



The link between male employment and child maltreatment in the U.S., 2000–2012



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ABSTRACT

Child maltreatment rates are strongly linked to adult male behavior, suggesting that labor market conditions, by influencing male behaviors, can influence maltreatment rates. Using the unemployment rate as the sole measure of labor market conditions, past studies generally conclude that employment conditions do not systematically influence child maltreatment rates. By contrast, this study found that state-level child maltreatment rates were statistically significant and inversely related to the state-level employment rates of men, aged 20 to 34 yrs old. It also found that the interaction of child poverty and living in a single-parent household is positively related to child maltreatment rates. Policies to reduce employment problems are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Child maltreatment is a serious problem. Adults with documented histories of childhood abuse have lower levels of education, employment, and earnings compared to matched control children (Currie and Widom, 2010). Maltreatment also greatly increases the probability of engaging in crime (Currie and Tekin, 2012). Government survey data indicates that men are involved in just under half of all maltreatment cases. However, there are two categories of maltreatment: neglect and abuse. Whereas men are involved in only 38% of neglect cases, they are involved in 62% of all abuse cases (Sedlak et al., 2010b, Table 6.3).

Adverse outcomes for children are most negative when a man other than the biological father is present. Harper and McLanahan (2004) reported that among boys not living with their biological father, those who lived with stepfathers were at an even greater risk of incarceration than those who lived with a single mother with no partner present.

Men have lower high school and college graduation rates than women. As the gender educational gap grows, more men are facing employment difficulties. Between 2000 and 2013, the national employment rate of men, 25 to 34 yrs old, decreased by 10.8% and 15.3%, respectively, for white and black men. We believe that some underemployment men bring their frustrations into the home. This hypothesis is consistent with some data on the increase in intimate violence rates during the Great Recession (Cohen, 2014) and with the NIS-4 data (Sedlak, McPherson, and Das, 2010a) that indicates that when a single

mother resides with a man not the father or all her children, child maltreatment rates are three times higher than when no man is present. This study tests this hypothesis by assessing whether or not labor market conditions influence the rate of child maltreatment. In particular, it will test state-level age-specific gendered employment rate measures rather than overall or gendered unemployment measures that are typical of the literature.

We understand that focusing on single components has its limitations. Cicchetti and Toth (1997, 318–19) have argued:

“[S]ingle component might act differentially depending upon the organization of the system within which it operates ... Such linear models of causality deny the complexity of developmental and the mutually influencing nature of constitutional, biological, psychological, environmental, and sociological influences over time. ... According to Belsky, child maltreatment is a socio-psychological phenomenon that cannot be understood in isolation from community and the culture within which the family and the culture is embedded.”

We include two interaction terms in the spirit of this transactional approach but otherwise focus, as other statistical studies, on the distinctive impact of labor market conditions on child maltreatment rates.

2. Literature survey

Many past studies have used the local unemployment rate as a measure of labor market conditions. Paxson and Waldfogel (2002) explored the impact of welfare reform on child maltreatment. Using 1990–98 state-level data, the state's unemployment rate was positively correlated with maltreatment rates but just missed reaching statistical significance. They did find, however, that as the share of fathers working

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declined there was a statistically significant increase in maltreatment. Using state-level data, Millett, Lanier, and Drake (2011) also found a weak and inconsistent relationship between economic indicators and maltreatment rates.

Using 1990–96 state-level data, Seiglie (2004) found state unemployment rates to be statistically significantly linked to neglect and sexual abuse but not physical abuse. He also found that the female labor force participation rate was statistically significant and inversely related to the sexual abuse rate. By contrast, using the same time period and a similar set of variables, Bitler and Zavodny (2004) found no statistically significant relationship between the unemployment rate and substantiated rates of child maltreatment.

Wood et al. (2012) studied 2000–2009 admissions to 38 hospitals located in twenty of the largest metropolitan areas. They found no link between the child abuse admittance rates and the local area unemployment rate. They did find, however, that abuse rates were strongly linked to economic stress caused by area housing delinquency and foreclosure rates.

A more recent study (Raissian, 2015) found a negative relationship county-level unemployment and child abuse rates in New York. The negative relationship was largely contained to metropolitan counties. The relationship between unemployment and child maltreatment reports in non-metropolitan counties was often positive but not statistically significant.

Lindo, Schaller, and Hansen (LSH) (2013) did look at gender-specific employment measures. They gathered allegations of child abuse made in 54 California counties between 1996 and 2009 and found no statistical link between allegations and estimates of the county's unemployment rate. LSH hypothesized that this result reflected the competing effects of changes in male and female labor market conditions. They did not have county-level gender-specific employment rates so instead used country labor department mass layoff data instead. As they hypothesized, LSH found a strong statistically significant positive relationship between male layoffs and allegations of child abuse while female layoffs were inversely related.

LSH's positive relationship between female employment and child abuse rates is quite consistent with the results from the 1993 NIC-3 and 2005 NIC-4 national child maltreatment surveys. As a result of changes in welfare policies, the labor force participation rates of single mothers with children younger than six years old increased from <50% in 1994 to almost 70% by 2000.¹ While these increases reduced poverty rates, they may have had an adverse impact on child maltreatment rates. In particular, between the two surveys, the rate of overall abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and serious abuse, respectively, rose by 22%, 14%, 49%, and 34% for children living with single mothers. By contrast, for children living in two-parent households, child maltreatment rates fell on each of the four measures by 44%, 24%, 62%, and 37%, respectively (Sedlak et al., 2010b, Figs. 5.6–5.8).

The NIS-4 survey estimated that the incident of child maltreatment among black households was double the white rate: 24.0 versus 12.6 per 1000. Researchers found, however, that most if not all of the racial differences disappear when comparing white and black low-income households (Drake, Lee, and Jonson-Reid, 2009). In addition, there is conflicting evidence (Ards et al., 2012; Drake et al., 2011) as to whether or not racial disparities reflect reporting bias.

Table 1 indicates that for single mothers without a partner present, black households have lower maltreatment rates than white households. It is only when a male is present that the black rate is substantially higher than the white rate. Seiglie (2004) did not find a statistically significant relationship between the black share of the population and his child abuse measures. However, Eckenrode, Smith, McCarthy, and

Table 1

Rate of child maltreatment (%), by race and family structure.

Measure of child maltreatment	Black single mothers		White single mothers	
	With partner present	W/o partner present	With partner present	W/o partner present
Emotional	4.50	0.90	2.70	1.70
Physical	1.24	0.38	0.65	0.37
Endangerment	9.10	2.50	4.70	3.70

Source: Sedlak et al. (2010a).

Dineen (2014) found that the black proportion of a state's population was statistically significant and inversely related to state maltreatment rates.

The share of children living in single-parent households (SPH) may be linked to child maltreatment. In the NIC-4 survey, the child maltreatment rate was 2.9 per 1000 for children living with married biological parents but 10.2 for those living with a single parent and no partner (Sedlak et al., 2010b, Figs. 5.1 and 5.2). By contrast, Seiglie (2004) did not find a systematic relationship between the share of children living in single-parent households and any of his measures of child maltreatment.

According to the NIS-4 survey, children in families with low-socioeconomic status, as measured by a composite of household income, parent educational attainment, and poverty-program receipt, were at significantly greater risk of maltreatment than other children (7.7 versus 2.5 children per 1000). This link is found in a wide body of research (Coulton, Korbin, and Su, 1999; Gelles, 1992).

3. Data and methodology

Our study covers the period, 2000 through 2012. The starting point was selected because before 2000 data on age- and gender-specific employment rates were not consistently available at the state level. The state-level substantiated child maltreatment rate is the dependent variable. Over the 13-year period, the national maltreatment rate (MR) declined modestly from around 12.2 to 9.2 per 1000.

We considered using a pooled OLS regression analysis with year effects. Pooled OLS regression analysis, however, doesn't control for state effects. In addition, Hausman tests suggest fixed effect models with controlled year effects are preferred over the pooled OLS estimations. For these reasons, we chose instead to test fixed effects models that control for both year and state effects.

Federal legislation (Child Welfare, 2014) defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:

- “Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation”; or
- “An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”

The Federal guideline provides definitions for sexual abuse but does not provide specific definitions for other types of maltreatment such as physical abuse, neglect, or emotional abuse. While Federal legislation sets minimum standards for states that accept Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) funding, each state provides its own definitions of maltreatment within civil and criminal statutes. Thus, maltreatment variations across states can be the result of different definitions.

As LSH emphasized, the state-level substantiated child maltreatment rate is not a perfect measure. Child Protective Services only investigated one-third of the cases identified in the NIS-4 report (Lindo et al., 2013). In addition, definitions not only vary across states but within states over time. Paxson and Waldfogel (2002) felt it is necessary to purge 15 problematic observations from their study. Problematic data led us to delete Alaska from our study. There, the maltreatment rate

¹ Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Share of married-couple families with an employed mother at its lowest, 1994–2010. (May 6, 2011). http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2011/ted_20110506.htm.

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