



Family Structure as a Dynamic Predictor of Child Maltreatment

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Introduction

- Family structure is often dichotomized as single parent vs. both parents. This does not take into account other family typologies.
- Single parenting is a risk for child maltreatment (Brown et al., 1998).
- Family structures can change over time. It could be argued that the amount of disruption in family structure (e.g. number of changes) also has negative consequences (e.g. Bray & Hetherington, 1993).

Research Questions

- Do **changes and/or variations** in family structure over childhood predict later child maltreatment?
- Does **family structure** moderate the relation between high-risk environments and child maltreatment?

Study Sample

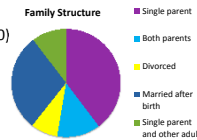
The study sample is from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS), a prospective investigation of the effects of the Child-Parent Center (CPC) intervention program for children from low-income families. The sample size of this current study is 1,371 participants (89% original sample).

Measures

1. Number of changes in Family Structure (birth-10)

2. Family Structure (birth -age 10)

- Always Single parent
- Always Both parents
- Divorced
- Married after birth
- Single parent & non-parental adult



3. Child Maltreatment

- Child maltreatment includes substantiated counts of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect
- Early child maltreatment (birth- age 9)
 - Later child maltreatment (ages 10-17)

4. Early Risk Indicators (at the time of participant's birth)

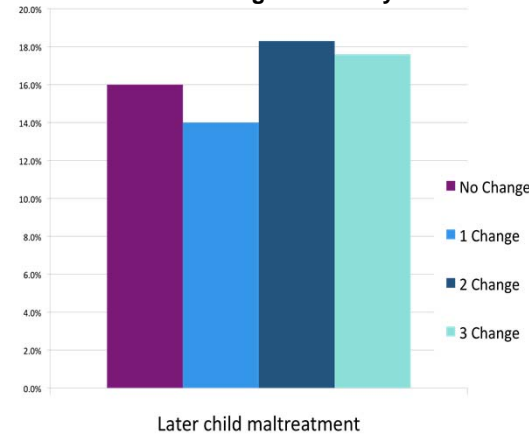
- School in low-income neighborhood
- Mom did not complete high school
- 4 or more children in household
- Mother unemployed
- Free lunch eligibility
- Teenage mom
- African American
- Male
- CPC participant
- TANF receipt

Descriptives

Descriptive Rates of Later Child Maltreatment by Predictors		
	N (1,371)	Rates of Later Maltreatment
Single parent	545	20.2%
Divorced parents	110	10.9%
Married after child's birth	435	15.6%
Single parent & another adult	105	16.2%
Both parents	176	5.1%
CPC preschool intervention	989	13.8%
Non-CPC participants	550	19.1%
Teenage mother	249	24.5%
Mother did not complete H.S.	835	19.9%
4 + children in the household	256	9.8%
Mother unemployed	1021	17.2%
School in low-income area	1169	14.8%
TANF receipt	966	18.1%
Free lunch eligibility	1289	16.8%
Male	770	16.0%
Female	761	15.5%
African American	1431	16.1%

Results

Frequency of Later Maltreatment by Number of Changes in Family Structure



Probit regression analyses indicate that the **frequency of changes in family structure does not predict later child maltreatment**

Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Family Structure Predicting Later Child Maltreatment (n=1,371)

Variables	Model1	Model 2	Model 3
	Marginal Effects (change in percentage points)		
Single parent since birth	.16***	.11**	.09*
Divorced parents	.07	.06	.06
Married after child's birth	.11**	.08*	.08*
Single parent & another adult	.09*	.05	.05
CPC preschool intervention		-.05*	-.05*
Early child maltreatment		.41***	.41***
Teenage mother		.03	.03
Mother did not complete H.S.		.04	.04
4 + children in the household		-.05*	-.08**
Mother unemployed		-.01	-.01
School in low-income area		-.06*	-.06*
TANF receipt		.03	.02
Free lunch eligibility		.03	.03
Male		-.005	-.004
African American		.06	.06
Single parent X 4+ children			.18*

Note: Pseudo R² = .02 for Model 1; Pseudo R² = .18 for Model 2; Pseudo R² = .18 for Model 3.

- Even after controlling for early maltreatment and risk factors, **family structure** (i.e. single parenting and mothers who married after child birth) **WAS found to be a risk factor for later child maltreatment**, along with other risk factors.
- The relationship between **single parenting** and later child **maltreatment** was **moderated** by having **4 or more children** in the household.

Discussion

- This study indicates that **family structure** dynamics during a child's development, as opposed to the frequency of family disruption **is related to later child maltreatment**.
- Children only raised by **single parents** are at **higher risk of maltreatment** than children raised by both parents, especially in **households of 4 or more children**.
- This suggests **child maltreatment** is a potential **consequence of inadequate support/resources** in families experiencing multiple risk factors.
- The significant **positive impact of the Child Parent Center intervention program** on later maltreatment in our high-risk sample provides **support for investment in interventions targeting high-risk populations** in need of additional resources (i.e. both financial and human capital).

References

- Bray, J.H., & Hetherington, E.M. (1993). Families in transition: Introduction and overview. *Journal of Family Psychology* 7,3-8.
- Brown, J., Cohen, P., Johnson, J.G., & Salinger, S. (1998). A longitudinal analysis of risk factors for child maltreatment: findings of a 17 year prospective study of officially recorded and self-reported child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 22(11), 1065-1078.

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Chicago Longitudinal Study

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