



## Research article

# Pre-existing adversity, level of child protection involvement, and school attendance predict educational outcomes in a longitudinal study<sup>☆</sup>



Miriam J. Maclean<sup>\*</sup>, Catherine L. Taylor, Melissa O'Donnell

Telethon Kids Institute, The University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 22 June 2015

Received in revised form 26 October 2015

Accepted 28 October 2015

Available online 25 November 2015

## Keywords:

Maltreatment

Educational outcomes

Academic achievement

Child protection

Out-of-home care

Record linkage

## ABSTRACT

Maltreatment largely occurs in a multiple-risk context. The few large studies adjusting for confounding factors have raised doubts about whether low educational achievement results from maltreatment or co-occurring risk factors. This study examined prevalence, risk and protective factors for low educational achievement among children involved with the child protection system compared to other children. We conducted a population-based record-linkage study of children born in Western Australia who sat national Year 3 reading achievement tests between 2008 and 2010 ( $N=46,838$ ). The longitudinal study linked data from the Western Australian Department of Education, Department of Child Protection and Family Support, Department of Health, and the Disability Services Commission. Children with histories of child protection involvement (unsubstantiated maltreatment reports, substantiations or out-of-home care placement) were at three-fold increased risk of low reading scores. Adjusting for socio-demographic adversity partially attenuated the increased risk, however risk remained elevated overall and for substantiated ( $OR=1.68$ ) and unsubstantiated maltreatment ( $OR=1.55$ ). Risk of low reading scores in the out-of-home care group was fully attenuated after adjusting for socio-demographic adversity ( $OR=1.16$ ). Attendance was significantly higher in the out-of-home care group and served a protective role. Neglect, sexual abuse, and physical abuse were associated with low reading scores. Pre-existing adversity was also significantly associated with achievement. Results support policies and practices to engage children and families in regular school attendance, and highlight a need for further strategies to prevent maltreatment and disadvantage from restricting children's opportunities for success.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

There is a sizeable body of research investigating the link between child maltreatment and adverse educational outcomes. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect are at increased risk of lower levels of cognitive functioning, language

<sup>☆</sup> This research was supported by an Australian Research Council Linkage Project Grant [LP100200507] and an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant [DP110100967]. MM was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award and UWA Safety-Net Top-Up Scholarship. MOD is supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Early Career Fellowship [1012439]. The authors acknowledge the partnership of the Western Australian Government Departments of Health, Child Protection and Family Support, Education, and the Disability Services Commission who provided support as well as data for this project. The paper does not necessarily reflect the views of the government departments involved in this research.

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author at: Telethon Kids Institute, The University of Western Australia, 100 Roberts Road, Subiaco, Western Australia, Australia.

development, achievement in reading and maths, grades, and school attendance, suspensions and decreased personal expectations of attending college (Eigsti & Cicchetti, 2004; Lansford et al., 2002; Leiter, 2007; Rowe & Eckenrode, 1999; Stone, 2007). Maltreated children are also less likely to finish high school and gain university qualifications, which in turn leads to unemployment and lower incomes (Mersky & Topitzes, 2010). However, as capacity has increased for larger studies that address a greater number of confounding factors, questions have been raised regarding whether such outcomes are attributable to maltreatment, or are a result of co-occurring risk factors (Boden, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2007). Given that millions of children around the world have experienced abuse or neglect (Sethi et al., 2013), it is important to understand the prevalence and risk of low educational achievement among maltreated children and to inform prevention and intervention strategies.

Maltreatment is both an adverse outcome resulting from a constellation of risk factors as well as an independent risk factor for other adverse child outcomes. Risk factors associated with maltreatment include parents being young or single, with low educational achievement and low socio-economic status, lack of social support, maternal smoking during pregnancy, substance use, or mental health problems (Sethi et al., 2013). A Western Australian cohort study found risk factors for substantiated child maltreatment include parental hospital admissions related to mental health, substance abuse and assault, along with social disadvantage and younger parental age. Children who were Aboriginal, and children with disabilities were at increased risk for substantiated maltreatment (O'Donnell et al., 2010).

Many of the same or similar factors are associated with low educational achievement, including low gestational age and birthweight, low maternal education, young parenthood, disadvantaged minority status, low SES, single parent status or changes in family structure, rigid parenting beliefs, negative parent-child interaction style, substance abuse, stressful life events, mental health problems, and domestic violence (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2008; Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Kolar, Brown, Haertzen, & Michaelson, 1994; Malacova et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2014).

Many studies of maltreated children have had to rely on small or highly selected samples, use of cross-sectional data, data from a single source (such as welfare records or survey data), with limited access to comparison groups and data on the broader range of risk factors affecting the child and their family. The use of linked administrative data is increasingly becoming recognised as a valuable tool in understanding the effects of maltreatment in a multiple-risk context (Fantuzzo, Perlman, & Dobbins, 2011).

Very few population level linked record studies (Fantuzzo et al., 2011; Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009) and large surveys (Boden et al., 2007) have been conducted examining the relationship between maltreatment and low educational achievement. These studies have found mixed results regarding the impact of maltreatment on educational achievement after taking into account co-occurring risk factors, raising questions about the widely held belief that maltreatment causes poor educational outcomes. In particular, Boden et al. (2007) in a longitudinal survey of 1,265 New Zealand children found that after controlling for confounding social, parent and child factors, the associations between child physical and sexual abuse and educational achievement (high school and tertiary qualifications) became non-significant. They concluded that social, family and individual context, rather than the child's maltreatment experiences were responsible for later educational outcomes. Conversely, Fantuzzo and colleagues found maltreatment was the strongest risk factor (adjusted OR = 1.6) for low educational achievement in second grade students, measured by the California Achievement Tests (Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009). Subsequent analysis showed results were only significant for some subgroups of maltreated children (Fantuzzo et al., 2011). Both studies used sound measures of educational achievement (standardised tests or attainment of qualifications) and controlled for additional risk factors, although Boden et al. (2007) controlled for many more risk factors than Rouse and Fantuzzo (2009). The conflicting and mixed results point to a need for further research to clarify the relationship between maltreatment and educational outcomes, taking into account pre-existing adversity and possible subgroup variations.

In addition, the influence of school attendance on educational achievement in child protection populations has not been studied widely. Within the general population, regular school attendance is associated with academic achievement (Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence, & Zubrick, 2014). Reduced attendance has been found among child protection groups, especially neglected children (Fantuzzo et al., 2011). School attendance is therefore an important factor to include in relation to educational achievement with clear policy implications.

### *Level of Child Protection Involvement*

Although maltreated children are often treated as a homogenous group in research, it is also recognised that outcomes are likely to differ across subgroups. First, results may differ for children with unsubstantiated maltreatment reports and substantiated maltreatment. Fantuzzo et al. (2011) found that the most consistent findings for poor educational outcomes were associated with unsubstantiated maltreatment reports prior to kindergarten, which may be an indicator of chronic adverse conditions.

In addition, after substantiation some children are placed in out-of-home care while others remain at home. Although children placed in out-of-home care are generally considered to be at particularly high risk for poor educational outcomes (Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, & Epstein, 2008), the limited available evidence from studies that control for co-occurring risk factors suggests out-of-home care may have positive effects on academic engagement (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2013), and no significant effect on educational achievement (Fantuzzo et al., 2011; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2013). However, as there are few large-scale studies that address co-occurring risk factors, and the study by Font and Maguire-Jack relies on children's

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832377>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832377>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)