RECOMMENDATION FOR REMOVAL: ARE WE BIASED AND AT WHAT COST?

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OBJECTIVES

- Identify family demographic factors, child maltreatment characteristics, evidence, and risk factors that are associated with recommendations for removal versus services for families.

- Explore whether biased assessments result in adverse long-term outcomes for families (i.e., recidivism).

If Child Maltreatment allegations are Substantiated…

- Child protection professionals are charged with deciding to:

  1. Recommend removal of a family member (either adult or child) from home.
  2. Recommend services (e.g., family preservation services) for family.

THE DECISION TO RECOMMEND REMOVAL IS COMPLEX

Simultaneous Consideration of Valid Constructs:
- Legal guidelines
- Evidence of abuse or neglect
- Severity and chronicity of maltreatment
- Risk factors
- Protective Factors

(Arad-Davidzon & Benbenishty, 2008; Atkinson & Butler, 1996; Britner & Mossler, 2002; Tjaden &Thoennes, 1992)

OTHER FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO REMOVAL DECISIONS

- CPS Worker Attitudes (e.g., Pro-Removal)
- African American Children
- Socioeconomic Status (SES)

(Arad-Davidzon & Benbenishty, 2008 ; Fialkov & Cohen, 1990; Lindsey, 1991; Lu, Landsverk, Ellis-Macleod, Newton, Ganger, & Johnson, 2004; Mandel, Lehman, & Yuille, 1995)

IF REMOVAL IS INDICATED, WHO SHOULD BE REMOVED?

- Child
- Biological Parent
- Step Parent
- Other Family Members
- Paramours
- Non-Relatives

- However, literature has **largely focused on removal of children, not adult caregivers.**

(Jent, Merrick, Dandes, Lambert, Haney, & Cano, 2009).

RECOMMENDATION FOR REMOVAL IS A HIGH STAKES DECISION

- Recommendations are designed to protect a child from immediate and future harm
- Outcomes are difficult to predict (e.g., at-risk population, Were recs followed?)
- Is removal the least harmful alternative?
- If the wrong decision is made, it may result in:

-unnecessary removal of a family member

-future harm to a child

The Current Study: Rationale

- Child protection professionals are charged with objective decisions regarding some of the most the most vulnerable children.

- If biased decisions exist, there may be potentially harmful long-term family consequences, such as increased rates of recidivism.

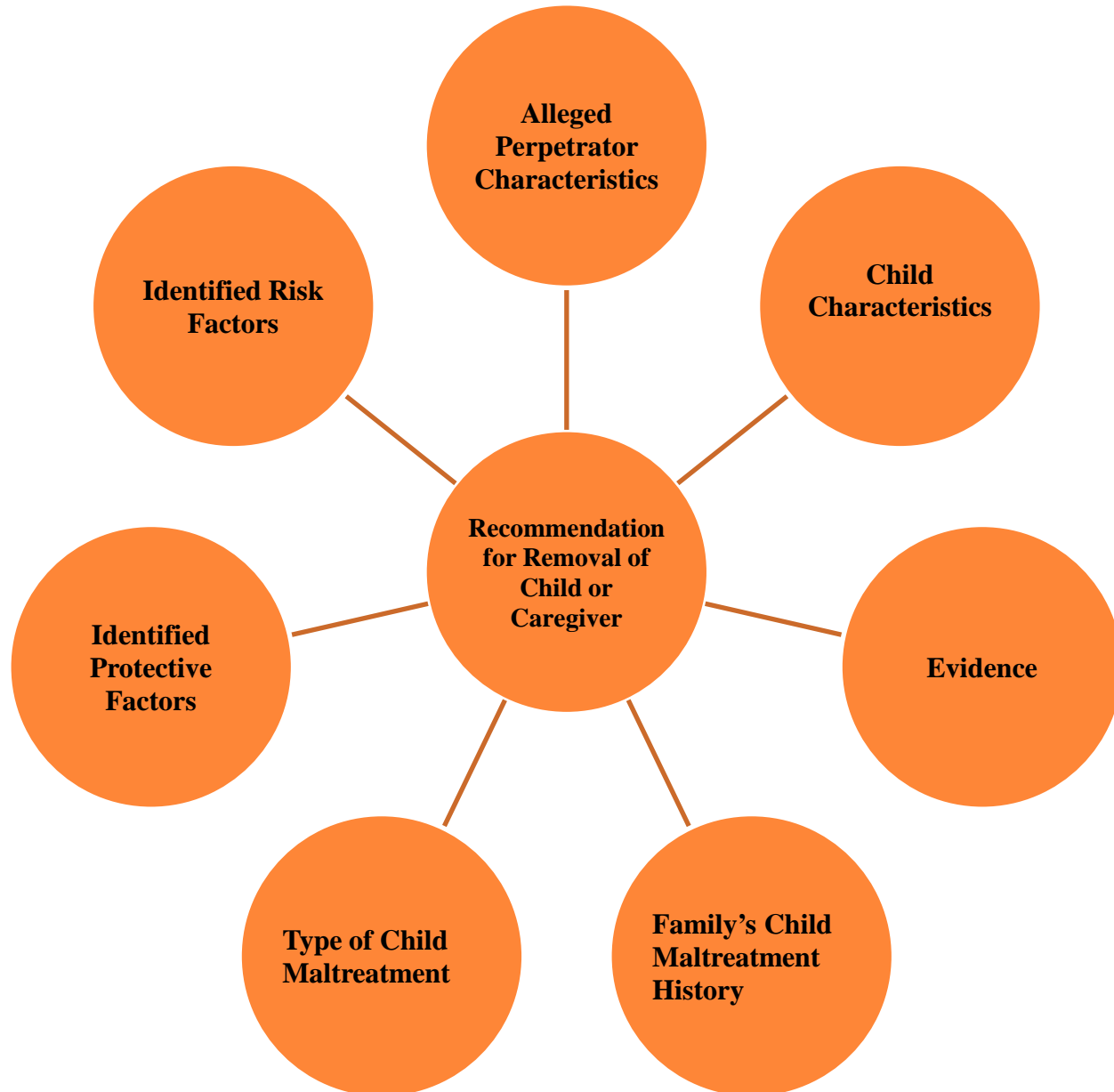- A greater understanding of caregiver removal recommendations is needed

Unanswered Questions

- To what extent are child protection professionals' recommendations for removal of a family member biased?

  - Hypothesis 1: Family demographics of evaluated families will predict removal decisions, above and beyond valid, statute driven constructs.

- If recommendations are biased, are there any associated long term adverse outcomes for families (i.e., recidivism)?

  - Hypothesis 2: Families who receive biased assessments will be more likely to be reported for future child maltreatment or abuse (recidivism).

HYPOTHESIZED PREDICTORS OF RECOMMENDATION FOR REMOVAL

Alleged Perpetrator Characteristics

Child Characteristics

Identified Risk Factors

Recommendation for Removal of Child or Caregiver

Evidence

Identified Protective Factors

Type of Child Maltreatment

Family's Child Maltreatment History

Sample

- Sample drawn from earlier studies exploring Florida Child Protection Teams' (CPT) adherence to child protection assessment best practices and CPT substantiation decision making (Jent et al., 2008; Jent et al., 2009).

- 845 of 4,895 CPT final case summary reports of evaluations conducted between July 2005-June 2006 were randomly selected from the CPT Information System.

- CPT FCS reports and corresponding child abuse hotline reports included description of child maltreatment allegations, summary of assessments completed, description of risk of harm factors, case findings, and recommendations.

MEASURES

- *Clinical Assessment Code Book*[1]

  - Designed to code qualitative and objective content of child protection evaluations.

  - Summary categories included for current study: Case demographics; background information; findings; interpretations and recommendations.

  - Overall inter-rater agreement for code book was good ($\kappa > .70$). Eight items with inter-rater agreement less than .70 were excluded from analyses.

- *Child Protection Team Coding Manual*[2]

  - Developed to code CPT evaluation reports for evidence, protective factors, and risk of harm factors.

  - Variables were only coded if clearly indicated in report.

  - Summary categories included: protective factors (24 items); risk of harm factors (56 items); and evidence (3 items).

  - Overall inter-rater agreement for code book was good ($\kappa > .70$).

- *Florida Safety Families Network*

  - Number of subsequent abuse reports and verified child maltreatment allegations up to four years after initial CPT evaluation (July 2006-July 2010).

[1] Budd, Felix, Poindexter, Naik-Polan, & Sloss, 1999; [2] Jent, Dandes, Merrick, & Rankin, 2006)

ANALYSES

- **Hypothesis 1:**

  - Logistic regression analyses conducted to examine effects of family demographic factors of evaluated families above and beyond effects of statute driven constructs on decisions to remove a family member from the home.
  - Dependent variable = Child protection professionals' recommendations (two levels: recommendations for removal of a family member and recommendations for family services).

- **Hypothesis 2:**
  - Hierarchical linear regression was conducted to examine the extent that biases predicted subsequent verified child maltreatment, above and beyond valid constructs.
  - Constructs that were found to be predictive of removal decisions were entered into regression analyses.

Table 1. Demographics of Families

Characteristics of Target Child	
Age- *M (SD)*	7.6 (4.5)
Gender (%)	
Male	47.2
Female	52.8
Race/Ethnicity (%)	
Black or African American	37.5
Hispanic	24.7
Caucasian	33.9
Asian American	1.2
Other	2.7
***Type of Alleged Maltreatment* (%)**	
Physical Abuse	52.4
Sexual Abuse	19.6
Emotional Abuse	0.5
Threatened Harm due to DV	1.1
Neglect	4.4
Multiple Maltreatment	22.0
***Case Disposition* (%)**	
Allegations Substantiated/Indicated	60.1
Allegations Not Indicated	39.9
Recidivism	
Subsequent Abuse Reports- *M (SD)*	1.78 (3.25)
Subsequent Verified Abuse Reports- *M (SD)*	.67 (1.48)

Table 2. Percentage of Alleged Perpetrators by Relationship Type.

Biological Mother	32.5
Biological Father	32.4
Step/Adoptive Mother	2.3
Step/Adoptive Father	10.5
Grandfather	1.6
Grandmother	1.4
Other Adult Relative	4.4
Other Adult Non-Relative	12.3
Minor Child	2.6

Table 3. Correlations Between Case-Specific Demographic Factors, Child Maltreatment Characteristics, and Recommendation for Removal Decisions

Characteristic	Removal of Child	Removal of Caregiver	Characteristic	Removal of Child	Removal of Caregiver
Child characteristics			**Type of Child Maltreatment Allegations**		
Child's Sex	-.03	.04	Physical Abuse	.05	**-.23****
Age	.03	**.08***	Sexual Abuse	**-.11****	**.22****
Child Race/Ethnicity			Emotional Abuse	-.02	-.03
African American	.03	-.01	Threatened Harm	-.03	**.10****
Asian American	-.03	-.04	Neglect	-.03	-.05
Caucasian	.01	.03	Multiple Maltreatment	**.07****	**.08***
Hispanic	.03	-.02			
Alleged Perpetrator Relationship					
Biological Mother	**.13****	**-.66****			
Biological Father	.02	.03			
Step Mother	.02	-.04			
Step Father	.00	**.21****			
Grandfather	-.03	.06			
Grandmother	**.07***	-.01			
Other Relative (e.g., aunt, uncle)	-.01	.04			
Non-relative living in the home	.02	**.16****			
Non-relative not living in the home	-.06	-.02	*Note.* * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$		

Table 4. Correlations Between Identified Protective Factors, Risk Factors, Evidence, and Recommendation for Removal Decisions

Characteristic	Removal of Child	Removal of Caregiver	Characteristic	Removal of Child	Removal of Caregiver
Total Protective Factors	**-.07***	**-.12****	**Child Risk Factors**		
Total Risk Factors	**.23****	**.13****	Child Developmental Concerns	.00	-.05
Caregiver Risk Factors			Child Psychological Functioning	.03	-.05
Aggressive Parent-Child Interactions	**.18****	.05	Child Hygiene Concerns	**.09****	.04
Caregiver Antisocial Behaviors	.05	**.16****	Child Hx of Trauma	-.01	.07
Caregiver Acts of Omission	**.15**.**	**.22****	Child Sexualized Behaviors	-.05	-.01
Caregiver Psychological Functioning	.02	.04	Substance Exposed Child	.01	**.10****
Caregiver Life Stress	.03	**-.10****	Juvenile Delinquency	-.02	-.01
Child Medical Regimen Adherence	-.02	-.06	**Evaluation-Specific Risk Factors**		
Caregiver Medical Problems	**.08***	-.04	Caregiver Coaching	-.02	-.03
Safety of the Home	.05	-.04	Credibility of Interviewees	**.09****	-.02
Intimate Partner Conflict	-.01	-.02	Prior CPS Involvement	**.07***	.05
Caregiver Mental Health Regimen Adherence	.06	-.03	**Evidence**		
Unemployed Caregiver	-.01	-.06	Physical Evidence of Injuries	**.26****	.02
Caregiver Cognitive Limitations	-.02	-.02	Child Disclosure	**.14****	**.23****
# of Children in the Home	.01	-.04	Perpetrator Confession	-.02	**-.14****
Prior Completion of Services	**.08***	.06			
Custody Dispute	-.01	-.01	*Note.* * *p* < .05, ***p* <.01		

Table 5. Binomial Logistic Regression Analyses for Recommendation for Child Removal Decision

Variables	df	χ2	Nagelkerke R^2	OR	95% CI	p
	15, 841	108.75	.31			.000**
Alleged Perpetrator Relationship						
Biological Mother				2.65	[1.38, 5.10]	.004**
Grandmother				2.15	[0.42, 11.04]	.361
Child Maltreatment Type						
Sexual Abuse				0.62	[0.13, 3.08]	.559
Multiple Maltreatment				2.03	[0.98, 4.21]	.058
Total # of Protective Factors				0.85	[0.69, 1.05]	.134
Total # of Risk Factors				0.97	[0.86, 1.10]	.637
Aggressive Parent Child Interactions				1.90	[0.80, 4.51]	.143
Caregiver Acts of Omission				3.28	[1.63, 6.61]	.001**
Prior Completion of Services				1.07	[0.33, 3.46]	.910
Credibility of Interviewees				1.30	[0.37, 72.09]	.486
Past CPS Involvement				1.73	[0.85, 3.53]	.133
Evidence						
Physical Evidence of Injuries				7.02	[3.18, 15.44]	.000***
Child Disclosure				1.60	[0.76, 3.36]	.212

Note: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; Nagelkerke R^2 = effect size* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 6. Binomial Logistic Regression Analyses for Recommendation for Caregiver Removal Decision

Variables	df	χ2	Nagelkerke R^2	OR	95% CI	p
Caregiver Removal	16,834	190.93	.37			.000***
Child Demographic Factors						
Child Age				1.02	[0.96, 1.08]	.491
Alleged Perpetrator Relationship						
Biological Mother				0.45	[0.24, 0.84]	.012**
Stepfather				3.96	[2.12, 7.40]	.000**
Non-Relative Caregiver Living in the Home				3.11	[1.54, 6.31]	.002**
Child Maltreatment Type						
Physical Abuse				0.84	[0.16, 4.30]	.832
Sexual Abuse				2.85	[0.55, 14.75]	.213
Threatened Harm				5.33	[1.59, 16.44]	.019*
Multiple Maltreatment				2.19	[0.43, 11.07]	.345
Total # of Protective Factors				0.91	[0.76, 1.09]	.298
Total # of Risk Factors				0.98	[0.90, 1.08]	.637
Caregiver Antisocial Behaviors				2.55	[1.38, 4.71]	.003**
Caregiver Acts of Omission				3.40	[1.99, 5.79]	.000***
Caregiver Life Stress				0.87	[0.23, 3.36]	.840
Substance-exposed Child				1.42	[0.59, 3.47]	.436
Evidence						
Child Disclosure				3.60	[2.09, 6.19]	.000***
Perpetrator Confession				0.41	[0.17, 0.97]	.042*

Note: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; Nagelkerke R^2 = effect size* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

WHAT FACTORS ARE PREVALENT AMONGST CAREGIVERS WHERE REMOVAL RECOMMENDATIONS ARE MADE?

Biological Mother

- Physical Abuse- 62%
- Aggressive Interactions- 73%
- Anitsocial Behaviors- 68%
- Acts of Omission- 54%
- Prior CPS Involvement- 78%
- Physical Evidence- 73%
- Child Disclosure- 70%

Stepfather

- Sexual Abuse- 45%
- Aggressive Interactions- 45%
- Antisocial Behaviors- 61%
- Acts of Omission- 45%
- Prior CPS Involvement- 68%
- Child Disclosure- 71%

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the effects of Demographic Factors on Recidivism up to Four Years later

Variables	B	SE B	B
Step 1			
Recommendation for Removal of Child	.14	.21	.02
Criminal Behavior	.20	.13	.05
Physical Evidence of Inflicted Injuries	.13	.11	.04
Step 2			
Recommendation for Removal of Child	.06	.21	.01
Criminal Behavior	.20	.13	.05
Physical Evidence of Inflicted Injuries	.13	.11	.04
Biological Mother Alleged Perpetrator	.30	.10	**.10****

Note: Step 1 R^2 = .01, ΔR^2 = .02**. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 8. *Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the effects of Caregiver Removal Demographic Factors on Recidivism up to Four Years later*

Variables	*B*	SE B	*B*
Step 1			
Recommendation for Removal of Caregiver	-.03	.16	-.01
Caregiver Antisocial Behavior	.26	.10	**.09***
Caregiver Act of Omission	.17	.13	.05
Child Disclosure	-.13	.11	-.04
Perpetrator Confession	.07	.13	.02
Threatened Harm Allegation	.83	.49	.06
Step 2			
Recommendation for Removal of Caregiver	.07	.16	.02
Caregiver Antisocial Behavior	.27	.10	**.09***
Caregiver Act of Omission	.16	.13	.04
Child Disclosure	-.11	.11	-.04
Perpetrator Confession	-.00	.13	.00
Threatened Harm Allegation	.65	.50	.05
Biological Mother	.26	.11	**.09***
Stepfather	-.12	.17	-.03
Non-relative living in the home	-.27	.20	-.05

Note: Step 1 R^2 = .01, ΔR^2 = .02**. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Why are Biological Mothers Who are identified as Alleged Perpetrators Predictive of Recidivism Four Years Later?

- Primary caregiver within an at-risk population
- Only stable caregiver over time
- Possible that initial recommendations were not implemented
- Insufficient and/or ineffective intervention services.

Conclusions

o No overt biases in CPT decision-making regarding recommendations for removal.

o Evidence and risk factors were the primary predictors of removal decisions.

o This is the third CPT study to find no overt bias in decision making related to substantiation or removal decisions.

o CPT Program Office provides a CPT manual, annual training opportunities, and annual QA/QI process that may promote statute and evidence-based decision making.

(Jent, et al. 2008; Jent et al., 2011)

LIMITATIONS:

- Sample limited to one geographic area and primarily, allegations of physical or sexual abuse.
- Absence of information regarding whether recommendations for removal or services were implemented
- No information regarding the effectiveness of received interventions following CPT evaluation.
- Risk factors were limited to items specifically identified as a risk factor by the report writer.

FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Is the decision to allow a perpetrator who confesses to stay in the home really any less risky?

- Why are biological mothers who are identified perpetrators more prone to recidivism?

- Are biological mothers not getting the support services needed to reduce recidivism?

- To what extent are recommendations implemented following CPT evaluations?

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QUESTIONS???

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