

Journal Highlights**Tamara Davis, PhD, Beth Ann Rodriguez, MSW****Domestic Violence and Child Neglect**

The cross-sectional study presented in this article focuses on the coexistence of child neglect and domestic violence (DV) in Jefferson County, Kentucky. Of 2,350 families investigated for child neglect during 1999, 29% also experienced DV. The authors found that within this sample, more substantiated neglect cases without DV were opened for ongoing services (57%) than the percentage of cases with co-occurring neglect and DV (45%).

A secondary systematic random sample of 100 families was taken from the original sample to further examine how this co-occurrence affects child welfare workers with regard to assessing risk and problems in child functioning, the relationship between risk assessment factors and DV, and how workers respond to the presence of DV in developing case plans and taking legal action. In their original case documentation, caseworkers used a consensus-based risk assessment tool (for which no reliability and validity data are available) to assess the level of risk for each child. For this study the researchers developed a case evaluation form to gather information from the intake, investigation, assessment, and case planning forms included in case records.

The researchers found that workers more often rated families experiencing DV at significantly higher risk for severe neglect/environmental conditions and limited social support than families without DV. Likewise, the presence of DV was significantly associated with lower child interpersonal and physical functioning. Children exposed to both child neglect and DV were found to be at higher risk of specific kinds of maltreatment, including physical abuse, lack of safety, and refusal of treatment (mental health and medical care), respectively.

The study further revealed that in many of the families where case records indicated DV was an ongoing issue, only 47% of such cases were previously reported to the authorities. In such cases, child welfare workers assigned a significantly higher assessment of risk to the family than when there was no evidence of previously unreported DV. Workers subsequently took legal action related to the DV in 65% of the cases. However, issues of DV were incorporated into case plan objectives for only 36% of the families.

The findings led the authors to suggest that child welfare workers need to be trained for the potential for co-occurring child neglect and domestic violence and the related “detrimental effects” on children so that appropriate assessment, legal action, and case planning can be implemented. The authors further recommended that states review laws around DV reporting to ensure they are working in the best interest of children. Finally, the authors suggested there is a need for developing specialized services to serve multiproblem families who demonstrate risk or who are substantiated for child neglect and who are experiencing domestic violence.

Antle, B. F., Barbee, A. P., Sullivan, D., Yankeelov, P., Johnson, L., & Cunningham, M. R. (2007). The relationship between domestic violence and child neglect. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention, 7*(4), 364-382.

Child Neglect and English Law

This paper describes issues related to child neglect cases in England and Wales. Specifically the article discusses tensions between the social work and legal professions in the intervention and resolution of neglect cases. The Children Act 1989 outlines the legal criteria that must be considered by courts in deciding whether to issue an order to intervene with a family in cases of neglect. Challenges in determining sufficient evidence to meet the “threshold criteria” for a court to issue a care or supervision order in such cases is the primary focus of this study. The two main criteria for order determination are existence or potential for significant harm to the child’s health and development and what is reasonable to expect of a parent.

This qualitative study conducted in 2001–‘02 includes interviews with social workers and lawyers in six local authorities in England and is intended to examine how the two professions work together in cases of child neglect. Social workers cannot remove children from home against parents’ wishes without first going to court and working with lawyers. Separate interviews were conducted with the social worker and lawyer working together on 23 concluded cases or 46 interviews. An additional 6 interviews were conducted with social services managers and 2 with legal managers. The cases were selected by staff in the six local authorities and represented a wide range of cases and interprofessional relationships. A range of neglect was a factor in 19 of the 23 cases.

The researcher found that the ambiguity of the law surrounding the threshold criteria is a main source of conflict between social workers and lawyers. Though the law does not stipulate the occurrence of a specific event to “catapult” a case into receiving a court order, lawyers often want social workers to clearly articulate why the intervention needs to happen now as opposed to some earlier time in the history of the family. In addition, the court requires a comprehensive care plan be established before it will agree to intervene with a family. Thus, social workers feel they must be able to fully satisfy the demands of the lawyers and the court before they begin to start proceedings for cases of neglect. When a particular event cannot be identified to serve as the tipping point, delays in processing neglect cases occur. Other delays are precipitated by changes in family circumstances or in cases where families cooperate just enough to get by.

Both social workers and lawyers believe the courts give little credibility to the evidence presented by social workers. Instead, expert assessments are typically sought, which adds to the delay of the case and diminishes the value of the social worker. Likewise, lawyers often believe the social workers’ evidence lacks quality and is not critically evaluated. This appears to be in large part why lawyers seek a catapult event on which to present a case of neglect.

The author concluded that cases of child neglect bring rise to a number of fundamental issues related to social work policy and practice. He suggested that improved dialogue between social workers and lawyers may offer some solutions to the dilemmas faced in cases of child neglect. In addition, he suggested that social work

needs to raise its standards for credibility and better communicate the complex nature of working with families to the courts. As well, the legal profession needs to improve its listening skills and recognize the differences and similarities from social work in professional mandates and desired outcomes for children and families. Finally, the author suggested that acknowledging their interdependency will contribute to working together more effectively.

Dickens, J. (2007). Child neglect and the law: Catapults, thresholds, and delay. *Child Abuse Review, 16*(2), 77-92.

Family Parental Structure and Child Neglect

Child neglect is the most common and the least studied form of child maltreatment. It appears to be most prevalent in families that are single-parented and female headed by women who are socially isolated and fraught with health and social problems. It has been argued that fathers are much more involved in neglectful families than past research has suggested. This research study seeks to address the significant gap of knowledge about the father’s role in child neglect.

The researchers analyzed data using a random selection process of 1,266 Canadian neglectful families (outside of Quebec) taken from the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect—2003*. Their objectives were, first, to describe the characteristics and structure of families struggling with neglect issues in order to identify the parental structure of the families. Second, they did an intergender and intragender comparison of the sociodemographic characteristics (age of parent, level of education, and employment status) and personal problems (alcohol/substance abuse, criminal activity, cognitive impairment, mental and physical health issues, social supports, maltreated as a child, and victim of domestic violence) of the parents of the neglectful families.

The study found some subtle differences in the profile of families struggling with neglect from what is usually found in scientific literature. Almost half of the families were single-parent families headed by a female with multiple needs. However, men were often present in situations of neglect, whether residing in a two-parent family (38%) or by maintaining a link with their biological children (35% of the single parent-, female-headed families). The study also found that neglecting fathers and mothers struggled with different personal problems based on family structure. For example, fathers in nuclear families were less likely to have alcohol and substance

abuse problems and single parent fathers were more likely to be unemployed. In contrast, women struggled with more problems, and the problems they faced explained many of the differences observed between the different family structures. For example, single-parent mothers tended to be younger, unemployed, and to have alcohol- and mental health-related issues. Overall, combining all family structures, single-parent women scored higher than men in all personal problem categories except criminal activity, and women were more likely than men to have been maltreated in childhood. With respect to intragender differences, surrogate fathers faced more problems than biological fathers, and in contrast, biological mothers faced more problems than surrogate mothers.

Based on the results of the study, which indicate that fathers experience fewer problems and that families in which the father is present seem to be less vulnerable to neglect, the researchers concluded that it is crucial to consider fathers from the initial moment of intervention when dealing with child neglect cases. The researchers also concluded that it is clear that parents who struggle with child neglect, especially single mothers, have many personal needs that must be addressed if intervention is to be effective. Finally, the researchers express the need for new studies to explore the impact of the presence of a father related to different types of neglect.

Dufor, S., Lavergne, C., Larrivée, M., & Trocmé, N. (2008). Who are these parents involved in child neglect? A differential analysis by parent gender and family structure. *Child and Youth Services Review, 30*(2), 141-156.

Predicting Prevention Program Completion

Many prevention programs have been developed in recent years to reduce risk factors and improve protective factors associated with child abuse and neglect. The results of evaluations of prevention programs are mixed and have led researchers to look at the process of service provision, paying particular attention to problems of client participation and to the circumstances that help and hinder program completion. This article uses a random assignment research design to examine the factors that predict program completion among families enrolled in a social work child neglect prevention program called Family Connections (FC).

The researchers selected 154 families who had participated in the FC program between 1997 and 2001. The eligibility criteria for the program were the following: (1) family referred by a person concerned that at least one of 19 neglect subtypes was occurring at a low level (too low for CPS investigation), (2) concern that at least two additional risk factors for neglect related to the child or the caregiver/family existed, (3) there was no CPS involvement, and (4) the caregiver was willing to participate in the program. Eligible families were randomly assigned into four conditions. Only two of the conditions were included in this article: FC intervention for 3 months (70 families) and FC intervention for 9 months (84 families).

A model was developed from the literature and program data to explore and identify the predictors of service completion. A total of 136 families with predata and postdata were included in relevant data analyses. Bivariate analysis compared differences between families who completed the services and those who did not, and differences between 3-month and 9-month intervention groups

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in completion status. In addition, logistic regression analysis was used to determine predictive variables.

The study was successful in predicting the families who completed services, but it was not as effective in predicting which families did not complete services. Some of the findings were consistent with findings from other research, but others were not. For example, similar to previous research, results from this study provide some support for the idea that even clients with difficult problems such as drug use and depression can complete preventive services. However, the authors suggested that this finding warrants further research. Other findings from this study include the importance of positive worker and family interaction and impact of the length of intervention on predicting completion of preventive services.

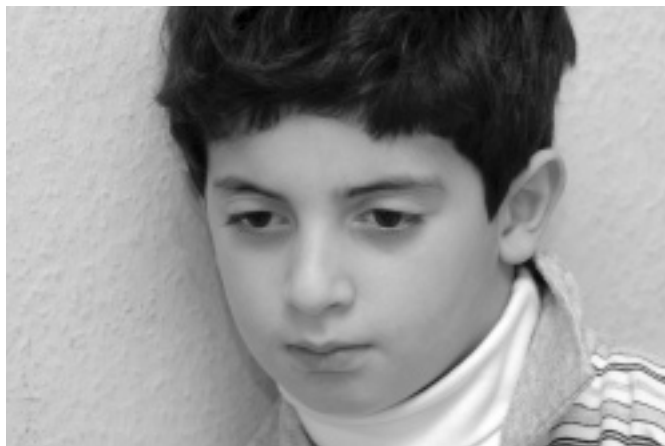
Girvin, H., DePanfilis, D., & Daining, C. (2007). Predicting program completion among families enrolled in a child neglect preventive intervention. *Research on Social Work Practice, 17*(6), 674-685.

New Measure of Child Neglect

This article reports the results of testing a new scale measuring child neglect, the Community Norms of Child Neglect Scale (CNCNS). The study was conducted in a Midwestern region of the United States. After initial development of the scale with undergraduate and graduate students from two universities, the scale was administered via telephone survey in 50 communities across one state. A two-stage sample strategy was used to initially select 10 CPS office areas and then oversample rural, ethnically diverse, and low-income communities. The final survey sample was 96.7% white. A total of 3,826 adult interviews were completed for a 59% response rate. The CNCNS includes 21 scenarios that are rated on a 0–5 scale of neglect severity.

Confirmatory factor analyses were used to determine that the measure represents specific types of neglect: emotional neglect, physical neglect, failure to provide, lack of supervision, and educational neglect. Overall the scale was found to be reliable and valid among professional and nonprofessional participants and across both rural and urban communities.

Goodvin, R., Johnson, D. R., Hardy, S. A., Graef, M. I., & Chambers, J. M. (2007). Development and confirmatory factor analysis of the community norms of child neglect scale. *Child Maltreatment, 12*(1), 68-85.



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Mental Processes Influence Maternal Neglect

The cross-sectional study reported in this article compares a convenience sample of neglectful mothers (n=34) to non-neglectful mothers (n=33) on how they processed information related to child emotions and behaviors. Approximately 85% of mothers in both groups were white. Three measures were administered to all participants to assess their perceptions of infant emotions and behaviors and the mothers' ability to recall important child-related information. A measure of depression was used as a control variable to further assess differences between groups.

Overall the study found neglectful mothers were less able to appropriately judge infants' emotions and more likely to make negative attributions to infants' behavior than non-neglectful mothers. After controlling for depression, there was no difference between neglectful and non-neglectful mothers in their abilities to recall important caregiving information. The findings appear to support previous research cited by the authors showing cognitive differences between neglectful and non-neglectful mothers.

Hildyard, K., & Wolfe, D. (2007). Cognitive processes associated with child neglect. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 31*(8), 895-907.

Systematic Review of Primary Prevention Programs

This article presents the results of a systematic review of primary prevention programs for child abuse and neglect. The purpose of the review was to identify gaps and future directions for the development and evaluation of interventions from a public health perspective.

The reviewers used literature published in 9 different databases from 1980 to 2004 and identified 7,208 abstracts; 369 abstracts met the retrieval criteria of describing an intervention or reviewing the literature. Publications chosen described interventions implemented before maltreatment in over half of the studies' populations in an effort to prevent child maltreatment. A total of 140 publications that described 188 programs were reviewed and coded. The variables coded included the following: type of abuse targeted by the programs; whether the program targeted the entire community or only those at high risk; targeted risk factors, program content, and components; providers delivering the program; and if applicable, evaluation design and findings on impact of risk factors or abuse observed.

The reviewers found several notable gaps in the programs reviewed. Only one fourth of the programs reviewed had been rigorously evaluated; therefore, it is unknown whether they were effective for preventing child maltreatment. Additionally, many of the evaluated programs measured only the risk factor hypothesized to lead to maltreatment but did not measure occurrence of child maltreatment. The authors contended that it is important to measure both. Another major gap found by the reviewers was that only 3 of the 188 programs targeted neglect, which is the most common form of child maltreatment in this country. Finally, the review found limited program efforts to modify certain risk factors that prior research has indicated to be prevalent and significant to the public health perspective. These risk factors include parental physical discipline of children, family poverty, partner violence, and teenage pregnancy.

Based on their review, the authors concluded that there are many primary prevention programs for child maltreatment that address various risk factors, but many of those programs have not been rigorously evaluated. Most of those evaluated did not produce results indicating an impact on risk factors or child maltreatment. The authors also suggested that new low-cost interventions be developed that focus on the previously noted prevalent risk factors.

Klevens, J., & Whitaker, D. J. (2007). Primary prevention of child physical abuse and neglect: Gaps and promising directions. *Child Maltreatment, 12*(4), 364-377.

Neglect of Neglect

The author’s review of the literature indicated that child neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment and has profound developmental implications. Yet, it is also the most understudied and least understood type of maltreatment. The author of this article examined why child neglect is so poorly understood and researched and made suggestions about how to address the “neglect of neglect.”

The commentary noted the difficulty in setting a standard definition of *child neglect* because it can take many forms and occurs in diverse contexts. The definitions used vary from state to state based on the many different perspectives of professionals and nonprofessionals about what constitutes child neglect. The lack of consistency in the definition makes it difficult to target and study. One of the major obstacles is determining what minimally adequate levels of care are, especially when considering cultural differences.

The author further stated that neglect is also difficult to substantiate except for severe cases. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether neglect is due to omission or absence of social, economic, or psychological resources, or whether it can be blamed on a parent, the environment, or both. Another challenge is that neglect tends to be “a long-term developmental issue rather than an event-specific crisis” (p. 609). Issues of poverty also create challenges in substantiating child neglect. Nonetheless, the increasing volume of allegations of child maltreatment has forced many child protection agencies to set up policies of prioritization. Physical abuse tends to be prioritized over neglect, even though the long-term harm of neglect can be more damaging to children. Neglect cases are often minimized until a particular incident of abuse occurs.

The author makes three suggestions to help raise awareness and understanding of child neglect. First, it is vital to define *child neglect* in clear and succinct terms so practitioners can develop a clear picture of the different types of neglect and be able to more effectively substantiate allegations. Second, intensive training should be provided to staff members who specifically deal with neglect cases. Finally, in recognition of the damage neglect inflicts on children, a critical timeline for dealing with cases of neglect may need to be developed to prevent the continual cycle of neglect.

McSherry, D. (2007). Understanding and addressing the ‘neglect of neglect’: Why are we making a mole-hill out of a mountain? *Child Abuse & Neglect, 31*(6), 607-614.

Using Neuropsychological Tests to Profile Effects of Neglect

This study used a neuropsychological perspective to examine whether cognitive functions can contribute to distinguishing neglected children with or without physical abuse from comparison participants. It also sought to demonstrate an increased detrimental impact to children who are victimized by a combination of different types of maltreatment. Previous studies focused on the negative effects of neglect on overall developmental delays, language, and intellectual functioning. A growing body of scientific literature indicates that there is a link between child neglect and cerebral development. Neuropsychology studies cognitive functions such as motor performance, short-term and long-term memory, spatio-temporal orientation, language/vocabulary, language/expression and comprehension, and intelligence. In this study, a total of 79 children, ages 6–12, receiving child protective services (CPS) because of neglect (28 children) or a combination of neglect and physical abuse (56 children) were compared were a control group of 53 children of the same age, gender, and annual family income who were not involved with CPS. All children received a neuropsychological assessment that covered seven domains, including attention, memory and learning, visual-motor integration, motor performance, language, intelligence, and frontal/executive functions.

MANOVA analyses found significant differences among the three groups on all tests combined. Univariate and *post-hoc* analyses were then applied and found significant differences between groups. Finally, a discriminant analysis noted significant first- and second-order functions. Function 1 included capacities related to auditory attention, flexibility and response inhibition, and visual-motor integration. Function 2 included capacities for problem solving, abstraction, and planning. This analysis confirmed the hypothesis that neuropsychological tests can distinguish children based on their membership in the three defined groups. Neglected and physically abused children indicated cognitive deficits in Functions 1 and 2. Neglected children without physical abuse showed lower scores than the control group on Function 1 but showed greater capacities on Function 2 than children in both the neglected physically abused group and the control group. The authors suggested that neglect and physical abuse combined are more likely to result in poor cognitive functioning than neglect without physical abuse. The researchers conclude that neuropsychological tests can identify the cognitive effects that differing levels of child maltreatment have on children.

Nolin, P., & Ethier, L. (2007). Using neuropsychological profiles to classify neglected children with or without physical abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 31*(6), 631-643.

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Washington Update

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Budget Politics to Dominate Election-Year Congressional Session

Congress returned in mid-January from its year-end recess to face a legislative agenda enlivened by the politics of an election year. In his State of the Union address on January 28, President Bush outlined themes for his last year in office. He promised to send Congress a budget proposal on February 4 for the 2009 fiscal year that would eliminate or reduce funds by more than \$18 billion in 151 “wasteful and bloated programs,” signaling a fairly tight spending plan from the Bush administration. Another round of budget disputes with the President is sure to dominate the legislative session this year.

The budget battle for 2008 funding was a tough one. Congress, still in session the week before Christmas, finished up the appropriations legislation for President Bush to sign into law on December 26. The omnibus funding measure combined spending for 11 of the 12 appropriations bills still awaiting final action at the end of the year. A series of veto threats by the President had blocked Congressional efforts from passing individual appropriations bills—except for the Defense Department spending measure signed into law in November. The President demanded that spending not exceed the overall total for the administration’s budget sent to Congress last February. In the final funding measure, appropriations leaders in Congress agreed to meet the President’s budget total, while setting many of their own spending priorities within that amount.

Much of the federal government’s domestic discretionary spending ended up with level funding or cuts. Appropriations for most child and family services programs were held at the 2007 funding levels, minus an across-the-board cut of 1.747%, resulting in cuts below last year’s spending. For example, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) programs were hit with a loss of \$1.746 million, not counting funds earmarked for special projects at \$1.888 million or the new discretionary funds at \$10 million requested by the White House, which the bill directs to go for support of “a range of home visitation programs... that have met high evidentiary standards.” The final budget leaves CAPTA State Grants at \$26.535 million, CAPTA Discretionary Grants at \$37.135 million, and the CAPTA Community-Based Prevention Grants at \$41.689 million for 2008.

A handful of Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) programs providing support for children and families were singled out for increases. Among them, the Head Start budget increased by \$14 million to \$6.9 billion, against the President’s proposal to cut Head Start by \$100 million. Likewise, the Community Services block grant, which the Bush administration has regularly sought to eliminate altogether, was funded again this year and given an increase of \$35 million to total \$653.8 million.

Other bills fared poorly. Funds for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program—the largest federal funding source for child maltreatment prevention—were cut by \$25.789 million. With the

mandatory funds held at \$345 million, the cut to the PSSF discretionary funds left the FY08 total at \$408.311 million compared with \$434.1 million in FY07.

While much of the political formula remains unchanged from 2007—except for the volatile chemistry of an election year—some factors will come into play to make the year ahead a bit unpredictable at the outset.

First, early last year, President Bush and Congressional Democrats drafted blueprints for balancing the budget by fiscal 2012. Those plans could change with an economic downturn. The legislative rush to push through an economic stimulus package is only the immediate response.

Second, Congress must deal with the reality of an annual budget deficit expected to grow by at least 34% this year due to an eroding economy. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO), in its annual budget and economic outlook report issued in January, projected the fiscal 2008 deficit will be \$219 billion, up from a deficit of \$162.8 billion in 2007. When figuring the cost of the new economic stimulus package and more funding for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq (not included in the CBO report), estimators put the deficit total closer to \$350 billion for the year.



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