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The Co-occurrence of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence: Examining Both Neglect and Child Physical Abuse

Carolyn Copps Hartley
University of Iowa

Research supports a substantial overlap between domestic violence and child maltreatment. However, few studies examine the characteristics of families in which both domestic violence and child maltreatment are present, with most studies exploring only child physical abuse. This study examined differences in demographic characteristics, parental problems, and maltreatment characteristics for families involving physical abuse or neglect and woman battering compared to families with the same type of maltreatment but no known woman battering present. Descriptive analyses found more differences between families with domestic violence and neglect and neglect-only than between co-occurring physical abuse and physical abuse-only families. Analyses looking at the association or interaction between the type of maltreatment and presence of domestic violence found a significant association between marital status, father’s biological relationship to the child, mother-as-perpetrator, and age of the children with co-occurrence of domestic violence for neglect but not for physical abuse.

Attention to the overlap between child maltreatment and domestic violence is growing. Although there is literature on such topics as the need for new policies (Dykstra, 1995; Edleson, 1998; Humphreys, 1999; Lyons & Kisiel, 1996; Magen, 1999) and training (Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Magen, Conroy, & Del Tufo, 2000; Shepard & Raschick, 1999) to address the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence, little empirical research focuses on the characteristics of families in which both domestic violence and child maltreatment are present. The purpose of this study is to explore differences in characteristics of cases involving both child maltreatment and woman battering compared to cases involving child maltreatment-only.

Edleson’s (1999) review of 31 studies on the overlap of domestic violence and child maltreatment found co-occurrence rates between 30% and 60% in the majority of studies examined. Appel and Holden (1998) reviewed a similar set of studies on the cooccurrence of domestic violence and child physical abuse, identifying a co-occurrence rate of about 40% using conservative criteria for defining child abuse. Rates in both reviews varied depending on the types of samples used and how researchers defined the violence, but clearly there is empirical support of a substantial overlap between domestic violence and child maltreatment.

However, few studies have examined the characteristics of families in which both domestic violence and child maltreatment are present. Existing studies on the topic have shown the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment to be related to lower occupational or socioeconomic status (Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988; Shipman, Rossman, & West, 1999), more incidents or reports of child maltreatment (Beeman, Hagemeister, & Edleson, 2001), and child maltreatment are present. The purpose of this study is to explore differences in characteristics of cases involving both child maltreatment and woman battering compared to cases involving child maltreatment-only.

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a greater number of children or larger household size (Bowker et al., 1988), more biological mothers in the home (Beeman et al., 2001), a higher number of family stressors (Shipman et al., 1999; Tomison, 1995), more maternal symptoms of distress and psychopathology (Shipman et al., 1999), and more caregiver alcohol or drug problems (Tomison, 1995).

Other studies have explored the gender of the perpetrator and victim of child abuse in families with both child abuse and battering present. Fathers in co-occurrence families are much more likely to maltreat a child than fathers in families of nonbattered mothers (O’Keefe, 1995; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). When examining the gender of the victim in co-occurrence families, male children are at greater risk of physical abuse than female children (Ross, 1996), and male children experience more frequent and severe physical abuse by both mothers and fathers when the battering is more extreme (Jouriles & LeCompte, 1991; Jouriles & Norwood, 1995).

The above studies provide a beginning understanding of the characteristics of families in which both domestic violence and child maltreatment exist, but they are not without limitations. First, many of the studies on the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence used shelter or self-identified samples of battered women self-reporting child abuse present in their families (Bowker et al., 1998; Shipman et al., 1999; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). These studies typically relied on one informant, the mother, providing information on the history of violence in the family and its effects. Yet, research has shown a fairly high level of disagreement among family members reporting on the presence and effects of parent-to-child and spousal violence in the home, arguing for the use of multiple informants for assessing violence (Sternberg, Lamb, & Dawud-Noursi, 1998). The use of child protection records in this study, although not without limitations, is likely to include at least some information from multiple informants.

Second, studies that began with known cases of child maltreatment typically relied on information in the child protection case records to identify mother battering (Edleson, 1999). The present study goes further to include multiple sources of data to verify the presence of domestic violence, including information from child protection investigation records, child protection service authorization assessments, and police data on domestic violence arrests. The use of multiple sources of data to identify domestic violence is particularly important, as partner abuse may be underreported in child maltreatment research (Appel & Holden, 1998).

Finally, many of the studies cited in the Edleson (1999) and Appel and Holden (1998) reviews examined only the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child physical abuse or included multiple child abuse types. However, physical abuse represents a smaller proportion of abuse cases reported to child protection. According to the most recent Reports from the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, the majority of reported victims (53.5%) experienced neglect compared to 22.7% of victims suffering physical abuse (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). With child neglect accounting for a substantially larger percentage of reported child abuse cases, it would be instructive to examine the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child neglect as well. At least one study found more neglect allegations in co-occurrence families compared to child maltreatment-only families (Beeman et al., 2001).

Differences in etiological factors for physical abuse and neglect also support examining the relationship between domestic violence and both child physical abuse and neglect. Although physical abuse and neglect have historically been grouped together as one type of child maltreatment, recent research has reported different etiological characteristics for child physical abuse and neglect (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 1999; Tower, 1996; Tzeng, Jackson, & Karlson, 1991). Higher unemployment (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995; Nelson, Saunders, & Landsman, 1993), single-parent families (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995; Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996), increased family size (Nelson et al., 1993; Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996), parental substance abuse problems (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995; Kelleher, Chaffin, Hollenberg, & Fischer, 1994; Nelson et al., 1993; Nelson & Landsman, 1994), maternal depression or other chronic mental illness (Nelson et al., 1993; Nelson & Landsman, 1994), and parental criminal history (Nelson & Landsman, 1994) are all associated with an increased risk of child neglect. Mental illness in mothers, and criminal involvement of fathers also differentiated severe neglect from mild neglect cases (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995).

With regard to physical abuse, younger parents (Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Salzinger, 1998; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998), parental substance abuse (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995; Kelleher et al., 1994) and single-parent mothers (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995) are common factors associated with this type of abuse. Mental illness in mothers, and domestic violence and criminal involvement of fathers further differentiated severe
physical abuse from mild abuse cases (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995).

There is still much to learn about other characteristics that differentiate families in which both child maltreatment and domestic violence are present from families in which only child maltreatment is occurring. Examining the co-occurrence of domestic violence with both neglect and child physical abuse, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Do co-occurrence families differ from child-maltreatment-only families on demographic characteristics of parents or family (household composition, biological relationship of adults to children, age of parents and children)?

2. Do co-occurrence families differ from child-maltreatment-only families on the presence of parental problems or family stressors (mother or father’s substance abuse at the time of the maltreatment, history of alcohol or drug problems, mental health and criminal history)?

3. Do co-occurrence families differ from child-maltreatment-only families on the characteristics of the maltreatment incident (gender of victim and perpetrator, number victims, prior contacts with child protection)?

Although this study is largely exploratory in nature, a few hypothesis are posed based on the overlap of characteristics seen in the co-occurrence literature and the etiological literature on child physical abuse and neglect:

Hypothesis 1: Families in which both domestic violence and either type of child maltreatment present will have a greater number of mothers with reported mental health issues than mothers in families with no domestic violence present.

Hypothesis 2: Families in which both domestic violence and either type of child maltreatment present will have a greater number of mothers and fathers with a reported substance use or abuse issue than parents in families with no domestic violence present.

METHOD

Setting

Data were obtained from a cross-sectional sample of all confirmed child maltreatment reports made to the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) from the city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and surrounding suburbs between December 1995 and February 1998. This city has a population of approximately 130,000. The Linn County DHS office, located in Cedar Rapids, is part of the Community to Partnership to Protect Children (CPPC) initiative funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. This initiative focuses on reducing the likelihood that children will be abused and/or neglected, ensuring that children who have come to the attention of child protection services will be less likely to be reabused and/or neglected, and reducing the rate of serious injury to children due to abuse and neglect (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1997). The Cedar Rapids Partnership for Safe Families site had an additional objective of reducing the likelihood that children will experience both child maltreatment and woman battering.

Participants

The original cross-sectional sample included 519 incidents (or reports) on 441 families (78 incidents were repeat abuse incidents involving the same family). More than 99% of the confirmed reports were located and coded. Only reports involving a parental perpetrator of child abuse were included. The parental perpetrator did not have to be biologically related to the children but was seen as a mother or father figure in the family. The mother figure was defined as a biological mother, stepmother, or father’s girlfriend/paramour at the time of the current maltreatment incident. This person did not need to live in the home at the time of the maltreatment, but she did need to be the father figure’s current partner at the time. The same criteria were used for the father figure.

Foster parents, grandparents, relatives, siblings, or other perpetrators were excluded. For families with more than one child maltreatment incident in the database, one incident for the family was randomly selected. Because the focus of this study was on the cooccurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment, cases involving single parents with no known partner present, were excluded from the sample (n = 130).

Cases were also excluded from the sample if (a) the mother was battered by a different or former partner but not the current partner, (b) the mother battered a past partner but was not being battered by a current partner, (c) the mother battered a current partner for whom there is no evidence to indicate the mother was also a victim of domestic abuse, (d) cases in which there was an indication of domestic violence in the assessment narrative or on the service authorization form but there was insufficient information to determine the identity of the victim and perpetrator, and (e) cases in which there is a police report indicating the father had battered a different partner but there is no evidence he battered his current partner.

The remaining cases were further divided into physical abuse and neglect, based on the State of Iowa definitions of these types of maltreatment. The final
sample of families included 94 families with a founded incident of neglect. Within this neglect sample, 35% of cases were founded for denial of critical care, 60% were founded for lack of supervision, and 5% were founded for both denial of critical care and lack of supervision. Denial of critical care included failure to provide adequate shelter, health or mental health care, or food, failure to meet emotional needs, and presence of illegal drugs in a child. None of the neglect cases involved a finding for failure to protect due to domestic violence. For physical abuse, there were a total of 86 families. Because of small numbers, cases involving both a confirmed incident of neglect and physical abuse and sexual or psychological abuse were excluded.

**Identifying Domestic Violence in the Family**

Three different sources of information were used to identify the presence of domestic violence: (a) the assessment narratives completed by child protection assessment workers investigating the child abuse allegation, (b) the service authorization forms completed by child protection service workers on families referred for services after the initial investigation, and (c) a database kept by the Cedar Rapids Police Department on all domestic violence reports or arrests occurring in the city from January 1996 through July 1999.

**Assessment narratives.** Assessors must respond to a series of closed- and open-ended questions when writing their investigative narratives. The narratives typically range from five to seven typed, single-spaced pages and include information on the circumstances of the current maltreatment, evidence of maltreatment, summaries of interviews conducted during the investigation, and the workers’ conclusions about whether the maltreatment occurred. In the course of conducting their investigation, information about domestic violence may be described in the assessment narratives.

**Service authorization forms.** If families are referred for services after a finding of maltreatment, the child protection service workers complete a service authorization assessment with each family. This authorization form includes a question regarding the worker’s concern about the presence of domestic violence in the family. Concern was rated at none, low, moderate, or high. In addition to indicating that domestic violence is a concern, the worker can write brief comments clarifying who the victim is and whether the domestic violence is a current or past concern. Data on domestic violence from the authorization forms were used to classify domestic violence if the concern was at least at a moderate level, and it was clear from the worker’s comments that the mother was being abused by her current partner.

**Police reports.** The Cedar Rapids Police Department keeps a reliable database of all domestic violence police reports and arrests occurring in the city. Using this database, we searched, by both name and social security number, for each parental figure in the child maltreatment sample. After identifying potential matching cases on either adult’s name, we received permission from the police department to obtain copies of the actual police arrest reports. The actual police reports were used to further confirm the match of the parent’s name by comparing addresses, birth dates, and social security numbers between the police reports and child protection files.

Domestic violence was defined as occurring if the mother figure was the known victim of battering by the current father figure in the family. In all cases, the domestic violence preceded the child maltreatment to meet the criteria for the co-occurrence group. These restrictions of current father figure and domestic violence preceding the child maltreatment were used to try to assure that the domestic violence was an ongoing issue with the child maltreatment. The relationship between a past history of domestic violence by a current or prior partner is not the focus of this study.

A case was coded as domestic violence present if there was a clear indication from at least one source (assessment narratives, service authorization forms, or police reports) that the current father was battering the mother. The assessment narrative was used as the first source of information on domestic violence occurring in the family because of the extensive amount of information provided in these narratives. A total of 62 families were identified as having domestic violence present in the home using these narratives. An additional 12 cases were identified from the service authorization forms, and another 8 cases were categorized as co-occurrence using only police report data. Cases coded as maltreatment-only had no indication of past or present domestic violence of either parent by a former or current partner using all three sources of data on domestic violence.

**Measures**

The main source of data for the dependent variables in this study were the child protection assessment narratives completed by the child protection assessment workers. Assessment workers are responsible for collecting detailed information about the circumstances of the reported abuse, an evaluation of the child’s safety, and a summary of the families'
strengths and needs (Iowa Department of Human Services, 1997). The strengths and needs assessment includes a description of parent or caretaker characteristics. Characteristics relevant to this study include the parent’s mental and physical health, parent’s criminal history, and parent’s use or abuse of substances. Workers are also required to assess whether there is a paramour in the home and the role of the paramour in the family.

In addition to demographic information, the assessment narratives typically contained a six to seven, single-spaced page summary of the investigation. A manual with a detailed set of coding rules was developed to extract data from the assessment narratives (Coohey & Hartley, 1999). The coding manual was piloted on more than 100 assessment reports before each operational definition of the variables and a set of responses was finalized.

Two coders received extensive training on how to reliably code the narrative assessments. Coders independently read each report and coded the variables. If the two coders disagreed on how the codes applied, a third coder resolved the discrepancy. The interrater agreement ranged from 95% to 99% depending on the variable.

Information was collected on the mother figure, father figure, and up to eight children in the family. This information included demographic characteristics (household composition, biological relationship of adults to children, age of parents and children); type of maltreatment, and the person(s) responsible for the maltreatment; and the characteristics of the mother and father in the family, including the parental figures’ use of drugs or alcohol at the time of the maltreatment, history of alcohol or drug problems, mental health history, and criminal history for a nondomestic violence–related offense. Because these data were gathered from child protection workers’ reports of interviews with involved persons and not from independent research interviews, the variables on parental characteristics were coded as “known to be present” or “not known to be present.” For example, a “yes” response on the father’s history of drug or alcohol problems meant there was clear information present in the assessment narrative to indicate the father had a known substance-abuse problem in the past. A “no” response meant either the father was not known to have the problem or it was unknown whether the father had the problem.

Although this method of data recording is not without limitations, there are several circumstances that lend support to the consistency of the data collected. First, the information collected came from an independent coding of detail assessment reports. We did not rely solely on data entered in to an administrative database. Second, the investigators generating these reports had substantial years of experience. There were 16 investigators who, on average, had worked for child protection services (CPS) for 20.19 years (SD = 8.43) and had been investigators for 15.25 years (SD = 9.11). Finally, the State of Iowa legislates that child protection workers conduct assessments of a family’s level of need, rather than investigations focused on a legal determination of guilt or innocence (Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2000). Therefore, the reports focus on a broader range of family characteristics and issues than is needed to determine whether abuse or neglect had occurred.

RESULTS

The co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment was compared using initial descriptive statistics. The association or interaction between the type of maltreatment and the presence of domestic violence were examined using the Breslow-Day statistic for homogeneity of odds ratios for dichotomous variables, and a 2 \times 2 factorial analysis of variance for continuous data. In both analyses, the type of maltreatment was used as the control variable. The Breslow-Day statistic tests the hypothesis of homogeneous odds ratios by comparing the degree of association between two dichotomous variables for different populations or groups (Hillis & Woolson, 1995). For example, it tests whether the odds ratio between the type of household (single versus two parent) in maltreatment-only families compared to co-occurrence families differs for neglect and physical abuse. The groups were compared on family and parental characteristics, mother and father problems, and characteristics of the maltreatment incident.

Chi-Square Analyses of Dichotomous Variables

The first step in the odds-ratio comparison is to conduct descriptive or marginal chi-square analyses of dichotomous variables. Table 1 describes the chi-square analyses of the dichotomous family and parental characteristics separately for the two conditions of maltreatment: neglect and physical abuse.

When looking at household status, 29.5% the households in the co-occurrence group in the neglect condition were single parent compared to only 6% of households in the maltreatment-only neglect condition, \( \chi^2(1, n = 94) = 9.19, p \leq .01 \). There were no significant differences in household status for physical abuse, with the majority of families reporting a two-parent household.
The partners in the co-occurrence group for neglect were significantly less likely to be married (33.3%) than partners in the neglect maltreatment-only group (60%), $\chi^2(1, n = 89) = 6.24, p \leq .05$. In the physical abuse condition, the majority of parents (70%) in both the maltreatment-only and co-occurrence groups were married.

The majority of mothers in both the maltreatment-only and co-occurrence groups for both neglect and physical abuse were the biological parent of all the children in the home. There were fewer fathers biologically related to all children overall for both maltreatment types and significantly fewer biologically related fathers in the co-occurrence group for the neglect condition than in the maltreatment-only neglect group, $\chi^2(1, n = 90) = 10.84, p \leq .01$.

Regarding mothers’ and fathers’ problems, in the neglect condition, the co-occurrence and maltreatment-only groups differed only on mother’s known history of alcohol or drug problems and mother’s mental health history. A total of 39% of mothers in the co-occurrence-neglect group had a known alcohol or drug history compared to only 18% of mothers in the neglect maltreatment-only group, $\chi^2(1, n = 94) = 4.98, p \leq .05$. Of mothers in the co-occurrence-neglect group, 25% had a known history of mental-health problems, whereas only 6% of mothers in the neglect maltreatment-only group reported such a history, $\chi^2(1, n = 94) = 6.67, p \leq .01$. Very few mothers in the physical abuse condition were known to be using alcohol or drugs at the time of the maltreatment or had a known history of alcohol or drug problems, mental health problems, or arrests.

Fathers in both groups for the neglect condition did not differ on known alcohol or drug use at the time of the maltreatment, history of alcohol or drug problems, or history of arrest for nondomestic violence–related offenses. Unlike the neglect comparisons, the two groups of physically abusing families differed only on fathers’ problems (see Table 1). Fathers in the co-occurrence physical-abuse group were significantly more likely to be using drugs or alcohol at the time of the physical maltreatment than fathers in the physical abuse maltreatment-only group (18.4% compared to 4.2%; Fisher exact test, $p \leq .05$). A total of 34% of fathers in the co-occurrence physical abuse group had a known history of alcohol or drug problems compared to 14.6% of fathers in the physical abuse maltreatment-only group, $\chi^2(1, n = 86) = 4.59, p \leq .05$. Almost one third of fathers in the co-occurrence physical abuse group had a known history of being arrested or convicted of a nondomestic abuse

### TABLE 1: Family and Parental Characteristics by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neglect</th>
<th>Physical Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maltreatment-Only</td>
<td>Co-occurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 50)</td>
<td>(n = 44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent household</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother biological parent of all children</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father biological parent of all children</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother was using alcohol/drugs at the time of maltreatment</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father was using alcohol/drugs at the time of maltreatment</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother has a history of drug/alcohol problems</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother has a history of a mental-health problem</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother has a history of arrest/conviction/incarceration for a nondomestic abuse charge</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father has a history of drug/alcohol problems</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father has a history of a mental health problem</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father has a history of arrest/conviction/incarceration for a nondomestic abuse charge</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother only perpetrator</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father only perpetrator</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents perpetrators</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom abused male victim</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom abused female victim</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad abused male victim</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad abused female victim</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.
charge compared to only 6% in the physical abuse maltreatment-only group, \( \chi^2(1, n=86) = 8.02, p \leq .01 \).

The identification of the perpetrator differed between the two groups in the neglect condition. The co-occurrence neglect group involved more mother-only perpetrators than the maltreatment-only neglect group (75.0% compared to 54.0%), \( \chi^2(1, n=94) = 4.47, p \leq .05 \). In the physical-abuse condition, there were no differences between the cooccurrence and maltreatment-only groups for the type of perpetrator.

Table 2 presents the odds ratios and Breslow-Days comparisons for the dichotomous variables that differed significantly on the initial chi-square analyses. The only significant differences between the odds ratios are for marital status, the biological parent relationship of the father to all children in the home, and the mother as identified perpetrator. There is a stronger association between marital status and co-occurrence in the neglect condition than in the physical abuse condition, with fewer parents being married in the co-occurrence neglect group (Breslow-Day test of homogeneity [B-D] chi-square value = 4.22, \( p \leq .05 \)). Regarding the father’s biological relationship to the children in the home, there is also a stronger association between this variable and co-occurrence for the neglect condition as well (B-D chi-square value = 4.93, \( p \leq .05 \)). Fewer fathers were biologically related to all children in the home in the co-occurrence–neglect group. Finally, for the mother as identified perpetrator, there is a stronger association between mothers as perpetrators and co-occurrence in the neglect condition (B-D chi-square value = 5.81, \( p \leq .05 \)). Mothers were more likely in general to be the founded perpetrator in the neglect condition, and mothers in the co-occurrence–only neglect group were even more likely to be the founded perpetrator compared to the maltreatment-only neglect group.

Regarding the hypotheses that there would be more maternal mental-health issues and more parental substance abuse associated with the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence, there is only limited support for these hypotheses. Descriptive analyses showed more history of maternal mental-health problems and more history of maternal substance abuse problems in the neglect condition, and more paternal substance use at the time of the maltreatment and more paternal history of substance abuse in the physical abuse condition. However, maternal mental-health and parental substance-abuse problems were not more strongly associated with one type of maltreatment over another.

**Descriptive and Interaction Analyses of Continuous Variables**

Means and standard deviations of continuous variables for the maltreatment-only and co-occurrence group for each maltreatment condition are shown in Table 3. Descriptive \( t \) tests examining the neglect and physical-abuse groups separately found some differences between co-occurrence and maltreatment-only within an individual maltreatment condition. In the neglect condition, mothers in the co-occurrence group were significantly older than mothers in the maltreatment-only group, \( t(85) = -2.00, p \leq .05 \). The mean ages of the youngest, \( t(92) = -2.40, p \leq .05 \), and oldest child, \( t(92) = -2.99, p \leq .01 \), were also higher in the co-occurrence group for neglect compared to the children in the maltreatment-only group. Finally, there were a greater number of reported victims in the co-occurrence-neglect group compared to the maltreatment-only group in the neglect condition, \( t(92) = -2.01, p < .05 \).

In the physical-abuse condition, fathers in the co-occurrence group were significantly older than fathers in the maltreatment-only group, \( t(69) = -2.16, p \leq .05 \). There were also a significantly greater number

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**TABLE 2: Odds Ratios and Breslow-Day Measures of Association for Dichotomous Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Odds Ratios</th>
<th>Breslow-Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent household</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>0.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.333</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father biological parent</td>
<td>0.224</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother has a history of drug/alcohol problems</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother has a history of a mental health problem</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father was using alcohol/drugs at the time of the maltreatment</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father has a history of drug/alcohol problems</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father has a history of arrest/conviction/incarceration for a nondomestic abuse charge</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>6.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother only perpetrator</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

CHILD MALTREATMENT / NOVEMBER 2002
of children in the household, \( t(69) = -2.47, p \leq .05 \), and a greater number of victims in the cooccurrence physical abuse group compared to the maltreatment-only physical abuse group, \( t(84) = -2.13, p \leq .05 \).

To examine the possible interaction between the type of maltreatment and domestic violence, a 2 (co-occurrence/maltreatment-only) × 2 (neglect/physical abuse) analysis of variance was run (see Table 3). Results showed a significant interaction effect between type of maltreatment and domestic violence for the age of the youngest, \( F(1, 180) = 4.26, p \leq .05 \), and oldest child, \( F(1, 180) = 3.89, p \leq .05 \). A simple effects test of the interaction showed that in the neglect condition, the age of both the youngest and oldest child differed significantly between the cooccurrence group and the maltreatment-only group. The mean age of the youngest child in neglect-cooccurrence group (\( M = 4.16, SD = 3.90 \)) was greater than the mean age of the youngest child in the neglect maltreatment-only group (\( M = 2.50, SD = 2.59 \)), \( F(1, 94) = 6.04, p \leq .05 \). The mean age of the oldest child in the neglect-cooccurrence group (\( M = 9.64, SD = 4.91 \)) was also greater than the mean age of the oldest child in the neglect maltreatment-only group (\( M = 6.33, SD = 5.69 \)), \( F(1, 94) = 8.96, p \leq .01 \). In the physical abuse condition, there were no significant child age differences between the cooccurrence and maltreatment-only groups.

**DISCUSSION**

Identifying domestic violence in families is difficult. Batterers can exert substantial power and control over their victims to prevent disclosure of abuse (Kirkwood, 1993). Batterers also socially isolate their victims, meaning women have few contacts with friends or family who might gain knowledge about the abuse. Therefore, it is possible a family could participate in a child abuse investigation and not reveal intimate-partner domestic violence occurring in the home. This underreporting was addressed by using data from multiple sources (e.g., assessment narratives, service authorization forms, and police reports) to identify domestic violence.

This study sought to expand our understanding of the differences between families in which only child maltreatment is present and families experiencing both child maltreatment and domestic violence. Descriptive analyses showed that the co-occurrence–neglecting families had more single-parent households, fewer married parents, fewer fathers biologically related to all children in the home, older mothers and children, more mothers with a history of alcohol and drug use and mental health problems, and more mother-only perpetrators compared to the maltreatment-only neglect families.

Many of the findings for the co-occurrence/neglect group are similar to other findings of risk factors associated with child neglect. More single-parent families (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995; Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996), parental substance-abuse problems (Child Welfare Partnership, 1995; Kelleher et al., 1994; Nelson et al., 1993; Nelson & Landsman, 1994), and maternal depression or other chronic mental illness (Nelson et al., 1993; Nelson & Landsman, 1994) are associated with an increased risk for child neglect. These similarities between the cooccurrence–neglect families in this study and previous literature on characteristics of neglectful families may mean that domestic violence was an undetected factor in previous studies of factors associated with child neglect. These findings also suggest that child protection may need to more systematically assess for the presence of domestic violence in families founded for child neglect.

Looking just at the physical abuse condition, families in the co-occurrence group had more fathers using drugs or alcohol at the time of the maltreat-

### TABLE 3: \( t \) Test and Univariate Analysis of Variance for Continuous Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neglect</th>
<th></th>
<th>Physical Abuse</th>
<th></th>
<th>Interaction Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maltreatment-Only</td>
<td>Co-occurrence</td>
<td>Maltreatment-Only</td>
<td>Co-occurrence</td>
<td>(2 × 2 ANOVA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X SD</td>
<td>X SD</td>
<td>X SD</td>
<td></td>
<td>F p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s age</td>
<td>27.91 7.69</td>
<td>30.95 6.39*</td>
<td>35.58 7.79</td>
<td>34.29 7.60</td>
<td>1.05 .308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s age</td>
<td>31.21 8.23</td>
<td>34.67 7.54</td>
<td>34.25 8.74</td>
<td>38.48 7.65*</td>
<td>0.080 .778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of youngest child</td>
<td>2.50 2.59</td>
<td>4.16 3.90*</td>
<td>7.98 5.18</td>
<td>7.01 5.05</td>
<td>4.26 .041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of oldest child</td>
<td>6.33 5.69</td>
<td>9.64 4.91**</td>
<td>11.79 5.41</td>
<td>12.02 4.51</td>
<td>3.89 .050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children in home</td>
<td>2.06 1.06</td>
<td>2.48 1.25</td>
<td>2.06 1.08</td>
<td>2.60 0.917*</td>
<td>0.148 .700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of victims</td>
<td>1.48 0.814</td>
<td>1.98 1.45*</td>
<td>1.02 0.144</td>
<td>1.29 0.768*</td>
<td>0.700 .404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior contacts with CPS</td>
<td>1.38 3.06</td>
<td>2.45 2.46</td>
<td>0.54 1.22</td>
<td>0.97 1.53</td>
<td>0.923 .338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: CPS = child protection services.

\*p = \( t \) test significant at the .05 level. \**p = \( t \) test significant at the .01 level.
ment, more fathers with a known history of alcohol or drugs and arrest or conviction for a nondomestic violence–related offense, and older fathers and children compared to the maltreatment-only families.

Analyses looking at the association or interaction between the type of maltreatment and the presence of domestic violence found that marital status, the father’s biological relationship to the children, mother as perpetrator, and the age of the children were differentially related to the type of maltreatment. Odds-ratio comparisons showed a significant association between marital status, father’s biological relationship, and mother-as-perpetrator with co-occurrence of domestic violence for neglect but not for physical abuse. There were also significant interactions between type of maltreatment and the age of the oldest and youngest child. Post-hoc tests showed that the effect of the type of maltreatment on children’s ages was significant for the neglect condition but not for physical abuse.

There are several data limitations in this study. This study involved intensive coding of detailed assessment narratives. The information contained in the narratives is limited by the questions asked by assessment workers, families’ willingness to share that information given the consequences of disclosure (e.g., they may underreport if they fear they might lose custody their children), and assessment workers’ choices to record certain information in the narrative. Although assessment workers are trained to conduct investigations and record information in a consistent manner, additional triangulation of data, particularly on parental characteristics, would further enhance the reliability of data. More valid assessments of the type and severity of mental health issues and substance abuse in particular are needed.

The fewer significant differences between paternal characteristics may also be a limitation of data collection processes. Fathers are often invisible participants in the child protection system (Edleson, 1998). They are less likely to be interviewed then mothers in child protection investigations, particularly if the father figure is not legally married to the mother, is not biologically related to the children, or is not living in the home at the time of the maltreatment. Thus, there is typically less information available in child protection files on father characteristics.

Conversely, mothers are more likely to be investigated for neglect in the child protection system because they are most often considered the primary caretaker. Thus, findings on the mother characteristics in the neglect condition should also be viewed with some caution. Although studies have shown that marital violence can negatively affect the quality of the woman’s parenting behaviors (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2000), this study does not attempt to draw a causal link between domestic violence and mothers’ being investigated for neglect.

Despite data limitations, study findings do show that the factors that differentiate co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic-violence families from child maltreatment-only families differ for neglect and child physical abuse. Intuitively, we think of domestic violence as being more associated with child physical abuse because both involve physical forms of violence. The numerous research studies on child physical abuse and domestic violence are evidence of this assumption. Yet it is clear that domestic violence does co-occur with child neglect, and co-occur–neglect families are experiencing multiple vulnerabilities. More research is needed to further examine the co-occurrence of domestic violence and specific types of maltreatment.

NOTE

1. This lack of neglect finding for failure-to-protect due to domestic violence may not be typical of other child protection jurisdictions. This may be due to the domestic violence training assessment workers received as part of the Partnership for Safe Families initiative.

REFERENCES


Carolyn Copps Hartley is an assistant professor at the University of Iowa, School of Social Work. She has experience both as a researcher and clinician in the field of interpersonal violence. Her clinical work includes treatment of child and adult victims of child sexual abuse, sex offenders, and families involved with child protection. Her research includes a variety of studies in the area of family violence. In addition to her work on the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment, she has conducted research on sex offenders and the prosecution of domestic violence.