Foreword

The Ministry of Social Policy and the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services are responsible for developing effective policies and programmes to address child abuse and neglect. Understanding the factors that heighten the risks to children is critical to the development of effective care and protection policies and programmes. To further this understanding, a review of the international literature was commissioned by the CYPF Act Research and Evaluation Fund Management Committee, a joint committee of the Ministry of Social Policy and the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. The review provides a detailed account of the characteristics and circumstances that can inform our understanding of physical abuse and neglect by familial caregivers. It identified a significant shift towards multidimensional explanations that include complex interactions among individuals, families, communities and cultural systems and concluded that treatment and prevention services need to reflect such complexities. This literature review makes a significant contribution to research based knowledge for development of care and protection policies and programmes. The report identifies the pitfalls inherent in the research methods used in the studies reviewed and enables assessment of the strengths and weakness of the research studies within the context of the research itself. In particular, it enables the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services to consider its programmes and practices in relationship to some of the international literature. Further research, drawing on the substantive literature on cultural studies and social work practice research is needed to complement this literature review and provide a robust basis for designing programmes to treat and prevent child abuse and neglect. Knowing the meaning given to abuse and neglect by different people will enable the design of treatment and prevention programmes relevant to those who will participate in them.

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Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the Department of Social Welfare in 1999.[1] The report reviews research literature related to familial caregivers' physical abuse of children and child neglect. It identifies what the international research says about:

- the personal or individual characteristics of familial adults who neglect or abuse children including: psychological characteristics; genetic characteristics; behavioural and developmental characteristics; physical, health and disability characteristics; sex, sexuality, and gender characteristics; life cycle characteristics; and socio-economic and other demographic characteristics
- the characteristics of families involved in abuse or neglect dynamics including: family and households structures; demographic characteristics; socio-economic characteristics; ethnic affiliations; and characteristics such as neighbourhood and community association
- the events or circumstances associated with the precipitation of abuse and/or neglect
- mediating factors that may decrease the probability of neglect and/or abuse including: the individual characteristics of adults and children; involvement of, or interventions by, external governmental and/or non-governmental agencies; and the characteristics and actions of family, community, and neighbourhood members

- the extent to which child abuse and child neglect are associated and show similar or different determinants and dynamics.

Most of the research has tended to search for explanations of child abuse and child neglect in individual or family pathology. This bias in research orientation, combined with pervasive methodological problems, means that the research findings in this area must be treated with considerable caution. In particular the developing shift away from single factor explanations for child maltreatment needs to be noted.

While there are significant issues with applying findings from international research to the situation in New Zealand without further research validation within New Zealand, the overseas literature does provide some key insights. The useful lessons we can clearly learn from the overseas research relate to the complexity of the determinants of child abuse and child neglect. These determinants range from factors relating to individuals through to factors associated with the family, the community, and the culture. Moreover, different factors counteract and/or compound the effects of each other.

An overall assessment of the research literature suggests that:

i.   the importance of individual and familial pathologies as determinants of child abuse and child neglect has been over-stated

ii. child abuse and child neglect are likely to arise out of clusters of factors involving

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[1] On 1 October 1999, the Department of Social Welfare evolved into the Ministry of Social Policy and the Department of Child, Youth and Family.

individuals, family process, the neighbourhood, and the cultural system

iii. three dynamics seem to co-occur with child maltreatment:

- *socio-economic deprivation* – within the family and the neighbourhood and as contributor to levels of individual stress

- *fragile social networks* – for individuals this involves dissatisfaction with friends and family relations. For families it is characterised by lack of reciprocity with family, including isolation from extended family among those involved in abuse, and for neighbourhoods by a lack of stable formal and informal networks and services

- *criminality, violence, and substance abuse* are important aspects of familial and individual probabilities of being involved in child maltreatment. These activities also disrupt and undermine community social structures, and formal and informal networks.

iv. the determinants and dynamics of child abuse and the determinants and dynamics of child neglect may overlap at times but are separate phenomena.

The international research suggests that a focus on individual or familial pathology is unlikely to reduce the incidence or prevalence of child abuse or neglect in our society. A multi-dimensional approach arising from and reinforcing a coherent configuration of policy and services is needed. Treatment and prevention services with individuals and families must be combined with a range of community programmes directed at strengthening individual and family integration into communities as well as strengthening these local communities' capacity to address their economic and social viability and cohesion. Finally, all of these need to be undertaken within a broader context of strategies that promote children's well-being, and social and economic policy settings that mitigate rather than generate deprivation.

1. Introduction

This review of the research-based literature is concerned with the factors that increase the probability and risk of child abuse and neglect, the protective factors that reduce the risk of abuse and/or neglect, and the dynamic interplay between risk and protective factors. The review is not designed to annotate the research-based literature, but to provide an integrative analysis that:

i.   assesses the relative weight of evidence concerning the attribution of patterns of child maltreatment to particular risk factors, protective factors, and the dynamics between risk and protective factors

ii. comments on the extent to which the findings of child abuse and child neglect literature can be generalised across cultures

iii. identifies the implications of the research findings on child maltreatment for policy and programme development.

There are a further ten sections to this report. They are as follows:

- *section 2* comments on the scope of the review

- *section 3* remarks on the inherent limitations of research reviews

- *section 4* discusses the broad orientation of the research in this area, its development over the last three decades, and pervasive methodological problems in child abuse and child neglect research

- *sections 5–8* describe the factors postulated in the research as key determinants of child maltreatment and assesses those in relation to four dimensions: the individual; the family; the neighbourhood and local social system; and the cultural system

- *section 9* is concerned with the extent to which empirical research has demonstrated similar or dissimilar determinants and dynamics for child abuse and child neglect respectively

- *section 10* comments on the extent to which this body of international research might apply in New Zealand

- *section 11* comments on the implications of the research-based literature for child care and protection policy and services.

2. Scope of the review

Three forms of child maltreatment have preoccupied public attention: the physical abuse of children, child neglect, and child sexual abuse.

Sometimes, but by no means frequently, a child can be the victim of more than one form of maltreatment. Similarly, an individual can perpetrate more than one form of maltreatment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Child maltreatment
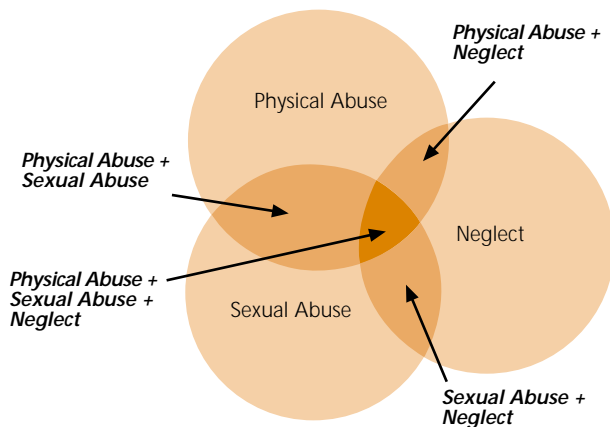
This review was commissioned specifically to focus on research-based literature on:

- child maltreatment perpetrated by familial caregivers
- the determinants of child abuse and child neglect rather than research into the incidence or impacts of child abuse and/ or neglect, or the outcomes of service interventions into child abuse and/or child neglect situations.

The review was explicitly to exclude general commentary on child maltreatment and research related primarily to child sexual abuse.

The focus of the review was restricted to familial caregivers because of the particular problems for child care and protection services when family caregivers are abusing or neglecting their children. Ensuring the safety of victims may require transferring care-giving to other family members or even to outside the family altogether. There are significant ethical, fiscal, social, and legal implications associated with such decisions. There are also very real questions about the most effective interventions in the long term and how child care and protection interventions might be best targeted.

Decisions in these sensitive and complex areas could be assisted by a more rigorous understanding of the personal characteristics of familial adults who neglect or abuse children, the characteristics of families involved in abuse or neglect dynamics, and the circumstances associated with precipitating abuse and/or neglect.

Limiting the review to published literature presenting empirical data had two advantages:

- it reduced the enormous body of commentary around child abuse and neglect to more manageable proportions[2]
- it weeded out the popular and speculative commentary around child maltreatment which frequently presents little empirical data and in a fragmented manner that is not amenable to methodological critique.[3]

The research into the determinants of child sexual abuse has been excluded for two reasons. Firstly, treating child sexual abuse as simply a variant of child abuse or child neglect can obscure important aspects of the determinants and dynamics of child sexual abuse. While child sexual abuse is a form of physical abuse and/or a form of neglect where a caregiver intentionally or unintentionally neglects to provide adequate protection to a child in his or her care, the study of the sexual abuse of children is a project in itself. Secondly, much of the research into the determinants of physical abuse and child neglect excludes research into sexual abuse.

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[2] Even so, over two hundred article and book references were identified as potentially fulfilling the criteria for inclusion in the review. The reviewed literature was identified through a snowballing process in which searches were specified for references generated from previously acquired literature. Of the two hundred references identified as potentially fulfilling the criteria for inclusion in the review, just over a hundred were acquired. The vast majority of the acquired material was in the form of articles published in academic and professional journals.

[3] This does not imply that the empirical research reviewed is without its own forms of bias and distortion. Indeed, as we shall see, an uncritical reliance on the international body of research in this area could be quite misleading for both policy advisers and service providers.

3. What can research reviews really tell us?

In commissioning this review the Department of Social Welfare wanted to investigate five aspects of child maltreatment:

i.   the personal or individual characteristics of familial adults who neglect or abuse children including: psychological characteristics; genetic characteristics; behavioural and developmental characteristics; physical, health, and disability characteristics; sex, sexuality, and gender characteristics; life cycle characteristics; and socio-economic and other demographic characteristics

ii. the characteristics of families involved in abuse or neglect dynamics including: family and households structures; demographic characteristics; socio-economic characteristics;[4] ethnic affiliations; and characteristics such as neighbourhood and community association

iii. the events or circumstances associated with the precipitation of abuse and/or neglect

iv. the mediating factors that may decrease the probability of neglect and/or abuse including: the individual characteristics of adults and children; involvement of, or interventions by, external governmental and/or non-governmental agencies; and the characteristics and actions of family, community, and neighbourhood members

v.   the extent to which child abuse and child neglect are associated and show similar or different determinants and dynamics.

The findings of any research review are constrained by the fact that:

•   research is created by the researchers who reflect the sets of beliefs and practices dominant in a particular field or discipline

•   reviewers often find that research published in professional and academic journals only provides a minimum amount of detail about research method. Some of this may be unclear and selective.

In the case of child maltreatment research, the first of these issues means that much of the research literature focuses on individuals or families although there is an emerging belief that the real determinants of child maltreatment are more complex and dynamic.

The second problem means that assessing the validity and reliability of particular research findings can be difficult. The extent to which either of these problems might affect a particular research review may vary. In the case of this review of the research literature related to child abuse and neglect both problems have been significant. The nature and implications of those problems are explored in more detail in Section 4.

Because most of the research is international, particularly generated in the United States, the research literature also poses issues round the extent to which its findings are likely to be applicable in the New Zealand context. Together, these concerns mean that any conclusions one might draw from a review of child abuse and child neglect research need to be treated with considerable caution.

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[4] Such as income, employment and labour force status, welfare status, educational characteristics, housing conditions.

4. Abuse and neglect – a research overview

Public concern with the maltreatment of children has a long history in Western industrial societies. In the 18th and 19th centuries, social reformers were particularly concerned with child labour (frequently associated with physical brutality and deprivation), and infanticide. By the early 20th century, the focus of social reformers had shifted to the neglect of children's physical and educational well-being – problems that were frequently seen as arising from poverty and limited access to education, health, and housing. The period of post-war affluence that emerged in Western industrial societies largely took child maltreatment out of the public eye until the 1970s.

In New Zealand, as in the USA, Europe, and Great Britain, the 1970s saw child maltreatment being 'rediscovered' by the public in what became known as the 'battered baby syndrome'.[5] Since then child maltreatment and the necessity for the care and protection of children has become a focus of concern for public and community agencies.

There has been a tendency to explain child abuse and child neglect in terms of a pathology emerging from individual inadequacies or characteristics of perpetrators, and less often the victims of maltreatment. This is often associated with a view that child abuse and child neglect is associated with so-called dysfunctional or stressed individuals or families. Other commentators have assigned the causes of child abuse and neglect to the impacts of stressful situations, material deprivation, or poor neighbourhoods and local environments. Still others suggest that child abuse and child neglect reflect the values embedded in cultural systems.

4.1 Research orientation

The various propositions about the determinants of child maltreatment can be empirically tested through research. However, in New Zealand, where research budgets and research capacity are extremely limited, there has been little systematic research on these issues. Indeed, even in the US, where much of the research publication in this area has been generated and where there has been a strong and on-going interaction between research, policy and service development, the research into child maltreatment has not been particularly systematic. In the US, researchers have tended to search for their explanations of child abuse and child neglect primarily in terms of individuals rather than on the other dimensions of family, neighbourhood, or cultural system.

4.1.1 Factors related to individuals

Individualist explanations for child abuse and child neglect have generated research into the association between child abuse and/or child neglect and:

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[5] The case of 'baby-bashing' published in Kedgley and Cederman's *Sexist Society* reflected that new public anxiety about child maltreatment.

i.   individual characteristics such as:
   • psychiatric status
   • substance abuse
   • personality characteristics
   • attitudes to children
   • parenting skills
   • past exposure to physical abuse and/or neglect
ii. situational conditions particularly the nature of precipitating events and stressful life changes.

Some research also focuses on whether victims of child maltreatment have individual characteristics that precipitate their victimisation, or characteristics that make them particularly vulnerable to it. Essentially this research is based on the idea that victims may create the situational conditions that trigger abuse or neglect. Those studies tend to focus on:

• low birth weight babies
• premature babies
• children in poor health or with a physical or intellectual disability
• children with particular behavioural patterns.

4.1.2 Factors related to families

A significant body of research also explores whether specific aspects of family structure, process, and resourcing, and child abuse and/or neglect are associated. Researchers have been particularly interested in the impacts of:

• single parenthood
• familial instability

• blended families and non-genetic familial care
• family size and child-bearing intervals
• patterns of anger and conflict resolution
• disciplinary practices
• marital support
• participation in extra-family activities
• socio-economic status
• income
• employment status.

4.1.3 Factors related to neighbourhoods and cultural systems

The research on individuals and the research on familial characteristics make up the bulk of the research into child abuse and neglect. Much smaller bodies of research look at the impacts of neighbourhood and cultural systems respectively as factors that might generate or affect child abuse or neglect.

The concern with the neighbourhood has arisen out of theories of human ecology in which human behaviour is seen as emerging out of the "mutual adaptation of person and environment".[6] Essentially, this research is concerned with:

• the extent to which the social resources of neighbourhoods affect the probabilities of families becoming involved in child abuse and/or child neglect
• macro level issues round whether societies that accept violence and do not value children are more likely to generate a higher incidence of child maltreatment than societies in which children are highly valued.

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[6] Garbariano, 1981:229.

4.1.4 A comment on research orientation and interpretative problems

There are substantial differences in the quantity of research undertaken by researchers in relation to the key dimensions of individual, family, neighbourhood, and social system (Infobox 1). The enormous variation in research effort directed to exploring individual factors of child abuse and/or neglect compared to, for instance, neighbourhood factors confronts us with very real problems of interpretation:

• can we weigh the relative importance of factors related to individual, family, neighbourhood, and cultural dimensions in driving the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect at any one point in time, let alone over time

• because the body of empirical research exploring the association between community well-being and child abuse and/or neglect is small, can we conclude that the state of community, the 'health of its social ecology', or its level of social capital has less impact on probabilities of child abuse or neglect

• does the fact that researchers are preoccupied with postulating and testing individually-related risk factors mean that those factors are most important in driving the incidence of child abuse and child neglect?

These questions can not be avoided. The answers are clear. Because certain factors and/ or certain dimensions have been extensively

Infobox 1: Research orientation into the determinants of child maltreatment

		Child abuse & child neglect determinants and precipitants	
		Determinants	*Precipitants*
Key Dimensions Driving Child Abuse and/or Child Neglect	*Individual*	Significant quantity of research focusing on social, economic and demographic factors, personality, health status, social marginality and cognitive powers of victims and perpetrators.	Research focuses on the impacts of child behaviours, stress incidents. This constitutes a smaller body of research than the research into individual attributes.
	Family	Significant quantity of re-search concerned with family structures, resourcing and demographics.	Increasing body of research focusing on stress factors.
	Neighbourhood	Increasing research effort on neighbourhood inte-gration and resourcing.	Increasing but small research effort focusing on the social ecology of local social systems.
	Cultural	Very little research. The research that does exist focuses on values and beliefs around appropriate disciplining of children.	Very little research. Research is hampered by extensive definitional and measurement problems.

researched does not mean that those factors or dimensions are more important in determining child abuse or child neglect than those that have not been extensively researched.

Researchers in the US and elsewhere are increasingly advocating research that goes beyond trying to explain the dynamics of child abuse or child neglect by referring to a single factor or a set of factors within a single dimension. It is increasingly recognised that child maltreatment is likely to have multiple determinants in some sort of dynamic interplay.

That interplay of factors may happen between individual factors – for instance, a history of child maltreatment might be offset or exacerbated by a personality characteristic. Or the interplay of determinants might also occur across dimensions – for example, certain personality characteristics might increase the probability of child abuse or child neglect but only in a neighbourhood environment which is characterised by instability and has few social resources.

Because researchers themselves are aware of the limited explanatory power of their research, we can expect the profile of child abuse and child neglect research to look substantially different in, say, a decade into the future.

4.2 Problems of method with child abuse and child neglect research

A considerable literature describes the methodological problems of the current body of child abuse and child neglect research. Much of that literature focuses on technical problems in quantitative research relating to sampling and data measurement. These are important issues and are discussed later (see Section 4.2.2). But those technical problems reflect a more fundamental problem – the inadequate and shifting conceptualisation of the field of child maltreatment, a problem exacerbated by unclear and inconsistent operationalisation and use of key terms and concepts.[7]

Figure 2: NCCAN definition

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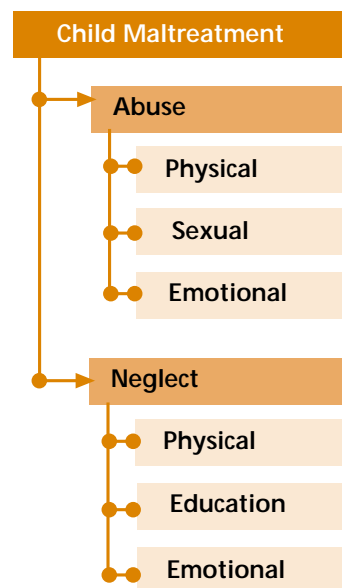
[7] See Dubowitz *et al* (1993) and Jayaratne (1977) for discussions of the conceptual problems confronting those wishing to define child neglect and child abuse.

4.2.1 Definitional and conceptual problems

There can be little doubt that defining child maltreatment is very complex. The US National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) has defined child maltreatment as falling predominantly into six major types ranging from physical abuse and sexual abuse to emotional neglect (Figure 2).

Most of the research gathered in the course of this review deals with either physical abuse or physical neglect. Sometimes researchers use the term 'child maltreatment' but apply it in such a way as to suggest that they really only mean physical abuse by the term maltreatment'.

Other researchers use the terms 'neglect' or 'abuse'. However, in doing so they are frequently unclear as to whether they are referring to all the types of abuse identified by the Center or to some combination of abuse types.

Even when researchers initially appear to be clear and rigorous in their operationalisation of 'neglect' and/or 'abuse', those distinctions often become less clear when reporting the results. This is particularly true of research dealing with both child abuse and child neglect. Many researchers use the term 'child maltreatment' as a catch-all phrase and, in doing so, effectively obscure the similarities or dissimilarities between the determinants of child abuse and child neglect.

Other typical problems with the way in which researchers define and apply terms include:

- some researchers require proof of intentionality and/or avoidability to be present before an incident is defined as neglectful while others do not
- some researchers require levels of injury not demanded by other researchers when defining child physical abuse.

4.2.2 Other problems of method

In addition to the problems of standardised definition, operationalisation, and measurement of key concepts, there are also a series of other problems, particularly with quantitative research. Those problems have been discussed by a number of commentators and include:[8]

i. the use of 'recall' studies in which respondents are asked to report on past incidences which they have perpetrated or in which they have been the victim of abuse or neglect with all the risks associated with self-reported rather than observed data

ii. sample fallacy arising from extrapolating the experience of maltreated victims or perpetrators of maltreatment to the population as a whole. There is a particular danger where:
   - a considerable number of studies rely on samples drawn from intervention programmes directed at the perpetrators or victims of maltreatment
   - the limited use of prospective studies

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[8] See Leventhal (1981), and Spatz Widom (1988) and Kinard and Klerman (1980), for discussions of technical problems in quantitative research into child abuse and neglect.

iii. inaccuracy and/or bias arising from using administrative records. Findings based on the use of those records may reflect different levels of contact and surveillance by care and protection agencies of some communities relative to their contact and surveillance of other communities

iv. problems with securing comparable control groups for retrospective studies

v. inadequate control of the full range of potentially influential variables.

Only a tiny number, if any, of the research reviewed could be confirmed as scientifically sound methodologically. In order to best use the findings reported in existing literature, each study was reviewed as part of a multiple data collection strategy with the findings of one study being considered relation to the findings of other studies in a form of triangulation.

This approach will not resolve all the problems of research orientation and method discussed in Section 4.1 and Section 4.2. It also pushes the logic of triangulation significantly further than was intended for it.[9] Nevertheless, this approach does recognise that this body of research is, despite all its limitations, already informing policy and service perceptions and decisions. It provides some basis for at least identifying where there is consistency and inconsistency in those research findings.

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[9] See Denzin, 1970 for a discussion of triangulation and its methodological importance.

5. Abuse & neglect – about individuals

Researchers have been concerned to establish the individual characteristics of both the perpetrators and the victims of child abuse and child neglect as well as the particular circumstances under which abuse is most likely to occur.

5.1 Perpetrators of child maltreatment

There have been some attempts to establish links between child maltreatment and the ascribed characteristics of perpetrators, in particular their age, sex, and ethnicity. In general, however, it has been recognised that any patterns related to these are most likely to be driven by the prevailing conditions that perpetrators face in relation to family, neighbourhood, and culture. Instead the major focus of the research effort directed towards individuals has been identifying connections between child maltreatment and:

- psychiatric disorder
- particular personality characteristics
- substance abuse
- attitudes towards children in general and child victims in particular
- levels of parenting skills
- exposure to child maltreatment as a child
- excessive exposure to, or inability to cope with, stressful life events.[10]

These factors are discussed in more detail below.

1. Psychiatric disorder: Only a small number of the reviewed articles presented data related to diagnosed psychiatric illness. It must be noted, however, that the boundaries between psychiatric illness, substance abuse, and certain personality characteristics are somewhat amorphous. Moreover, as Kincaid (1982) points out, the research in this area tends to be retrospective or recall research using small samples.

People with diagnosable mental illness do not generally appear to be over-represented among abusers and/or neglectors of children. The exception is depression. Both prospective and retrospective studies regularly cite symptoms of depression among both those neglecting children and those abusing children. Whether the depression itself is a cause of neglect or abuse is less clear. Two studies are of interest. Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1988), in their small observational study of the behaviour of mothers towards a conduct-disordered child, found depressed mothers reporting more daily spankings than non-depressed mothers.

Zuravin's (1989) study of 518 low income, welfare recipient mothers found moderately depressed, but not severely depressed mothers, at increased risk of child abuse and

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[10] There has been some suggestion that there are genetic drivers to the perpetration of child abuse and neglect. There was no substantial and systematic research in this area included in the literature acquired for review. The development of genome research is likely to generate research in this area in the future.

physical aggression. This finding cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the probable behaviour of depressed mothers in other socio-economic positions.

Relevant Studies:

Smith, S., and R. Hanson,1975, Interpersonal relationships and childrearing practices in 214 parents of battered children, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 127:513–25.

Susman, E.J., *et al.,* 1985, Child rearing patterns in depressed, abusive, and normal mothers, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 55:237–51.

Webster-Stratton, C., and M. Hammond,1988, Maternal depression and its relationship to life stress, perceptions of child behaviour problems, parenting behaviour, and child conduct problems, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 16(3):299–315.

Webster-Stratton, C., 1985, Comparison of abusive and nonabusve families with conduct-disordered children, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 55(1):59–69.

Whipple, E.E., and C. Webster-Stratton, 1991, The role of parental stress in physically abusive families, *Child Abuse and Neglect Review*, 15:279–91

Zuravin, S.J., 1989, Severity of maternal depression and three types of mother-to-child aggression, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59(3):377–89.

2. Personality and psychological characteristics:[11]

The search for an association between certain personality types and the propensity to abuse and/or neglect has been inconclusive. However, there are some psychological characteristics that do appear among those involved in child abuse or in child neglect. Those characteristics differ slightly between child abusers and child neglectors. Those perpetrating child abuse are more likely than those involved in neglect to show:

- low self-esteem
- perceptions of an externalised locus of control
- anti-social behaviours including aggression, criminality, substance abuse, isolationism
- poor impulse control and high reactivity.

Research into the psychological characteristics correlated with child neglect is considerably less extensive than that into child abuse. That limited body of research suggests that personality characteristics associated with child neglect are:

- low self-esteem
- apathy
- child-like dependence.

Relevant Studies:

Conger, R., *et al.,* 1984, Perception of child, childrearing values, and emotional distress as mediating links between environmental stressors and observed maternal behaviour, *Child Development*, 55:2234–47.

Francis, C., *et al.,* 1992, Physically abusive parents and the 16-PF: a preliminary psychological profile, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16:673–91.

Pianta, *et al.,* 1989, The antecedents of maltreatment: results of the mother-child interaction research project, in Cicchetti and Carlson (eds).

Melnick, B., and J.R. Hurley., 1969, Distinctive personality attributes of child-abusing mothers, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 33(6): 746–49.

Milner, J.S., 1988, An ego-strength scale for the Child Abuse Potential Inventory, *Journal of Family Violence*, 3:151–62.

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[11] See Wolf (1985) for a detailed, although dated, review of twenty psychological studies.

Smith, S., and R. Hanson, 1975, Interpersonal relationships and childbearing practices in 214 parents of battered children, *British Journal of Psychiatry,* 127:513–25.

Vesterdal, I., 1980, Psychological mechanisms in child abusing parents, pp. 165–9, in Cook and Bowles (eds).

Wright, L., 1976, The sick but slick syndrome: a personality component of parents of battered children, *Journal of Clinical Psychology,* 32:41–5.

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3. Substance abuse: The results of studies into the association between substance abuse and child maltreatment are mixed, but there appears to be some over- representation of alcohol and substance abuse among parents involved in maltreatment.

A study comparing addicted and abusing/ neglecting families with addicted non-abusing/non-neglecting families suggests that the differences lay in the sex of the addicted parent (mothers with addiction were more likely to maltreat than fathers with addiction), levels of inter-parental violence, and level of poverty (abusing/neglecting families being most impoverished).

There are significant methodological problems with existing studies relating to sample selection, and the extent to which current research adequately distinguishes between the contribution of the drug abuse vis-a-vis the impacts of social and economic marginalisation.

Relevant Studies:

Black, R., and J. Mayer,1980, Parents with special problems: alcoholism and opiate addiction, *Child Abuse and Neglect.* 4:45–54.

Famularo. R., *et al.,* 1986, Alcoholism and severe child maltreatment, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 56:481–85.

Mayer, J., and R. Black, 1977, Child abuse and neglect in families with an alcohol or opiate-addicted parent, *Child Abuse and Neglect* 1:85–98.

Murphy, J. M., *et al.,* 1990, Substance abuse and serious child mistreatment: prevalence, risk, and outcome in a court sample, *Child Abuse and Neglect,* 15:197–211.

Whipple, E.E., and C. Webster-Stratton, 1991, The role of parental stress in physically abusive families, *Child Abuse and Neglect Review* 15:279–91

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4. Attitudes to children: There appear to be some differences in the attitudes towards children between those that perpetrate child abuse, and those that neglect children. There appear to be greater similarities between non-maltreating parents and neglecting parents than between abusing and non-maltreating parents. In comparison to perpetrators of child maltreatment, non-abusing and non-neglecting parents are less likely to:

- see children as being an unrewarding burden or there for their own convenience
- experience extremes in their responsivity to child behaviour (very low in the case of neglect and very high in the case of abusers)
- see their children as disobedient
- see their children when disobedient as intentionally disobedient while at the same time typifying good child behaviour as fortuitous.

Relevant Studies:

Bauer, W. D., and C. T. Twentyman, 1985, Abusing, neglecting, and comparison mothers' responses to child-related stressors, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 53:335–43.

Conger, R., *et al.,* 1984, Perception of child, childrearing values, and emotional distress as

mediating links between environmental stressors and observed maternal behaviour, *Child Development*, 55:2234–47.

Corse, K., *et al.,* 1990, Social network characteristics of mothers in abusing and non-abusing families and their relationship to parenting beliefs, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 16:44–59.

Egeland, B., *et al.,* 1980, Prospective study of the significance of life stress in the etiology of child abuse, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 48:195–205.

Feschbach, N., 1989, The construct of empathy and the phenomenon of physical maltreatment of children, in Cicchetti and Carlson (eds).

Larrance, D.T., and C.T. Twentyman, 1983, Maternal attributions and child abuse, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 92(4):449–57.

5. Parenting skills: The rediscovery of child 'battering' in the 1970s coincided with a period in which the age of childbearing in Western societies was, in comparison to the previous decades, relatively young. The 1970s saw women bearing and rearing children in relative isolation, often living in suburbs and nuclear families without other members of the extended family living with them. This combination of events led to considerable speculation that child battering and, to a lesser extent, neglect might be associated with parental inexperience and exacerbated by social isolation. In particular, both educationalists and psychologists suggested that child abuse and neglect could arise out of parental misunderstanding or ignorance of child development, and limited levels of appropriate expectation able be placed on children and ranges of appropriate responses to child behaviour.

A small number of studies are concerned with parental skills and patterns but the findings are mixed, possibly due to small sample sizes as well as somewhat different research focii. It is clear that parents who maltreat children have a significantly less diverse response to child behaviour (good or bad) than other parents. But it is unclear whether abusing and neglecting mothers tend to have less realistic expectations of their children and poorer problem-solving skills. Even if they do, one can not assume those factors, in themselves, are sufficient to cause neglect or abuse, particularly as one control study of eighty mothers found that personality and child-rearing attitudes made only a trivial contribution to the probability of maltreatment.

Relevant Studies:

Azar, S. T., *et al.*, 1984, Unrealistic expectations and problem-solving ability in maltreating and comparison mothers, *Journal of Consulting Clinical Psychology*, 52(4):687–90.

Bousha, D., and C., Twentyman, 1984, Mother-child interactional style in abuse, neglect, and control groups: natural observations in the home, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 93(1): 106–14.

Coontz, D., and J. Martin, 1988, Understanding violent mothers and fathers: assessing explanations offered by mothers and fathers for their use of control punishment, in Hotaling *et al*, (eds).

Crittenden, P.M, 1985, Social networks, quality of child rearing, and child development, *Child Development*, 56:1299–313.

Kravitz, R.I., and J.M. Driscoll, 1983, Expectations for childhood development among child-abusing and nonabusing parents, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 53(2):345–52.

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Family patterns and child abuse, in Straus, Gelles and Smith (eds).

Wolfe, D.A., *et al.*, 1981, A competency-based parent training program for child abusers, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 49(5):633–40.

6. Exposure to child maltreatment: Social interactionist theories of child development suggest that children replicate the practices of their significant others. That, and evidence of the negative psychological effects of child maltreatment on victims, together underpin a widespread belief that child maltreatment, particularly physical abuse, is almost inevitably transmitted from one generation to another. Research findings in this area tend to be highly variable.

Reviews of research into the transmission of child abuse conclude there are both intergenerational continuities but also significant discontinuities. Retrospective studies make estimates of transmission ranging from 7 per cent to 70 per cent of cases. Prospective studies tend to suggest much lower rates of transmission.

Factors that appear to inhibit intergenerational transmission of abuse include:

- positive social support
- a supportive spouse
- an ability to characterise the abuse directed to them as children as unacceptable and negative behaviour on the part of the perpetrator
- a positive relationship with an adult significant other as a child
- therapeutic interactions during and/or after adolescence.[12]

Relevant Studies:

Caliso, J., and J. Milner, 1992, Childhood history of abuse and child abuse screening, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16:647–59.

Ferguson, D.M., and M.T. Lynskey, 1997, Physical punishment/maltreatment during childhood and adjustment in young adulthood, *Child Abuse and Neglect,*, 21:617–30.

Gil, D., 1971, Violence against children, *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* November.

Main. M., and R. Goodwyn, 1984, Predicting rejection of her infant from mother's representation of her own experience: implications for the abused-abusing intergenerational cycle, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 8:203–17.

7. Stress and Stressors: Stress reflects the state of an individual in dealing with stressors. Stressors can include difficulties with children such as prematurity, ill-health, disability, or behavioural problems. They can also include positive life events – marriage, holidays, changes in house and employment. Stressors can be either event-related or condition-related.

Condition stressors refer to sets of circumstances in which people might find themselves over extended periods of time. Examples include:

- long-term unemployment
- extended periods of low income and resource deprivation
- extended involvement in substance abuse by one or more members of a family
- long periods of ill-health within the family
- unsupportive and/or violent marital relations
- unaddressed personal skill and competency deficits.

[12] See also the research reviews by Kaufman and Zigler (1987) and Rutter (1989).

There is considerable difficulty in teasing out the relationship between stress and stressors. But stress researchers do note that stressors can impact both as a precipitating agent and/or in a cumulative fashion. This makes measuring levels of stress and establishing the relationship between stress levels and the probability or incidence of child abuse or neglect very difficult.

At-risk individuals appear to be more likely to exhibit neglectful or abusive behaviours when stressed. Parents who maltreat their children are more likely to experience a wider range and number of stressors such as negative life events, and also perceive those stressors more negatively. The perception of stress is important because it holds one key as to why stressful life events, in themselves, appear to explain only a relatively small proportion of abusive incidents.

But if some individuals are more reactive to stressors than others, there is still the issue of why stress is transformed by some, but not all, stressed individuals into abuse and/or neglect. Stress may require some additional ingredients if it is to be transformed into abusive behaviour. Such an ingredient may be an individual's exposure to a life experience or 'life script' that condones and normalises violent responses to problems, stressors, and stress.

Relevant Studies:

Barth, R. P, and B. J. Blythe, 1983, The contribution of stress to child abuse, *Social Service Review*, :477–89, September.

Bauer, W. D., and C. T. Twentyman, 1985, Abusing, neglecting, and comparison of mothers' responses to child-related stressors, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 53(3):335–43.

Conger, R., *et al.*, 1984, Perception of child, childrearing values, and emotional distress as mediating links between environmental stressors and observed maternal behaviour, *Child Development*, 55:2234–47.

Conger, R.D., *et al.*, 1980, Child abuse related to life change and perceptions of illness: some preliminary findings, in Cook and Bowles (eds).

Egeland, B., M. Breitenbucher, and D. Rosenberg, 1980, Prospective study of the significance of life stress in the etiology of child abuse, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 48(2):195–205.

Giovannoni, J., and A. Billingsley, 1970, Child neglect among the poor: a study of parental adequacy in families of three ethnic groups, *Child Welfare*, XLIX(4):196–204.

Howse, D., and J. Kotch, 1984, Disentangling life events, stress and social support: implications for the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 8:401–9.

Justice, B. A. Calvert, and R. Justice, 1985, Factors mediating child abuse as a response to stress, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 9:359–63.

Whipple, E.E., and C. Webster-Stratton, 1991, The role of parental stress in physically abusive families, *Child Abuse and Neglect Review*, 15:279–91.

5.2 Victims of child maltreatment

Children who come to the attention of health and social services because of neglect or abuse tend to be very young (three years of age or younger), or adolescent. This clustering tendency has prompted speculation that there may be specific aspects of a victim's personality, behaviour, or

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[13] See Friedrich and Boriskin (1980) for a somewhat dated literature review.

vulnerability that engenders an abusive or neglectful response from their caregivers. Young and disabled children were seen as particularly likely to attract abuse or neglect because of their vulnerability.[13] It has been postulated that other children create significant stress on their parents by their behaviour. Children frequently identified as at-risk include:

- low birth weight babies
- premature babies
- children in poor health and/or those with a disability
- children involved in anti-social activities (such as stealing and bullying), or exhibiting poor school performance, hyperactivity, oppositional behaviour, and lack of discipline.

The research in this area does not consistently identify any of these as key causes or factors that are associated with persistent maltreatment. It appears that the characteristics of victims are of importance primarily where perpetrators either/or:

- have characteristics which place them at risk of abusive or neglectful behaviour
- are in familial and neighbourhood circumstances associated with child maltreatment and discussed below.

Relevant Studies:

Benedict, M., *et al.*, 1985, Maternal pre-natal risk factors and child abuse, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 9:217–24.

Egeland, B., and B. Vaughn, 1981, Failure of "bond formation" as a cause of abuse, neglect and maltreatment, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 51(1):78–84.

Crittenden, P.M., 1985, Maltreated infants: vulnerability and resilience, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 26(1):85–96.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (no date) *A Report on the Maltreatment of Children with Disabilities*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington.

6. Abuse & neglect – about the family

Where children are maltreated within the family it is because family members engage in or accept maltreatment, and/or have been unable to protect a child or their children from maltreatment by other family members. Why this occurs in some families but not in others has engaged researchers' interest almost as much as why particular individuals perpetrate abuse or persistently neglect their children.

The aspects of family on which researchers have concentrated their efforts to find explanations of child abuse and child neglect include:

- family structure, fertility, and demographics
- the patterns of familial interaction
- familial resourcing.

6.1 Family structure, fertility, and demographics

The themes that emerge in the research around the relationship between child abuse/neglect and family fertility, structure, and demographics respectively are:

- the impact of early, particularly teenage, childbearing on probability of abuse and/or neglect
- the association between abuse and neglect with family size and child spacing
- the impact of sole parenthood on propensity for abuse and neglect
- the possible association between reconstituted or non-genetic family care with abuse and neglect.

The research does confirm a likely link between child maltreatment and family fertility patterns and family structure. But that association is extremely complex and may be mediated by a number of situational and environmental variables. In addition, there appear to be significant differences in the fertility and structural patterns that are associated with neglect compared to the patterns associated with child abuse.

Overall, there appear to be three important variables that are associated with abuse and/or neglect, although their precise impact can vary:

- the number of children by different fathers
- younger ages at first birth. Note, however, that retrospective studies found this was strongly mediated by stress factors, and prospective studies have not identified this as a factor
- the combination of number and spacing of live births. However, greater numbers of children tend to be associated with neglect rather than abuse while short spacings between births seem to be more significant with increased probabilities of neglect.

A large body of evidence suggests that the incidence of reported child maltreatment is over-represented among single parent families and blended families. Much of that research, however, is based on relatively simple comparisons of the proportion of such families in the general population compared to their representation among families reported in maltreatment statistics.

That type of analysis must be treated with considerable caution.

Some of these groups, particularly single-parent families who are female-headed and receiving welfare, may be under significantly higher levels of surveillance by public welfare agencies (and, indeed, neighbours) than other parents. That surveillance may contribute to higher reported rates of child maltreatment among those groups. In addition, the impacts of familial socio-economic position need to be teased out from the impact of families' structural and demographic characteristics. This is particularly problematic because disadvantage, in itself, tends to be correlated with particular family features such as single-parenthood and female-headed households.

The extent to which blended families and non-genetic families may exhibit higher levels of child maltreatment has been the subject of considerable debate and some research. Earlier retrospective studies found blended families over-represented among families reported to authorities for child abuse. More recent research results tend to contradict that earlier research. A national survey of family violence during the 1980s in the United States found no statistically significant difference in the rates of severe violence experienced by the genetic and non-genetic children members of families.

One of the problems of earlier research in this area was that it failed to address and control for potentially confounding variables. In particular, the earlier research did not deal adequately with measuring the structural

stability of families and did not separate out blended families from families in which a number of adults enter and exit the family in rapid succession.

Relevant Studies:

Conger, R., *et al.*, 1984, Perception of child, childrearing values, and emotional distress as mediating links between environmental stressors and observed maternal behaviour, *Child Development*, 55:2234–47.

Conger, R.D., *et al.*, 1980, Child abuse related to life change and perceptions of illness: some preliminary findings, in Cook and Bowles (eds).

Connelly, C.D., and M.A. Strauss, 1992, Mother's age and risk for physical abuse, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16:709–18.

Creighton, S., 1985, An epidemiological study of abused children and their families in the United Kingdom between 1977 and 1982, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 9:441–8.

Dubowitz, H., *et al.*, 1987, Inflicted and noninflicted injuries: difference in child and familial characteristics, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57:525–35.

Ferguson, D.M. and M.T. Lynskey,1997, Physical punishment/maltreatment during childhood and adjustment in young adulthood, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 21:617–30.

Gelles, R.J., and J.W. Harrop, 1991, The risk of abusive violence among children with nongenetic caretakers, *Family Relations*, 40:78–83.

Gil, D., 1971, Violence against children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, November.

Murphy, S., *et al.*, 1985, Prenatal prediction of child abuse and neglect: a prospective study, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 9:225–35.

Polansky, N., *et al.*, 1981, *Damaged Parents: An anatomy of child neglect*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Zuravin, S.J., 1991, Unplanned childbearing and family size. Their relationship to child neglect and abuse, *Family Planning Perspectives*, 23(4):155–61.

Zuravin, S.J., 1988, Fertility patterns: their relationship to child physical abuse and child neglect, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50:983–93.

Zuravin, S., 1988, Child maltreatment and teenage first birth: a relationship mediated by chronic socio-demographic stress?, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 58(1):91–103.

6.2 Patterns of family interaction

The research evidence suggests that child abuse is associated with families whose interactions are persistently characterised by the following patterns:

• endemic anger and conflict in the family

• spousal violence

• the use of coercion and punishment irrespective of the particular pattern of a child's behaviour or the circumstances in which the need for discipline has arisen

• lack of marital support between the parental partners

• a tendency for family members to also engage in aggressive, violent, or coercive interactions with people outside the family.

There is some indication that families involved in the physical abuse of their children actively isolate themselves from extended family, welfare agencies, and their neighbourhoods. But the data on this is somewhat unclear, especially with regard to the extent to which that isolationism is intentional and/or reflects environmental or personal conditions.[14]

Neglectful families tend to have unstable familial membership, but more importantly, show disorganised passivity and disengagement from the interests of other family members and children. Nevertheless,

the little research that has been undertaken in this area suggests that neglectful caregivers can have intense interactions with family and neighbours, particularly in so far as they may depend on others to look after their children. Those relationships exhibit little reciprocity.

Relevant Studies:

Corse, S., *et al.*, 1990, Social network characteristics of mothers in abusing and non-abusing families and their relationship to parenting beliefs, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 18:44–59.

Crittenden, P.M., 1985, Social networks, quality of child rearing, and child development, *Child Development*, 56:1299–313.

Crockenberg, S. 1987, Predictors and correlates of anger toward and punitive control of toddlers by adolescent mothers, *Child Development*, 58:964–75.

Cazenave, N.A., and M.A. Strauss, 1990, Race, class, network embeddedness, and family violence: a search for potential support systems, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Fantuzzo, J., *et al.*, 1995, Domestic violence and children: prevalence and risk in five major U.S. cities, *Journal of American Academic Child Adolescence Psychiatry*, 36(1):116–22.

Ferguson, D. M. and M. T. Lynskey, 1997, Physical punishment/maltreatment during childhood and adjustment in young adulthood, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 21:617–30.

Gagan, R. J., *et al.*, 1984, The families of children who fail to thrive: preliminary investigations of paternal deprivation among organic and nonorganic cases, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 8:93–103.

Gelles, R. G., and E. F. Hargreaves, 1981, Maternal employment and violence toward children, *Journal of Family Issues,* 2(4):509–30.

Giovannoni, J., and A. Billingsley, 1970, Child neglect among the poor: a study of parental adequacy in families of three ethnic groups, *Child Welfare*, 49:196–204.

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[14] See Seagull (1987) for a review of the literature relating to social isolation.

Pianta, R., *et al.*, 1989, The antecedents of maltreatment: results of the mother-child interaction research project, in Cicchetti and V. Carlson (eds).

Smith, S., and R. Hanson, 1975, Interpersonal relationships and childrearing practices in 214 parents of battered children, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 127:513–25.

Straus, M. A., and R. J. Gelles, 1986, Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985: as revealed by two national surveys, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 48:465–79.

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Family patterns and child abuse, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Violence in Hispanic families in the United States: incidence rates and structural interpretations, in Straus, Gelles and Smith (eds).

Webster-Stratton, C., 1989, The relationship of marital support, conflict and divorce to parent perceptions, behaviours, and childhood conduct problems, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51:417–30.

6.3 Familial resourcing

Some commentators tend to question the importance of socio-economic status, familial income, and employment as a predictor or determinant of child abuse or neglect. Those commentators point out that:

- while child maltreatment tends to concentrate in poor families, not all poor families are involved in maltreatment
- maltreatment does occur in families in middle and higher socio-economic status positions
- the link between socio-economic status and child abuse/neglect may be an artefact of greater surveillance by welfare services of the poor than the rich and middle classes.

Most research finds, however, that the burden of child abuse and, even more particularly, the burden of child neglect, is carried by the poor – indeed the 'poorest of the poor'.[15] Very low incomes and social and economic marginalisation appear to exacerbate the impact of other identified risk factors, although the precise mechanics of this are unclear. Under conditions of severe poverty, incidents of neglect such as failure to seek medical attention for an injured or sick child, or inadequate provision of clothing and/or food may simply arise because a caregiver can not afford those goods and services.

Straitened circumstances may also lead to neglect by reducing contact between caregivers and their children. Higher rates of mothers absent from home in poor communities because of their engagement in paid work were found to be associated with higher rates of reported neglect in the US, although there was no association with rates of reported abuse.

On-going and severe resource constraint may have a cumulative stress affect on families that may contribute to the risk of child abuse and/or neglect. Research in this area, however, is somewhat inconclusive. Research in both Great Britain and New Zealand suggests that it is instability and uncertainty rather than economic 'poorness' as such that is disruptive to family life. Both British research and US research suggest that moving from resource adequacy to inadequacy or

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[15] See Pelton (1978 and 1994) for detailed reviews of the literature on the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment.

from an integrated to a marginal position (for example, employment to unemployment) is associated with higher levels of family stress and incidents of abuse.

This does not mean, of course, that the majority of the poor are involved in child abuse and/or child neglect just as it does not suggest that incidents of child abuse and child neglect do not arise in more well-off families. What it does suggest is that maintaining non-abusing and non-neglecting familial relations can be made more difficult in the context of resource deprivation.

Relevant Studies:

Connelly, C. D., and M. A. Straus, 1992, Mother's age and risk for physical abuse, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16:709–18.

Cazenave, N.A., and M.A. Straus, 1990, Race, class, network embeddedness, and family violence: a search for potential support systems, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Dubowitz, H., *et al.*, 1987, Inflicted and noninflicted injuries: differences in child and familial characteristics, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57:525–35.

Ferguson, D. M. and M. T. Lynskey, 1997, Physical punishment/maltreatment during childhood and adjustment in young adulthood, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 21:617–30.

Gaines, R.A., *et al.*, 1980, Etiological factors in child maltreatment: a multivariate study of abusing, neglecting, and normal mothers, in Cook and Bowles (eds).

Gelles, R.J., and E.F. Hargreaves, 1990, Maternal employment and violence toward children, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Giovannoni, J., and A. Billingsley, 1970, Child neglect among the poor: a study of parental adequacy in families of three ethnic groups, *Child Welfare*, XLIX(4):196–204.

Pianta, R., *et al.*, 1989, The antecedents of maltreatment: results of the Mother-child Interaction Research Project, in Cicchetti and V. Carlson (eds).

Straus, M. A., and R. J. Gelles, 1986, Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985: as revealed by two national surveys, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 48:465–79.

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Family patterns and child abuse, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Violence in Hispanic families in the United States: incidence rates and structural interpretations, in Straus, Gelles and Smith (eds).

Webster-Stratton, C., 1985, Comparison of abusive and nonabusive families with conduct-disordered children, *American Journal of Orthopsyhiatry*, 55(1):59–69.

7. Abuse & neglect – about neighbourhoods

Only a very small body of research literature attempts to establish the extent to which the overall 'health' of a neighbourhood might impact on the incidences of child abuse and/or child neglect within the families that live in those communities.[16] In attempting to establish the impact of communities on families and the probabilities of child abuse and/or neglect, researchers have looked at:

i.   the extent to which indicators of community well-being in a particular locality predict the incidence of child abuse and/or child neglect. This research tends to use community indicators such as employment levels; profiles of family structure; housing quality, affordability, and security; poverty measures; median educational attainment; ethnic profiling; incomes; and residential fluidity. Child abuse and child neglect incidence is generally measured using administrative data from justice and welfare agencies

ii. the extent to which the incidence of child abuse and/or child neglect can be explained in terms of :

• the nature of residents' views about their neighbourhoods

• the way in which residents interact with the social and economic resources and services available in neighbourhoods

• neighbourhood integration.

This area of research is very preliminary, but there has been some attempt to replicate studies and use standardised measures in the United States. The few studies undertaken suggest that significant amounts of the variations in reported rates of child maltreatment found between neighbourhoods can be explained by reference to the socio-economic profile of the neighbourhood. There is also evidence that some areas have higher rates or lower rates of observed maltreatment than predicted on the basis of their socio-economic profiles. Research suggests that these variations in child abuse and neglect reflects differences in the 'social ecology' or 'social capital' of neighbourhoods.

In particular, communities with higher than expected levels of child maltreatment appear to be characterised by:

• poor collective morale and a sense of hopelessness

• limited service provision

• weak informal and formal social networks

• little perception of visionary leadership within the community

• a limited sense of community belonging even among long-time residents.[17]

Relevant Studies:

Corse, S., *et al.*, 1990, Social network characteristics of mothers in abusing and nonabusing families and their relationship to parenting beliefs, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 18:44–59.

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[16] See Zuravin (1989) for a review of the state of social ecology research at that time.

[17] See Warren (1981) for a discussion of how different support systems in neighbourhoods.

Crittenden, P.M., 1985, Maltreated infants: vulnerability and resilience, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 26(1):85–96.

Garbarino, J., and K. Kostelny, 1992, Child maltreatment as a community problem, *Child Abuse and Neglect,* 16:455–64.

Garbarino, J., and D. Sherman, 1981, Identifying high-risk neighborhoods, in Garbarino and Stocking (eds).

Korbin, J.E., 1994, Sociocultural factors in child maltreatment, in Melton and Barry (eds).

Krugman, R. D., *et al.*, 1986, The relationship between unemployment and physical abuse of children, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 10:415–18.

Pelton, L.H., 1994, The role of material factors in child abuse and neglect, in Melton and Barry (eds).

Polansky, N. A., *et al.*, 1985, The psychological ecology of the neglectful mother, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 9:265–75.

Spearly, J. L., and M. Lauderdale, 1983, Community characteristics and ethnicity in the prediction of child maltreatment rates, *Child Abuse and Neglect,* 7:91–105.

Young, G., and T. Gately, 1988, Neighbourhood impoverishment and child maltreatment: an analysis from the ecological perspective, *Journal of Family Issues*, 9(2):240–54.

Zuravin, S. J., 1989, The ecology of child abuse and neglect: reviews of the literature and presentation of data, *Violence and Victims,* 4:101–20.

8. Abuse & neglect – about cultural systems

Whether rates of child abuse and neglect reflect the way in which different cultures and societies value their children has been subject to only limited research. That research has taken three different directions:

i. a tiny number of studies have attempted to discern different ethnic patterns of child abuse and/or neglect. They have substantial methodological problems in establishing truly comparable samples that do not confound the effects of ethnicity with the effects of socio-economic position. The latter is particularly problematic in countries like the US where some minority ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in, and over-represented among, the disadvantaged. The few prospective US studies that have addressed this issue have found that what appear to be apparently ethnic differences are largely explained away when class or socio-economic variables are controlled

ii. there is some, but unsystematic, research about non-ethnic sub-cultures, particularly urban, class cultures

iii. some studies are concerned with cross-societal comparisons. These are also inconclusive because of considerable methodological problems. There are difficulties in establishing definitions of child abuse and neglect that might be appropriately applied cross-culturally.

There are also problems of reliability and validity with comparative child abuse and child neglect statistics because of differences in reporting practices by different child care and protection agencies.

Relevant Studies:

Cazenave, N.A., and M.A. Straus, 1990, Race, class, network embededness, and family violence: a search for potential support systems, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Fantuzzo, J., *et al.*, 1995, Domestic violence and children: prevalence and risk in five major U.S. cities, *Journal of American Academic Child Adolescence Psychiatry*, 36(1):116–22.

Gelles, R.J., 1987, What to learn from cross-cultural and historical research on child abuse and neglect: an overview, pp. 15–30, in R.J. Gelles and J.B. Lancaster (eds).

Giovannoni, J., and A. Billingsley, 1970, Child neglect among the poor: a study of parental adequacy in families of three ethnic groups. *Child Welfare*, XLIX(4):196–204.

Korbin, J.E., 1994, Sociocultural factors in child maltreatment, pp. 182–221, in G.B. Melton and F.D. Barry (eds).

Korbin, J.E., 1987, Child maltreatment in cross-cultural perspective: vulnerable children and circumstances, pp31–55, in R.J. Gelles and J.B. Lancaster (eds).

Spearly, J. L., and M. Lauderdale, 1983, Community characteristics and ethnicity in the prediction of child maltreatment rates, *Child Abuse and Neglect,* 7:91–105.

Straus, M. A., and R. J. Gelles, 1986, Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985: as revealed by two national surveys, *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 48:465–79.

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Family patterns and child abuse, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

Straus, M.A., and C. Smith, 1990, Violence in Hispanic families in the United States: incidence rates and structural interpretations, in Straus, Gelles, and Smith (eds).

9. Distinguishing between abuse and neglect

Do neglected children also experience abuse and are abused children neglected? Are neglectful parents or families more likely to abuse their children? Are the determinants and dynamics of child abuse and child neglect similar, even where the manifestation of those determinants and dynamics differ? The body of research that provides a comparative analysis of neglect and abuse is limited. Even where studies have explicitly separated the two, they frequently do not report comparative data. This gap in the research severely limits the ability to develop appropriate policy and service delivery responses.

If abuse and neglect tend to be concurrently perpetrated and experienced, the existence of one form of maltreatment can act as a sentinel or marker for the other. Under those circumstances, screening for neglect can act as a device for screening or identifying children and families at risk of abuse. If, on the other hand, there are significant differences between the perpetrators and victims of abuse and neglect respectively, separate screening methods will be required for each.

Similarly, even the populations of abusers and neglectors overlap, this does not necessarily mean the same policies and programme interventions will address both forms of behaviour. Such an approach would only be effective if abusive interactions and neglectful

behaviours were generated from the same set of determinants and dynamics.

The limited number of studies acquired among the reviewed literature that provided clear, comparative analysis of abuse and neglect patterns covered a range of dimensions and issues including:

- the expectations of children by abusers and neglectors and their responsivity (four studies)
- impacts of drug abuse and dependency (one study)
- integration with social networks (one study)
- family characteristics and demographics (five studies)
- neighbourhood characteristics (six studies).

A summary of key differences between abuse and neglect perpetrators is presented in Infobox 2.

Infobox 2
Summary of research comparing abuse and neglect determinants

	Child abuse & child neglect determinants and precipitants	
	Abuse	*Neglect*
Individual	Non-reciprocal and coercive relations with networks. Isolationist. More negative expectations of children and hyper-responsivity, unrealistic expectations of children.	Non-reciprocal and dependent relations with network. Under-responsive to environment and children, but similarly unrealistic expectations as abusers.
Family	Poor but less poor than neglect families.	Poorer than abuse families. Spacing and family size more strongly related to neglect than abuse, number of live births and the number of children by different fathers most important. Frequent contact with family/relatives, crisis-oriented.
Neighbourhood	Less transient than neglect areas, but like neglect areas have large percentage of families in poverty, areas with vacant housing. Abusers tend to have short-term friendships.	New arrivals but, like abuse, areas have large percentage of families in poverty, areas with vacant housing. Neglect rates inversely related to measures of economic resourcing than abuse. Infrequent friend contact.

10. Can international research findings be applied to New Zealand?

The reviewed research is almost entirely dominated by the experience of the United States. There is a smattering of British, Australian, and New Zealand studies. The last consists of an article presenting data from the longitudinal study of child development among a sample of Christchurch children (Ferguson and Lynsky, 1997).

Can the findings from research into child abuse and neglect be applied to societies other than those in which the empirical data was generated? This question actually raises two problems:

i.   is it valid to transfer the findings of *any* social research from one society to another

ii. if this type of cross-cultural transfer of findings is not rejected on principle, is there anything particular to the body of research related to child abuse and neglect that would prevent the transfer of its findings to the New Zealand context?

Research generated in other societies can be useful in the New Zealand context in two ways. Firstly, internationally-generated research findings can be used to provide an insight into the *range* of determinants and dynamics affecting a particular issue, process, or phenomenon that is found in some form in many, if not all, societies. Secondly, research from societies with similar institutional, demographic, and cultural

similarities to our own may provide some indication of the particular variables, determinants, and dynamics likely to be important in New Zealand. In neither case does this imply that research findings can be lifted from one society and be assumed to apply exactly in that manner to New Zealand.

In short, the international research can help us ask the right questions about the situation in New Zealand. It may also provide us with information about where and why we might find answers. That research can not, however, provide the 'New Zealand answer'.

This is particularly important to recognise where a body of overseas research is generated in a society that shows considerable institutional, cultural, economic, and demographic differences. We must, in terms of the child abuse and neglect research, acknowledge that the US is, in terms of its sheer size alone, significantly different from New Zealand. The generation and history of ethnic inequalities, the evolution of the city, the working of the welfare system, and the nature of the economy in the US are profoundly different from New Zealand society. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the overseas research on child neglect and child abuse is riddled with inconsistencies and extraordinarily diverse in its focus and approach.

The useful lessons we can clearly learn from the overseas research relate to the complexity of the determinants of child abuse and child neglect. They range from factors relating to individuals through to factors associated with the family, the community, and the culture.

Moreover, different factors counteract and/or compound the effects of each other.

These findings can certainly be applied to New Zealand, but they are very generic and imply that:

- overseas research data cannot be used as anything more than indicative of probable factors and dynamics

- the application of overseas research findings to the New Zealand context should be considered on a case-by-case basis with an assessment of the institutional, cultural, and demographic similarities and dissimilarities between the New Zealand and the societies where the research was generated

- overseas research findings should be tested in the New Zealand context through the development of an independent body of New Zealand-based research.

But is there anything more that we can learn from the international research? Quite possibly – the research does appear to identify some consistencies at the macro-level, at least, we could expect to hold cross-culturally. Those lessons are:

i. the importance of individual and familial pathologies as determinants of child abuse and child neglect has been over-stated

ii. child abuse and child neglect are likely to arise out of clusters of factors involving individuals, family process, the neighbourhood, and the cultural system

iii. three dynamics seem to co-occur with child maltreatment:

- *socio-economic deprivation* – within the family and the neighbourhood and as contributor to levels of individual stress

- *fragile social networks* – for individuals this involves dissatisfaction with friends and family relations; for families it is characterised by lack of reciprocity with family, including those involved in abuse being isolated from their extended families; and for neighbourhoods by a lack of stable formal and informal networks and services

- *criminality, violence, and substance abuse* are important aspects of familial and individual probabilities of being involved in child maltreatment. These activities also disrupt and undermine community social structures, formal and informal networks

iii. that the determinants and dynamics of child abuse and the determinants and dynamics of child neglect may overlap at times, but are separate phenomena.

11. Policy implications

In New Zealand, as in many Western societies, the response to child abuse and neglect has involved both the public and community sectors as well as individuals and families. Child care and protection services and strategies have involved health and therapeutic services, the justice system, and social services. The responses have been primarily, but not entirely, directed at the victims and perpetrators of abuse and their families.

In general, services have been directed at responding to particular incidents with a particular desire to mitigate the effects of child abuse and prevent reoccurrence. There is a strong interest internationally in being more proactive both to prevent child abuse and/or neglect prior to an initial incident and to be able to detect child abuse and neglect more effectively. Indeed, a significant driver of the interest in establishing the determinants of child abuse and child neglect has been among practitioners seeking to:

- develop both more effective screening tools to detect abuse and/or neglect
- target preventative programmes to what are seen as at-risk groups.

The findings from the international body of research suggest that while an individual and family focus may be important, it is unlikely, in itself, to reduce the incidence or prevalence of child abuse or neglect in our society.
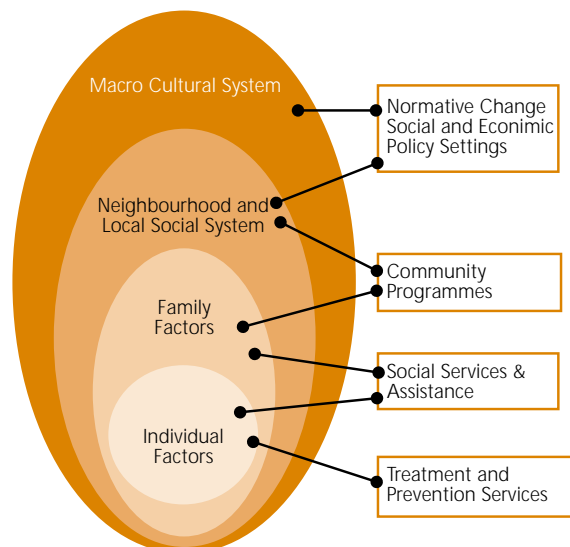
If, as the research suggests, child abuse and child neglect are generated out of complex interplays between different factors that may act at the level of the individual, the family, the community, and the cultural system, then the response must also be multi-dimensional.

As indicated in Figure 3, reducing and preventing child maltreatment requires a coherent configuration of policy and services that mutually reinforce the drive to reduce child abuse and child neglect. It requires not merely treatment and prevention services with individuals and families, but also a range of community programmes directed at strengthening individual and family integration into communities as well as strengthening local communities' capacity to address their economic and social viability and cohesion.

All of these need to be undertaken within a broader context of strategies for promoting children's well-being as a core value, and social and economic policy settings that mitigate rather than generate deprivation.

Figure 3: Responding to child abuse and neglect

Macro Cultural System

Neighbourhood and Local Social System

Family Factors

Individual Factors

Normative Change Social and Econimic Policy Settings

Community Programmes

Social Services & Assistance

Treatment and Prevention Services

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