Secondary Analysis of Data from the
Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

Susan J. Zuravin
University of Maryland Baltimore
School of Social Work

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The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS), conducted during the three month period of October 1 to December 31 of 1998, has produced a virtual treasure trove of data for secondary analysis. The purpose of this paper is to identify four topics that can be answered by analysis of the CIS data. For each topic a brief summary of the literature will be provided and study methodology will be discussed. The questions are:

- What proportion of biological, non-offending mothers consistently believed, provided emotional support for, and protected the sexually abused child from further incidents? What proportion was ambivalent? What proportion consistently neither believed, provided emotional support, nor protected the sexually abused child?

- What factors predict that a biological, non-offending mother will consistently believe, provide emotional support, and protect the sexually abused child from further incidents?

- On what factors do intake caseworkers base their decision to substantiate a report of child maltreatment? Do the predictors differ by type of maltreatment – physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse?

- What factors predict that a child will be placed in substitute care?

Topic 1: What proportion of biological, non-offending mothers consistently believe, provide emotional support for, and protect the sexually abused child from further incidents? What proportion is ambivalent? What proportion consistently neither believed, provided emotional support, nor protected the sexually abused child?

Topic 2: What factors predict that a biological, non-offending mother will consistently believe, provide emotional support for, and protect the sexually abused child from further incidents?

Literature Review

Prior to 1985, no theoretical or empirical attention was paid to post-disclosure maternal support of the sexually abused child, the name given to the area of sexual abuse research encompassed by the above questions. During the following 16 years, three studies (deYoung, 1994; Pintello, 2000; Sirles and Frank, 1989) purposely investigated prevalence and predictors of maternal belief, a component of support, while 12 others examined other topics but also reported some findings on maternal belief. Similarly, three studies (Faller, 1988; Heriot, 1991; Pintello, 2000) purposely investigated prevalence and predictors of maternal protective action, another component of support which addressed whether the mother took actions to protect the child from further sexual abuse, while 9 others examined other topics and reported some results on protective action. Currently, no studies have examined whether the mother provided post-disclosure emotional support to the sexually abused child.

To date, the specific questions identified for study from the CIS data have received no attention. Review of the literature found only one study (Pintello, 2000) that came even close. Pintello's case record study of 437 cases substantiated for sexual abuse identified the proportion of biological non-offending mothers who consistently believed and took protective action to protect the child from further abuse as well as determined the predictors of such consistency. Thus, currently no studies have examined the consistency with which non-offending mothers do all three -- believe, provide emotional support, and take action to protect the child from further abuse.

Findings from the studies that examined the prevalence of maternal belief as well as protective action varied quite a bit. Results of the 15 studies that examined maternal belief showed that anywhere from 9% to 95% believed their sexually abused child. Results of the 12 studies that examined protective action showed that anywhere from 29% to 64% took protective action to

prevent further sexual abuse. These wide differences in results among studies are most probably due to methodological differences among studies including the data collection methodology (case records, interviews with caseworkers, interviews with mother and child), the particular operational definition of maternal belief and protective action, attrition from the sample, size of the sample, and amount of time that had passed from disclosure when data was collected. Pintello's (2000) study of 437 mothers found that 41.8% consistently believed and took protective action; 27.3% were ambivalent, i.e., they either believed and did not take protective action or did not believe and did take protective action; and 30.8% consistently did not believe and did not take protective action.

Findings from the studies that focused on identifying protectors were also quite varied, mostly because of methodological differences between the studies. Since those most relevant to Topic 2 are Pintello's (2000) and the predictors she used go well beyond those used by the other predictive studies, only hers will be examined. She used a total of 28 predictors broken into three categories – 10 maternal, 10 child, and 8 situational characteristics. The 10 maternal predictors included age at first birth, race, marital status, employment status, public assistance status, history of substance abuse, history of child sexual abuse, history of domestic violence, not in current relationship with offender, and knew about sexual abuse before disclosure. The 10 child predictors included age at disclosure, age at onset of sexual abuse, gender, history of physical abuse, history of sexual abuse, history of neglect, relationship to offender, behavioral problems, academic problems, and sexualized behavior. The 8 situational predictors included severity of sexual abuse, frequency of sexual abuse, duration of sexual abuse, offender substance abuser, offender admits to sexual abuse, offender employment status, risk for recurrence, and juvenile court hearing. Findings from a hierarchical logistic regression analysis, where the criterion was consistently believed and

took protective action (coded 1) versus ambivalence and consistently did not believe and take protective action (coded 0), identified four predictors of consistently believed and took protective action. They were (1) mother postponed first birth until reaching adulthood, (2) mother not in a sexual relationship with the offender, (3) mother had no knowledge of sexual abuse until disclosure, and (4) child did not exhibit sexualized behaviors.

Methodology – Topic 1

Sample

To answer the questions all **substantiated** sexual abuse cases (where sexual abuse is the primary or secondary category of investigation)(item 14 on CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child) involving the **categories sexual abuse completed through voyeurism** (item 14 on CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child) where the **child's biological mother is either Caregiver A or B** (item 1 on CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Household information) will be used. The characteristics of the sample – substantiated, categories sexual abuse completed through voyeurism, and child biological mother is caregiver – were chosen on the basis that they conform to those of Pintello's study (1998) as well as many of the other studies on the general topic area. Such conformity will increase the ability to compare findings across studies.

Variables

Three variables for each case in the sample are necessary to answer the question. They are item 25a – non-offending caregiver believes child, item 25b – caregiver provides emotional support, and item 25c – caregiver protects child from further incidents of sexual abuse. To prepare the variables for the analysis, it is necessary to identify how many cases in the sample have biological mothers who consistently believe, provide emotional support, and take protective action; how many cases in the sample have biological mothers who are ambivalent (inconsistent with

respect to the three behaviors); and how many cases in the sample have biological mothers who consistently do not believe, do not provide emotional support, and do not take protective action. Such preparation can be easily accomplished with SPSS by using three "If" statements.

Analysis

Once the number of cases has been determined for each of the three categories of responses, simply dividing the number in each response category by the number of cases in the sample will identify the proportion of mothers in each category.

Methodology – Topic 2

Sample

The group of cases to be used in the analyses are identical to those used for Topic 1 -- all **substantiated** sexual abuse cases (where sexual abuse is the primary or secondary category of investigation) involving the **categories sexual abuse completed through voyeurism** where the **child's biological mother is either Caregiver A or B.**

Variables

Predictors. Because there is no theory regarding maternal belief, emotional support, and protective action, the variables selected as predictors will be primarily chosen on the basis of those used by prior studies, namely those used by Pintello (2000) since she employed the most comprehensive group. Decisions regarding the coding of the variables will also be based on Pintello's methods to the extent possible since the CIS variables used many more categories than Pintello's variables. Because the CIS gathered information on some variables that differ from those of prior studies, these variables will also be included if they appear that they might add something to the analysis. A total of 13 predictors will be included in the analyses.

Six maternal characteristics will be used as predictors. All come from the CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Household Information data-gathering sheet. They include **mother's age**, coded as 18 or less (0), 19 through 30 (1), and 31 and greater (2); **primary income source**, coded as social benefits, other benefits, unemployment, and none (0), and full-time employment, part-time employment, multiple jobs, and seasonal as (1); **educational level** coded as elementary (0), secondary (1), and college (2); **ethno-racial group** coded as all categories other than white (0), white (1); **caregiver maltreated as a child** coded as no/unknown (0), suspected (1), and confirmed (2); and **caregiver in violent relationship** coded as no/unknown (0), suspected (1), and confirmed (2). Of these predictors, four were used by Pintello – primary income source, ethno-racial group, caregiver maltreated as a child, and caregiver in violent relationship. The remaining two, age and educational level, were used by other prior studies.

Five child characteristics will be used as predictors. All but one, **case previously open**, come from the CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child data-gathering sheet. They include **age**; **gender** coded as male (0) and female (1); **child functioning** coded as a continuous variable where each child is given a score based on how many of the confirmed or suspected problems they have (range 0 to 19); **child's relationship to perpetrator** coded as extrafamilial (0), including categories other and stranger, and intrafamilial (1), including categories mother, father, stepfather/common law, stepmother/common law, and sibling; **case previously open** coded as no (0) and yes (1). All five are renditions of variables used by Pintello (2000) as well as other prior researchers.

Two situational predictors will be used. Both come from the CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child data-gathering sheet. They include **severity of sexual abuse** coded as exposure of genitals (0), touching/fondling genitals (1), sexual activity attempted (2), and sexual activity

completed (3); and **duration of maltreatment** coded as single incident (0), less than 6 months (1), and more than 6 months (2). Both are renditions of variables used by Pintello (2000) as well as other prior researchers.

        Criterions. Two criterion or dependent variables with two levels each will be developed. The first criterion, **ambivalent vs. consistent**, is coded 0 for an ambivalent or inconsistent response on the part of mother and 1 for a response where the mother consistently believed, provided emotional support, and took protective action. The second criterion, **consistent vs. consistent**, is coded 0 for a response where the mother consistently did not believe, provide emotional support, and take protective action and 1 for a response where the mother consistently did believe, provide emotional support, and take protective action.

Analyses

        Two logistic regression analyses will be performed. Given that the criterion variables are dichotomous and the predictors are both categorical and continuous, this is the most appropriate statistical procedure. The first analysis will regress the criterion, **ambivalent vs. consistent,** on the thirteen predictors. The second analysis will regress the criterion, **consistent vs. consistent**, on the thirteen predictors. This analytic strategy differs from that of Pintello (2000). She regressed her one criterion (ambivalent and consistently neither believed nor took protective action vs. consistently believed and took protective action) on each of the three sets of predictors and then in a final analysis regressed the criterion on only those variables that were significant from the first set of analyses. The analytic strategy for this paper, unlike that for Pintello's will identify whether different predictors are associated with the two different criterions.

Topic 3: On what factors do intake caseworkers base their decision to substantiate a report of child maltreatment? Do the predictors differ by type of maltreatment – physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse?

Literature Review

Recent studies have shown increases over time in the number of child maltreatment reports and in the severity of maltreatment seen in the U.S. child protection system. Without a concomitant growth in funding and services, this rise in reports has had an adverse impact on the ability of many CPS programs to carry out their mission. Lacking sufficient staff, many agencies are not able to investigate all of the reports that they receive in a timely fashion or to provide services to all maltreating families.

To address the problem, some states have passed laws to allow CPS to screen out reports without further investigation, and most jurisdictions have developed policies and procedures for prioritizing reports and the determining the scope of investigations. Examination of these policies, laws, and procedures reveals considerable variation across states and local programs. For example, "some allow preliminary investigations that are not in person … some set a ceiling on the number of reports that workers will investigate … and some have screening units that do preliminary investigations of questionable cases (Wells & Anderson, 1992: p. 12). Other programs use decision-making tools as an aid; items on such tools tend not to be highly specific. Consequently, judgments are likely to be subjective, particularly for new staff and those working in programs where training is limited. Additionally, the vast majority of such tools have not been empirically constructed, and their reliabilities and validities have not been tested. Johnson and Clancy (1988) portray the difficulties of intake by describing "the process of screening, investigating, and disposing of reports as a nerve-wracking one" (p. 47).

Given an environment typified by inadequate funding, increased severity of maltreatment incidents, and demands for programs and workers to be accountable for their actions, there is a pressing need for structured decision-making tools that will decrease decision-making subjectivity, assure that scarce resources will be expended on the highest risk cases, and reflect shifting standards with regard to time, available resources, and other factors. To achieve these goals both Johnson and Clancy (1988) and Wells and Anderson (1992) stress the need for empirically-derived models to predict the likelihood of substantiation from information available at the time the report is made. Once developed, "models could be integrated into a computer-based advisory and consultant system" (Wells and Anderson, 1992: p. 7) and changed as standards shift.

To date, only four teams of investigators (Johnson & Clancy, 1988; Wells & Anderson, 1992; Winefield & Bradley, 1992; Zuravin, Orme, & Hegar, 1995) have worked specifically on constructing such models. While predictors examined by the groups differed, findings from the first two studies suggest that different models are needed for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, and perhaps for different jurisdictions (Wells & Anderson); and that empirically-based models are more successful than caseworker decisions for predicting the substantiation status of a report. Of the many predictors included in each of the four studies, four were examined by at least two of the studies. All examined reporter identity and all found it to be associated with disposition; however, findings differed across studies regarding which reporter's reports were most likely to be substantiated. Three studies (Wells & Anderson, 1992; Winefield & Bradley, 1992; Zuravin, Orme, & Hegar, 1995) examined age, gender, and ethnicity of the victim child. Two of the three (Winefield & Bradley, 1992; Zuravin, et al., 1995) found that as victim age increased so did likelihood of substantiation. One study (Zuravin, et al, 1995) found victim race to be associated with substantiation and none of the studies found victim gender to be associated with

substantiation. Two of the four studies (Wells & Anderson, 1992; Winefield & Bradley, 1992) examined whether previous reports of maltreatment predicted substantiation. Both found this variable to increase the likelihood of substantiation.

Zuravin and colleagues (1995) as well as Wells and Anderson (1992) concluded that "the quest for model development … must continue" (Wells and Anderson, 1992: p. 72), results of these studies revealed that neither "model had achieved the predictive power necessary to warrant extensive use in CPS" (p. 66). Wells and Anderson recommended the use of larger data sets, examination of other predictors, and use of an outcome measure(s) that is a better indicator than substantiation status (a two-level variable which indicates only whether the allegations were ruled out or confirmed) of the complex, multi-dimensional nature of decisions that need to be made by take caseworkers.

The primary objective of the proposed study described below is to develop models for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect that will exceed the predictive power of previously developed models by following the methodological recommendations of Wells and Anderson (1992). Specifically, this study will use a larger data set than earlier ones, will examine predictors identified during the investigation as well as those known at report only, and use an outcome measure that goes beyond substantiation status, the two-level variable mentioned above.

Methodology

<u>Samples</u>

Three different sets of cases or samples will be developed to answer the questions posed in Topic 2. The first sample will consist of all cases opened for assessment/investigation (CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Intake Face Sheet) for which at least one child had a primary or secondary code of physical abuse (CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child). The second sample will

consist of all cases opened for assessment/investigation for which at least one child had a primary of secondary code of sexual abuse. Finally, the third sample will consist of all cases opened for assessment/investigation for which at least one child had a primary or secondary code of neglect.

<u>Variables</u>

<u>Predictors</u>. A total of 10 variables will be used as predictors. Three of the variables—**reporter identity**, **case previously open**, and **case previously reported on the same child**—were chosen because they were used by two or more of the previous four studies. **Reporter identity** (CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Intake Face Sheet), a categorical variable, will be coded as that of Zuravin and colleagues (1995): anonymous (0), non-professional (1), non-medical professional (2), and medical professional (3). **Case previously open** (CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Household Information), a categorical variable, will be coded never (0), one time (1), 2-3 times (2), and 3 or more (3). **Case previously reported on the same child** (CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child), a categorical variable, will be coded no (0) and yes (1).

In addition to the above three variables, seven other variables will be used as predictors. They have been chosen on the recommendations of both Wells and Anderson (1992) and Zuravin and colleagues (1995), both of whom suggested that variables identified during the investigation be used to create the model. These variable include **whether either or both caregivers was/were maltreated as a child**, coded as 0 if neither or the single caregiver was not maltreated and 1 if both or one of the caregivers was maltreated; **whether either or both caregivers were/are involved in a violent relationship** coded as 0 if neither or the single caregiver was not involved in such a relationship and 1 if both of the caregivers was involved in such a relationship; **caregiver functioning**, a continuous variable, where the variable is created by adding 1 to the score for each of the eight problems that are suspected or confirmed so that the score on this variable ranges from

0 to 8; **family income estimate**, a categorical variable, coded as 24,999 or less (0), 25,000 to 40,999 (1), 41,000 to 57,999 (2), 58,000 to 80,000 (3), and 80,000+ (4); **child functioning**, a continuous variable, where the variable is created by adding 1 to the score for each of the 19 problems that are suspected or confirmed so that the score on this variable ranges from 0 to 19; **alleged perpetrator**, a categorical variable, coded extrafamilial (0), unknown (1), intrafamilial (2); and **harm caused by maltreatment**, a categorical variable, coded as no harm (0), bruises/cuts/scrapes (1), burns/scalds (2), broken bones (3), head trauma (4), fatal (5).

Criterions. For each type of maltreatment, two different criterion variables will be used. They are unfounded coded 0 vs. suspected and substantiated coded 1 and unfounded and suspected coded 0 vs. substantiated coded 1. The use of multiple criterion variables follows the recommendations of Wells and Anderson (1992) as well as Zuravin and colleagues (1995).

Analyses

Simultaneous entry logistic regression will be used for all analyses. This procedure is appropriate when the criterion or dependent variable is dichotomous and the predictors are categorical or continuous. Two analyses will be performed on each sample. The criterion unfounded vs. suspected and substantiated will be regressed on the predictors and the criterion unfounded and suspected vs. substantiated will also be regressed on the predictors. In all cases of two-category as well as multi-categorical variables, each level will be compared to the first level, coded 0.

Topic 4: What factors predict that a child will be placed in substitute care?

Literature Review

The child protective services (CPS) decision-making process is driven by one objective: the protection of children from further maltreatment. Of the intervention options that can be directed

toward this goal, placement of a child in substitute care is the most radical because of the costs to society and the disruptive life effects for child and family. Given these costs, one might expect to find a well-honed empirical model to guide decision-making. Instead, caseworkers and juvenile court judges—the key decision-makers—work without guidelines (Lindsey, 1991; Pecora, Whittaker, & Maluccio, 1992). Consequently, decisions are unreliable (Lindsey) and are subject to individual biases and other idiosyncratic factors (Pecora, et al).

This absence of an empirical model is not due to a lack of concern. Attention has been called to this problem for years (Foy, 1967; Pecora, et al, 1992). The substitute care literature includes a large body of clinical and empirical work beginning in the late 1950's that focused on placement issues or empirical models. Clinical models have focused on identifying criteria that should be considered when making a placement decision (see Depanfilis & Scannapieco, 1994 for a literature review). Although not all models identify the same factors, criteria can be organized into six domains: child, parent, family, environment, maltreatment, and intervention predictors (Depanfilis & Scannapieco).

The empirical literature (Depanfilis & Scannapieco, 1994; Kadushin & Martin, 1988) has focused on identifying factors that are associated with the decision to place a child. However, and unfortunately, studies vary in objectives, design, data collection methodology, predictors, unit of analysis, and analytic strategy. Consequently, findings from separate studies are virtually impossible to integrate and do not as a group lead to a set of conclusions. Some have focused on identifying caseworker characteristics associated with placement, whereas others have concentrated on family, environmental, and maltreatment characteristics. Most common are descriptive studies. Data sources vary from case record narratives to items recorded in central registries to interviews with or questionnaires completed by caseworkers and supervisors. The

latter source is rare. Analytic strategies vary from sophisticated multivariate and multiple regression approaches to examination of bivariate correlations to frequency distributions. Few studies have used the former approaches.

The more recent multiple regression studies (ones that used logistic regression or discriminant analysis can be sorted into two categories: (1) those that examine a range of potential predictors (e.g., Hunter, Coulter, Runyan, & Everson, 1990; Leifer, Shapiro, & Kassem, 1993; Pellegrin & Wagner, 1990; Zuravin & Depanfilis, 1995) and (2) those that used rating scales as predictors (e.g., Feldman, 1991; Nelson, 1993). Like the descriptive and bivariate studies, multiple regression studies differ in predictors and other aspects of methodology. In addition, many studies are compromised by design problems that bar drawing conclusions. Because most studies use the child as the unit of analysis and multiple children from one family may be placed, coefficients for some predictors are likely to be overestimated. Using children from multiple jurisdictions is also likely to greatly influence findings because of differences across jurisdictions in decision-making factors. For example, both Jeter (1963) and Runyan et al (1981) found jurisdiction to be the strongest predictor of placement likelihood.

This proposed study has two goals: (1) to identify predictors of placement using family demographic characteristics, parent problems, and maltreatment features for agencies with more than 950 investigations per year and (2) to assess the predictive efficiency of the models.

Methodology

Sample

For each agency/office that investigated more than 950 cases per year create a sample that consists of all substantiated cases (CIS Maltreatment Assessment: Child item 14) for all types of

maltreatment—physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment—for children living with those other than foster or adoptive parents.

Variables

Predictors. Because there is no theory to guide the selection of predictors, they were selected on the basis of predictors used in prior studies, predominantly those from the Zuravin and Depanfilis study (1995). Eleven predictors will be selected from three domains—family/caregiver demographics and characteristics, parent functioning, and maltreatment characteristics. From the domain, family/caregiver demographics and characteristics the following four variables will be used: **family income estimate** coded less than $24,999 (0), 25,000 – 40,999(1), 41,000 – 57,999 (2), 58,000 to 80,000 (3), and 80,000+ (4); **race of caregiver A** coded other (0) and white (1); **unsafe housing** coded no (0) and yes (1); and **moves in last 6 months** coded 0 (0), 1 (1) and 2 or more (2). From the parent functioning domain two variables will be used **caregiver(s) involved in violent relationship** coded as neither involved in violent relationship (0) and one or both involved in violent relationship (1) and a continuous variable named **caregiving functioning** which will be coded from 0 to 8 with each confirmed or suspected type of problem given a score of 1 with all scores of 1 being added. From the maltreatment characteristics domain five variables will be used: **primary maltreatment type** coded emotional maltreatment (0), neglect (1), physical abuse (2), and sexual abuse (3); **number of types of maltreatment** coded 1 through 3; **duration of maltreatment** coded single incident (0), less than 6 months (1) and more than 6 months (2); **physical harm** coded no harm (0), bruises (1), burns/scalds (2), broken bones (3), and head trauma (4); and **previous reports to CPS on same child** coded no (0) and yes (1).

Criterion. The criterion or dependent variable for the analyses is substitute care, coded no placement (0) and informal placement, foster placement, group home placement coded (1).

<u>Analysis</u>. Simultaneous entry logistic regression analysis will be used to carry out the analysis. This technique is appropriate when the criterion or dependent variable is dichotomous and the predictors are nominal and continuous. In all cases of two-category as well as multi-categorical variables, each level will be compared to the first level, coded 0.

Conclusions and Discussion

The CIS has produced a rich database capable of addressing many topics relevant to the children, families, and situations that come to the attention of Child Protective Services. Those questions addressed by this paper are but a sample of the many that can be addressed by this database. For example, questions can be answered about an array of predictors and consequences of the four types of maltreatment—sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and emotional mistreatment as well as the predictors and consequences of situations involving multiple types of maltreatment. For each type of maltreatment as well as those situations involving multiple types, child, caretaker, and situational predictors can be identified and assessed relative to magnitude of predictive effect. By answering these questions, the database will contribute significantly to the empirical and theoretical literature on situations known to Child Protective Services.

The CIS database is rich not only in the variety of questions that it can address and the contributions it can make to the literature but also in terms of its structural features. To begin, it is a very large database consisting of thousands of case situations. Currently, it is the largest database on record that can address questions about child protection situations. This is a particular plus because in most instances it allows researchers to estimate the effects of various predictors on half of the case situations and test the identified model on the other half of the cases. This helps assure researchers that the original model is not capitalizing on a chance distribution of case situations. Additionally, it assures that power problems due to small sample size will not lead to false

negatives. Secondly, the database consists of a large array of different descriptive variables at the caretaker, child, and situational level as well as many variables expressive of the actions taken with regard to child protective situations. This is also a plus because it not only facilitates the replication of earlier studies but also allows researchers to go beyond prior efforts. Thirdly, because data was collected from a wide variety of different child protective jurisdictions, it is possible to determine whether models of various outcomes—e.g., substantiation, child placement, etc.—differ according to jurisdiction, a topic that has received little research attention. In conclusion, the CIS database is well worth mining for all the many questions that it is capable of answering about child protective situations.

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