



The relationship between unemployment and child maltreatment: A county-level perspective in California

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 January 2013
Received in revised form 27 May 2013
Accepted 28 May 2013
Available online 7 June 2013

Keywords:

Economy
Unemployment
Child maltreatment
Self-sufficiency standard
Mental health

ABSTRACT

The conventional logic supported by research and statistics suggests that there will be more child maltreatment as the economy becomes worse and less child maltreatment as the economy becomes better. However, in some local jurisdictions in California, statistics indicate the opposite. A closer examination of one county, San Mateo, suggests that this may be due to the fact that the County has a very high Self-Sufficiency Standard in which people get jobs with incomes that do not exceed the Standard, but in fact disqualifies them from the safety net of Federal benefits. Further, children born around the time of the last recession have a higher chance of adverse mental health issues and are now entering schools with issues that may reflect child abuse and neglect.

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1. Introduction

On average nationally, there is a report of child maltreatment every 5 s, and child maltreatment is substantiated every 30 s (Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2012). Over 400,000 children are in out-of-home placement in America because of child maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012b). Researchers suggest that child maltreatment has long-term adverse health outcomes or proxy indicators of adverse health outcomes. These adverse health outcomes include poorer gastrointestinal health, poorer gynecologic or reproductive health, more pain, increased cardiopulmonary symptoms (Irish, Kobayashi, & Delahanty, 2010), higher risk for obesity (Irish et al., 2010; Knutson, Taber, Murray, Valles, & Koeppel, 2010), increased hospital visits (Lanier, Jonson-Reid, Stahlschmidt, Drake, & Constantino, 2010), riskier sexual behavior (Houck, Nugent, Lescano, Peters, & Brown, 2010), and increased mental health issues (Oswald, Heil, & Goldbeck, 2010). In fact, "post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rates for [former foster youth] were up to twice as high as for U.S. war veterans" (p. 1, Pecora et al., 2005).

Child maltreatment has had a major impact on the economy conservatively costing the U.S. about \$124 billion (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012), of which only about one-quarter is due to direct child welfare expenditures (Wang & Holton, 2007). In an overview of the literature, researchers noted that although foster children represented less than 4% of all Medicaid enrollees, they account for up to 41%

of all Medicaid-funded mental health expenditures for some state Medicaid programs (Rubin, Halfon, Raghavan, & Rosenbaum, 2005). This could be much worse as only about one-third of all foster children who need the services actually receive the services (Rubin et al., 2005).

What, then, is the effect of the economy on child maltreatment? Children are disproportionately represented among the poor, and in turn, are disproportionately affected in a poor economy (Ober, 2011). Conventional logic, supported by some research, suggests that there is less child maltreatment when the economy becomes better and more child maltreatment when the economy becomes worse. For example, increased hospital administration rates for physical abuse and traumatic brain injury (TBI) were related to increased mortgage delinquency and increased foreclosure rates during the recent recession in 17 of 20 major metropolitan areas (Wood et al., 2012). Increased TBI was also found to be higher during the last recession versus prior to the recession in 74 counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington (Berger et al., 2011). Research from the 1970s to the 1990s indicated that child abuse was more likely in the home of a two-parent family in which the father was unemployed (Paxson & Waldfogel, 1999). Another study looked at several economic factors, including the unemployment rate in seven states (Millet, Lanier, & Drake, 2011). They found that there was no relationship in six of seven states, with the exception in California where there was an increase in the unemployment rate correlated with an increase in child maltreatment referrals. Statistics at the national level (Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2012) point to a decline in child abuse maltreatment in the past few years (Ober, 2011) that is in line with an improving economy. Another recent study suggests that although aggregate

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Table 1
Descriptive statistics of the 58 California counties.

County	Child population	Median income	Self-sufficiency standard	Female	African-American	White	Latino	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian	Multi-race	Disproportionality measure for African-American children	Number of allegations per 1000 children	Number of substantiated allegations per 1000 children	Number of entries into foster care per 1000 children	Number of children in foster care per 1000 children	Unemployment rate
Alameda	404,516	\$67,295	\$61,658	48.6%	12.2%	22.9%	32.0%	25.6%	0.2%	7.0%	4.48	32.7	2.4	1.7	3.8	8.2%
Alpine	270	\$46,706	\$55,339	53.1%	0.0%	61.0%	11.0%	0.0%	26.4%	1.7%	0.00	139.1	0	0	0	11.6%
Amador	7221	\$51,553	\$53,687	48.2%	1.9%	68.1%	21.3%	1.2%	1.9%	5.6%	0.00	87	9.3	5	4.8	11.0%
Butte	60,013	\$39,208	\$47,116	49.0%	1.6%	60.9%	23.3%	6.8%	1.8%	5.7%	5.17	80.3	13	6.2	11.3	11.5%
Calaveras	10,032	\$50,599	\$48,606	47.8%	1.2%	73.6%	17.7%	1.4%	1.1%	5.0%	5.66	80.2	17.9	7.5	9.9	12.1%
Colusa	7254	\$47,469	\$46,451	46.9%	0.8%	24.4%	70.5%	1.0%	1.6%	1.6%	0.00	37.6	9.1	3.1	2.9	23.3%
Contra Costa	302,462	\$74,241	\$60,733	48.8%	9.4%	36.7%	33.7%	13.1%	0.2%	6.9%	4.48	40.5	5.2	2.3	3.7	8.2%
Del Norte	6969	\$35,598	\$45,399	48.3%	1.5%	53.0%	22.8%	6.0%	10.1%	6.5%	1.83	148	27.7	12.5	13.3	13.2%
El Dorado	46,918	\$61,970	\$56,021	48.6%	0.8%	69.2%	20.1%	4.2%	0.9%	4.9%	9.01	56.1	10.6	5.1	6.9	9.5%
Fresno	326,056	\$42,572	\$49,026	48.7%	5.0%	20.5%	61.7%	9.7%	0.6%	2.6%	2.92	69.3	8.2	3.7	6.2	14.9%
Glenn	8916	\$40,221	\$45,107	48.8%	0.7%	40.0%	52.3%	2.8%	1.8%	2.4%	10.61	81.9	17.1	6.3	8.9	14.2%
Humboldt	33,300	\$39,526	\$48,052	49.0%	1.2%	62.9%	17.0%	3.6%	7.7%	7.5%	4.89	79.7	7.7	6.3	9.7	9.8%
Imperial	60,280	\$36,898	\$46,296	48.5%	1.4%	8.0%	88.4%	0.6%	1.0%	0.7%	4.14	39.8	9.4	5	4.7	26.3%
Inyo	4404	\$44,928	\$46,477	48.0%	0.6%	43.8%	36.7%	1.1%	13.6%	4.2%	0.00	89.6	11.5	2.4	4.8	9.0%
Kern	295,763	\$44,903	\$44,898	48.7%	5.2%	27.2%	61.4%	3.0%	0.6%	2.6%	2.52	72.9	16.2	3.1	6.9	12.9%
Kings	48,004	\$48,319	\$45,242	47.8%	4.4%	26.1%	61.8%	2.9%	0.9%	3.9%	2.91	69	10.4	6.7	8.5	14.9%
Lake	15,585	\$35,882	\$47,238	48.0%	1.4%	58.3%	30.6%	0.9%	3.3%	5.4%	2.38	75.4	6	4	9.2	15.0%
Lassen	7278	\$47,938	\$46,465	44.7%	2.7%	70.4%	16.4%	1.5%	3.7%	5.4%	0.00	95.2	15.5	8.3	7.9	12.2%
Los Angeles	2,792,610	\$52,239	\$61,812	48.8%	7.7%	17.4%	62.0%	9.9%	0.2%	2.9%	3.93	59.4	12.2	4.3	7.3	10.2%
Madera	49,461	\$44,795	\$46,434	48.2%	1.9%	22.6%	71.1%	1.4%	1.0%	2.0%	2.83	70	11.7	5.2	4.8	13.2%
Marin	60,432	\$78,470	\$82,038	48.4%	2.2%	62.6%	23.5%	5.2%	0.2%	6.3%	19.19	37.2	4.3	1.1	1.5	5.6%
Mariposa	3649	\$42,175	\$47,330	49.5%	0.4%	74.0%	16.7%	0.9%	2.9%	5.0%	0.00	84.8	33.1	6.9	6.9	11.3%
Mendocino	22,417	\$41,236	\$50,924	48.2%	0.6%	48.8%	39.0%	1.7%	5.1%	4.7%	2.64	88.4	19.4	7.8	10.1	9.4%
Merced	96,016	\$40,016	\$43,979	48.4%	2.9%	23.4%	64.5%	6.7%	0.3%	2.3%	4.95	70.7	11	5.4	6.6	16.7%
Modoc	2360	\$34,654	\$44,986	49.1%	0.5%	67.1%	25.5%	0.4%	3.1%	3.5%	0.00	98.5	23.4	5.5	4.5	13.7%
Mono	3490	\$48,758	\$58,629	49.2%	0.2%	48.2%	45.9%	0.8%	1.7%	3.2%	0.00	50.8	5	0	0.7	8.8%

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