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The Relationship Between Social Isolation and Child Abuse: A Critical Literature Review

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ISOLATION AND CHILD ABUSE:
A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

by

ANN A. PEDERSON

A practicum submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

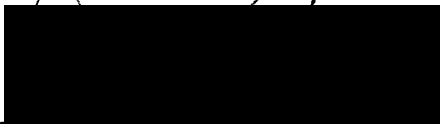
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Portland State University
1978

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

The practicum advisor approves the literature review,
The Relationship Between Social Isolation and Child Abuse:
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APPROVED:

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature of the practicum advisor.

Arthur Emlen, Practicum Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

This review began with an interest in treatment of child abuse and in how a study of social isolation might lend direction to treatment of abusing families. The literature leads one to believe that social isolation is somehow involved, but that the process is far from clear. The intent of this review is to synthesize the findings available on the relationship between social isolation and child abuse, to encourage further thought on how the concept of social isolation can be refined and operationalized, and to discuss the implications of that relationship for treatment and prevention of physical abuse. The information gained might assist those responsible for community programs to understand the role of social resources in the prevention of child abuse.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

For the purpose of this study, the scope of child abuse will be limited to physical abuse. Child welfare literature defines this type of abuse most clearly, and a great deal of research has been done pertaining to the identification and treatment of abusing parents. The term 'physical abuse' may be taken to mean the use of physical force by a parent-figure which results in injury or physical trauma to the child.

The concept 'social isolation' is much more difficult to define. Research done in experimental psychology refers frequently to the existence of such a phenomenon, but the data are based on research with laboratory animals, whose environments can be closely controlled. Child abuse literature refers frequently to the isolation of abusive families, but little data on the specific characteristics or numbers of families involved can be found. Social work has found no way to standardize a definition of the term, although many authors apparently believe in the existence of isolation or alienation of these families.

This review, then, sought evidence of abusive families' demographic status, social and work-related contacts, presence or absence of extended family relationships, poor community and social adjustments, and ties and relationships the family has or does not have among its own members, and between themselves and the larger community.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO CHILD ABUSE

Reviewing the evolution of treatment gives an idea about what have been considered important characteristics of the abuser and his family.

Until recently, treatment for child abuse followed a medical model. The abuser was diagnosed and treated as psychotic, pathological, or character disordered. Psychoanalytic theory was proposed to explain the deviant behavior. Wasserman (1967) focused on intra-psychic theory when he suggested that abuse was a result of a mother's depression over her abandonment by her own mother, her disappointment in not being loved by her infant in the way she had expected, or her unconscious transference of negative feelings about the infant's father, name sake, or person with whom mother identifies the child. Blumberg (1974) also describes this approach; ideally the parent would become involved in psychotherapy. However, even Blumberg, a physician, allowed that the cost of this is prohibitive, and that other approaches must be explored (Blumberg, 1974).

Since that time, a number of other authors have presented alternatives to a psychoanalytic approach. These alternative approaches have paid increasing attention to the environment of the parent and child, and less attention to the abuser's intra-psychic condition. Examples include

treatment of faulty parenting skills, attention to faulty parent-child relationships, "the different child" theory, and the "life crisis" mode of interpreting the difficulty.

As a facet of being directed more toward the environment, these approaches suggest the use of groups as a part of treatment. Group approaches include class-like parenting groups, Parents Anonymous using mutual support, and centers where various social services are offered to families as units.

Emphasis has shifted then from the individual as the unit of treatment, with no involvement of the family, to totally family-oriented programs.

Most communities set as their first line of defense against child abuse a publicly supported agency charged by law with the responsibility for identifying abuse, protecting the child, and treating the family, and since the service is mandated, these things must be done in the most cost effective manner.

The above, coupled with a growing commitment to keeping families intact, has led the social work profession to seek commonalities among families who abuse, and to look for ways of studying the commonalities and putting them to use in screening families who might benefit from intervention prior to a crisis.

Social isolation may be one of these commonalities, but data on it are difficult to obtain. First, the term--although it is often referred to in social work literature on abuse--has

not been operationally defined in a consistent way. These authors note that the entire family is somehow set apart (or sets itself apart) from its community, but indicators are difficult to identify. Secondly, even if case files were examined, the information in them would be subjective and would vary from worker to worker and from case to case.

Subsequent sections of this review show that as the emphasis on treatment of families grew, so did efforts to obtain information.

EARLY USE OF THE TERM "SOCIAL ISOLATION"

In her analysis of social isolation, Marjorie Young presents it as part of a broader alienation:

Social isolation manifests itself in the family's reduced social relationships outside the family, and in reduced support systems when they need someone to turn to in times of stress. Isolated parents share less of themselves in communication with their spouses, and show a low degree of integration into their community through participation in organizations and associations.

Specifically, then, what does the literature offer in quantification and qualification? A number of indicators of social isolation have been suggested. The literature initially relied heavily on a clinical model, and when the topic of child abuse began to receive more attention, the social factors involved in abuse began to assume more importance. As one of these factors, social isolation began to appear in the literature as early as 1964 (Leontyne Young, Wednesday's Children). Young's study laid a research-oriented groundwork, and subsequent literature mentions Young's social isolation without supporting evidence.

Zalba (1967), in classifying abusers, noted that such families, in addition to being plagued with marital discord (not in itself social isolation), had poor communication with relatives also. Spinetta (1972) describes another facet of isolation when he notes in a psychological profile of abusing parents that they lack relationship-building skills due to

faulty learning from their own families.

Mobility is another factor hypothesized in child abuse theory as contributing in some manner. Mobility and isolation are linked in a study by Weiss (1973). In a case history format he notes the effect of frequent moves on his subject, who was thereby separated from familiar networks, and who became increasingly isolated in each new setting.

Blumberg (1973), even while using a psychoanalytic approach, agreed that abusing parents, as a result of their disturbed personalities might possess characteristics which would alienate them from potential sources of support.

A series of federal publications on child abuse and neglect and its treatment came out in 1975 (U.S. Department of HEW, Working with Abusive Parents). Apparently the federal government was convinced that social isolation was indeed a factor. These pamphlets were not intended to be scholarly works but were designed to provide an overview of the problem and the most up-to-date approaches. One module (U.S. Department of HEW, The Diagnostic Process and Treatment Programs) includes a discussion of ways to treat the "Lack of Trust, Isolation, and I'm no Damn Good" cycle, while another psychiatrically oriented article summarizes a description of the abusing parents' negative responses to offers of help by noting that angry, resistant parents "suffer from the same problem of social isolation as do passive, superficially cooperative families." While neither of these pamphlets goes into detail, nor even offers a bibliography, the

acceptance of social isolation as a variable somehow connected with child abuse is apparent. These articles left much to be desired in terms of research, but contributed a great deal by exposing professionals to the concepts associated with a socio-cultural view of child abuse. This becomes apparent when the Federal publications present the concept of social isolation as an integral part of their diagnosis and treatment module, and delineated this aspect of child abuse for further inquiry.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND RELATED CONCEPTS

A growing interest in research has been provoked, perhaps first by the concern of those attempting to treat abusers, and secondly by the continuing flow of general information about isolation and alienation in society.

Marjorie Young describes these two concepts in her chapter on alienation theories (1976). Laying the groundwork, she offers Marxian thought as a basis; progress toward a technological society has aroused increased feelings of alienation among all classes of persons. Division of labor and life have changed the complexion of man's existence. The outcome, then, is fragmentation and isolation.

To go a step further, Madeline Engel (in Young, 1976) relates alienation to more specific sources in society:

". . . Modern man not only feels isolated but is isolated." Fewer and fewer attend church, communal ties are destroyed by high-rise apartments where small homogenous neighborhoods used to be. The once significant extended family is gone--replaced by shaky conjugal relationships highly susceptible to divorce. Many aged, no longer respected, live away by themselves, the ties to past and future broken. The end result is a society of persons left with little power over vast areas of their lives, persons feeling alone, fragmented, and isolated.

Seeman (in Young, 1976) gives a social psychological definition in his most recent work on the facets of alienation. To paraphrase, social isolation or social estrangement refers to one's low expectancy for inclusion and social acceptance, which presents itself typically in feelings of loneliness or feelings of rejection or repudiation.

Social isolation as a variable had thus begun to be defined, at least in relation to society at large. Social theorists had contributed by providing a schema into which social isolation might fit. Social isolation could now be seen as a part of alienation related to economic and social structure. Seeman added another piece to the puzzle when he defined social isolation, as a facet of alienation, to include low expectations for inclusion and social acceptance. How then can this view of man in society be related to that of the abusing parent's role in society?

Young (1976) speaks to that question in a chapter on alienation and child abuse. Accepting the identification of social isolation as a variable related to the occurrence of child abuse, she divides the concept of alienation further into 1) loneliness and 2) powerlessness.

Loneliness is of course connected to the social situation of many abusing parents. They have few friends, relatives or neighbors upon whom they can call in times of need. In addition, they may also be shut off from their mates leaving them virtually totally alone.

The second component considered is that of powerlessness.

Polansky, who has written several articles on child abuse, states that powerlessness will manifest itself as the emotion of helplessness (Polansky, 1972). This helplessness would be characterized in abusive parents by their inability to deal with crying, misbehavior and disobedience of their children. Powerless parents may be hypothesized to have greater difficulty learning their parental role, in light of Seeman's research which indicates that those who feel powerless, i.e. those whose behavior has no bearing upon their desired goals, do not have internal inducement to learn.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RELATING CHILD ABUSE TO SOCIAL ISOLATION

Gelles' article (14B) on a multidimensional approach to abuse highlights the concept of stress: situational stress, stresses on the parent-parent relationship, and child-produced stress. Research touches on all three areas, but situational stress is the most-often studied. Data seem to be lacking in the areas of faulty relationships between parent and parent, and between parent and child, as suggested by the 'difficult child' theory. One might guess that parents are more willing to answer questions that might place the blame outside the home (situational stress) than within the home (relationship difficulty).

Leontyne Young's Wednesday's Children (1964) marked the beginning of a more research-oriented period for variables related to child abuse. Young's study might be considered one of the first efforts to link the broad concept of social isolation to child abuse. Wednesday's Children studied 120 abuse and neglect records from three agencies, two public suburban, one public urban protective. Young describes crumbling family structure in terms of degree of marital and economic stability, choosing as indicators families' social relations. She saw these families as distrustful and uninvolved in groups, organizations, or churches. The families "saw other people as victims, resources, or enemies." They

had "contacts," not friends. They didn't visit, and seldom invited others to their homes. This study laid the groundwork for future exploration of the social behavior of known abusive and neglectful families.

Several other studies during this period point to the negative effect of social disruption on family life, and how that disruption might contribute to social isolation.

Wilenski (1961) found that participation in the labor market meant participation in the social structure. Using objective measures of social participation such as number of social roles played, frequency of contact, amount of time in each role, range of participation, role integration and coherence of the pattern, and stability or duration of relationships, he found that the majority of his hypotheses relating job or career and social participation were proven. Judging from his results, employment, often deemed to be a factor in the occurrence of child abuse, also implies participation in some type of social structure. Although this does not necessarily mean that unemployment can be equated with social isolation, it does suggest the need for further exploration of this aspect.

A second study speaks to the effect of mobility on family life. Chaskel (1964) concluded that mobility can provoke internal family disorder. This may be mitigated by the job-related support provided to military and organizational families, but families without these supports, who may be predisposed to isolation, and who move a great deal, would be

prime candidates for isolation. . Certainly many would be without the support network mentioned frequently in the literature. This author did no direct research, drawing her conclusions from others. She too, however, provided information on a specific aspect of social isolation's relationship to child abuse.

Elizabeth Elmer contributed another important study in 1967. Using the "Parental Attitude Research Instrument," she measured, among other things: 1) marital difficulty, 2) anomie, 3) mother lacking associations outside the home. Her sample included eleven abusers and twelve non-abusers with the following results: ninety per cent of the abusers reported marital difficulty while only nine per cent of the non-abusive families felt their marriage was a problem; forty-six per cent of the abusive families felt themselves alone and lacking support while only eight per cent of the non-abusers felt this way; forty-two per cent of the abusing mothers reported lacking associations outside the home, while none of the non-abusers reported this.

Generally speaking, Elmer concluded that the abusive mothers did not belong to organizations or churches, that they lacked close friends and were uneasy with what friends they did have. Another significant factor was that a majority of the abusive mothers reported no relative on whom they could depend, while all twelve non-abusers reported the existence of such relatives.

In Elmer's study it becomes difficult at times to

separate factual data from general conclusions. This is a problem especially when terms such as 'marital difficulty' and 'anomie' are not operationally defined. This, coupled with her small sample size, clouds her research. What must be considered, however, is that the non-objective data are perhaps not the author's conclusions but also the perceptions of the parents themselves. Certainly these perceptions are valuable in guiding further research.

The results of this study present another dilemma. One is unable to tell whether the abusive parents questioned felt the same prior to the abuse, and whether their identification by themselves and the community as abusers has colored their responses to these subjective questions.

Because of the nature of the problem, child abuse researchers find it less difficult to obtain information about families who are 1) reported to some agency as having an abuse problem, and 2) unable to afford private help. There is some evidence to suggest that poorer families are reported more frequently because of crowded housing conditions, lack of privacy, and dependence on some type of agency. All this is likely to bias any research undertaken and must be controlled as much as possible.

Addressing this question is a study by Kent (1975). Using groups matched for low income, he compared five hundred children and families referred for abuse to one hundred eighty-five families referred for other reasons (alcohol or drug abuse, mental illness, inadequate parenting). His

findings showed that abusive parents were younger, relatively new to the neighborhood, often without telephone or transportation, had few friends, reported a history of abuse by their own parents. More complications during pregnancy or birth and a greater incidence of children with either feeding or developmental problems were also reported, adding weight to the 'difficult child' theory.

Much research has been focused on the impact of socioeconomic stress on a family. A more sophisticated approach has been used in research on stress on mothers by James Garbarino (1976). Matching for the counties' transience, economic development, utilization of educational resources, rural or urban character and the socioeconomic situation of mothers, he found that availability of economic and educational resources and the access to and use of the resources correlated statistically with the incidence of abuse. In other words, those women who had less access to resources were more likely to abuse.

Situational stress, then, in all probability does play a part in the occurrence of abuse. Most of the stresses described thus far are both external and concrete: job, income, mobility. Justice and Duncan (1976) present another facet of situational stress. These researchers matched two groups of thirty-five parents each on age, education, economic status. The groups were weighted toward lower-middle and working class families. Justice and Duncan chose as a measure the Social Readjustment Scale. (A copy of this

instrument is located in the appendix.) This scale was intended to discriminate between abusers and non-abusers in terms of stress factors at play in their lives. The instrument was administered and rated. Non-abusers were found to have a mean score of one hundred twenty-four, while abuser's mean was two hundred thirty-four. The means differed significantly at the .001 level of confidence using a one-tail T test. These results indicated that a significantly greater number of stresses were occurring in the abuser's life. Greatest variance was seen in difficulties regarding sex, finances, living conditions, and in-laws. The authors also noted that they had seen abusers to be isolated, distrusting, impatient, in spousal conflict, and troubled by a low self-image. This test data supports the social isolation theory in a rather vague way; stresses can be partially a result of poor communication patterns. More directly applicable is their subjective observations of the abusers as isolated and poorly adjusted.

Melnick and Hurley (1969) reported on field research involving ten abusive and ten control mothers, matched for age, social class, and education. The mothers were tested on eighteen personality variables with several testing instruments. Although significant differences were found on several important characteristics, the results were hampered by a lack of control for the degree of disturbance of the child. Most of the mothers were black. The abusing mothers were found to be higher on pathogenicity and dependency,

frustration, and on manifest rejection of family satisfaction (TAT and Family Concept Inventory), lower on need to give nurturance (TAT), self-esteem (California Test of Personality). The article concluded with the interpretation that inability to cope and lack of supports play a part in distinguishing abusing from non-abusing families.

Only during the last few years has field research been able to provide much specific information on those variables previously associated with child abuse in the literature. Helfer and Kempe speak to the effects of social isolation in their much-referred to Helping the Battered Child and His Family (1972). Parke and Collmer present an exhaustive compilation of information on abuse, and on social isolation and abuse in particular. The topic is further researched by Marjorie Young who studied and reported on the existence of social isolation in data gathered in the field. All of these studies begin to delineate discernable variables and probably deserve wide exposure in order to increase further specification of the keys to identifying those with potential to abuse.

Parke and Collmer (1975) summarize much of the current research on social isolation as a factor in child abuse, describing the unavailability of supportive structural arrangements for stressful times as a potential "important determinant." In addition to data from Young and Elmer mentioned previously, they refer to an extensive but unpublished by Lenoski (1974). His research yielded the following data: eighty-nine per cent of the abusive parents had unlisted

telephone numbers, while only twelve per cent of the non-abusive parents' numbers were unlisted. Eighty-one per cent of the abusive families indicated that they preferred to solve crises alone as opposed to forty-three per cent of the non-abusive families.

The question of whether this isolation is voluntary is approached by Merrill whose 1962 work reported that abusive families are not well-accepted by their communities; thirty-six per cent were accepted only moderately well, and forty-seven per cent minimally well. This again raises the question of whether families were somehow rejected, i.e. isolated by the community prior to the abuse, or as a result of the abuse.

This study also examines the possible effects of mobility especially in terms of the lack of built-in social control and support by the extended family. This is a factor which has appeared over and over. Much of the social isolation theory rests on the conviction that as life-styles move away from extended family ties and residence in one community, isolation will naturally occur. Parke and Collmer reinforce this by supplying data linking lack of involvement with the community and poor familial relationships with the tendency to abuse.

Parke and Collmer illustrate a developmental perspective on the way in which social isolation perpetuates itself. Aside from considerations of an abuse family history, there is the isolation which abuse families seem to impose on their

children. Children are denied the opportunity to socialize normally, and carry on a tradition of isolation.

Parke and Collmer identify social isolation of both parent and child as characteristic of abusive families. They concluded their analysis of social isolation as a factor by raising a question, that of directional causality. Do abusive parents isolate themselves to avoid detection? Are abusive parents isolated because they lack social skill, or do others avoid and thereby isolate them because they disapprove of their way of dealing with children?

These questions, of course, have not yet been answered, but lend direction to research efforts on the phenomenon of social isolation. Answers to them may provide a framework for intervention on a network basis with an eye to prevention.

Summarizing then, the Parke and Collmer article confirms the existence of social isolation as a factor in child abuse, and goes a step further in proposing research based on this supposition. Because this article is apparently well-researched, credence may be given to its line of thinking.

Perhaps one of the most interesting studies in the field of child abuse was begun several years ago by Carol Schneider, Ray Helfer, M.D., and Carl Pollock, M.D. Begun in the early 1970's, this study represents an initial effort to identify potentially abusive families by their responses to a pencil and paper questionnaire.

The test design, described briefly in Helping the Battered Child and His Family, included not simply a battery of

objective questions with scoring above a certain point indicating potential to abuse, but rather clusters of questions designed to bring out patterns of responses. Therefore, a normal person might answer several questions as would an abuser, but it would be unlikely for him to show an abusive pattern on the clusters of questions.

Scoring would be based on calculation of normal ranges for each cluster, plotting this, and then comparing test cluster scores to them. Those with scores perhaps more than two standard deviations from the mean would be seen for an interview. One research goal was to design an instrument which would identify no more than four per cent (or two standard deviations from the mean) of so-called normals as potential abusers.

Several versions of this questionnaire have been designed, each including a cluster designed to identify those persons who feel somehow alienated or isolated. After several trials, it is their expectation that both typical pure abusers and typical denying abusers would score outside the defined normal limits. (A denying abuser would be one who denies any difficulty with self-control or anger at children.)

Although no final instrument is available, it is these researchers' intention to develop such an instrument which can be used as a screening device.

Another interesting piece of research, unpublished as yet, is that of Marjorie Young, ACSW, on the alienation of abusive parents. Using as the basis for her hypotheses the

references to isolation in L. Young, Elmer, and others, she researched two aspects of alienation: 1) social isolation, and 2) powerlessness. Hypotheses relating to social isolation included: Social isolation is expressed in a) reduced social relationships outside the family and in reduced support systems available in times of stress; b) less sharing of selves in communication with spouses; c) less integration into the community through participation in organizations and associations.

The sample was obtained through Oklahoma Public Health nurses. Divided by county and numbered, even-numbered nurses gave names of families who had been abusive, and odd-numbered gave families who were not known abusers, as controls.

One hundred ninety-one health nurses were then mailed a questionnaire and asked to fill it out basing it on families seen during the last six months. (An eighty per cent return was achieved. In addition, some responses were not used as the nurse involved had seen no abusive families in the preceding six months.)

Two instruments were used to measure social isolation: the FIRO-BC and sub scale (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Scale), measuring how an individual characteristically behaves as he relates to others in areas of affection, control, and inclusion, and to measure the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relationship with people, and analysis by the Likert Scale, analyzing responses to nine statements describing families' social relationships, support systems, communication

with their spouses, ability to deal with child's behavior, and unrealistic expectations of the child by the parent.

In comparing the groups, Young found that there were significant differences between the abusers and the non-abusers. Generally the information discriminated at a high level, .84, using Cramer's V. ($x^2=40.28$, 27 df, $P=.05$, Cramer's $V=.84$). The additional information provided by analysis by the Likert Scales further supported the confirmation of the hypotheses. Breaking the information down by analysis, abusive families were perceived by the nurses as having fewer friends outside the immediate family ($x^2=6.22$, 2 df, $P=.05$). Also significantly different were the amounts of sharing between spouses ($x^2=14.21$, 3df, $P=.0026$, Cramer's $V=.56$), with less sharing between the abusers. Other variables (availability of books, magazines, transportation and telephones) measured the integration of the family into the community. Only church membership and unlisted phones failed to discriminate between groups at extremely low levels of confidence.

The author concluded from the data that all hypotheses regarding social isolation had been confirmed. Summarizing, Ms. Young's data indicates that when abusers and non-abusers are questioned about various aspects of what could be considered social adjustment, the answers discriminated between abusers and non-abusers. Especially significant were data pertaining to nurses' perceptions of lack of friends outside the home, persons to turn to during an emergency, and sharing

between spouses.

Ms. Young also describes limitations to be kept in mind when interpreting her data. One question pertains to the reliability of nurses' responses to the subjective questions. Young indicates that although responses were subjective, objective data from case records also differentiated between control and abusive families. Also, the nurses were not aware of the variables being measured and therefore perception would have been colored by that knowledge.

Another weak point about which nothing could be done was the lack of recorded information which would denote social class other than occupation; this prevented more stringent control for socio-economic status.

This study used an adequate sample, and attempted to gather information directly in support of social isolation as a factor in child abuse. In fact, it provides information which has not previously been available. Admittedly controls for socio-economic status, number of children in the family, characteristics of the abused child, and others which might interact as isolation-related variables were not available. However, as one of the few studies which has provided hard data, it is certainly a contribution to further research efforts.

TREATMENT APPROACHES BASED ON RESEARCH
RELATING CHILD ABUSE TO SOCIAL ISOLATION

With the evolution of child abuse treatment from medical model to a more flexible family-based treatment schema, came a growing awareness of the families' places in the communities, how they might be strengthened, and how the community might become involved in treatment and prevention. The following literature descriptions reflect that trend.

Gil (1971) perhaps was one of the first researchers to suggest strongly that long range planning for treatment of the abuse ought to include 1) neighborhood based social services: home makers, mother's helpers, baby-sitters, and day care, and 2) intensive support services to those families who do develop problems. The services would certainly meet needs involving isolation from friends, relatives and community.

Elsa Ten Broeck, director of the Extended Family Center in San Francisco, began in 1973 treating child abuse at a center designed to involve the entire family. The program was structured so as to allow the isolated families to develop a network of staff and other families to provide the supports they were lacking. In addition to providing therapy for the victim-youngsters, the centers used the talents of the parents in building repairs, decorating and providing mutual support--the kind of activities an extended family might very well be

involved in.

Another popular group approach is that of Parents Anonymous. Through group support members endeavor to conquer their problem with abuse. This group is managed by members, with professional sponsors becoming involved only when asked. These groups too may also act as an extended family--a family which many abusing parents have never had.

More recently, the literature has broadened its approach. Instead of individual or 'family' group treatment, the community at large is asked to take a look at what it can offer to abusers.

One prime proponent of this approach is James Garbarino. Laying the foundation for research and practical application, Garbarino addresses this society's desire for privacy, and the part this desire plays in child abuse: "We allow child abuse by permitting value placed on privacy to be misused as a justification for social isolation" (Garbarino, 1977).

He notes that our culture has increasingly often broken the bonds of kinship and neighborhood by mobility and preference for privacy. This has eliminated the intrusive concern shown by family groups.

It is his contention that our society must again learn to value this intrusion as support from relatives and others concerned about a family's welfare.

Garbarino follows this idea through in much of his research. He sees abuse happening as a result of a mismatch between child and parent, and family and neighborhood.

Caregiver relationships are disturbed, a number of factors unite to stress a family, and finally, two necessary conditions provide the setting. Garbarino describes cultural acceptance of force against children and isolation from potent support systems as the factors which allow abuse to happen, much like an extreme point on a continuum rather than an isolated breaking away from society's patterns.

His preliminary work (1978) on neighborhood ecology and child abuse indicates strong connections between mobility, lack of involvement in a neighborhood, and isolation, each adding likelihood to the prospect of abuse. He mentions this multivariate approach in his suggestions for screening neighborhoods to serve them most appropriately.

Garbarino has begun field research using his theories. He emphasizes that he is committed to an ongoing effort to use the concepts of human ecology and renewed human helping systems to guard against social isolation and therefore aid in the prevention of child abuse. He intends to promote this through further research and implementation of programs on an experimental basis.

His approach rests on the theory that no single variable can discriminate between abusers and non-abusers, and that multivariate techniques can provide usable information to child protection agencies. Part of this information would be an analysis of the factors surrounding social isolation. It is his hope that this information will be used to create innovative programs within communities to treat and prevent child abuse.

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature reviewed supports the hypothesis that social isolation defined as a lack of significant supportive contacts does in fact relate to the incidence of child abuse. Early publications mention isolation subjectively in their assessments of families, and more recent research begins to quantify isolation in abusive families by means of mobility, number of listed versus unlisted telephone numbers, and participation in family and community systems. The relationship is also intimated by the increasing focus on certain treatment for abusers; support groups and family involvement are advocated.

As the table of social isolation variables associated with child abuse shows, statistical evidence can be offered showing a connection between such things as lack of friends outside the immediate family, marital difficulty and lack of communication between spouses, and general anomie. Lenoski's study in Los Angeles found a high correlation between unlisted family telephone numbers and child abusers; however, Young's work in Oklahoma indicated that this variable did not discriminate effectively at a low level of confidence.

The causal link, however, is not made clear. Certainly not all parents who have no friends, or an unlisted telephone number, abuse their children. So the connection is not a

direct one--that is, a part of the puzzle is missing. It cannot be assumed that isolation leads to abuse. Rather, isolation seems somehow to interact in such a way as to weaken the protective bond and allow an abuse situation to occur.

Not until isolation can be defined more clearly will research be able to provide the missing connection. But perhaps that goal can be reached through further refinement of the current body of knowledge.

Thus far, the literature refers to several environmental variables in its research. These are lessened supportive and social relationships, poor community participation, isolation as a family pattern, poor spousal communication, mobility, type of employment, lack of transportation and unlisted telephone numbers. Needless to say, some of these can be quantified easily, some cannot. None are the cause of child abuse, but combinations seem to allow an abuse situation to develop. As has been shown, research information is sketchy especially regarding variables such as family isolation as a pattern.

It appears safe to conclude that the concept of social isolation is worth researching. Perhaps such research should be concentrated in the direction of specificity, that is, narrowing the previous group of variables to more specific quantifiable factors whose correlative relationship to abuse can be found. Such research would also be of benefit in the prediction of susceptible families.

The idea of a missing link was referred to previously.

Since all of the above factors exist without abuse also, another factor must exist. A look at the culture might suggest direction. This society has phased out mechanisms whereby families would automatically receive support. Garbarino's article on privacy points this up. Perhaps then special attention ought to be given to family and spousal relationships and how to strengthen them.

Network theory may also become important in the field of child abuse. Communities may be called upon to provide some of what the extended family used to give. Assessing family isolation in the context of network theory could provide significant information for treatment and prevention of abuse.

An apparent lack in the research is that in the area of subcultural value assessment. Definitions of abuse vary from subculture to subculture, and certainly the impact of that on any definition of social isolation would need to be taken into consideration. Another facet is that of isolation and its meaning in an urban versus a rural setting. For instance, telephones and transportation in a rural setting might take on greater importance.

Much of the literature seems to assume that isolation precedes abuse. A question to be considered is whether an abuse situation, detected or not, could cause a family to isolate itself. From the evidence, it might be supposed that isolation does in fact occur prior to abuse, but it may also occur as a result of the family's inability to face others

after an abuse, or because of fear of detection.

Also to be considered is the possibility that some personality types become isolated more easily than others. Determining this might answer some of the questions surrounding the question of prediction of child abuse by defining more closely a connection between personality type and propensity to isolation. This information might also have implications for other aspects of child abuse, especially in determining the type of person prone to react to other necessary factors surrounding abuse.

The most obvious need is improved definition and quantification of social isolation. A logical progression would include expansion of research on the variables associated with social isolation, moving from exploration of the personality variables associated with social isolation to family patterns, and then on to preventive and treatment oriented work based on development of social resources that may reinforce protective parental behaviors.

Issues for research may include those pertaining especially to patterns evident in the development and continuation of social isolation in families, stress, and its relationship to social isolation, and mobility and its interplay with social isolation.

The missing link might be eliminated through investigations of the patterns of social isolation. Certainly patterns exist. This might be researched in terms of both the family and the neighborhood. Garbarino's current efforts

indicate that some link may exist: Does the individual become isolated as a result of his own developmental experience? Is isolation the result of some combination of individuals who marry?

Mobility is a related concern. It would seem logical that if a family moved a number of times, that they would lose the links Garbarino (1977) and others describe within family and community.

Garbarino (1978) suggests that neighborhood may exert some influence on the reception a family receives. Research might well disclose avenues for assisting neighborhoods with a high mobility and other demographical correlates of child abuse such as lack of social resources and socio-economic status of residents (Garbarino, 1976) in offering support to those who arrive.

A second broad area in need of research is that of stress' interaction with social isolation. Stress has long been noted as a factor in child abuse. The documentation of a link between social isolation and child abuse might make worthwhile research into how stress and social isolation interact. Garbarino's approach hypothesizes that how stress is dealt with is influenced by the degree of social isolation suffered by the family.

Perhaps most interesting is the idea of using the information from this research to work more effectively with a larger segment of the population than that reached now through agencies. The effect would be felt not only in terms

of better service, but through a more cost-effective program for the community.

CONCLUSIONS

This review documents the existence of a correlation between child abuse and social isolation, defined as lack of community and spousal contact and communication, by both the abusing family's and others' perceptions of the family as not fitting into the neighborhood, and by a tendency of the family to impose its isolation onto its children.

With the knowledge of the existence of the relationship, recommendations have been made regarding further research, especially into the relationships between social isolation, stress, and the neighborhood ecology of abuse.

Though the state of information is limited at this time, varied efforts are being made to offer more usable and specific information. This information will be welcomed as a tool in the effort to specify the factors involved in child abuse, and to offer to professionals additional means of evaluating families and neighborhoods in order to offer more effective services.

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APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RELATING CHILD ABUSE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION
(Arranged Chronologically by Publication Date)

VARIABLE	SAMPLE	FINDINGS	REFERENCE
Family structure (how parents inter-acted with each other and the community)	120 abuse and neglect records	Families distrustful and unin- volved in groups, organizations or churches. Did not visit, did not invite others to their homes.	L. Young, 1964.
Mothers' contacts outside the home	11 abusing mothers, 12 non-abusing	46% of the abusive mothers felt they were lacking support; 8% of the non-abusers felt they were lacking support.	Elmer, 1967.
Marital diffi- culty	11 abusers, 12 non-abusers	90% of the abusers perceived themselves as having marital difficulty, while only 9% of the non-abusers saw themselves as having this difficulty.	Elmer, 1967.
Unlisted telephone	Abusive fami- lies referred from health care facility.	89% of the abusers had unlisted phones, while only 12% of the non-abusers had such phones.	Lenoski, 1974.
Stress coping	Abusive fami- lies referred from health care facility.	81% of the abusers preferred to deal with crises alone, while only 43% of the non- abusers preferred to.	Lenoski, 1974.

APPENDIX I--Continued

VARIABLE	SAMPLE	FINDINGS	REFERENCE
Family associations outside the home	500 abusing families, 185 other families.	Abusing families were relatively new to the neighborhood; families were often without telephone or transportation, and had few friends.	Kent, 1975.
Life stress as predicted by the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Appendix II)	35 abusive parents, 35 controls.	Non-abusers mean score=124; abusers mean score=234, therefore greater stress exists in the abuser's life.	Young, 1976
FIRO-B, a self report questionnaire, designed to assess a person's needs for inclusion, control, and affection as exhibited by behavior one directs toward others, and behavior he desires to direct toward him.	153 nurses reporting on their cases.	Parents who abuse their children, when compared to controls, manifest greater social isolation as expressed in 1) reduced support systems, 2) reduced spousal sharing, and 3) less community participation in organizations and associations.	Young, 1976.
Neighborhood social resources.	Neighborhood with high and low abuse rates, Douglas County, Nebraska	34% of variance in abuse rates was associated with neighborhoods having fewer social resources.	Garbarino, 1978.

APPENDIX II

SOCIAL READJUSTMENT RATING SCALE
(Source: Justice & Duncan, 1976.)

Item No.	Life event	Life change unit value
1 . . .	Death of spouse	100
2 . . .	Divorce	73
3 . . .	Marital separation.	65
4 . . .	Jail term	63
5 . . .	Death of close family member.	63
6 . . .	Personal injury or illness.	53
7 . . .	Marriage.	50
8 . . .	Fired at work	47
9 . . .	Marital reconciliation.	45
10 . . .	Retirement.	45
11 . . .	Change in health of family member	44
12 . . .	Pregnancy	40
13 . . .	Sex difficulties.	39
14 . . .	Gain of new family member	39
15 . . .	Business readjustment	39
16 . . .	Change in financial state	38
17 . . .	Death of close friend	37
18 . . .	Change to different line of work.	36
19 . . .	Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
20 . . .	Mortgage over \$10,000	31
21 . . .	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
22 . . .	Change in responsibilities at work.	29
23 . . .	Son or daughter leaving home.	29
24 . . .	Trouble with in-laws.	29
25 . . .	Outstanding personal achievement.	28
26 . . .	Wife begin or stop work	26
27 . . .	Begin or end school	26
28 . . .	Change in living conditions	25
29 . . .	Revision of personal habits	24
30 . . .	Trouble with boss	23
31 . . .	Change in work hours or conditions.	20
32 . . .	Change in residence	20
33 . . .	Change in schools	20
34 . . .	Change in recreation.	19
35 . . .	Change in church activities	19
36 . . .	Change in social activities	18
37 . . .	Mortgage or loan less than \$10,000.	17
38 . . .	Change in sleeping habits	16
39 . . .	Change in number of family get-togethers.	15
40 . . .	Change in eating habits	15
41 . . .	Vacation.	13
42 . . .	Christmas	12
43 . . .	Minor violations of the law	11