How can understanding risk and protective factors predict chronic neglect for CPS-involved families?

What can we learn from this study?

Chronic neglect has long-lasting negative effects on children, yet it is less represented in the literature than other types of child maltreatment. This study examines the **use of risk assessment tools in predicting subsequent chronic neglect**. Families were tracked and placed into one of two groups: (a) families with no additional screened-in reports between 2009 and 2014 (no chronic neglect); and (b) families that subsequently had at least four more screened-in reports of neglect by 2014 (chronic neglect).

Study details:

- **Population:** 2,074 families that had a first-time report of neglect in 2009 or 2010
- **Data source:** CPS administrative records in a large, diverse jurisdiction in the Northeast
- **Methodology:** Longitudinal cohort study, bivariate tests and hierarchical logistic regression
- **Dates:** 2009 or 2010 (first report) through 2014 (subsequent reports)

What are the critical findings?

- The strongest predictors of chronic neglect were **parent cognitive impairment, history of substitute care, parent mental health problems, and a higher number of allegations in the first CPS report**. This suggests that families at risk for chronic neglect face multiple challenges that require significant support.

- Other significant predictors include:
  - Younger parents
  - Families with a higher number of children
  - Families with a child under age 1
  - Higher number of substantiated allegations in the first CPS report

- The standard risk assessment tool used in this study **did not predict chronic neglect**.

Why is this important for our work?

Current risk assessment tools may not predict chronic neglect. Including a comprehensive assessment of cumulative harm in risk assessment processes may provide better screening for chronic neglect. In addition, it is important for child welfare systems to develop an effective service response and provide tailored interventions for families at risk of chronic neglect (such as Family Connections).

This summary synthesizes the findings of a single research study. To learn more about risk assessment, please review the following resources: What safety and risk assessment tools are used in tribal child welfare? and What is predictive risk modeling and how can it be applied to child welfare?

For additional information, see the abstract or email KMResources@casey.org.