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## STRATEGIES FOR INTERVIEWING CHILDREN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Because of the high rate of co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence, and the potential harm to children exposed to domestic violence, the author of the present study suggests incorporating questions about domestic violence into assessments of child maltreatment. Referring to research on interviewing techniques used to elicit information about sexual abuse, the author recommends several interview strategies that may be helpful in gauging a child's exposure to domestic violence. One strategy is the cognitive interview, which is typically used for substantiated abuse. The primary task is context reconstruction, where the child is asked to draw a picture of a particular incident and then describe what happened in detail. As part of this strategy, children could be asked to take the perspective of the victim of domestic violence; however, younger children may not be capable of this task. A second strategy is narrative elaboration, during which cue cards can be used to trigger children to describe certain aspects of an event, including the participants, behaviors, and feelings about what happened. A final strategy is segmentation. Using this technique, a trained interviewer breaks a story into several parts by asking the child to describe what happened before or after a certain point. A child may feel less anxious discussing these smaller segments than trying to describe the event as a whole. The author also noted that the interviewer will likely need to ask several questions in order to determine if domestic violence has occurred. Since children do not usually seek help for domestic violence, focused questions may be necessary to determine if a child is at risk for exposure or has already been exposed to domestic violence.

Faller, K. C. (2003). Research and practice in child interviewing: Implications for children exposed to domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18*, 377-389.

## FAMILIES OF SEXUALLY ABUSED PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS MORE ENMESHED, PUNITIVE THAN FAMILIES OF OTHER PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS

Understanding differences between families of sexually abused children and nonabused children is important in determining appropriate services for those families, and for developing treatment programs for sexually victimized children and adolescents. In this study, researchers explored family factors that differentiated between adolescents who were sexually abused and those who were not. The authors interviewed 57 adolescents receiving mental health services in a residential treatment center, roughly half of whom had experienced sexual abuse. Researchers compared the diagnoses between the sexually abused and nonabused inpatients and found that sexually abused adolescents had higher levels of depression than did the nonabused youths in the study. At intake, researchers asked participants questions about their families. The interviews were designed to assess the adolescents' perception of how their families function along three dimensions – the relationships among family members, family values, and the parents' management style. The authors examined whether any of these three dimensions could differentiate between abused and nonabused inpatients. The only one of the three dimensions that was successful in distinguishing between the two groups was family management style. Specifically, two subscales that make up this dimension differentiated between sexually abused and nonabused participants: enmeshment and authoritarian family

styles. In other words, blurred boundaries between family members and a harsher, more punitive parenting style characterized the sexually abused group. These findings suggest that treatment services for families of sexually abused youth should consider encouraging the development of appropriate family boundaries and a less severe parenting style. The researchers also explored differences in perceptions of family messages and found that sexually abused inpatients perceived more negative messages about the world from nonoffending father figures than did their nonabused counterparts. Given the importance of social support in children's adjustment following abuse, this finding suggests that it may be especially important to involve nonoffending father figures in treatment.

Reinemann, D. H., Stark, K. D., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Family factors that differentiate sexually abused and nonabused adolescent psychiatric inpatients. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18*, 471-489.

## AGE-RELATED DEFICIENCIES CAN PLACE JUVENILES AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THE ATTORNEY-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

In an increasingly adversarial juvenile justice system and with the transfer of many juveniles to criminal court, it is becoming even more important for juveniles to be able to build a solid relationship with their attorneys and be able to assist in their own defense. However, several developmental differences between adolescents and adults may place youths at a disadvantage in the attorney-client relationship. In this study, 203 juvenile males and 110 adult males who were detained pre-trial were presented with a hypothetical vignette concerning a male ("Joe") who committed a robbery and was meeting with his attorney for the first time. Juveniles were more likely than adults to list "refusing to talk" as an option for Joe, and were also more likely to recommend that he deny that he committed the crime. Juveniles were also more likely to think of short-term as opposed to long-term consequences for Joe, and placed a greater focus on potential short-term gains. Adults were more likely to consider long-term gains, like plea agreements. The authors suggested that attorneys who work with youth need to be educated on these developmental differences, and should be allowed the time they need to develop a meaningful attorney-client relationship. In addition to these age differences, the researchers found that participants' race and the seriousness of their crime were also linked to differences in recommendations for Joe. For example, minorities were less likely to recommend that Joe talk to his attorney and admit he had committed the offense, though they were equally likely to recommend these actions for themselves if they were in a similar situation. Those offenders who had committed a lesser offense were more likely to recommend that Joe speak honestly with his attorney, whereas those who had a history of detention were less likely to recommend honesty for Joe or themselves. Lastly, when compared to private attorneys, both juveniles and adults often viewed court-appointed attorneys negatively. The authors concluded that age, race, and type of crime committed represent "situational barriers" to developing an effective attorney-client relationship.

Schmidt, M. G., Reppucci, N. D., & Woolard, J. L. (2003). Effectiveness of participation as a defendant: The attorney-juvenile client relationship. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 21*, 175-198.

## AFRICAN AMERICANS, NATIVE AMERICANS OVERREPRESENTED IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Researchers investigated whether children of different races were overrepresented at different points in the child welfare system: the investigation of a referral (investigation stage) and after an allegation had been substantiated (victimization stage). Using data from five states across the country, the researchers calculated ratios of disproportionality at both of these stages for African American, Native American, Hispanic, and white children. By calculating these ratios, the researchers were able to compare the proportion of kids of different races in the child welfare system to their proportion in the general population. If there are more kids of a particular race in the child welfare system than in the general population, then those children are said to be overrepresented. At the investigation stage, the authors found that Hispanic and Native American children were represented proportionally. That is, the proportion of Hispanic and Native American children being referred for an investigation was equal to the proportion of those children in the general population. However, white children appeared to be referred for an investigation less often than one would expect given the total proportion of white children in this five-state sample. Most importantly, African American children were significantly overrepresented at the investigation stage. In other words, African American children were more likely to be referred for an investigation than would be expected based on their number in the general population. Looking at substantiation, the rates are slightly different. White and Hispanic children were just as likely to be the subject of substantiated maltreatment as one would expect given their presence in this sample. African Americans were slightly overrepresented in this stage, but not as much as they were in the investigation stage. Most importantly, Native Americans were greatly overrepresented at this stage; the proportion of Native Americans that were subjects of substantiated maltreatment was much greater than their proportion in the sample as a whole.

Fluke, J. D., Yuan, Y. T., Hedderson, J., & Curtis, P. A. (2003). Disproportionate representation of race and ethnicity in child maltreatment: Investigation and victimization. *Children and Youth Services Review, 25*, 359-373.

## ANTISOCIAL FATHERS LIVING AT HOME MAY DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD

Marriage incentives in public policy are enacted partially under the assumption that two parents can raise children better than one parent can. Previous research supports the notion that, on average, children growing up in two-parent homes experience more positive psychological and behavioral outcomes than children in single-parent homes. However, prior researchers have generally neglected to study how family characteristics influence whether or not children are “better off” if both parents reside in the same home. This study of parents of over 1000 pairs of 5-year-old, same-sex twins examined the impact of fathers’ antisocial behavior and fathers’ presence in the home on child behavior problems. The main finding was that if fathers exhibited high levels of antisocial behavior (for example, getting into fights or lying), longer presence in the home over the course of their child’s life was associated with more child conduct problems. Thus,

father presence in the home (and, hence, a two-parent family) appeared to be detrimental for children in this study if the father engaged in high levels of antisocial behavior. In addition, the researchers analyzed the relation between how much time fathers spent caring for their children (regardless of residential status) and children’s conduct problems, again considering level of father’s antisocial behavior. The results were similar to the previous analysis: more caretaking by fathers was related to fewer child behavior problems only if the father exhibited few antisocial behaviors. The authors cautioned that if one goal of family policy is to reduce the likelihood of child behavior problems (and thereby reduce later delinquent, antisocial, and illegal behavior), then encouraging all fathers to live with their children might be misguided.

Jaffee, S. R., Moffitt, T. E., Caspi, A., & Taylor, A. (2003). Life with (or without) father: The benefits of living with two biological parents depend on the father’s antisocial behavior. *Child Development, 74*, 109-126.

## INCREASED DRUG TESTING OF PAROLEES HAS UNINTENDED NEGATIVE EFFECTS

The effectiveness of a drug-testing program in deterring drug use and future arrests was examined. Researchers randomly assigned 1,958 serious juvenile offenders in California who were being paroled to one of five different levels of drug testing, ranging from no routine testing to testing once every two weeks. Overall, the percentage of positive drug tests was relatively low (8.8%). However, unexpectedly, youths with more frequent drug testing had higher arrest rates during the 42-month follow-up period. The authors were hesitant to conclude that frequent drug testing led to higher arrest rates. Instead, they suggested an indirect line of causality. Specifically, frequent drug testing may be a serious stressor on the probation officer/parolee relationship, especially given that the probation officers in this situation were not able to reward the juveniles for positive behavior by decreasing the frequency of their drug testing. The authors suggested that more rigorous screening might not be worthwhile, as there was little crime-reduction among the juvenile offenders above a minimum level of testing. Given the low rate of positive drug tests in this sample, the authors suggested that drug use was likely not a major reason for the high amount of recidivism. Instead, drug use may be better characterized as just another form of risky behavior that these youth may undertake. Finally, as the youth in this sample were serious offenders, the researchers suggested that drug screening might be more effective for less serious offenders.

Haapanen, R., & Britton, L. (2002). Drug testing for youthful offenders on parole: An experimental evaluation. *Criminology and Public Policy, 1*, 217-243.

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