



## Informal support in maltreating families: Its effect on parenting practices

Sandra J. Lyons<sup>a,\*</sup>, Julia R. Henly<sup>b</sup>, John R. Schuerman<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, 1313 E. 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, United States*

<sup>b</sup>*School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, United States*

Available online 21 September 2004

---

### Abstract

Enlisting the aid of parents' informal support networks in child maltreatment interventions is a widely accepted practice; yet little is known about how support affects parenting in maltreating families. This study examines the role of informal support among families receiving child welfare services. It posits that financial strain and negative life events affect parenting through their negative effect on maternal depression and examines the influence of informal supports on these relationships, whether child welfare services affected the availability of support, and whether change in support is associated with change in parents' exposure to stressors and parental functioning.

The study's findings suggest that increasing support may reduce the amount of stressors and depression that parents experience and improve their positive parenting. But using support to alter negative parenting may be a more complex undertaking and depend on the supporter's capacity to provide constructive support.

© 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Informal support; Maltreating families; Parenting practices

---

### 1. Introduction

Despite the fact that a substantial amount of research has suggested that the help that people receive from relatives and friends enhances their well-being and that a lack of adequate support may contribute to child maltreatment in some families, little is known about how informal support may affect parents' childrearing. Yet, the practice of enlisting

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 773 256 5177.

E-mail address: [slyons@uchicago.edu](mailto:slyons@uchicago.edu) (S.J. Lyons).

the aid of parents' family members and friends in maltreatment interventions is widely accepted by child welfare professionals. Indeed, engaging parents' informal supporters in intervention efforts is often cited by child welfare professionals as playing a pivotal role in such community based treatment strategies as wraparound services, community partnerships, and family preservation. To inform treatment efforts in this arena, it is essential to acquire a better understanding of the ways in which support affects parenting. To this end, this study examined the roles of informal support in families who were receiving child welfare services.

The idea of including efforts to mobilize and strengthen families' informal supports in child maltreatment interventions is partly inspired by research reporting that maltreating families are often socially isolated from friends, relatives, and neighbors (Daro, 1988; Giovannoni & Billingsley, 1970; Polansky, Ammons, & Gaudin, 1985). That research suggested that parents' social isolation might have contributed to child maltreatment because of limited support from relatives and friends that could have assisted parents with childrearing. At the same time, research in health and psychology has demonstrated the benefits of informal support on many aspects of physical and emotional well-being, including depression (Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976; House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Thoits, 1995). Furthermore, research on family support systems in impoverished communities argued that while sometimes problematic, reliance on extended family members for support of all kinds can be an effective coping strategy (Henly, 2002; Stack, 1974).

Although this earlier research identifies informal support as an important contributor to individual well-being, informal support strategies have been difficult to implement as a maltreatment intervention. This is partly because there is little understanding of the ways in which support may affect parenting (Thompson, 1995). For instance, does the provision of support enhance positive parenting or inhibit negative parenting? Does support affect parenting by acting directly on parents' child rearing practices? Or does support operate in a more indirect way, perhaps by improving contextual conditions that affect parental functioning? Moreover, research examining the influence of child welfare services on parents' informal supports is scarce. For example, it is not known whether service providers' attempts to engage supporters in intervention efforts result in parents receiving more help from their relatives and friends than they would have otherwise. Nor do we know if such change in parents' levels of support enhances their parenting.

To address these questions, this study uses a composite of several child and family researchers' models outlining the relationships between sources of stress, parents' psychological resources, informal supports, and parenting practices (Belsky & Vondra, 1989; Jackson, Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Blake, 1998; McLoyd, 1990). Specifically, using a structural equation modeling framework, the study examines the linkages among two kinds of stressors (financial strain and negative life events), maternal depression, informal supports, and maternal parenting in a sample of mothers receiving child welfare services.

The study's objectives were threefold. The first objective was to test the hypothetical model presented in Fig. 1.

As the path diagram illustrates, financial strain and negative life events were hypothesized to heighten maternal depression and thereby reduce positive and increase negative parenting practices. The plausibility of the model was examined using cross-sectional data of a sample of mothers receiving services from child welfare programs.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات