

*Is There a Predictive Model of Child Abuse and Neglect? What these Data are Telling Us
from a Retrospective Case Review in Tulsa County*

Executive Summary

Background

- Identifying risk factors, especially those that occur early in the life course, has a number of advantages. From a theoretical point of view, identifying risk factors narrows the search for causal risk factors to the set of antecedent characteristics that are most strongly related to the outcome. Identifying risk factors also helps identify intervening variables that translate the increased vulnerability into actually experiencing the outcome. From a more practical point of view, the identification of risk factors can promote tailoring interventions to the specific risks or combinations of risks a person is experiencing and perhaps even the timing of those risks.
- The present study was designed to build upon findings in existing literature on risk factors by considering how risk factors might be different across different types of maltreatment.
- The current study also extends upon what was learned in a previous study for Tulsa County that looked at how community-level risk factors are associated with the incidence of abuse and neglect overall. In this study, individual-level risk factors were identified within individual cases of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

Study characteristics

- Three focus groups with DHS Child Protective workers during Spring 2014.
- Reliability training for case reviewers, September 2014.
- Data collection and case reviews started in September 2014, and ended May 2015.
- Child maltreatment referrals for a one-year period were reviewed for the dates beginning July 1, 2012, through June 30, 2013.

	Referrals (Actual)	Randomly Selected Cases (Reviewed)
Total	8,122	642
Confirmed Investigations	435 (5.3%)	386 (59.5%)
Not Confirmed (unsubstantiated)	1,259 (15.5%)	132 (20.3%)
Screened out	5,943 (73%)	54 (8.3%)
No Finding (Assessment)	485 (8.2%)	70 (10.8%)

- Predictive analysis was performed on confirmed investigations (n=386) for each type of child maltreatment.

- Clusters of risk factors were identified and combined to test the ability to predict the different types of confirmed maltreatment cases based on the combination of these identified risk factors.
- The risk factors, therefore, were grouped into the following clusters:
 - I. Previous Involvement with DHS or law enforcement
 - II. Paternal Factors
 - III. Maternal Factors
 - IV. Child Factors
 - a. Behavioral
 - b. Health
 - c. Exposure to drugs and alcohol

Key Findings

- Factors most strongly associated with child maltreatment are not the same for different types of maltreatment.
- Although some factors do appear to be commonly associated across different types of abuse, the strength of the relationship between the risk factor and the type of abuse is stronger for some types of maltreatment than it is for other types.
 - For example, a child with a disability is a risk factor for physical abuse and neglect. However, it is a higher risk factor for physical abuse than it is for neglect.
 - Likewise, a child with a difficult temperament is a common factor in physical abuse and sexual abuse. However, it is a higher risk factor for sexual abuse in the cases reviewed.
- Some factors appear to be high for certain types of maltreatment, but low for other types.
 - For example, a case in which the father is unknown, or in which there are multiple children with different fathers (multiple fathers in the case), is more likely to be a case of physical abuse. However, these factors were not as strong in cases of neglect.
 - The presence of a stepfather and a mother who was sexually abused as a child are strong factors associated with cases of sexual abuse but do not appear to be strong factors in cases of physical abuse or neglect.
- A summary of the highest-level risk factors for each type of maltreatment is presented in the table below.