

Background

During 2016, an estimated 4.1 million referrals were received by child protective services agencies in the U.S., and an estimated 3.5 million children received an investigation or alternative response. In 2016, there were approximately 676,000 victims of maltreatment in the U.S., with 18.2% having been physically abused.

Child physical abuse has been linked with a wide range of behavioral, psychological, and social problems among children. With respect to educational outcomes, researchers have found that children who were physically maltreated were less engaged in school, had lower grades, had poorer test scores, experienced more suspensions, had higher absenteeism, and were more likely to drop out of school compared to children who were not maltreated. Little is known about the effects associated with exposure to the physical abuse of a sibling, and what has been explored has primarily focused on behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore differential education outcomes for children who were allegedly physically abused and children who were exposed to the alleged child physical abuse in comparison to their peers who never came in contact with the child protection system. The research questions were:

- Do school attendance and achievement patterns differ for children who were involved with CPS due to physical abuse compared to their peers who were not involved with CPS?
- Do school attendance and achievement patterns differ for children who were allegedly physically abused compared to children who were exposed to alleged physical abuse?

Method

- **Data Source:** Secondary data from the Minnesota Departments of Human Services (DHS) and Education (MDE) housed by the Minn-LInK project.
- **Sample:** Accepted maltreatment reports from 2000-2016 were used to identify a statewide population of children who were the subject of or exposed to alleged physical abuse for the *first and only* time in academic years (AY) 2011-2012 or 2012-2013, when they were 8-10 years old. Children with other types and those with subsequent maltreatment were excluded.
- **Analysis:** MDE records were used to track school attendance and academic achievement over four years (in the AY of the CPS report and three following years). Generalized Estimating Equations were used to determine differences in attendance and academic achievement over four years, starting in the year of the maltreatment report.

Sample Characteristics

Using propensity score matching, children who were CPS-involved as either an alleged victim of physical abuse or via exposure to the alleged physical abuse of another child in their household were matched to a similarly-situated group of children without a history of CPS involvement.

	Alleged child physical abuse	Exposed to alleged child physical abuse	Total CPS-involved	Matched Comparison Group	Total
	%	%	%	%	N
Female	21.19%	28.80%	50.00%	50.00%	802
Male	26.33%	23.67%	50.00%	50.00%	938
White	24.55%	25.15%	49.70%	50.30%	994
Black	21.85%	28.00%	49.85%	50.15%	325
Hispanic	23.50%	26.07%	49.57%	50.43%	234
Asian	23.97%	28.08%	52.05%	47.95%	146
AI/AN	29.27%	24.39%	53.66%	46.34%	41
Special Education	30.06%	20.84%	50.90%	49.10%	499
Free/reduced lunch	23.63%	26.89%	50.53%	49.47%	1,227
Total	23.97%	26.03%	50.00%	50.00%	1,740

Academic Achievement Results

Figure 1. Math proficiency over time

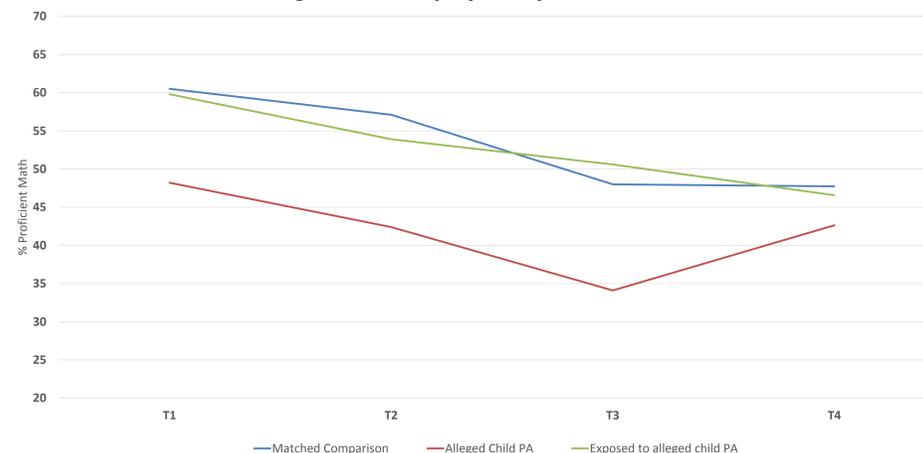
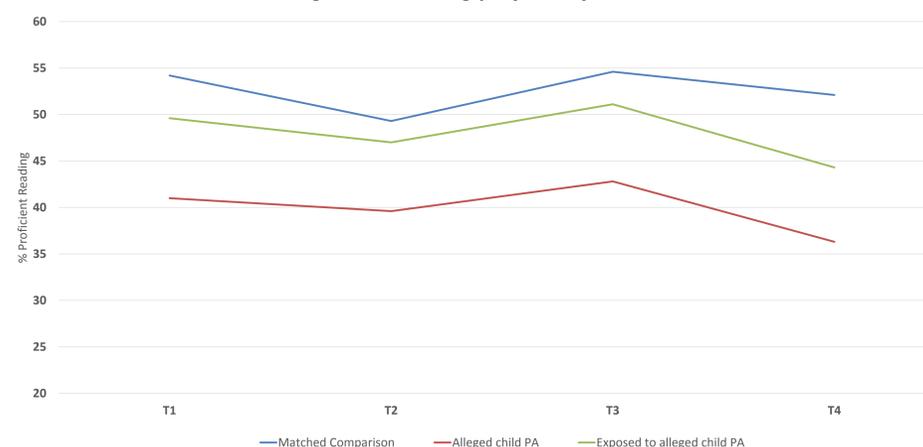
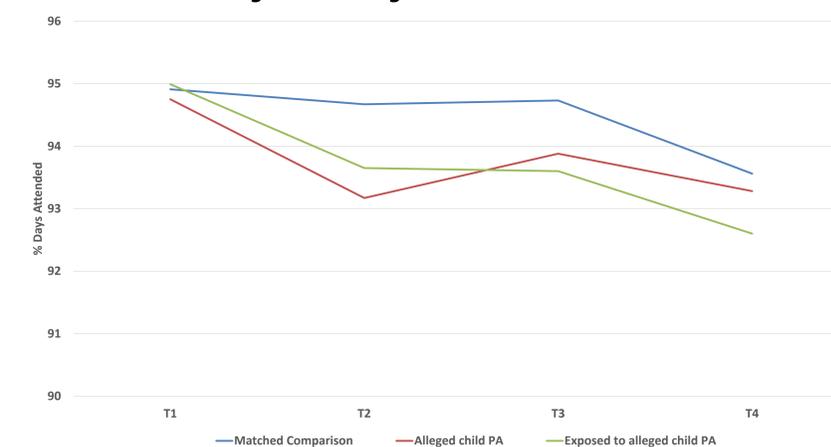


Figure 2. Reading proficiency over time



Attendance Results

Figure 3. Average attendance over time



Conclusion & Implications

Attendance rates of children with CPS involvement declined at a significantly faster rate than the attendance rates of their peers.

- Lower attendance among children exposed to the maltreatment of a sibling may be linked with children's behavioral health.
- Children exposed to physical abuse of a sibling may exhibit feelings of guilt because they were not directly maltreated and/or helplessness because they could not stop the abuse.
- Feelings of guilt may translate into symptoms of depression or anxiety which may lead to avoidance of the school environment.

The math and reading proficiency of children with CPS involvement also declined at significantly faster rates than those of their peers.

- Differences in achievement patterns coincided with the alleged experience of physical abuse on both math and reading assessments and the exposure to alleged physical abuse on reading assessments.
- Child welfare and school professionals should be mindful of potential academic challenges among children who have been directly and indirectly maltreated and recognize that children may require academic supports for several years following the incident of abuse.

Child welfare and school professionals should be aware of the potential negative effects of various forms of maltreatment and provide academic support, counseling, and other interventions to support children's academic stability.

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