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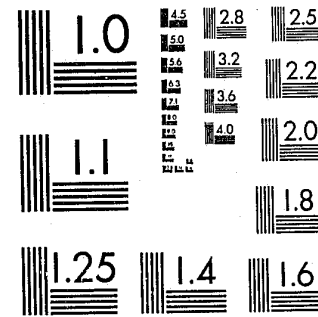
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An Exploratory Investigation of Potential
Societal and Intra-Familial Factors
Contributing to Child Abuse and Neglect

National Council for Black Child Development

April 1980 .

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the apparent systematic differences between Black mothers who abuse their children and those who do not. Data were elicited in the spring of 1978 from 224 Black mothers in the District of Columbia, 103 who were known child abusers who had been so identified by court action, and 121 who had no record of child abuse. These two groups were compared to discern differences between them in an effort to discover important correlates and/or causes of child abuse among Blacks. In this static-group comparison pre-experimental research design it was discovered that while there were no apparent differences in intra-familial social dynamics between abusing mothers and the comparison group, there were substantial differences in variables representing the impact of society on these families. Abusing mothers were typically unmarried and had larger families. They had less education. They were not social recluses and participated in the same array of occupations represented in the non-abusing mothers group. However, their employments were much more likely to be interrupted by disability or other cause, and their incomes were scarcely one-half those of the non-abusing mothers. Though generally in good health, abusing mothers were much more likely to be seriously disabled.

More rigorous inquiry into this phenomenon is suggested. Based on the literature review and new findings of this study, implications for further research

i

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are that: (1) child abuse and neglect in the United States are characteristic of all social strata and not limited to low income or minority groups, a factor that should be taken into account in all future work; (2) research should focus on the impact of social institutions on the family where abuse occurs, with some emphasis on the effect of employment discontinuities; (3) additional intergenerational studies of personality development would be useful, including the impact of social institutions across all social strata; (4) a strong cross-cultural emphasis would be useful in all child abuse and neglect studies; and finally, (5) research is needed to assess the efficacy of treatment programs in light of findings of this study.

National policy toward child abuse and neglect would be most effective if included as an integral part of a rational, coherent, comprehensive, national family policy to prevent the destructive effects of the operation of the U.S. social system on children, most particularly Black children. Such a policy should be characterized by a broader vision than what has been typical of fragmented policy in this area, and should establish policy objectives in the areas of adequate employment, income maintenance, definitive criteria of what constitutes child abuse and neglect, child care services, national health insurance integrated family social services, fostering child network advocacy groups, research aimed at generating knowledge on inter-personal family violence and the impact of social systems on child abuse and neglect, as well as in other areas.

The implications of this research are that social service agencies, helping professionals, and community organizations must engage in activities and practices that will lead to a reduction of the pressures on families. It is these pressures, particularly if unrelieved, that may enhance the probability of child abuse or neglect.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Child abuse has become the center of a new research focus. Once a little studied area, it is now the subject of many new research projects, and abusing parents and abused children have become the objects of a growing number of treatment programs specifically aimed at the child abuse phenomenon. Recent research, reviewed in the next section, has shown that child abuse and neglect take place in every social stratum, though it is often underreported in middle and upper social strata because of the systematic operation of major U.S. social institutions. It is appropriate that work designed to elucidate Black child abuse is part of this new research and treatment emphasis, but very little has been done on this aspect of the problem. The National Council for Black Child Development undertook the research reported below to meet this need. Since this is among the first major research efforts of this kind, it is necessarily an exploratory study.

The definition of child abuse and neglect is not obvious; there are many potential ways of defining the concept. While narrow and highly technical definitions would be more satisfactory to measurement experts and legal scholars, a broader and more general definition is more suitable for an exploratory inquiry. This will assure that a large net is cast to capture many aspects of child abuse and neglect that may be relevant to the advancement of theory, and to the improvement of social policy and social service practice.

The particular definition adopted is one provided by David Gil in his testimony before the U.S. Congress concerning the Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1973:

> "...any act of commission or omission by individuals, institutions or
> society as a whole, and any conditions resulting from such acts or
> inaction, which deprive children of equal rights and liberties and/or
> interfere with their optimal development, constitute, by definition,
> abusive or neglectful acts or conditions."

Potential abusers, then, include not only parents and parent substitutes, but also institutions such as schools, juvenile courts, detention centers, child welfare homes, foster homes and agencies, and correctional facilities, as well as others.

Recognizing this need for a broad definition of child abusing behavior and for a concommitantly broad definition of potential child abusers, this study is focused on abusing mothers and a comparison group of apparently non-abusing mothers who are Black. Because study resources did not permit a direct study of social institutions and other non-parental phenomena, the apparent effects of these on study parents had to be inferred from parental perceptions. It is obvious that additional work would appropriately focus on a close study of the institutional and other extra-familial factors that emerge as influencing abusive and neglectful behaviors toward children. Additional comments on this are to be found in Section 5 below.

Objectives

There were four specific objectives of this study. All are closely related, forming the core of the inquiry.

The first objective was to address the variety of definitions of child abuse. This is accomplished in the literature review section (Section 2) that follows.

The second objective was to present from empirical inquiry some of the societal factors that may create stress for the Black family, and that may have a bearing on child abuse and neglect.

The third objective was to identify some of the familial behavioral characteristics that may have a bearing on child abuse and neglect.

The fourth objective was to examine the patterns of relationships, if possible, between societal factors affecting the Black family and familial characteristics as both may interact to generate abusive or neglectful behavior.

The second, third, and fourth objectives cannot be easily separated conceptually, and they are discussed in light of the empirical evidence in Section 3 below. The implications for policy and practice and for further research are discussed in the fourth and fifth sections. A discussion of the implications of the reserach is an obvious and necessary part of any such undertaking, especially when treatment alternatives are currently being considered by agencies of all levels of government, private social service agencies, and interested citizens.

Research Methods

The basic static group comparison pre-experimental research design involved the comparison of a group of Black mothers known to be abusers as the result of court proceedings with a comparison group of Black mothers who are not apparently abusers taken from the community by quasi-random selection. One hundred three (103) abusers and 121 apparent non-abusers were interviewed. The 619-item questionnaire was designed to elicit data on variables thought probable to distinguish between these two groups of mothers. Those variables differentiating abusers from non-abusers in a significant way were taken to suggest relationships with abusive or neglectful behavior. This achieved the desired result of developing a list of factors apparently contributing to the generation of abusive and/or neglectful behaviors of the parents in the study.

More discussion on the study methodology is provided in a methodology section the sixth and final section of this report.

Staff

Many persons worked on this project from 1975 to 1980. Among them were:

- Robert Bentley, Ph.D. - December, 1975 - June, 1977
- Michele Chargois - December, 1975 - November, 1976
- Wilfred Hamm - July, 1977 - September, 1977
- Eugene Beard, Ph.D. - October, 1977 - August, 1979
- William Ellis, Ph.D. - September, 1979 - March, 1980.
- Rubye Johnson - November, 1979 - March, 1980

The final report was prepared by William Ellis with the assistance of Rubye Johnson.

These individuals worked under the leadership of five NCBCD presidents—Thomas Taylor, Evangeline Ward, Ph.D., Roy Littlejohn, Marjorie Grosset, and Jay Chunn, Ph.D. The project was further aided by a Professional Advisory Panel, including Carolyn Block, Ph. D., Michele Chargois, Jeanne Giovannoni, Ph.D., Frederick Green, M.D., Kenneth Johnson, Ura Jean Oyamade, Ph.D., Ruth Perot (Chair), Patricia Shannon, Jerry Sutton, and Rosa Trapp-Dukes, Ph.D.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough search of the literature revealed that there is a paucity of research related to child abuse and neglect as it impacts Black parents and their children. Considering the far reaching consequences of this phenomenon, the scarcity of available studies on factors correlated with abuse and neglect in Black communities is both alarming and disconcerting. In view of the limited literature related specifically to abuse in Black communities, the literature review for the present study necessarily included studies which may appear to be only tangentially related to the problem under investigation.

The literature review was extrapolated from the following sources: (1) Child Abuse and Neglect Research: Projects and Publications, (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1979), (2) professional journals, (3) conference proceedings dealing with the areas under investigation and related topics, and (4) related publications.

The literature review focused on four aspects of Black child abuse and neglect: problem definition, the critical issue of biased reporting, factors contributing to abuse, and characteristics of abusing parents and their children.

Problems of Definition

It can be immediately discerned that a major problem in the study of child abuse is the considerable disagreement concerning its definition. David Gil, author of Violence Against Children (1970), captures the scope of the problem by stating that the fields of medicine, law, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and social welfare have all attempted to define child abuse according to their varying perspectives. Medical practitioners, whose job is to diagnose and treat physically injured children, define abuse in terms of identifiable anatomical and physical symptoms of attack. Mental health workers, who assess emotional or psychological abuse, broaden their definition to include both physical and mental damage. Social workers, law enforcement authorities, and others whose reponsibility falls beyond care of the victims to the perpetrators of abusive acts, define child abuse in terms of observable, physical and psychological consequences, and include motivational and behavioral characteristics of the perpetrators. Further, legislators and social policy specialists,

whose concern is the protection of children from potentially injurious acts and/or conditions, require comprehensive definitions encompassing clinical, physical, and psychological aspects of abuse as well as cultural, social, economic, and political factors presumed to be sources of this destructive phenomenon.

Gil (1970) suggests that an appropriate definition of child abuse should contain not only factual statements but value premises directly reflecting society's extent of concern for the welfare of children as its most valuable resource. The definition of child abuse Gil presented before the Subcommittee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare at hearings on the Child Abuse Prevention Act in 1973 is a definition which the present investigators regard as most useful for the formulation of social policies and measures of protection for children, and it has been quoted in Section 1 above.

This definition encompasses physical and emotional abuse and neglect resulting from acts of commission and omission on the part of parents or parental substitutes. At the same time, the definition covers a broad spectrum of damaging acts against children within the realms of societal abuse which are committed by such institutions as schools, juvenile courts, detention centers, foster homes and agencies, correctional facilities, and other such social service agencies. Societal abuse also includes the maintenance of substandard housing and its attendant conditions. Finally, the definition alludes to the influence of social institutions, particularly in the distribution and allocation of power, privilege, and wealth to certain individuals while fostering dependency and relegating inferior status to entire groups of individuals such as Black Americans.

A basic premise in Gil's definition is that American culture and society have historically condoned the use of physical force in the child rearing process. Such discipline continues to be considered necessary in the socialization process of children, and as a result, is the underlying cause of physical abuse in private homes, schools, and child care settings. However, Gil neglects to adequately develop the important concept of cultural relativism in his discussion. Child abuse can not be defined without respect to the particular culture in which it occurs (Chargois, 1978, p. 67). Child-rearing practices, like all other socialization processes, are culture-bound; even a limited acquaintance with anthropological and sociological theory makes one aware of the fallacies in any attempt to define socialization practices along a culturally free dimension. What may be considered as abusive in one culture may not be considered to be so in another. Patterns of behavior exhibited toward children over generations need careful examination in order to assess cultural factors where they are judged to be significant.

The definition offered by Clark and Menzel (1976, p. 3) concerns physical child abuse which, they stated, occurred when a child suffered bodily harm after some deliberate action by a parent, guardian, relative, or babysitter. Spinetta and Rigler (1972, p. 296) limit their definition of abuse to the concept of physical injury to the child, willfully inflicted. An abused child is one, according to Brown and Daniels (1968, p. 90) on whom an act of aggression has been committed and which requires medical attention or created concern for his physical well-being.

A more operational definition and frame of reference is provided by Alvy (1975). It should be noted that his focus was also physical abuse. His approach is two-faceted: (1) the comprehensive approach which defines child abuse as collective, institutional, and individual in nature, and (2) the narrow approach, which considers only individual abuse (p. 921). In relation to the narrow approach, Alcy's description is similar to the focus of the Federal Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act and most local and state approaches to the problem. On the other hand, "Collective abuse," according to Alvy (1975, p. 922), "... refers to those attitudes held collectively by our society that impede the psychological and physical development of children." Institutional abuse, within the comprehensive definition, consists of several sub-sets of abuse, including abusive and damaging acts perpetrated against children by institutions such as schools, child welfare agencies, juvenile courts, and other institutions responsible for child care. Individual abuse "...refers to the physical and emotional abuse and neglect of children resulting from acts of commission or omission on the part of parents and other individual caretakers."

Definitional frames of reference range from individual to comprehensive in scope and defy consensus. Looking at this range from a Black perspective, the most appropriate definitional frame of reference would be the comprehensive approaches (Alvy, 1975; Lewis, 1960). This broad approach is preferable to any that ascribe the blame for child abuse to genetic or class-related variables. This is not to imply that parents are blameless; it is, more importantly, to focus on the entire sociocultural environment or the total human ecology to provide the most comprehensive multivariate analysis of a problem. The role of socially mandated institutions in providing both potentially and actually abusive, noxious conditions is equally pertinent to analyses as is the co-association of group demographic variables.

It can be concluded from the literature that an urgent need exists to move toward a more comprehensive definition of child abuse and neglect if research in the area is to become comparable across samples. It would seem that abuse must be viewed and defined as either socio-institutional or individual in nature. The former includes those noxious environmental or ecological forces impinging on the lives of groups and individuals that negatively effect the overall quality of life in America.

The Critical Issue of Biased Reporting

The central issue concerning Black communities in existing reporting practices is that of being overrepresented in the incidence rate of child abuse and neglect. The most serious infraction in reporting systems affecting Black communities is systematic socioeconomic bias. At least four explanations of this discrepancy have been offered in the literature: (1) private doctors are reluctant to report (Helfer, 1975); (2) agencies are less likely to intervene with affluent families; (3) affluent families can maintain privacy and seclusion (Parke and Collimer, 1975); and (4) the better educated, affluent families can hide abusive behavior (Parke and Collmer 1975). In terms of reporting practices, Green (1975) cautioned that the critical issue is one of who gets reported. This was also noted in the literature review by Bentley (1976) who wrote about the social inequality inherent in society as reflected in its reporting practices. Ninety-eight percent (98 percent) of the reported cases

7

are from public agencies predominantly serving poor and marginal income families. The remaining two percent (2 percent) are reported from private physicians and agencies. Unless we assume that child abuse and neglect is literally nonexistent in our more affluent population, we are led relentlessly to the conclusion that our present cohort of reported cases is seriously biased and underreported (p. 330).

In the area of child abuse among minority families, Gil (1970) suggested that the overrepresentation of nonwhite children in his two samples of abused children may indicate the effects of discriminating attitudes and practices operating on the part of the reporting sources. Alternatively, those data may indicate a true higher incidence of child abuse among ethnic minority groups reflecting differences in culturally accepted childrearing practices between whites and nonwhites, though this is doubtful. Furthermore, Gil's conclusions are limited because of his restrictive focus on poverty as a major factor contributing to child abuse in Black families. He asserts that child abuse and poverty are related in the following four ways:

- Cultural approval of physical force in childrearing practices tends to be stronger among the socio-economically deprived members of society. Presented data showed that the middle class uses significantly less corporal punishment than the working class.
- The working class is less inhibited from expressing aggressive violent feelings and impulses directed towards other persons than the middle class.
- The presence of environmental stress conditions and strain has more serious consequences for persons living in poverty than for those who are affluent.
- The poor have less opportunity and fewer channels for escaping from child-bearing responsibilities.

These four conclusions are only suggested by Gil's data on abusive families and are not intended to indicate causal relationships. In addition, they are further limited by a confounding of class and race as intervening variables, since the representation of middle class whites and Blacks in his sample is minimal.

8

From the above discussion of the literature regarding the reporting of abusive behavior, it may be concluded that what is lacking is a more in-depth, systematic exploration of factors which singularly or in combination may influence the reporting of abusive and neglectful behavior.

Psychosocial Ecological Factors

There are several ways in which one may perceive factors contributing to child abuse and neglect, the most common of which is to look at familial, cultural, and environmental influences. As these three areas are interdependent, they have been subsumed by the present investigators into one category: the psychosocial ecological perspective. This relatively new approach examines interdependent forces which can contribute to abuse and neglect or reduce the potential for such behavior, such as interpersonal forces, life situation forces, and cultural forces.

Several authors have suggested that child abuse and neglect are related to environmental stress such as that generally experienced by lower socio-economic groups. This perspective assumes that these groups are overrepresented in incidence rates because they live with more stressful experiences which place them at high risk of becoming abusers. The literature identifies several variables that can serve as precipitating factors in abuse such as education, housing, unemployment, income, family stress, family size, and job dissatisfaction. All these factors are associated with lower socio-economic groups.

Gil (1970) found that over 48 percent of abusers had an annual income under $5,000 while only 25 percent were at this income level in the population as a whole. He found, also, that abusive adults tend to be poorly educated, a variable usually associated with income (Gil, 1970). Gil's findings were supported by Johnson's (1973) comprehensive study of abusive families in seven Southern states when his data indicated that the educational level of male and female abusing parents was low and that their occupational status reflected this. These findings on income and education of Gil and Johnson are almost certainly artifacts of their biased samples, based on what is now known about the distribution of child abuse in the American population. Moreover, although the evidence emanating from Gil and Johnson's

9

studies appears to offer plausible causal variables, the dominant society's impact on Black families' low socio-economic status as a possible mitigating force is not evident in the researchers' design. The oppressive nature of the dominant society precludes economic growth for this segment of the population.

Several studies have suggested that child abuse and neglect are directly linked to housing. For example, Parke and Collmer's (1975) research indicates that a decrease in living space may increase the frequency with which males use physical force to punish their children. The dilemma for the Black family in housing today is sharpened by the stressful conditions of economic deprivation and retrenchment experienced by society as a whole, but is more keenly and painfully felt by Blacks who find themselves on the lower rungs of the economic ladder. Researchers tend not to be cognizant of the attendant factors contributing to this social phenomenon for the Black family, in their efforts to accummulate data to substantiate the strong social pathological orientation governing most research on Blacks and other minorities.

Several studies have suggested that unemployment may contribute to abuse, although these findings, like others, may be the result of biased sampling. Gil (1970) reported that 12 percent of the fathers in his survey were unemployed at the time the abuse occurred. The National Institute of Mental Health (1977) and Parke and Collmer (1975) have reported even higher rates of unemployment among abusers. Relationships between employment and child abuse, particularly as regards unemployment and recession, were discussed at the American Public Health annual meeting in Chicago, in 1975 (Justice and Duncan, 1975). Four work-related situations were found to be stress producers for subjects susceptible to child abuse: traumatic job experiences that result in undischarged tension; unemployed fathers caring for children; working mothers overloaded with job and domestic responsibilities; and working husbands, especially professionals who neglect their wives.

Another factor which may be related to abusive behavior is job satisfaction. McKinley (1964), cited in Parke and Collmer (1975), found that "...the lower the job satisfaction, the higher the percentage of fathers who employed harsh punishment with their children." This

10

relationship was significant across social class levels (Parke and Collmer, 1975, p. 24). Gil (1974) suggested that many forms of intra-familial violence may be attributable to job dissatisfaction. This contention is supported by a study of job satisfaction and harsh punishment (McKinley, 1964, cited in Parke and Collmer, 1975). When one takes into consideration the low economic status of Blacks in this society, it may be assumed that they are most often forced to remain in jobs which are not stimulating, offer no challenge, and from which they derive no gratification or satisfaction.

Family size has been mentioned in the literature as being related to child abuse and neglect. Data relevant to this phenomenon suggest that abusive families have more children than the average family (Light, 1973; National Institute of Mental Health, 1977). This variable may be confounded by socio-economic status, as low income families tend to have more children than the national average (National Institute of Mental Health, 1977). Blacks and other minorities are disproportionately represented in the statistics on low socio-economic status families, an artifact of biased reporting. It is probably not family size per se which elicits abusive or neglectful behavior, but the attendant stresses. Some of these stress factors have already been noted.

Certain marital situations may be related to abuse. One of these factors may be the presence or absence of the father figure in the home. Several studies have reported that a disproportionately greater number of abusing or neglectful families have no father figures in the home (National Institute of Mental Health, 1977). In spite of these findings it seems likely that this fact is confounded by ethnicity. Gil (1970) reported 20 percent of all abusive families had no father figure in the house. When ethnicity was introduced in the statistical analysis, the percentages of abuse ranged from more than 40 percent among Puerto Rican families and 37 percent among Black families to less than 20 percent among white families. On the basis of Gil's findings, one might conclude that father absence is positively related to the incidence of child abuse, and this being the case, Black and other minority group families are therefore at higher risk in abusing their children. Before accepting Gil's findings, however, one must look at studies which refute them. For example, one recent

study from Children's Hospital Medical Center in Boston, Massachusetts (1974 cited in the National Institute of Mental Health, 1977) found no fatherless homes in a sample of 303 families.

Tension and discord within the marriage unit such as repeated separations, insufficient income, and marital stress, as well as divorce have also been cited as factors related to abuse. For example, Johnson and Morse (1968) report marital conflict for 70 percent of their sample.

Isolation as a factor in child abuse and neglect has been reported in several studies (NIMH, 1977; Young, 1964). This isolation of families may be from their extended family, the community as a whole, and/or the services the community provides. Isolation from the community has also been reflected in the lack of association with church or other organized community group. Two studies reported data with significant differences between abusing families and a control group of non-abusing families relative to the length of time each had been at the same address or the number of moves the family had made in the preceding year (NIMH, 1977).

Young (1964, cited in Parke and Collmer, 1975) indicated that abusing parents are more apt than neglectful parents to prohibit their children from participating in after-school activities. Hence the child not only spends more time with the parents, which increases the opportunities for abuse, but also the child fails to develop the normal peer relationships. Failing to develop normal peer relationships, the child may be unable to develop normal adult relationships as a parent later. The pattern of isolation is then said to have a cyclical effect.

On the basis of the literature related to psychosocial ecological factors contributing to child abuse and neglect, one might conclude that environmental or psychological stress does not cause parents to abuse or neglect their children; rather, there are several factors that serve as immediate forerunners to incidents of abuse and neglect.

Community Institutions

It is customary to focus on parents and parent surrogates when discussing child abuse and neglect. Of equally serious consequence is the abuse and neglect resulting from the maltreatment of children by community institutions, often under the guise of helping.

DeFrancis (1961) reviewed the role of protective services in child neglect. He noted that family deterioration is a major factor in child neglect, thus prevention should be the focus of protective services, as this approach would not only save the community money, it would also preserve homes. The cooperation of the entire community aimed at prevention is stressed by DeFrancis (1961). Elkind, Berson, and Edwin (1977) looked at problems facing protection service workers and agencies involved with providing services to abused children and their families. They stated that coordinated assistance from several resources is needed. Further, communication among these agencies is often difficult. Collaboration directed toward maintaining family integrity is sometimes challenged by agencies and professionals viewing and treating the parent as the "victimizer" and the child as the "victim," though this may sometimes be necessary to protect the health and safety of the child. Moreover, Hamory and Jeffry (1977) described a therapeutic approach to child abuse in Western Austria with particular emphasis on cooperation, coordination, and services delivery. Among the resources mentioned are the pediatric hospital, state child health services, mental health services, and child life protection units. Factors considered in the treatment approach include socio-economic status, the effect of past experiences; and external stress such as housing or financial problems. Services available using the multi-disciplinary approach include those of social workers, psychologists, and lay therapists.

Brookhurst (1977) states that schools can play an active role in the fight against child abuse and neglect in four areas: reporting suspected incidents, acting as a partner in decision-making and treatment programs, acting as an agent for primary prevention, and serving as child advocates.

Colucci (1977) in an article entitled, "The Schools and the Problem of Child Abuse and Neglect," offered similar formulas for handling the problem. He suggested the following

steps for schools to take: training teachers in identification, instructing teachers concerning reporting procedures, requiring a physical examination by the school physician, and reporting the findings to the appropriate agency, maintaining communication with the agency, and developing a cooperative therapeutic plan and establishing follow-through procedures on all therapeutic plans.

To further dramatize the multi-dimensional focus involved in the phenomena, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Inc. suggests in a training manual almost identical steps in the detection and prevention of child abuse and neglect as offered by Broadhurst and Colucci. They also emphasize the concept of joint responsibility as well as the need for cooperation between law enforcement and other professional agents.

Delaney (in Helfer and Kempe, 1976) suggested that the purpose of the court is to define and protect the rights and enforce the responsibility of the parent, the child, and the community. More important, he strongly advocated that child protection be a team effort involving medical and social service professionals, as well as the law.

Other Societal Factors

The lack of a systematic policy relating to family violence, economic stress, and inadequate services is a major cause of child abuse and neglect as noted by Stembridge, et al. (1978) in their article titled "Focus on Child Welfare Policy." Four aspects of policies are examined, namely policy-maker status, the impact of policy on service delivery to a special client, the implementation of improved policy-making, and service delivery and the public acquisition and utilization of information. Their examination of these policies resulted in three issues for future research: whether child abuse and neglect labels are being unevenly applied to the poor and to minorities; the definition of a family as a functional or dysfunctional social unit; and abusive child care patterns of the normal parent.

M.W. Edelman, in an article entitled "On Effective Child Advocacy" (1977), reinforces the the need indicated by Stembridge, et al. for further study of labeling and defining the family as a social unit. She suggests that Americans have not accepted responsibility for children's needs because children are powerless as a pressure group, and the oppression

resulting from such powerlessness has been demonstrated in cases with women, as well as with Blacks and other minorities.

Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne Giovannoni offer the consummate credence to the above concerns in their book Children of the Storm (1970, p. 12), succinctly stating:

> "...of the twin evils of our time, racism and poverty, racism ranks first and poverty second as causes of the difficulties Black children face. Neither of these maladies is caused within the Black Community. Both are generated, operated, and perpetuated by the White Community and the institution it dominates. We must examine and speak to societal abuse."

The Children

This final section in the literature review looks at the victims of abuse and neglect, the children themselves. Gil (1968, 1967) conducted two surveys on abused children, with samples composed of 6,617 children and 5,993 children, respectively. Defining child abuse as physical abuse and concentrating on the behavior of the perpetrator, he saw abuse as the intentional, non-accidental use of force or intentional, non-accidental acts of omission aimed at hurting, injuring, or destroying a child. In both samples half of the children had previously been victims of a child abuse incident which indicate that abuse is not an isolated incident but may reflect a pattern of caretaker/child interaction within the home.

Gil found that fathers and stepfathers were involved in child abusing incidents more than mothers, and that nearly 87 percent of the perpetrators of child abuse were parents or parent substitutes.

A review of the data on the abused child showed that some children may be abused because they are "different" from the other children in some specifiable way. Kempe and Helfer (1972) defined "different" as the presence of a birth defect, hyperactivity, retardation, very high intelligence, or some other distingishing characteristic possessed by the

abused child. A perfectly normal child may even be perceived as being "different" by his parents and will be singled out for punishment for no obvious reason.

The Parents

Finally, we look at the perpetrators of abuse and neglect. Kempe and Helfer (1972) provided a profile for recognizing abusive parents which consisted of the following parental characteristics and behavior:

- Abusive parents are unusually vulnerable to criticism.
- There is often disinterest or abandonment by a spouse or an important person in the life of the abusing parent.
- Abusive acts are precipitated by incidents which tend to lower the abusing parent's already inadequate self-esteem.
- Abusive parents have unrealistic, exaggerated expectations for the abused child; and when events create a crisis of an unmet need in the parent, the parent turns to the child with exaggerated demands for gratification. Physical abuse is used to ensure that the child behaves so as to meet the expectations of the abusing parent.
- The pattern of unrealistic demands on the part of the abusing parent comes directly from the parent's own childhood and learning experiences. These parents were raised in a similar manner, were expected to perform well at a very early age, and were severely criticized and punished for failure to do so. These authors pointed out that while these factors are not abnormal in themselves, the degree to which they are expressed is distinctly excessive.
- Abusive parents have deep and lasting imprints of their early childhood experiences which were extremely stressful. These experiences have left them with no firm self-esteem; and therefore, they express an immature and constant need for reassurance. Such parents are shattered by events which indicate poor performance or disapproval from a spouse, relative, employer, and other significant individuals in their lives. Their reaction in the fact of such an event is to

repeat those acts they learned in childhood concerning how adults behave towards children at these times. Hence, such adults abuse their own child in attempts to gain the nurturance and reassurance they lack.

In a study in which 30 known abusers and 30 non-abusing individuals were interviewed, Kempe and Helfer (1972) found that abusers perceived themselves as being significantly less close to other persons, as possessing higher expectations of their children, and as having had unsatisfactory relationships with their mothers than did the non-abusive matched controls. Of interest is the fact that there was no significant difference in the degree to which both groups of individuals expressed being made anxious and upset by the behavior of their children. This last finding is in agreement with Gil's (1970) data which indicate that a major precipitating factor of child abuse incidents is the occasion when parents take disciplinary measures with the abused child which become exaggerated as the parent succumbs to uncontrolled anger. Richard Light (1973) notes in his profile of abusing families that they are "just like everyone else" except that they cannot adequately inhibit aggressive behavior in dealing with rather common disciplinary interactions with their children.

These findings have led to the postulation that exposure to many children (many common disciplinary interactions with many children) increases the incidence of abuse. However, Light (1973) finds that the number of children adults are exposed to at any one time is not important. He observed that as family size tends to increase, the amount of time a parent is exposed to at least one child grows, but not proportionately to the number of children in the family. Light contends that the parent's urge to abuse a child occurs at random for any family size, but that the probability of the development of the urge to abuse increases with family size. Also, the urge to abuse may be related to economic or financial pressure which in turn correlates highly with the number of children in the family.

Gil (1970) has presented a typology of precipitative factors of child abuse in seven causal contexts:

- The home environment is characterized by psychological rejection of the child which results in his being repeatedly abused and battered.

- The circumstances where the uncontrolled anger of the parent causes him/her to implement culturally accepted norms for disciplining children but with exaggerated intensity.

- The instance where abuse is delivered by a male babysitter who acts out sadistic and sexual impulses in the temporary absence of the mother, often under the influence of alcohol.

- The instances where abuse is caused by a mental or emotional disturbance in the caretaker (46.1 percent of Gil's sample) acting under increasing environmental stress, although most abusing adults exhibit a profile of normal individuals except in their childrearing behavior.

- The characteristics of the child contribute to his own abuse due to being perceived as "different" or due to his misconduct and persistent atypical behavior.

- The abuse caused by the activity of a female babysitter who abuses the child during the temporary absence of the mother.

- The abuse of the child which develops from a quarrel between his caretakers at times under the influence of alcohol.

Gil (1970) concluded that this seven-factor typology allows prediction and the proportional distribution of reports of physically abused children under presently existing sources of reporting mechanisms in the 50 states.

Summary

From the foregoing review of the literature the following points are highlighted:

- There is a paucity of research related to child abuse and neglect as it impacts Black community, parents, and their children.

- There are both causative and correlational factors related to child abuse and neglect. Thus, the definitions of the phenomena may be either individualistic or societal, with the former being a narrow definition and the latter more comprehensive in scope.

- From a Black perspective, the broad approach is preferable to any that ascribe the cause for child abuse to class-related variables, in recognition of the incidence of abuse in all social strata.

- Definition of these phenomena should focus on the entire socio-cultural environment, on the total human ecology which provides the most comprehensive multivariate analysis of the problem.

- Child abuse cannot be defined without respect to the particular culture in which it occurs. Child rearing practices, like all other socialization process, are culture-bound.

- A cross-sectional sample representative of American social class structure is a basic methodological consideration in research design.

- Although the one parent family is frequently noted to be high risk to child abuse and neglect, very few studies have subjected this assumption to analysis. A concerted effort should be undertaken to look at adequately functioning one-parent families and to describe exactly what goes on.

- Intentional or unintentional societal abuse and neglect occurs as the result of the failure of society to provide means of support that facilitate families meeting basic instrumental needs.

- Faulty and biased reporting practices have resulted in unreliable data on the incidence of abuse and neglect particularly as they relate to minorities and the poor. This is reflected in the overrepresentation of minorities and the poor.
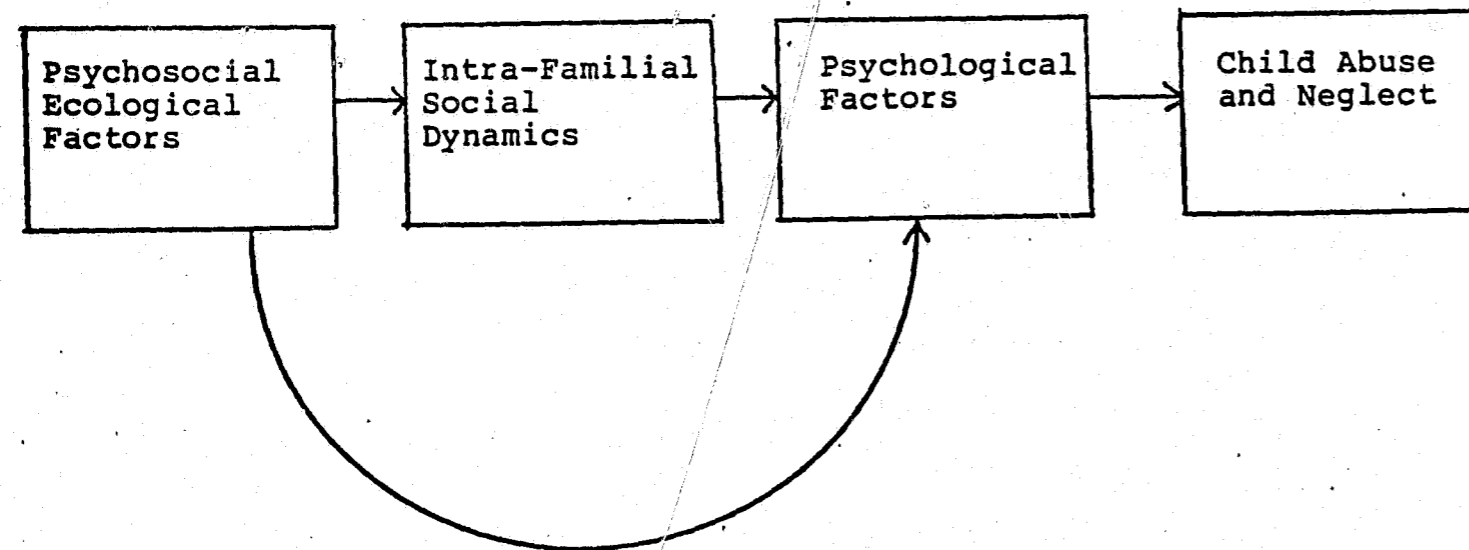
In conclusion, on the basis of the reported literature, it may be stated that child abuse and neglect cannot be understood or effectively viewed in a vacuum. Abuse and neglect are the result of multi-dimensional problems, inextricably interrelated with other concerns and issues. The social, economic, cultural, and ethnic contexts in which these occurrences manifest themselves are as real as the acts themselves. Our research efforts must mirror a multi-dimensional approach if we are to fully understand child abuse and neglect.

3. FINDINGS

There were a number of interesting preliminary findings that emerged from this study. Readers should be cognizant of the fact that this is an exploratory study, one designed to generate hypotheses, rather than concrete findings. These so-called "findings," then, should be considered with caution, and none should be taken as firm. This section provides a statement of the results of the research. It divides the variables considered into three categories—those related to the impact of psychosocial and ecological factors on the family, those related to the social dynamics of the internal life of the family, and those representing the interaction between these, namely psychological factors centered around the personality development of the study mothers. There is additional comment on the effects of agencies.

It is difficult to draw clear distinctions between these variables; and therefore, these categories must be taken as mainly utilitarian, rather than as having any necessarily enduring theoretical significance. However, there is a model implicit in them, one in which society influences intra-familial social dynamics. Further, intra-familial social dynamics influence psychological factors, which, in turn, affect child abuse or neglect (or the lack thereof). There is an additional direct link between societal variables and child abusive behavior which is unmediated by the family. This model is represented in Figure 1. In addition to the relationships indicated in this model, there are other feedback effects, in which the abused children have an impact on the development of other children, both their peers and their own children later in life. Furthermore, the abusing parent may experience impacts in other areas of his/her life resulting from having participated in abuse. For example, law enforcement authorities may get involved, costing work time and potentially damaging the parent's reputation among members of the community; or other children in the family may experience deleterious effects to their development, though they may not themselves have been direct targets of abuse. An obvious example is the potential impact of sexual abuse to an adolescent female on her younger brothers and sisters who may not themselves be directly abused.

Figure I

Theoretical Model

| Psychosocial Ecological Factors | → | Intra-Familial Social Dynamics | → | Psychological Factors | → | Child Abuse and Neglect |

Psychosocial Ecological Factors

The first group of variables to be considered is related to the impacts of society on the condition and dynamics of the Black family in which child abuse or neglect occurs. The so-called "social assets" of both abusing and apparently non-abusing families were assessed through the administration of a Self-Administered Social Assets Scale. Here, as throughout the study, the investigators were seeking to identify critical differences between abusing and non-abusing families. (See Table l.)

Marital status - Non-abusing mothers were almost twice as likely to be married, that is never separated, divorced, or widowed. Approximately 34 percent of the abusers were divorced, separated, or widowed, compared to only 23 percent of the comparison group. Forty-one percent (41 percent) of the abusers were never married, compared to 31 percent of the non-abusers. (Additional tables, Table 2 through Table 12B, are presented at the end of this section.)

Household Composition - There were also some differences in household composition. Slightly more than one-half (55 percent) of the non-abusing mothers lived in families with mate and children, compared to only 26 percent of the abusers. Family size was also different. Forty percent (40 percent) of the abusers had four or more children, while only 18 percent of the non-abusers had larger families of four or more children. This parrallels findings of other studies.

Education - Non-abusing mothers apparently had more years of formal schooling than the abusers, with a majority of the non-abusers completing high school or above and only 41 percent of the abusers. Extreme care, however, must be taken in the interpretation of this and any other socio-economic status variables because of known underreportage of abuse among the affluent.

Parents of the mothers - The male parents of the comparison group mothers tended to be living (70 percent), or if not living, had died when the respondent was over 20 years age (17 percent). Of the abusers, only 64 percent had the male parent living, and 11 percent had experienced the death of the male parent when they were more than 20 years of age. For

the abusing mothers, the female parent had died when they were between 6 and 20 years of age in 13 percent of the cases, while the female parent had died in only 8 percent of the cases of the non-abusers. Some 70 percent of both groups of mothers felt that their parents were proud of them, and the remainder felt either that their fathers spent too little time with them or that their mothers sought to exercise undue controls over their lives. There was also little difference between abusers and non-abusers on financial problems their parents had experienced, with approximately one-half of each group reporting this as part of their experience.

Friends and social group membership - No difference was found between abusing and non-abusing mothers in numbers of friends or social group memberships. This represents a contrast to earlier work reported in the literature review in Section 2.

Occupational status - The largest number of comparison group (32 percent) were employed in clerical occupations, whereas the largest number of abusing mothers (49 percent) were homemakers. The second largest proportion of mothers were employed in unskilled occupations such as domestics, waitresses, retail store clerks, and so, with little difference between abusing and non-abusing mothers. A very small segment (from 3 percent to 6 percent) of each group were employed in professional occupational categories. Overall, occupational status did not substantially differentiate between abusers and non-abusers.

Employment status - Occupational status is a measure of the social rank assigned to a particular occupational category. Employment status is a measure of whether or not the person is presently employed full-time, employed part-time, or unemployed. There were substantial differences between abusers and non-abusers on this variable. Approximately one-half (47 percent) of the non-abusers, but only 26 percent of the abusers, were employed full-time. Abusers were also less likely (5 percent) to be employed part-time than comparison group respondents (14 percent). Furthermore, almost six times as many abusers (12 percent) were unemployed or could not work because of a disability, compared to 2 percent of the non-abusers. Interestingly, non-abusing mothers experienced fewer interruptions in employment during the prior two years than did abusing mothers. Forty-nine

Table 1

Comparison of Mothers" Mean Social Assets Scores*

	Nonadjudicated	Adjudicated	Level of Significance
Marital Status	0.43	0.74	p .01
Education	1.14	1.62	p .001
School Record	1.00	1.07	
Household Composition	1.70	1.54	
Feelings toward Parents	0.42	0.38	
Father/Step/Foster Parent	2.31	2.99	p .01
Mother/Step/Foster Parent	1.75	2.46	p .001
Parents' Martial Status	2.17	2.24	
Parents' Money Problems	1.55	1.48	
Friends	0.54	0.82	
Social Group Membership	2.39	2.40	
Job History	0.53	0.27	p .01
Occupational Status	1.23	1.53	
Interests Including Work	0.91	0.75	
Physical Condition	1.10	0.87	
Childhood Health	1.36	1.20	
Disabled	1.00	1.46	p .05
Parents' Health	1.01	0.91	
	(N=121)	(N=103)	

*Scores ranged from +2 to -2 depending on whether or not the particular characteristic was an asset or a liability.

percent (49 percent) of the abusers had experienced such interruptions, while only 26 percent of the non-abusers had done so. The non-abusers were also less likely to have changed positions. This general pattern confirms earlier research.

Income - There were large differences in income between abusing and non-abusing mothers. The annual median family income of abusing mothers was between $4,000 and $6,999, while that of the comparison group was between $10,000 and $12,999. This pattern was also discovered in other research, as noted in Section 2 above, though it may be the result of biased reporting of child abuse or neglect episodes.

Interests (including work) - The differences between the interests of the two groups, including work, were not divergent. Some 40 percent to 50 percent of the mothers had several interesting and enjoyable activities as integral parts of their lives. Equivalent proportions had either one or more major interests that occupied them from time to time.

Health - The childhood health of the mothers, their present physical conditions, and the health of their parents when study respondents were children were not significantly different. Approximately 80 percent of both categories of mothers described their childhood health as "good," approximately 15 percent described theirs as "fair," and 12 percent or less said their health was poor in childhood. The overwhelming majority of both abusing and non-abusing mothers described their present health as "good." Respondents from both groups reported approximately the same proportions of their parents were in good health, with nearly 50 percent of each group reporting that their parents were rarely in poor health, and with 35 percent to 40 percent of each group reporting that their parents were never in poor health.

Disability - Abusing mothers were somewhat more likely (35 percent) to have been disabled than comparison group mothers (27 percent); and of those who had been disabled, approximately one-half of the non-abusers and 30 percent of the abusers were disabled for periods between two weeks and one month. However, abusers (28 percent) were much more likely to be disabled continuously than non-abusers (9 percent).

The abusing family - In comparison to the non-abusing mothers, abusers were unmarried with larger families and apparently less education. They were not comparative social recluses, as they had friends and belonged to social groups; and they had the same array of occupations as the non-abusers. However, their employments were much more likely to be interrupted by disability or other cause, and their income was scarcely one-half that of the non-abusing families. Though generally in good health, they were much more likely to be seriously disabled.

Intra-Familial Social Dynamics

The above pattern represents a substantial amount of external pressure. What, then, are the resulting social dynamics inside the abusing family with its substantially lower resources? A Family Environment Scale (FES) was incorporated in the instrument, comprising 90 true-false and including 10 subscales. Three dimensions of intra-familial social dynamics were explored—a relationship dimension, a system maintenance dimension, and a personal growth dimension.

Relationship dimension - The most important aspects measured by the relationship dimension were family cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict--that is, the degree to which mothers felt they belonged to and were proud of their families, the extent that open expression was encouraged, and the magnitude of conflictual interactions. There was no difference between abusing and non-abuseing mothers on cohesion, expressiveness, or conflict. Other, less important, aspects of the relationship dimension reflected no significant differences between abusers and non-abusers either. These included intellectual-cultural orientation (concern, interest, and participation in political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities), active recreational orientation, and moral-religious emphasis.

System maintenance dimension - The system maintenance dimension of intra-familial social dynamics measured family management practices and procedures. Abusers and non-abusers were not different on either the organization (order and organization in structuring family activities) or control (hierarchical organization, inflexible rules and regulations, and autocratic decision making) aspects of this dimension.

Personal growth dimension - Likewise, there were no significant differences between abusing and non-abusing mothers on the personal growth dimension. Aspects represented in this dimension include independence, achievement orientation, socio-cultural activities, intellectual activities, recreational involvement, and ethical growth and development.

There were no differences on any of the intra-familial social dynamics variables, which immediately discredits the stereotype of the abusing home as one in which confusion and discord reign supreme, where little respect is shown by family members for each other, and where slovenly ways predominate. To the contrary, mothers in both kinds of homes equally and strongly emphasized ethical and religious values and issues, and were generally neat and orderly. Parents form both groups of homes emphasized being on time; duties were clearly defined; and money was handled with care.

Psychological Factors—the Personality Development of Mothers

A third set of variables was examined in the search for differences between abusing and non-abusing mothers. There is much in existing child abuse literature suggesting that childhood relationships have an essential impact on the personality development of the potential abuser. Such an impact can be characterized as one which is not mediated by the abuser's own family consisting of herself, children, and perhaps a mate. Such an effect can also be viewed as societal in that it originates at a point outside the abusing family environment that is the focus of this study. And, finally, it can be viewed as part of the feedback loop in which current familial environments spawn the next generation of parents, many of whom may be potential child abusers. The theory implicit in this line of argumentation is that that abusing mothers had abusing parents who rejected, criticized, punished, failed, and/or hurt them—a notion prominent in the literature, as reviewed in Section 2 above. As children, the abusing mothers were either the direct objects of these behaviors or they observed them being directed at their siblings. These practices then became models by which these mothers raised their own children.

What the data show regarding this explanation is unclear. On the one hand, parents of abusing mothers were reported to be strict without being severe in their disciplinary

practices. On the other, there is no apparent pattern of sharp differences between the reported childrearing practices of parents of abusing and non-abusing mothers. Furthermore, this ambiguity is compounded by the fact that the data were reports by some persons, namely the study mothers, of other persons' behaviors, namely those of their mothers. It can be strongly suggested that the study mothers are not likely to be the best reporters of the childrearing practices to which they were subjected. For this reason, this category of variables will have to await further assessment in additional studies in which direct intergenerational data will form the basis for analysis. Only by interviewing both parents and their grown children will it be possible to get at the phenomena in question. In such studies, one of the most important variables will be the differences between the parents' perceptions of their childrearing practices and the children's perceptions of them.

Effects of Agencies

Another difficult aspect of the child abuse and neglect phenomenon to fathom in these data is that of the effects of public and private institutions on child abuse. What institutions promote child abuse directly or indirectly? What institutions attenuate or curtail abusive or neglectful behavior? Very little can be said from these data concerning this. However, it should be noted that there are certain systematic differences between abusing and non-abusing mothers on variables attributable to the impact of social institutions. For example, the income of abusing mothers was scarcely one-half that of non-abusing mothers, and their employments were more likely to be interrupted. The pressures generated on the family by this alone would be substantial, and such pressure can be attributed to the inadequacy of the operation of U.S. economic and political institutions with respect to these persons. It should be remembered that any such difference may not be real or may be exaggerated by biased reporting.

Schorr and others make a strong relevant argument in Schorr's edited volume, Children and Decent People (1974). They assert that federal programs for children are poor and underfunded because they are for the poor. Similarly, it can be suggested that programs of all kinds for the poor are ineffectual and underfunded because they are for the poor. And by

extension, U.S. society can be said to operate very well for the affluent, and very marginally for the poor, including the Black poor.

Though these speculations are not derived from the data in this study, they are of some interest and should be close to the core of any further inquiry on child abuse and neglect.

Conclusion

Mothers in the study who abused or neglected their children were

- apparently _different_ on societal variables representing the impact of the operation of U.S. social institutions on their families, though it was possible to discern the direct effects of any specific institutions, and understanding that these difference may result from biased reporting of child abuse, and neglect,

- very _similar_ on the intra-familial social dynamics variables representing what takes place in the family, and

- impossible to clearly judge on the personality development variables that would indicate the direct effect of social institutions, unmediated by the family, on mothers who were study respondents.

The policy and practices implications of these preliminary findings are discussed in the following section.

Table 2

MARITAL STATUS

Marital Status	Abusers	Comparison Group
Married	26 (25%)	56 (46%)
Divorced, separated, or widowed	35 (34%)	28 (31%)
Never married	42 (41%)	37 (31%)
TOTALS	103 (100%)	121 (100%)

Table 3A

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION: MATE AND CHILDREN, ETC.

Composition	Abusers	Comparison Group
Live with mate and children	26 (26%)	66 (55%)
Live with mate, no children	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Live with children or family (no husband)	61 (60%)	51 (42%)
Living alone	6 (6%)	0 (0%)
Living with others	7 (7%)	4 (3%)
TOTALS	101 (100%)	121 (100%)

Table 3B

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION: NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Number of Children in Family	Abusers	Comparison Group
One	22 (21%)	39 (33%)
2-3	39 (38%)	57 (49%)
4-5	23 (22%)	14 (12%)
More than 5	19 (18%)	7 (6%)
TOTALS	103 (100%)	117 (100%)

Table 4

EDUCATION

Highest Grade Completed	Abusers	Comparison Group*
No grade school	1 (1%)	0
Some grade school	13 (13%)	2
Completed grade school	10 (10%)	5
Some high school	36 (33%)	32
Completed high school	29 (28%)	*
Some college	6 (69%)	*
Completed college	7 (7%)	*
Other	3 (3%)	*
TOTALS	103 (100%)	*

*A serious missing data problem rendered these computations very difficult to interpret precisely.

PARENTS OF MOTHERS: FATHERS, ETC.

Father, Stepfather, or Foster Parents	Abusers	Comparison Group
Living	64 (64%)	83 (70%)
Died when I was 6 years old	8 (8%)	3 (2%)
Died when I was 6 to 9 years old	3 (3%)	1 (1%)
Died when I was 10 to 15 years old	6 (6%)	5 (4%)
Died when I was 16 to 20 years old	8 (11%)	7 (17%)
Died when I was over 20 years old	11 (11%)	20 (17%)
TOTALS	100 (100%)	119 (100%)

Table 5B

PARENTS OF MOTHERS: MOTHERS, ETC.

Mother, Stepmother, or Foster Parents	Abusers	Comparison Group
Living	80 (79%)	92 (77%)
Died when I was 6 years old	8 (8%)	1 (1%)
Died when I was 6 to 9 years old	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
Died when I was 10 to 15 years old	0 (0%)	3 (2%)
Died when I was 16 to 20 years old	2 (2%)	4 (3%)
Died when I was over 20 years old	8 (8%)	18 (18%)
TOTALS	101 (100%)	120 (100%)

Table 6A

FRIENDS

Friends	Abusers	Comparison Group
Many close friends	18 (18%)	23 (20%)
Some close friends	20 (19%)	31 (26%)
Only a few close friends	62 (60%)	50 (51%)
No friends	3 (3%)	4 (3%)
TOTALS	103 (100%)	118 (100%)

Table 6B

SOCIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Social Group Membership	Abusers	Comparison Group
Active in one or more social groups	21 (21%)	24 (20%)
Not very active	18 (18%)	24 (20%)
No social group membership	61 (61%)	70 (59%)
TOTALS	100 (100%)	118 (100%)

Table 7

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

Occupational Status	Abusers	Comparison Group
Professional, government	2 (3%)	5 (5%)
Professional, private	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Managerial, government	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Operative, goverment	1 (1%)	3 (3%)
Operative, private	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Factory labor	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Sales	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Clerical	9 (12%)	34 (32%)
Homemaker	37 (49%)	19 (18%)
Student	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Security guard	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Service worker	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Other	16 (21%)	28 (27%)
Unemployed	8 (10%)	9 (9%)
TOTALS	76 (100%)	105 (100%)

Table 8

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employment Status	Abusers	Comparison Group
Employed full-time	26 (26%)	56 (47%)
Employed part-time	5 (5%)	17 (14%)
School or job training full-time	5 (5%)	4 (3%)
School or job training part-time	3 (3%)	3 (2%)
Employed and school or training	6 (6%)	4 (3%)
Unemployed and looking for work	28 (28%)	23 (19%)
Unemployed but not looking for work	11 (11%)	9 (8%)
Disabled	12 (12%)	2 (2%)
Other	5 (5%)	2 (2%)
TOTALS	101 (100%)	120 (100%)

Table 9

TOTAL FAMILY INCOME

Total Family Income	Abusers	Comparison Group
$1000 - 3999	36 (40%)	21 (19%)
$4000 - 6999	19* (21%)	15 (13%)
$7000 - 9999	16 (18%)	18 (16%)
$10000 - 12999	6 (7%)	17* (15%)
$13000 - 15999	8 (9%)	14 (12%)
$16000 - 18999	1 (1%)	11 (10%)
$19000 - 21999	1 (1%)	12 (11%)
$22000 - 27999	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
$28000 - 33999	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
$34000 - above	3 (3%)	0 (0%)
TOTALS	91 (100%)	112 (100%)

*Median category

Table 10

INTERESTS (INCLUDING WORK)

Interests (including work)	Abusers	Comparison Group
Several major interests, extremely gratifying	18 (18%)	15 (13%)
A number of major interests, usually enjoyable	24 (24%)	41 (34%)
One major interests, usually enjoyable	15 (15%)	17 (14%)
A number of interests with much shifting	21 (21%)	27 (23%)
Difficult to maintain interest in anything for an extended time	21 (21%)	19 (16%)
TOTALS	99 (100%)	119

Table 11A

CHILDHOOD HEALTH

Childhood Health	Abusers	Comparison Group
Good	76 (75%)	98 (82%)
Fair	14 (14%)	19 (16%)
Poor	12 (12%)	3 (2%)
TOTALS	102 (100%)	120 (100%)

Table 11B

PRESENT PHYSICAL CONDITION

Present Physical Condition	Abusers	Comparison Group
Usually very good	40 (40%)	57 (48%)
Usually good	38 (38%)	49 (42%)
Occasionally ill	14 (14%)	10 (8%)
Almost always ill	8 (8%)	1 (1%)
TOTALS	100 (100%)	117 (100%)

Table 11C

HEALTH OF PARENTS

Health of Parents when Respondents were Children	Abusers	Comparison Group
Parents always ill	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Parents frequently ill	12 (12%)	15 (13%)
Parents rarely ill	46 (46%)	56 (48%)
Parents never ill	39 (39%)	43 (37%)
TOTALS	101 (100%)	117 (100%)

Table 12A

DISABILITY

Was Respondent Ever Disabled?	Abusers	Comparison Group
Yes	34 (35%)	33 (27%)
No	64 (65%)	88 (73%)
TOTALS	98 (100%)	121 (100%)

Table 12B

LENGTH OF DISABILITY*

Length of Disability	Abusers	Comparison Group
Less than one week	4 (13%)	5 (15%)
Two weeks to one month	10 (31%)	17 (52%)
More than one month	9 (28%)	8 (24%)
Continuously	9 (28%)	8 (9%)
TOTALS	32 (100%)	33 (100%)

*Includes only mothers who were disabled.

4. POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

This section offers some approaches to combatting the incidence of child abuse in families throughout America, with emphasis on Blacks and minority families. The intent here is not to articulate all aspects of policy and practice changes necessary to prevent and/or ameliorate the phenomena of child abuse and neglect; rather the purpose is to set the stage for the development and implementation of a comprehensive national family policy.

Policy

Service delivery systems for abused and neglected children must necessarily include rehabilitative efforts; however, prime consideration should also be given to prevention and amelioration, for it is only through preventive measures that many of the etiological factors apparently related to abuse and neglect can be adequately addressed.

This study and others reported in the literature review point to several variables that may be related to incidence statistics:

- faulty or inconsistent reporting
- inconsistent definitions
- social class
- economic status
- ecological factors (such as employment and family size)

Unfortunately, this study and others bear witness to the fact that the above variables overwhelmingly affect Blacks and other minority families to a greater degree than other ethnic groups, with serious implications for policy formulation and implementation necessary to combat this phenomenon in Black communities as well as in other communities throughout the country.

Preventive and ameliorative efforts are most efficacious when couched in national policy. It is important to understand the rationale for recommending a comprehensive national policy to address child abuse and neglect. It is evident from all we know about piecemeal policies that broad policy measures are needed to strongly affect psychosocial variables identified in this study, as well as technical and legal aspects of reporting

practices and problems inherent in definitional specificity of child abuse and neglect. Further, it is apparent that these factors affect not only Black communities but many other elements of American society. However, it should be noted that they have a more profound impact on the lives of Blacks and other minorities than others due to the racist practices inherent in American society.

The findings of this study indicate an overwhelming need for the development and implementation of a comprehensive family policy beyond any policy to address child abuse and neglect, however broad. The national policy focus advocated here compliments present rehabilitative activities, adding the range, breadth, and comprehensiveness necessary to combat destructive forces operative in the United States sociopolitical system, as it related to children, and to Black children in particular.

In the past, when policy-makers formulated policies and programs on behalf of children, a narrow vision was employed. The characteristics and problems of individual families were focal points, rather than those social, economic, and political factors which impact parents and children of every social level. This approach has had disastrous results with respect to child abuse and neglect, now a major national problem. It is quite apparent that a comprehensive national family policy is now imperative to begin to adequately address this and other facets of the crisis that besets the American family. Such a policy would necessarily be characterized by a broader vision than what has traditionally characterized fragmented policies in this area.

There is a need to establish policy objectives in the following eight areas within the context of a national family policy:

- adequate employment (full and fair employment)
- income maintenance
- definitive criteria of what constitutes child abuse and neglect
- child care services
- national health insurance
- integrated network of family social services

43

- fostering child network advocacy groups
- research aimed at generating knowledge on interpersonal family violence and the impact of social systems on child abuse and neglect

Practice

The policy suggestions put forth here point to a critical need to acknowledge the interplay between society and the individual. Recognition of this critical interplay mandates that a two-pronged focus be utilized by those delivering these services--most notably social workers. This group of professionals must be committed to countering the increasingly dehumanizing forces of modern society that impinge on the functioning of individuals experiencing the study problem. Furthermore, they must be willing to serve as a link between individuals and their environment, by acting as educators, consultants, brokers, and advocates as necessary when negotiating with environmental social and institutional systems; to do this adequately, they must be committed to meeting the diverse needs of individuals by providing a wide range of services.

Conclusion

These policies and practices are part of society based on the claim that our children are our "most precious natural resource" (Keniston, 1977, p. 221), and the view that families are "the building blocks of our society" (Keniston, 1977, p. 221). This value stance would make our children the nation's highest priority, which is precisely what is needed if we are to build a better society for all children and for all adults as well.

44

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are a number of implications for further research emerging from this study. In any exploratory study such implications for the next stage of research are an expected and important part of the outcomes.

First of all, it is important to note that the scientific work on child abuse and neglect is only now entering what is likely to be its most productive phase. For many years the work on child abuse and neglect made an implicit assumption that abusive and neglectful behaviors did not take place in "good" homes, the ones with higher socioeconomic status and stability. Child abuse was taken to be the province of the poor, and most particularly that of the Black and Hispanic poor. The image of the abusing home in the minds of many researchers may have been the poor home with much disorder characterized by juvenile delinquency, disrespect, and general confusion. Recent research, cited in the literature review in Section 2, has shown that child abuse and neglect take place in every social stratum. The underreportage of child abuse and neglect in the middle and upper social strata is said, by some researchers, to be the result of the systematic operation of major social institutions. For example, physicians and hospitals have vastly underreported child abuse among middle and upper strata families, and social service agencies and the criminal justice authorities are much more likely to discover and deal with child abuse cases among the poor, as these important public and private organizations are constructed primarily for these social elements. This change in the attitudes of researchers toward child abuse and neglect in the United States, from one in which these events were assumed to be most characteristic of the dispossessed to one in which abuse is thought to take place in all social strata, is part of a more general shift in the attitudes of researchers toward studies of interpersonal violence. Studies and treatment programs on incest, sexual assault, and spouse beating are now turning away from concentration on the poor with new, and to some, surprising findings that these events seem to be distributed throughout the fabric of society. Research based on this new assumption will generate a whole new perspective on interpersonal violence in the home.

Second, further research should, nonetheless, concentrate on the impact of social institutions on the family where abuse occurs. The data elicited in this project suggest that financial problems may have an impact on the potential for child abuse. While this may be a function of the systematic biases in the reporting of child abuse and neglect, with lower income groups being more fully reported than others, there may still be some important effects here. This is not necessarily an indictment of the poor family, of whatever ethnicity, because financial problems may well plague middle and upper income families under stress. In addition, other societal factors may impact families throughout the social structure in such a way as to raise their potential for child abuse and neglect.

Third, the matter of personality development must be approached in further research in a way that will make it possible to generate some firmer determination of the impact of these phenomena. As stated above, it would be best to directly study child abusers and their parents' childrearing practices, comparing these with practices of non-abusers. Any additional studies of the intergenerational personality development type should include a consideration of the impact of social institutions on personality development. They should also include adequate numbers of middle and upper class abusers and non-abusers, as these personality development studies may be the source of explanations of child abuse across social strata.

Fourth, the obvious implication of the third suggestion is that additional studies of Black child abuse and neglect must include the study of some whites as well. In spite of changes in the elan of research on interpersonal violence, there are probably still many researchers who assume that such violence occurs primarily among Blacks and other ethnic minorities, especially those who are poor. It would be even better to conduct such reserach on a global scale which would include a variety of other cultures. It is intriguing that the "six cultures study" (Whiting, 1963) seems to suggest that the ideal-typical American household, in which a mother has more or less continuous and complete responsibility for rearing children in substantial isolation, apparently generates more tension than other environments where childrearing responsibilities are shared by several adults in various

ways. Cross-national studies of child abuse and neglect, imbedded in comprehensive studies of childrearing practices, would best elucidate this interesting theoretical notion.

Finally, as always, it would be enlightening to study a variety of child abuse and neglect prevention and treatment programs in the context of programs to prevent and treat other kinds of interpersonal violence. It is important for policy and social service practice to conduct studies that will inform future policy and practice to enhance their efficacy. It would be best if some of these efforts could be cast as formative evaluation, that is, evaluation which is at once objective and at the same time immediately helpful in the improvement of on-going programs. To be sure, other efforts should more broadly consider the major policy and practice options that are currently in effect to ascertain their comparative efficacy. And it will be important to use the results of both types of efforts as an empirical basis for future policy formulation.

6. METHODOLOGY

This section is a brief description of the procedures followed in conducting this research. There were many complexities in the work, and the investigators were forced by circumstances to adapt procedures to meet the real problems and limitations experienced in the field. This is typical of all social research, but especially characteristic of exploratory inquiries.

Research Design

The basic research design was a static-group comparison. This is a design in which a group that has experienced a phenomenon is compared with one that has not. Campbell and Stanley include this in the category of pre-experimental designs (Campbell and Stanley, 1963, pp. 12-13). There is a potential logical flaw in such a design resulting from the fact that where differences in the two groups are apparent, they may have been different without the occurrence of the phenomenon under study (Campbell and Stanley, p. 12). As a result, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions of a scientific sort from data generated in the application of such a design. However, a static-group comparison design is entirely appropriate for an initial exploratory inquiry in what is essentially an uncharted area.

The study was comprised of one group of mothers who had been adjudicated as child abusers by the judicial system of the District of Columbia, and another of group of apparent non-abusers taken from the Black community at large in the District of Columbia. These two groups were examined to determine what differences existed between them. Conclusions were then drawn from the discerned differences regarding the factors that may explain child abuse in the Black community. The results of the project were some working hypotheses, stated as preliminary findings, that can provide the basis for future, more rigorous research. This additional research will then provide a developing body of empirical theory that will qualify as true scientific results.

Sampling Procedures

The study sampling objectives were to secure a group of approximately 100 randomly selected convicted child abusing Black mothers and a comparison group of approximately 100 apparent non-abusers. The term "apparent" is used to qualify these persons because it was not felt that the investigators could clearly ascertain that any given mother was not an abuser. There is an additional ambiguity regarding the designation of the particular child abuser because child abuse cases in the District of Columbia are opened in the name of the affected child's mother, whether or not she was the actual abuser. Other studies have shown a strong role of fathers and stepfathers in child abuse and neglect, as noted in Section 2 above.

The judicial authorities of the District of Columbia were contacted to secure the names of known child abusers who had been recently convicted by the city courts, and approximately 500 such persons convicted by the District of Columbia Superior Court were so identified. A multi-stage effort was then mounted to secure an adequate sample. First, a random sample of more than 100 was drawn from the confined universe of 500 convicted abusers. Because there was not an adequate number of persons in the initial sample, a second effort was made, selecting an additional number of persons at random. When this also failed to produce the desired number of willing respondents, a third stage was initiated in which 25 persons were selected from the 500 convicted abusers by the criterion of willingness to participate in the study. The result was quasi-random sample of 103 Black female adjudicated child abusers who were mothers of the abused children.

For the comparison group of apparent non-abusers, predominantly Black areas of the District of Columbia were approximately matched with the group of abusing parents by socio-economic status based on Census data. Blocks were selected for sampling on this basis. A total count of all dwellings in the selected blocks was then made, and every third dwelling was selected. An individual was then selected for interviewing within each of these dwellings. As with the abusing parents, the refusal rate was high, and the random sampling procedure was again modified to secure enough mothers to meet the sampling objectives by

49

selecting additional mothers by the criterion of willingness to be interviewed. The result was a quasi-random sample of 121 Black female apparent non-abusers who were mothers.

Instrumentation

Existing studies in child abuse, and especially on Black child abuse, were reviewed to determine questions for inclusion in the instument. A lengthy instrument was structured on this basis; and after refinement, it was subjected to a pre-test in which ten (10) persons were randomly selected from the study samples. These persons were administered the questionnaire on two separate occasions separated by an interval of several days. A reliability coefficient of greater than 0.9 resulted, taking the correlation between the scores for the items in the two test administrations. There were no validity tests conducted. With some editing of a few of the items in the questionnaire, a 619-item questionnaire resulted, which was subsequently administered to members of the study sample.

Additional information on this instrument is available from the National Council for Black Child Development, P.O. Box 28353, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Data Collection

A variety of data collection procedures was used in the administration of the questionnaire to the study population in the spring of 1978. Some of the questionnaires were administered by interviewers with substantial training; others were administered by interviewers with somewhat less training; while the reminder were self-administered. This may have resulted in some biases in the data set, though it should be noted that the patterns in the data make good intuitive sense, which may suggest that reliability may not have been damaged by the employment of these diverse procedures.

Data Analysis

The Self-Administered Social Assets Scale was analyzed to test the hull hypothesis of no difference between the social assets of abusers and non-abusers. The scale item values ranged from -2 to +2, according to whether the item was considered an asset or liability. Each item's mean value was squared to remove any negative sign and then increased by a constant that varied. The test, standard error of the differences between uncorrelated

50

means, was applied to the data, and only those differences that were statistically significant were indicated as real differences between the study group and the comparison group.

This comprised the major aspect of the data analysis for those variables reported above.

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