The Elephant in the Room: The Role of Poverty in Child Maltreatment

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND CENTER ON CHILD WELFARE POLICY & PRACTICE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Kristen Shook Slack
Lawrence M. Berger
Ksslack@wisc.edu
Lmberger@wisc.edu

Presentation Overview

- Background on relationship between poverty and child maltreatment
- National estimates and trends in child maltreatment
- Cross-study comparison of neglect predictors
- Preventing child maltreatment with economic interventions

Relationship between Poverty and Child Maltreatment

- What we know & what we don’t know

Most Poor Families Do Not Maltreat…

- Families in Poverty
- Families in CPS
WHAT WE KNOW

- Low-income families are over-represented in child protective services (CPS) and out-of-home care populations;
- In National Incidence Studies (NIS-1-2-3-4), strong inverse correlation with income; strongest for neglect;
- Child maltreatment report rates are greatest in communities with high poverty rates and high unemployment rates;
- Receipt of public assistance (e.g., TANF, Food Stamps) predictive of CPS involvement;
- Welfare sanctions that result in income loss are predictive of neglect reports, but not substantiations

Implications of these study findings....

- The role poverty-related factors play in CPS policy and maltreatment definitions:
  - CPS practice philosophy dictates "not for reasons of poverty alone"; less clear in practice
  - If economic hardship increases risk of CPS reports but not substantiated reports or case openings, then what?
  - Need for explicit attention to the economic needs of families at-risk for maltreatment—rather than just their parenting-related needs—whether or not CPS has a role

Poverty and Maltreatment: WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

- Little experimental evidence linking access to economic resources to child maltreatment outcomes
  - Delaware’s welfare reform experimental evaluation (Fein & Lee, 2000).
  - Wisconsin’s Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (Cancian, Shack & Yang, 2010)
- Limited understanding of the mechanisms linking poverty and child maltreatment
  - Direct effects of resources
  - Stress/coping
  - Surveillance and/or class bias
  - Social "selection"

How Might Poverty Matter for CPS Involvement?
Most Recent Data on Incidence

- Neglect most common form of child maltreatment
- Form of CM most associated with poverty, and most likely to be associated with a CM-related death
- Substantiated child victims:
  - 7.5/1,000 (excludes medical neglect and psychological neglect)
  - 3/4 of child victims experience neglect
  - Caseloads increasingly comprised of "chronic neglect" cases
- Most common among 0-3 age group, declines with age
- National Incidence Study (NIS-4) (2005):
  - Harm standard: 10.5/1000
  - Endangerment standard: 30.6/1000
  - Only form of maltreatment to NOT show a statistically significant decline since NIS-3 (1993), but downward trend for harm standard.

Trends in NCANDS vs. NIS victimization rates

Source: Finkelhor, D., Jones, L. & Shattuck, A. (undated); Updated Trends in Child Maltreatment, 2009. Crimes Against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire
Real Declines in Physical and Sexual Abuse?

- Arguments for real declines:
  - They are large
  - Declines in official statistics parallel declines in other perpetrator-victim phenomena;
  - Declines parallel declines in teen suicide, runaway teens, juvenile delinquency, and teen pregnancy;
  - Declines in National Incidence Study maltreatment estimates between 1993 and 2005-6 (NIS-3 to NIS-4)
State level data on CPS reports and economic indicators in 7 states (unemployment, labor force participation, food stamp use)

- States demonstrated trends in expected direction for economic indicators, but not for child maltreatment
- Increases in unemployment predicted increases in neglect reports
Why no noticeable declines in trend data?

1. Fewer mandated reporters
2. “Lag” effect (other trends may serve as harbingers, e.g., increased doubling-up, unemployment, family homelessness)
3. System capacity and deflection efforts
4. Those with CPS histories (e.g., chronic neglect) may be least affected by recession
5. Increases in public benefit use may precede uptick in CPS caseloads

To summarize...

- Inconsistent trends in CPS indicators during recession
- Contextual trends: increased indicators of economic stress, but declines in crime statistics
- Unclear counterfactual: slowed or stagnated declines vs. increase?
- Verdict: need more time and more data

Cross-study Comparison of Neglect Predictors

3-Study Analysis of Neglect Risk

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 published in the Children and Youth Services Review, Slack et al., 2011)
Three Studies

- **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

- **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)

- **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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPS NEGLECT</th>
<th>CTSPC NEGLECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HFNY: public benefit receipt, material hardships, unemployment, depression, (low) self efficacy, LBW (-)</td>
<td>HFNY: public benefit receipt, material hardships, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement in child activities, spanking, parenting stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFS-CWB: public benefit receipt, material hardships, unemployment, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement in child activities, spanking, parenting stress</td>
<td>IFS-CWB: material hardships, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement with child activities, parenting stress, domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFCW: material hardships, depression, parent health problems, (low) self efficacy, (low) involvement in child activities, parenting stress</td>
<td>FFCW: material hardships, depression, parent health problems, child health problems, domestic violence, substance use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black = statistically significant in 1 study; Blue = statistically significant in 2 studies; Red = statistically significant in all 3 studies.
Summary of Findings

- 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; but—limited # of parenting constructs tested

Implications of Findings

- 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

Preventing Child Maltreatment with Economic Support

Continuum of CPS Involvement

- Full
- Differential Response
- Community Response
- Traditional CPS
- Cases screened out at report stage
- Cases closed after investigation
- Could target families post-reunification, teens aging out, etc.
- None
- Family Support
What was the initial CRP intervention?

Wisconsin’s Community Response Program (CRP) now operates in 9 funded sites across the State. Sites vary on the length and intensity of their intervention. All referrals are from CPS.

Families define their needs; receive comprehensive case management services on a voluntary basis.

Services may include: domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse, basic needs, assistance with employment, parenting, and community resource referrals.

Key Findings from CRP Implementation Evaluation

- Community service provider and CPS agency need to have a shared understanding of how to make referrals, and for whom.
- Average acceptance rate of 54%; range 28% to 83%. Those referred following an investigation more likely to engage than families screened out at report stage.
- CPS referral reasons (to CRP) were most often related to parenting needs; participant defined needs most often related to income.

CRP Evaluation Findings, cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Goal</th>
<th>Percent with Referral Reason</th>
<th>Percent with Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting/home environment</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income and benefits</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child health/behavior</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental well-being</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other resource needs</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Findings, continued

- Participant reports of public benefit receipt were low at CRP intake, despite very low income levels.
- 70% of participants made significant progress toward at least one service goal; 57% attained at least one goal.
- Having an income-related service goal was highly predictive of goal attainment.
### Service factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service factor</th>
<th>Significant Progress toward goals</th>
<th>Goal attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any home visits</td>
<td>2.64** 1.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any visits at CRP site</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>2.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any family team meetings</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any written contacts</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any telephone contacts (reference group)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service goal: parenting/home environment</td>
<td>1.84*</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service goal: income and benefits</td>
<td>3.11***</td>
<td>2.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service goal: child health/behavior</td>
<td>1.89*</td>
<td>1.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service goal: parental well-being</td>
<td>2.27**</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service goal: other needs (reference group)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Milwaukee Community Response Program (M-CRP)

#### The Milwaukee CRP Model
- Initially piloted in La Crosse County

- **Linking to Benefits and Economic or Material Resources**
- **Financial Decision-Making Assistance**
- **One-time emergency assistance with economic needs**
- **Target Population:** Families whose CPS cases close upon investigation
- **Service Duration:** ~6-10 weeks; families can re-engage if they need additional assistance

#### Key Elements of M-CRP
- **Objective referral eligibility criteria:**
  - All cases closed after an investigation
  - Family has reasonable contact information
- **CRP service provider is external to CPS**
- Different from most Alternative Response models
- Intervention around economic stressors only
- Significance for the prevention field: “How much prevention can be attained by intervening only around economic issues?”
M-CRP Staff Roles

Outreach and engagement

Resource hub for information on public benefits and local resources to help stabilize a family’s economic situation

Guide and advocate in benefit linkage process

Educate on issues pertaining to financial planning, debt reduction, credit issues…..

Milwaukee Implementation Progress

Referrals are received weekly – 1st set received 10-18-11
- Closed as “Safe” after Initial Assessment – may be served if re-opened later
- 2/3 Randomized by eWisACWIS
- Must have child under age of 5

Engage Family for Services
  Week 1 = letter, phone
  Week 2 = letter, phone
  Week 3 = phone, cold home visit if no contact

Implementation Progress, cont.

Total referred = 383 families, 20 weeks
Contact made = 39.6% of total referred (152)
Initially Interested = 81.5% of total contacted (124)
Completed Intake = 64.5% of total contacted (98)
Overall = 25.5% of total referred

In sum, lower than expected engagement, but mostly due to bad contact information/inability to make contact. Once contact made, engagement is reasonably high.
Implementation Progress, cont.

Financial goals set:

Access to Benefits (includes Energy Assist.) - 45 / 19.4%
Budgeting or Credit Counseling - 16 / 6.8%
Education/job skills - 24 / 10.3%
Employment- (job search and resume) - 34 / 14.7%

Housing - 46 / 20.0%
Material resources - 15 / 6.4%
Transportation - 16 / 6.8%
Other need (child support, taxes, DL) - 35 / 15%

Barriers Encountered

Only able to reach 40% of referral list
- inaccurate address and phone numbers for 60% of families

Caseloads at Capacity-
- Many clients utilize staff for full 8 weeks
- 383 families received intervention out of 536 referrals sent
- 71% served, 29% in control group by default

Laptops with internet for in-home sessions
- Difficult to catch signal
- Evening and weekends
- Clients frequently no-show

Cold Home Visits
- Someone comes to the door = 25%

Next Steps

Working on improving contacts with treatment group

Ongoing process evaluation is refining protocol

Outcome evaluation cohort will begin (hopefully) in October, 2013
- will involve combination of survey, program, and administrative data

Implications of Existing Research

Reported but not substantiated or served: …opportunity to engage this at-risk group

The role S-related factors play in CPS policy and maltreatment definitions:

CPS practice philosophy dictates "not for reasons of poverty alone": less clear in practice

Need for explicit attention to the economic needs of families at-risk for maltreatment—rather than just their parenting-related needs—whether or not CPS has a role

Economic interventions clearly not "THE" answer, but if we can learn the extent of their role in prevention, very important knowledge for the field.