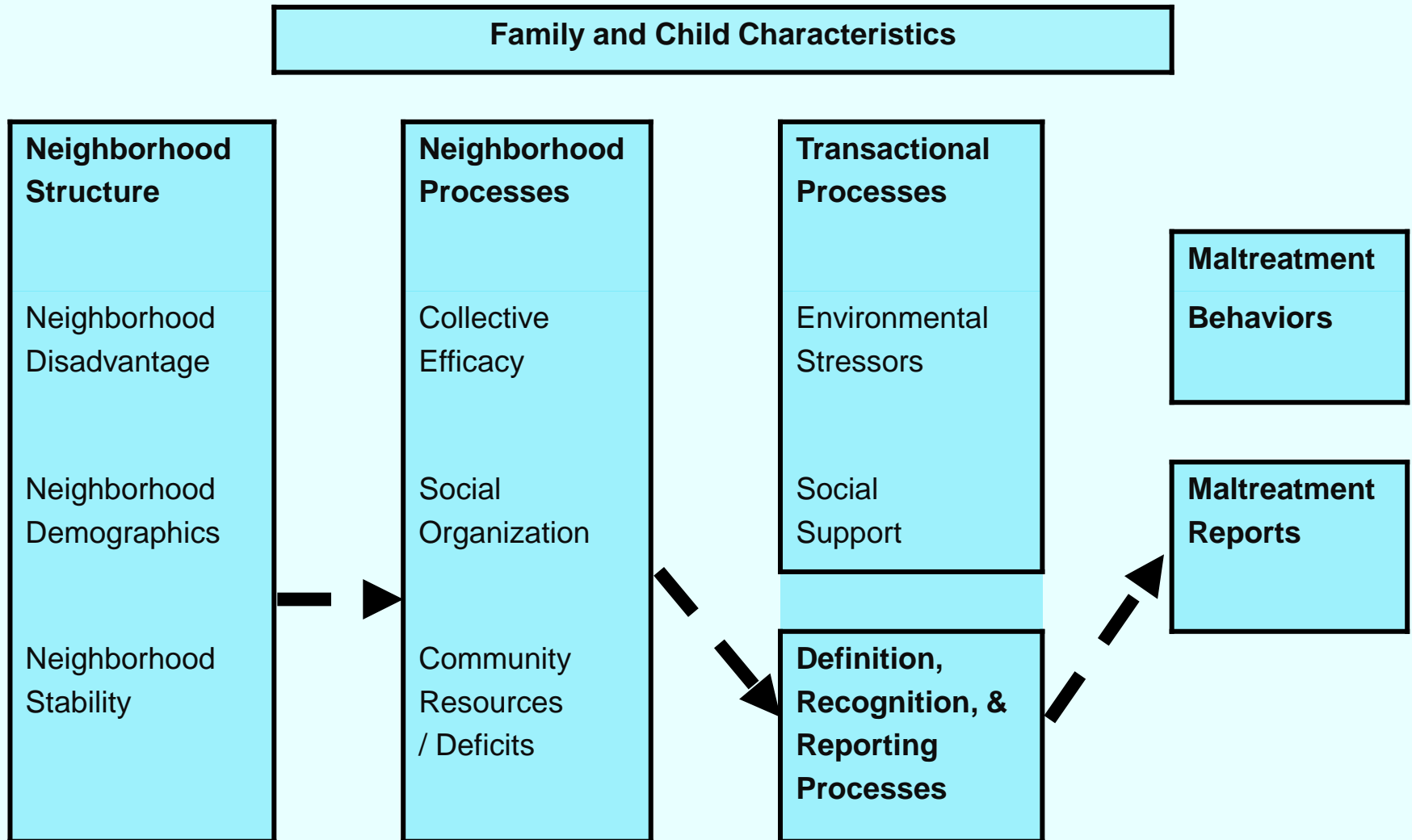


# Evidence for Pathway #1

- NBH structural factors  Maltreatment
- NBH disadvantage  Social Disorder
- NBH stability  Collective Efficacy  Violence
- NBH social disorganization & instability  Psychological & Social Distress  
 Parenting Behaviors

Ref: Coulton et al., 1995; Sampson et al., 2002; Ross, 2000; Ross et al., 20002; Lynch & Cicchetti, 2002

# Pathway 2: Neighborhood Conditions Linked to How Maltreatment Defined & Reported



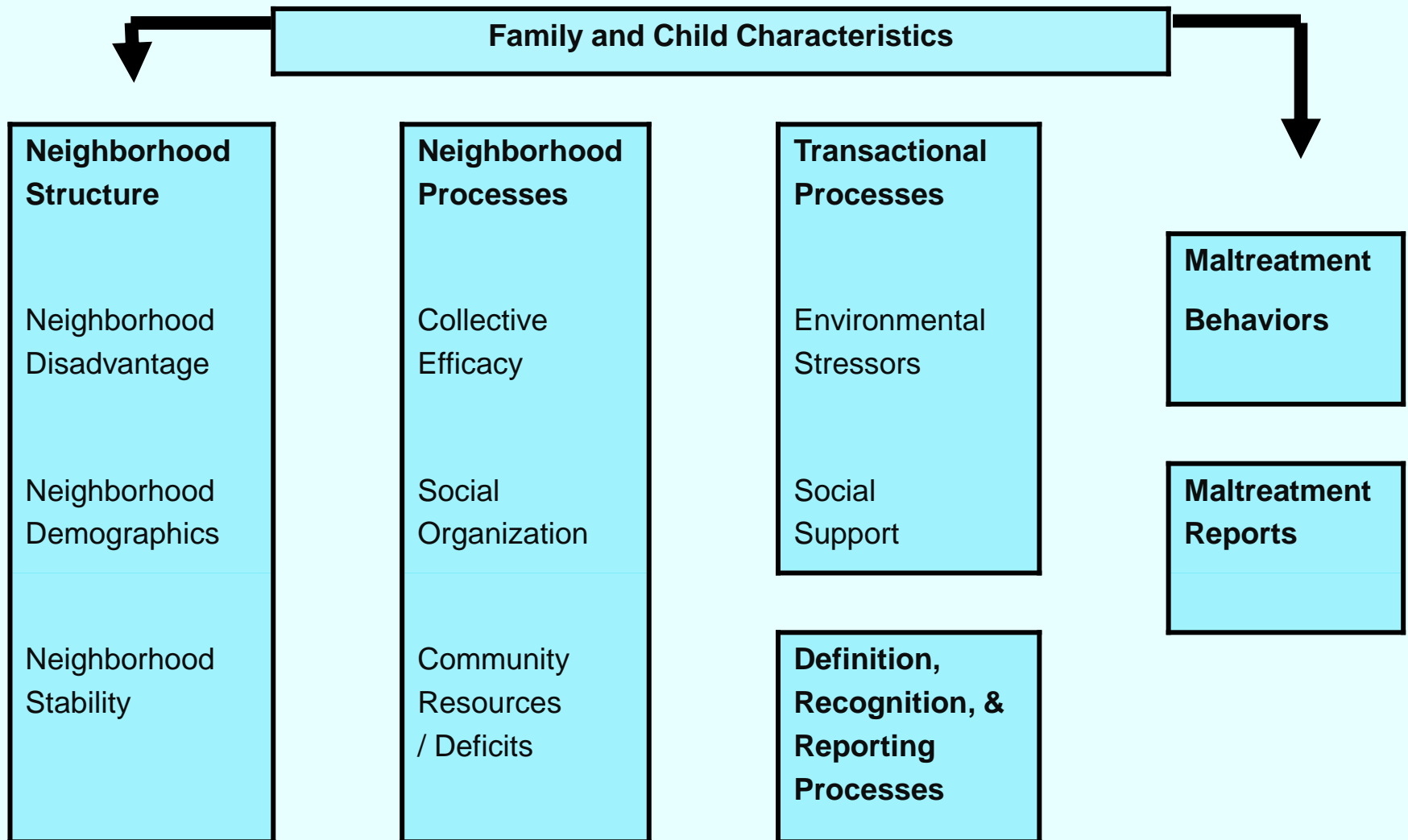


# **Pathway 2: Neighborhood Influences**

## **Definition, Recognition and Reporting**

- NBH differences drive defining/reporting differences independent of actual maltreatment behavior
- Long-standing controversy in some areas on whether increased reporting results from increased maltreatment or increased scrutiny
- Observed disparity & disproportionality of reports contribute to these debates
- Nonprofessionals make substantial % of reports & evidence suggests their definition/response may be shaped by level of neighborhood disorder
- Potentially critical pathway because majority of research uses reports to CPS as the measure of child maltreatment

# Pathway 3: Apparent Neighborhood Influence Actually Due to Family/Child Characteristics (Selection Bias)



# Pathway 3: Family and Child Characteristics (Selection Bias)

- Involves processes through which families select neighborhoods to live in
- (Unmeasured) characteristics that make parents likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods also and make them likely to maltreat children
- Thus, apparent link between neighborhood and maltreatment, but really due to individual or family factors
- Represents a real challenge to research trying to understand **neighborhood** effects

# Different Pathways Lead to Different Research Needs, & Practice, Policy, Implications (examples)

- ***Pathway 1: Behavioral Influences:***
  - Calls for research to better understand neighborhood conditions
  - Policies & practices to bolster conditions & processes that reduce maltreatment behavior
- ***Pathway 2: Definition, Recognition & Reporting***
  - Research to better understand the factors involved
  - Policies & practices to improve recognition and accurate, appropriate reporting
- ***Pathway 3: Family & Child Characteristics***
  - research to better understand processes through which families select neighborhoods & account for selection bias in studies
  - Inform policies & practices to improve housing and neighborhood conditions

# Complexities in Neighborhood Effects Research

- How to define a neighborhood
  - Administrative designations vs. resident perspectives
- Neighborhoods are not independent units
- Neighborhood effects may differ by “type” of maltreatment
  - Structural factors more linked to neglect vs. other types maltreatment
- Grappling with selection bias
  - Natural experiments, qualitative methods

# **A Plug for Mixed Methods & Multiple Perspectives in “Neighborhood Effects Research”**

## **A preferred study design combines:**

- Aggregate and structural measures (e.g. census-level, administrative records, geocoding)
- Neighborhood resident perceptions: interviews, surveys, ethnography
- Perceptions of local agency/institution staff
- Structured observations of environments and interactions

**Thank You!**