

Risk and Protective Factors for Child Neglect during Early Childhood



A THREE-STUDY COMPARISON

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Why Focus on Neglect in Early Childhood?

2

- **Most prevalent form of child maltreatment**
 - Most recent National Incidence Study estimates 61% (harm standard) - 77% (endangerment standard) of maltreatment incidents are neglect-related
 - Most commonly alleged reason for reports to child protective systems (CPS)
 - Relatively little research on neglect compared to physical or sexual abuse
 - Younger children at greatest risk for neglect, with infants at highest risk
 - Severe neglect, including fatalities, also more common among younger children

Risks as Predictors of Neglect

3

- Large literature exists on “correlates” of maltreatment
 - Studies that employ cross-sectional designs
- Little known about factors that predict neglect
 - True understanding of risk requires prospective lens (i.e., risks/protective factors measured prior to occurrence of outcome)
- Great variation in measures across studies
 - Leads to difficulty in comparing findings
- Very few studies that incorporate more than one neglect outcome measure
 - Neglect vs. Neglect-related CPS involvement

Goals of Presentation

4

Among low-income families with young children (0-5 years)...

- To see what predicts involvement with child protective services (CPS) for reasons of neglect *within* three separate studies.
- To see whether similar factors *within* separate studies predict both neglect-related CPS involvement and a validated (parental) self-report measure of child neglect.
- To see whether there are consistencies *across* studies in the predictors of both neglect outcomes.

(Full paper is forthcoming in the Children and Youth Services Review)

Three Studies

5

Fragile Families
and Child
Wellbeing (FFCW)
N=1,820

Healthy Families
New York
(HFNY)
N=421

Illinois Families Study-
Child Wellbeing
(IFS-CWB)
N=385

- All involve probabilistic samples (or subsamples) of low-income families with young children
- All involve prospective, longitudinal designs
- All are able to distinguish neglect from other forms of maltreatment, and have two different measures of neglect outcomes
- They share a relatively large set of common/approximate measures

Outcome Measures

6

- **Investigated CPS neglect reports**
 - HFNY and IFS-CWB have official reports; FFCW has parent self-report measure
 - HFNY (53%); IFS-CWB (14%); FFCW (5%)
- **Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale** (Straus et al., 1998)
 - CTSPC neglect subscale involves 5 items that capture caregiver failure to provide for basic developmental needs of child
 - Neglect subscale dichotomized to allow for easier comparison to CPS outcome models
 - HFNY (17%); IFS-CWB (22%); FFCW (13%)

Risk and Protective Factors (Predictors)

7

- **Demographic Factors**
 - (e.g., parent age, education level, race/ethnicity, family structure)
- **Economic Factors**
 - (e.g., work status, public benefit receipt, material hardships)
- **Parent and Child Wellbeing Factors**
 - (e.g., child health, parent depression, self-efficacy, social support, domestic violence, substance abuse)
- **Parenting Factors**
 - (e.g., spanking, parenting stress, involvement in child activities)

Statistically Significant Predictors of Neglect

8

CPS NEGLECT

HFNY: public benefit receipt, **material hardships**, unemployment, depression, substance use

IFS-CWB: public benefit receipt, **material hardships**, unemployment, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement in child activities, spanking, parenting stress

FFCW: **material hardships**, depression, parent health problems, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement in child activities, parenting stress

CTSPC NEGLECT

HFNY: public benefit receipt, **material hardships**, spanking, (low) self efficacy, LBW (-)

IFS-CWB: **material hardships**, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement with child activities, parenting stress, domestic violence

FFCW: **material hardships**, depression, parent health problems, child health problems, domestic violence, substance use

Summary of Findings

9

- **Economic factors are strong predictors of neglect across studies**
 - Does not appear to be the sole result of “surveillance” (given similar findings for CTSPC) related to material hardships
 - Surveillance may still play a role with respect to public benefit receipt
 - Economic factors not affected by inclusion of other measures in full models
- **Less consistency across studies with respect to parent and child wellbeing factors**
- **Moderate consistency related to parenting factors**

Implications of Findings

10

- Markers of both poverty and parenting struggles predict both measures of neglect;
- Parenting characteristics do not appear to “explain” the links between poverty and maltreatment;
- Suggests independent effects of poverty and parenting.
- Economic factors may serve as an intervention target in efforts to prevent child maltreatment, rather than exclusive focus on parenting or parent/child wellbeing

Implications of Findings for Current Economic Context

- ❖ When monitoring maltreatment trends in context of the recession:
 - ❖ Must pay careful attention to how poverty-related stressors may elevate risk of actual harm to child, versus risk of being noticed and reported to CPS;
 - ❖ Some declines began before recession occurred;
 - ❖ Stressed state/local budgets, fewer mandated reporters
 - ❖ “Newly” poor may have different (and/or fewer) risk factors than “already” poor;
 - ❖ Changes in take-up rates for other means-tested benefits and programs may foreshadow changes in CPS trends.