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Does employment status, mental health diagnosis, or SUDs lead to neglect of a child?

Background: Child neglect, one of the most prevalent forms of child maltreatment can lead to long-lasting physical, psychological, and developmental consequences for a growing child (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2007). The causes of neglect are multifaceted but involve the failure of a caregiver to provide for the child’s basic physical, emotional, and educational needs (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention). Families who face unemployment and economic instability may be the most at risk (Wikipedia 2025), as their under-resourced status may lead to their struggle to meet the children’s basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, healthcare, and supervision. Parental mental health disorders, such as those connected to a history of trauma from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2016) or those struggling with substance use disorders may lead to a disruption in a caregiver’s ability to safely and effectively parent their child. The purpose of this study is to determine if...

- **Hypothesis 1:** Maternal employment status, having a diagnosed mental health disorder, maternal substance uses problem, and maternal adverse childhood experiences are collectively significant predictors of child neglect.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Parental unemployment is strongly associated with a higher risk of child neglect.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Mental health issues, particularly trauma-related disorders (e.g., depression, PTSD), are significant predictors of neglect in children.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Substance use disorders (SUDs) are associated with child neglect, and the presence of SUDs may increase the likelihood of neglect when combined with other factors like unemployment and mental health issues.

Methods: This study utilized a cross-sectional, observational design with existing data from child welfare reports that focused on families in which neglect was substantiated versus other forms of maltreatment. Association between neglect and parental employment status, mental health diagnoses, ACES, and substance use disorders was explored through descriptive statistics.

Results:

Using a binomial logistic regression, the overall model for child neglect using X, Y, and Z as predictors was not significant. When examining individual predictors, maternal mental health diagnosis was marginally significant ($Z=-1.95$, $p=0.051$)

Discussion:

This study aimed to explore the contributing factors to child neglect in young children, focusing on parental unemployment, mental health diagnoses, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and substance use disorders (SUDs).

References:

(Berger, L. M., & Font, S. A. (2015). *The role of income and income instability in child maltreatment*. Social Service Review, 89(3), 409–445.)