

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Impact of Family Engagement and Child Welfare Services on Maltreatment Re-reports and Substantiated Re-reports

Fuller, T., & Zhang, S. (2017). The impact of family engagement and child welfare services on maltreatment re-reports and substantiated re-reports. *Child Maltreatment*, 22(3), 183-193. doi:10.1177/1077559517709996

SUMMARY: Child welfare services have the potential to decrease the risk of child maltreatment re-occurrence. This study analyzed data from a statewide evaluation of child protective services (CPS). The purpose of the study was to investigate the associations between child welfare services, family engagement, and child maltreatment re-reports (incidents that were either substantiated or not) and substantiated re-reports (re-reports in which at least one allegation was verified). Results revealed that family engagement and child welfare services had an effect on preventing child maltreatment re-occurrence one year after the service.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Child welfare services' duration and intensity were not related to child maltreatment re-reports and substantiated re-reports.
- The higher level of service-need match (the number of each family's needs that were addressed by the service) was associated with lower level of child maltreatment re-reports and substantiated re-reports.
- Families' increased engagement was associated with the decrease of child maltreatment risk.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Provide continuous guidance and assistance (e.g., teaching parenting skills) to military families that have a history of child maltreatment
- Collaborate with civilian professionals to offer military families innovative preventative interventions (e.g., support groups) in order to reduce negative child outcomes after maltreatment

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Teach Service members and their spouses about healthy interpretations of child behaviors to reduce the risk of child maltreatment
- Offer workshops for military parents to increase their parenting skills and decrease the likelihood of child maltreatment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families on ways of preventing child maltreatment perpetrated by military parents
- Encourage further research that focuses on child maltreatment prevention in military families

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METHODS

- Data were collected from two sources in Illinois: Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and case-specific child protection services (CPS) reports for each family.
- Child welfare service variables included the number of contacts between CPS workers and families, service-needs match, and family engagement, all reported by CPS workers; outcomes variables included maltreatment re-reports and substantiated re-reports within one year following the initial CPS response close date.
- Data were analyzed to examine the associations between child welfare services, family engagement, and maltreatment re-reports and substantiated re-reports.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 4,868 families with screened-in child maltreatment reports (child maltreatment cases that meet the criteria for a CPS response) between November 2010 and May 2012.
- Most families had one (58%) or two parents (34%), whereas 8% of the families had no parent (the children were living with their grandparents or legal guardians); the average age of the youngest children from these families was 6.3 years (SD = 5).
- The majority of the sample were White (57%), followed by Black (30%) and Latino (13%).

LIMITATIONS

- The measures of service-need match and family engagement were from CPS workers' perspectives, so they may not represent the families' views.
- Data were collected from one state (Illinois) only; therefore, caution must be taken when generalizing the results to other states which have different CPS systems.
- CPS workers may feel pressured to report more family engagement and fewer unmet needs than there really were; therefore, the results may be influenced by social desirability bias.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct the study in different states to increase the generalizability of the results
- Collect data not only from official sources such as CPS but also from families so that parents' and children's perspectives could be addressed
- Conduct longitudinal study to examine whether the associations between service-need match, family engagement, and child maltreatment re-reports remain over time

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