Father-Mother Co-Involvement in Child Maltreatment

ASSOCIATIONS OF PRIOR PERPETRATION, PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE, INADEQUATE HOUSING, PARENTAL MEDICAL CONDITIONS, AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE WITH DIFFERENT MALTREATMENT TYPES

Key Findings

• There were differential associations between dyadic parental risk factors and four mother-father co-involved child maltreatment types: physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.

• Intimate partner violence was associated with higher odds of mother-father co-involved neglect and emotional abuse.

• Parental substance use, inadequate housing, and prior perpetration history were all associated with higher odds of mother-father co-involved neglect, but lower odds of physical abuse.

• Parental disability and medical conditions were associated with higher odds of mother-father co-involved sexual abuse.

• Parental substance use was associated with lower odds of sexual abuse.

About this Study

The current study applied a family systems approach to examine dyadic parental risk factors linked with mother–father co-involved physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Parental substance use, mental health problems, disability and medical conditions, inadequate housing, economic insecurity,
intimate partner violence, and prior perpetration history were investigated as key risk factors of mother-father co-involvement in child maltreatment at the dyadic parental level. Logistic regression analysis was conducted using national child welfare administrative data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The results showed differential associations between dyadic parental risk factors and four child maltreatment types: physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Intimate partner violence was associated with higher odds of mother–father co-involved neglect and emotional abuse. Parental substance use, inadequate housing, and prior perpetration history were all associated with higher odds of mother–father co-involved neglect, but lower odds of physical abuse. Parental disability and medical conditions were associated with higher odds of mother-father co-involved sexual abuse, whereas parental substance use was associated with lower odds of sexual abuse. Implications include more nuanced ways of addressing multiple risk factors within the family to prevent future occurrences of child maltreatment involving both mothers and fathers.

Conclusion

Our results showed differential associations between dyadic parental risk factors and four child maltreatment types: physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. In particular, the results suggest the need to address the presence of a prior child maltreatment perpetrator in the parental dyad, parental substance use, parental disability and medical conditions, inadequate housing, and intimate partner violence as possible levers for programmatic and policy change in the prevention of future mother-father co-involved child maltreatment incidents. Plans for future research include understanding the role of positive parenting—including that by fathers, father figures, and their support systems (e.g., paternal relatives)—to prevent child maltreatment and promote child wellbeing.
About the researchers

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