



Predicting recurrent maltreatment among high-risk families: Applying the Decision-Making Ecology Framework



Kathryn Maguire-Jack ^{a,*}, Sarah A. Font ^b

^a The Ohio State University, College of Social Work, 1947 College Rd, 325B Stillman Hall, Columbus, OH 43210, United States

^b University of Wisconsin, 1350 University Ave, Madison, WI 53706, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 February 2014

Received in revised form 24 April 2014

Accepted 25 April 2014

Available online 4 May 2014

Keywords:

Multi-level

Recurrent maltreatment

NSCAW II

Organizational factors

Decision-making ecology

Context

ABSTRACT

Recurrent maltreatment is an easily measured indicator of the extent to which CPS agencies have met their primary objective; achieving safety for children reported as suspected victims of maltreatment. The familial and community factors that are important to the risk of maltreatment generally are likely to also affect the probability of recurrent maltreatment. However, recurrent maltreatment adds an important new dimension – specifically; an initial maltreatment report requires some interaction with a CPS system. That is, many families encounter CPS, but, even among higher risk cases, only a portion of those experience recurrent involvement. It may be the case that the families who experience recurrent involvement have different initial risk factors, but the interaction between the family and the CPS system may also affect the probability that subsequent maltreatment will occur. The current study used hierarchical linear modeling to analyze data from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well-being II. Specifically, in an application of the Decision-Making Ecology Framework (Baumann, Dalgeish, Fluke, & Kern, 2011), this study sought to understand what family, caseworker, agency, and community factors contribute to the risk of recurrent maltreatment among high-risk families.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Recurrent maltreatment is one of the key federal performance measures used to assess the effectiveness of child protective services (CPS) agencies. CPS agencies are tasked with screening for and responding to child maltreatment risks, and thus, agencies' responses to initial maltreatment complaints are intended to ameliorate the conditions that led to maltreatment, with the ultimate goal of ensuring children's ongoing safety. Recurrent maltreatment is an easily measured indicator of the extent to which CPS agencies have met their primary objective; achieving safety for children reported as suspected victims of maltreatment. Prevention of recurrent maltreatment is not only a measure of system efficacy, but it is also important for children's development. While exposure to any maltreatment has been linked with negative developmental and socio-emotional outcomes, children exposed to recurrent or chronic maltreatment tend to experience worse outcomes when compared with children who experience a single maltreatment incident (Éthier, Lemelin, & Lacharité, 2004; Ireland, Smith, & Thornberry, 2002; Jaffee & Maikovitch-Fong, 2011; Manly, Kim, Rogosch, & Cicchetti, 2001).

CPS agencies may seek to address the maltreatment-related risk factors of families through several mechanisms – namely, voluntary or compulsory services, which may include temporary or permanent removal from the familial home. Nevertheless, national estimates suggest that nearly 15% of all cases investigated by CPS, and 5.2% of substantiated or indicated cases, are re-reported within 6 months of the investigation (Fluke, Yuan, & Edwards, 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). This initial 6 month period is the timeframe in which families are considered to be at highest risk of re-report (Connell, Bergeron, Katz, Saunders, & Tebes, 2007). However, data that track cases longer suggest that risk of recurrent maltreatment extends beyond that time frame – 26% are re-reported within two years (Lipien & Forthofer, 2004) and 67% of high-risk cases are re-reported within 8 years (Proctor et al., 2012).

A vast body of literature has sought to identify various predictors of recurrent maltreatment, typically focusing on two types of factors: (1) the characteristics of families and children associated with increased risk of re-report (Connell et al., 2007; Kahn & Schwalbe, 2010; Thompson & Wiley, 2009) or (2) how rates of re-report differ based on the CPS response to the index investigation, in terms of the decisions related to substantiation, service provision, and child removal (Connell et al., 2007; Drake, Jonson-Reid, Way, & Chung, 2003; Fluke, Shusterman, Hollinshead, & Yuan, 2008; Kahn & Schwalbe, 2010; Thompson & Wiley, 2009). Yet, while the families' characteristics and case decision-making are likely important, families and caseworkers

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Maguirejack.1@osu.edu (K. Maguire-Jack), font@wisc.edu (S.A. Font).

function within the structure and norms of their communities and agencies, respectively. Research has documented links between community level factors and community maltreatment rates (for a review see: Coulton, Crampton, Irwin, Spilsbury, & Korbin, 2007 and Freisthler, Merritt, & LaScala, 2006), but less attention has been paid to the role of community factors in the response to maltreatment and prevention of its recurrence. Similarly, as the responsibility of preventing recurrent maltreatment lies at least partially in the agency response, the characteristics and capacities of the local CPS agency are likely to influence the probability of maltreatment recurrence. In an effort to understand factors associated with recurrent maltreatment, this study applies the Decision-Making Ecology Framework (Baumann, Dalglish, Fluke, & Kern, 2011) which posits that individual decisions within CPS are the product of factors related to the individual case, the CPS worker, the CPS agency, and the external environment. This study aims to provide evidence on the following research question: What family, caseworker, agency and community factors contribute to the risk of recurrent maltreatment among families that receive services paid by the agency or when the child received out-of-home placement services?

2. Background

2.1. Micro-perspectives on maltreatment

Maltreatment is an aggregate term that encompasses a range of actions and inactions, but the primary issues that are investigated by CPS are neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Of these, sexual abuse is most often explained as a micro-level phenomenon – that is, it is believed to be most influenced by psychopathological characteristics of the perpetrator (Black, Heyman, & Slep, 2001; Johnston, French, Schouweiler, & Johnston, 1992; Whitaker et al., 2008), though some evidence suggests a potential association with economic hardship (Drake & Pandey, 1996).

Physical abuse is often attributed to the effects of microsystem factors on individuals, such as the effect of poverty on parental stress, which may lead to physical abuse (Berger, 2005; Vondra, 1990). The Family Stress Model of Economic Hardship (Conger & Elder, 1994; Conger, Wallace, Ebert, Sun, Simons, McLoyd and Brody, 2002) proposes that in addition to the direct effect of economic hardship (e.g. income loss, unemployment) on children in the form of deprivation, these hardships also indirectly impact children through the change in family dynamics. These hardships become economic pressures for parents when they are unable to meet their families' basic material needs, are unable to pay bills, or have to cut back on necessary expenses. In addition to these hardships possibly resulting in child neglect directly through the inability to meet basic needs, this theory also suggests that economic pressures adversely affect parenting abilities and family relationships (Conger & Elder, 1994; Conger et al., 2002), potentially leading to physical abuse through harsher parenting practices.

Neglect differs from physical and sexual abuse because it involves a failure to act as opposed to a specific act occurring. Because neglect is so intertwined with poverty, it is often viewed in the context of larger systematic and institutional factors. As a result, the characteristics associated with neglect may differ from those associated with abuse. Despite their potential differential causes, few theories separate neglect from other forms of maltreatment (Azar, Povilaitis, & Poquette, 1998). Some theorists have suggested that child neglect may be the result of a mother's lack of knowledge and motivation coupled with contextual factors, like family income, stress, and lack of social support (Polansky, Chalmers, Buttenwieser, & Williams, 1981), while others have suggested that child neglect occurs with the presence of poverty in conjunction with poor parenting behaviors and a lack of parental warmth (Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, & Bolger, 2004).

2.2. Macro-perspectives on maltreatment

Although much of the prior literature on maltreatment has focused on micro-level predictors, ecological theory suggests that micro-level perspectives are insufficient to understand the full picture of influences on a family's behavior. Specifically, they do not consider the potentially important role of the context in which families live and aspects of the CPS agency providing services to their community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Consequently, a large body of research has also examined the impact of community context on maltreatment. Commonly, studies identifying community-level effects on maltreatment rely on social disorganization theory, which was first advanced by Shaw and McKay (1942) in the first half of the twentieth century to help explain the variation in rates of criminal behavior by community, and later received widespread support in the crime literature (Lowenkamp, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003; Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Groves, 1989). In applying social disorganization theory to variation in rates of child maltreatment by community, researchers have proposed that maltreatment is the result of the societal context that produces deviant behaviors and disorganized neighborhoods that do not have the necessary social controls and essential services to prevent maltreatment from occurring (e.g. Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1999; Irwin, 2009; Kim, 2004).

These studies have generally found support for the theory in the application to child maltreatment. However, relatively few of these studies were conducted in a multi-level context (for exceptions see: Coulton et al., 1999; Irwin, 2009; Kim, 2004; Merritt, 2009; Molnar, Buka, Brennan, Holton, & Earls, 2003) – the majority of these studies were conducted at the macro-level, examining rates of community characteristics and the associations with rates of community maltreatment (e.g. Albert & Barth, 1996; Drake & Pandey, 1996; Ernst, 2000; Fromm, 2004; McDonnell & Skosireva, 2009). These aggregate-level studies are unable to separate the effects of community context from the effects of community composition. For example, an aggregate study cannot discern whether the association between neighborhood rates of poverty and maltreatment is due to the environmental context of living in an impoverished neighborhood or simply a product of the collection of individual-level risk related to individual poverty status.

2.3. Maltreatment vs. recurrent maltreatment

In this study, we focus on recurrent maltreatment, as opposed to initial maltreatment or maltreatment generally. While we consider these to related phenomena in several respects, recurrent maltreatment is also unique. The familial and community factors that are important to the risk of maltreatment generally are likely to also affect the probability of recurrent maltreatment. However, recurrent maltreatment adds an important new dimension – specifically; an initial maltreatment report requires some interaction with a CPS system. That is, many families encounter CPS, but, even among higher risk cases, only a portion of those experience recurrent involvement. It may be the case that the families who experience recurrent involvement have different initial risk factors, but the interaction between the family and the CPS system may also affect the probability that subsequent maltreatment will occur.

2.4. Decision-making ecology

An examination of micro- and macro-perspectives suggests that micro-level studies neglect the important role of context, while macro-level studies ignore the influence of individual variation (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). As such, a multi-level approach to understanding recurrent maltreatment is needed. Specifically, we seek to test the relative importance of four potential influences on recurrent maltreatment: child and family characteristics, caseworker quality, agency context, and community context. To guide this work, we apply the Decision-Making Ecology Framework for understanding how child welfare professionals make decision within the context of actual CPS operations (Baumann et al.,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6834271>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6834271>

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