Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology

Psychology, Department of

2000

Understanding the Dynamics of Child Maltreatment: Child Harm, Family Healing, and Public Policy (Discussant's Commentary)

Ross A. Thompson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rthompson1@unl.edu

Understanding the Dynamics of Child Maltreatment: Child Harm, Family Healing, and Public Policy (Discussant's Commentary)

Ross A. Thompson

University of Nebraska

For almost a half-century, the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation has profiled many of the evolving themes and issues at the heart of psychology. It has also documented, less directly, changes in society. When the symposium was inaugurated in 1951, child maltreatment was a sad reality of life for many children, but it was not a topic of considerable professional attention. With the identification of the "battered child syndrome" (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962) in the early 1960s, however, professional concern with the plight of abused and neglected children quickly grew. National attention to child maltreatment also increased as public concern about family poverty escalated in the late 1960s, the incidence of reported sexual abuse grew in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and anguish over drug-exposed babies and the effects of homelessness on children emerged during the past decade. During the same period, media reports of abuse-related fatalities in families who were well-known to social service personnel and of children who became "lost" in the foster care system focused critical scrutiny on the inadequacies of the child protection system. These reports also revealed how the growing national problem of child maltreatment had become linked to other social ills, such as urban and rural poverty, the drug culture, neighborhood dysfunction, and the changing patterns of family life

and child care (Thompson & Wyatt, 1999). A symposium devoted to child maltreatment would have been almost unimaginable when the symposium began in 1951, but the chapters of this 46th Annual Nebraska Symposium on Motivation reveal how much we have learned about this extraordinarily complex and challenging problem of human motivation.

As psychologists have studied child maltreatment, three questions have been at the heart of their inquiry. First, *what are the effects of abuse or neglect on its child victims?* Psychological research has revealed that the sequelae of maltreatment extend significantly beyond bruises and broken bones to include damaged self-esteem, distrust in close relationships, conduct problems, and other harms. Often the psychological effects of maltreatment are the most significant sequelae, but understanding why abuse leaves enduring scars for some children but has transient consequences for others is a significant research challenge. Second, *how can families be healed?* Psychological research has highlighted the multifaceted contributors to family risk for child maltreatment, such as adult psychopathology, the child-related belief systems of parents, economic stress, family disorganization, domestic violence, and deteriorating neighborhoods. These and other etiological considerations are profound, and their diversity and complexity make it uncertain how often—and how—abusive families can be psychologically reconstituted to become healthy environments of child nurturance. Third, *how can public policy reduce child maltreatment?* Psychological research has shown that abuse and neglect occurs within family, neighborhood, community, and broader social ecologies that must each be included in intervention, but how to accomplish this with limited public resources remains a formidable challenge. This is especially so if the goal is not merely to intervene to stop abuse that has occurred, but to prevent child maltreatment in families at risk.

These three questions—concerning child harm, family healing, and public policy—underlie contemporary research in child maltreatment. Although each question contributes crucially to our understanding, researchers have not always studied these questions in complementary ways. The breadth of definitions of child maltreatment varies significantly, for instance, depending on whether the focus is on child victimization, family healing, or public policies (English, 1998; Thompson & Jacobs, 1991). Likewise, the essential

elements of effective intervention are conceptualized very differently depending on whether the primary concern is remediating the effects of abuse on children, reconstituting the family, reducing abuse recidivism, or addressing complex public priorities concerning family welfare (Thompson & Flood, in press). This can make the study of child maltreatment resemble the proverbial blind men inspecting the elephant, with each characterizing the beast differently depending on his special perspective.

The contributors to this symposium volume provide compelling, state-of-the-art perspectives on these central questions of child harm, family healing, and public policy. In so doing, each contributor also frames the questions that define an agenda for future research on these issues. Although each has a unique perspective to child maltreatment, none of these experts is blind to the additional, sometimes alternative perspectives that are essential to a more complete understanding of this social problem. Each is also thoughtful about the difficulties in studying, as well as treating and preventing, this complex social phenomenon. As a result, this collection of papers highlights some of the ways that the study of child maltreatment can be more thoughtfully conceptualized, and better integrated, than has been true in the past. The goal of this short commentary is to show how this is true by discussing some of the more important themes emerging from this symposium volume.

Child Harm: The Consequences of Child Maltreatment

How are children affected by abuse or neglect? The answer to this question is neither obvious nor simple. As the contributors to this volume explain, the consequences of maltreatment are complex and contingent. Consequences are complex because they can affect the full range of developmental competencies that are rapidly emerging in childhood and adolescence: not just physical trauma but psychological and relational sequelae are apparent in child victims. Moreover, children and youth are especially susceptible to the detriments of abuse and neglect because the rapid pace of their growth means that developing physical and psychological capacities are vulnerable to insult, detriments are likely to cumulate rapidly as the child matures, and coping capacities as well as resiliency are limited. This makes an understanding of the complex consequences of child maltreatment

important to treatment and prevention, and also to our understanding of the processes of development itself.

Consequences are contingent because they are not apparent in all children who are victimized by abuse or neglect, and while some sequelae are enduring, others are more transient. The effects of child maltreatment are often complexly tied to other risk factors in the child's home and neighborhood. This means that rather than assuming that maltreatment has comprehensively devastating effects on a child's psychological functioning, individual patterns of vulnerability and compensation are the rule. As Widom (this volume) notes, abuse or neglect meaningfully heightens a child's psychosocial risk, but does not make dysfunction inevitable.

The contributors to this volume explain why this is so. Children vary significantly in the kind of maltreatment they experience, as well as the frequency, intensity, and chronicity of their victimization. Widom and Cicchetti and Toth (this volume) each describe research findings indicating that these variations in the kind and severity of maltreatment contribute to meaningfully different outcomes for children, despite the comorbidity of different forms of child victimization. Furthermore, Milner's chapter (this volume) surveys research studies indicating that parent belief systems differ significantly for adults who are physically abusive or neglectful, contributing further insight to the associations between type of maltreatment and child outcomes. The term "maltreated children" thus describes a heterogeneous population of children whose victimization varies significantly in its effects on the child, in the parental and family processes associated with harm, and quite likely also in the child's own self-regard and personal construction of the experiences contributing to victimization.

Each of the contributors to this symposium reminds us also that child maltreatment occurs in a complex social ecology that begins with but extends beyond the family system. This is relevant to prevention (as Daro notes in this volume) and treatment (Lutzker's ecobehavioral model) as well as to understanding the consequences of maltreatment. As Lutzker (this volume) notes, for example, the social ecologies in which children and families live include social networks, school-based associations, religious institutions, work (or lack of work), and other ecologies. Children who are abused or neglected are thus affected also by homes that may be colored by domestic

violence, economic stress, substance abuse, single parenting, welfare reliance, and other ills that contribute their own risks to healthy psychosocial growth. Children may also live in neighborhoods that are impoverished, dangerous, unstable, or which otherwise undermine healthy intellectual or socioemotional growth. As Widom notes—and as she and Cicchetti and Toth thoughtfully describe in their research—the risk to children from maltreatment interacts with other risk factors in the child's environment. This means that many of the sequelae of child abuse or neglect are also outcomes of the cumulation of other risk factors in the child's life experience. Indeed, for children at heightened psychosocial risk, Widom's "saturation model" suggests that experiences of maltreatment may not in themselves significantly heighten risk much further than what the child already experiences (Widom, Ireland, & Glynn, 1995). What we often regard as the consequences of maltreatment may be created instead by the broader family conditions associated with abuse.

A thoughtful and sensitive understanding of the life experience of victimized children requires consideration not only of risk factors, but also of buffers or protections. The social ecologies of some children, even in conditions of risk, offer them access to a supportive adult outside the family (such as a grandparent, teacher, counselor, or the parent of a friend) who can provide assistance in coping with victimization (Thompson, 1995). As Cicchetti and Toth show from their research, sometimes the resources of resiliency come from within the child, such as the positive self-esteem and ego-resiliency that some maltreated children in their sample maintained despite their victimization. Knowledge of the psychosocial protections that exist along with risk factors is important not only because it contributes to a more accurate assessment of the quality of a child's life experience, but also because it provides a foundation for therapeutic or preventive interventions. Indeed, many of the strategies outlined by Daro and Lutzker to reduce child maltreatment consist of strengthening the psychosocial buffers in the child's life or in the family ecology.

Contributing further complexity to predicting the effects of child maltreatment are the dynamics of individual development and of family life. The effects of abuse or neglect emerge over time and appear in a developmentally changing individual. This can account for the well-known "sleeper effects" by which certain sequelae are not immediately apparent, but gradually emerge over time as new devel-

opmental challenges are encountered and as the child's capacities to master those new challenges are undermined by earlier victimization. The changes, challenges, and opportunities of psychosocial growth can also account for the amelioration of immediate harms over time as well, and patterns of developmental adaptation can be seen in the findings presented by Widom and by Cicchetti and Toth. Just as children develop, families also change over time. Some family changes can increase risk for child maltreatment, and others may reduce it. To Daro, understanding changing family risk status over time is crucial to providing appropriate preventive interventions; to Cicchetti and Toth, it is necessary for maintaining appropriate comparison between maltreated and nonmaltreated groups. In each case, changing family risk over time reflects the family dynamics that also color a child's life experience related to maltreatment.

These considerations related to the hetereogeneity of child maltreatment, the multifaceted risk factors in the lives of victimized children, consideration of protective factors, and the dynamics of individual development and family life have important methodological implications that are also elucidated by the contributors to this symposium. They suggest, for example, that the sequelae of child maltreatment should be better distinguished from those of correlated risk factors in research on child victimization (see also Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998). Because maltreated children are likely to come from families and neighborhoods in which they are prone to many psychosocial risks, distinguishing the harms they experience that arise uniquely from abuse or neglect is a formidable research challenge. Another challenge is to develop better empirical and theoretical models to characterize processes of psychosocial adaptation and resiliency that maltreated children experience. To the extent that theoretical expectations provide a prism through which researchers interpret their findings, general expectations of psychosocial dysfunction arising from maltreatment may cause researchers to miss important evidence for constructive coping and psychosocial adaptation when it appears. Yet if abuse or neglect do not inevitably foreshadow psychological decline, and if individual patterns of vulnerability and compensation are instead the rule, then greater attention to processes of psychosocial coping as well as harm may be appropriate.

These and other considerations suggest that more complex re-

search strategies are needed in the study of child maltreatment, as Lutzker argues insightfully in his description of clinical research methods. This is a difficult task in the limited current funding environment for research on abuse and neglect (Thompson & Wilcox, 1995). Yet in contrast to the "hourglass methodology" that has often characterized research into child maltreatment—in which a variety of antecedent risk factors are predictively associated with child maltreatment and in which maltreatment is used as a single predictor of a host of sequelae—more incisive (and expensive) research designs are required to ask more insightful questions concerning distinctive risk factors, patterns of compensation and adaptation, and the dynamics of individual development and family life. Fortunately, the contributors to this symposium provide useful models of how to do so. Widom's large-sample, prospective longitudinal cohorts design, incorporating a matched control group, exemplifies the kind of research strategy necessary to distinguish the sequelae of child maltreatment from those of other risk factors in children's lives. Her research design also enables careful assessment of alternative theoretical portrayals of the unfolding of risk over the course of individual lives. Cicchetti and Toth's prospective longitudinal research design incorporates ecological and developmental systems views to sensitively document the unfolding of the psychosocial consequences of maltreatment as children mature. Each study offers lessons to current researchers (and research funders) about the scale of the research effort required to address the most important questions concerning child victimization.

Not just more sophisticated research methodologies but more sophisticated theoretical schemas may also be needed in future studies of the consequences of maltreatment for children. Concepts from the interdisciplinary study of developmental psychopathology may be especially useful because scientists in this field must address the complexities of psychosocial risk and psychological dysfunction in a thoroughly developmental framework (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997; Sroufe & Rutter, 1984). Several principles that have emerged from the field of developmental psychopathology may be especially relevant to research on the effects of child maltreatment. First, the principle of *equifinality* emphasizes that there are multiple pathways leading to the development of childhood disorders. As earlier noted, in studies of the sequelae of maltreatment, it is important

to remember that the outcomes observed in child victims are likely to have complex and multifaceted origins in which abuse or neglect is often one of many factors shaping adjustment. Second, the principle of *multifinality* underscores that any risk factor can lead to diverse outcomes depending on other influences on the child. In this regard, as the studies described in this volume illustrate, child maltreatment is linked to diverse psychological outcomes that can be maladaptive (e.g., increased aggression, anxiety, depression, conduct problems) but some may be psychologically adaptive in the circumstances in which children live. The consequences of maltreatment may be best understood in the context of other influences on the child.

Third, developmental psychopathologists caution against searching for single, direct causes of pathology and emphasize that "the action is in the interaction" over time among multiple internal and external influences on development. The interactive, compounding impact of psychosocial risks is likely to be greater than the additive effects of each risk factor taken alone. Risks must be viewed in the context of protections and of sources of adaptation and compensation. In research on the consequences of child maltreatment, it is likewise valuable to remember that child victimization—itself a heterogeneous phenomenon—is likely to interact in complex ways with other psychosocial influences from within the child (e.g., developing self-concept, ego resiliency) and in the child's social ecology (e.g., social support, disadvantaged minority status).

Keeping these principles in mind will help researchers view child maltreatment within the context of the multiple psychosocial influences that shape individual patterns of adjustment for victimized children and to devise research strategies incorporating these considerations. Keeping these principles in mind will also help researchers distinguish marker variables that are associated with child maltreatment from causal influences that are etiologically relevant, as Joel Milner (using a memorable illustration of the association between the earlobe crease and heart attack risk) reminded the symposium audience during his presentation.

Finally, developmental psychopathologists emphasize that children at risk should be regarded as developing persons, who face the same psychological changes, challenges, and opportunities in their growth as do children in more typical conditions. As illustrated especially in the work of Cicchetti and Toth and of Widom,

a comprehensively developmental orientation to the study of child maltreatment is essential to a sensitive portrayal of its consequences.

Family Healing: Changing Representations and Relationships

Another principle of developmental psychopathology is that individuals help to construct their own developmental pathways. They do so primarily through the representations that guide their self-awareness, relationships with others, interpretations of events, and perceptions of the broader world. In recent years, new insight into the sequelae of child maltreatment has been achieved as researchers have borrowed concepts from attachment theory, social information processing theory, and other formulations to consider the nature of the "internal working models" that are created from early experiences of abusive or neglectful care. Widom's inquiry into the "cycle of violence" inaugurated by child maltreatment draws substantially on these cognitively-based formulations, as does Cicchetti and Toth's examination of the developmental outcomes of maltreated children. Their findings, and those of others (e.g., Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990), suggest that some of the most important sequelae of abuse and neglect may be in children's representations of self, relationships, and the family that derive from their victimization.

Representations are important to understanding not only the experience of victimized children, but of the parents who abuse them. Milner's provocative chapter provides a theoretical expansion of the social information processing model that has been heuristically powerful in understanding the core deficits of troubled, abuse-prone parents. This model also has implications for effective intervention. Milner's discussion emphasizes the quasi-sequential steps of social information-processing that contribute to child abuse, beginning with biased perceptions of child behavior, leading to abuse-prone interpretations and evaluations of the meaning and significance of the child's acts, followed by inadequate information integration and response selection, and concluding with poor response implementation and monitoring processes. Milner's discussion highlights also the diversity of the parental belief systems that must be considered in understanding the adult representations that contribute to maltreatment. As he thoughtfully indicates, parents have core beliefs related

to the nature of children, the motives underlying their behavior, children's responsibility for misbehavior, and expectations for age-appropriate conduct. Parents also have core beliefs concerning their role as parents, their attitudes toward behavior control, and views about the nature of the parent-child relationship. Perhaps most importantly, parents have representations of themselves in the world that contribute to the threat-oriented schemas, low perceptions of self-efficacy, external locus of control, and diminished self-esteem that also contribute to risk for maltreatment. Many of the most important self-referent beliefs prognostic of abuse may be unarticulated, unrecognized, perhaps even unconscious, influences on parental behavior.

Research on the representations underlying abusive parenting is consistent with vigorous study of the representational facets of typical parenting in developmental psychology. Just as child maltreatment researchers are beginning to incorporate an understanding of parental representations into their studies of the personality, ecological, and other factors influencing maladaptive parenting, developmental psychologists are following the same path in their understanding of normative parent-child relationships. They are discovering the importance, for example, of the multiple (and sometimes conflicting) goals, expectations, and relational schemas—for both parent and offspring—that underlie the success of discipline encounters (Dunn, Brown, & Maguire, 1995; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997; Kochanska & Thompson, 1997; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Developmental researchers are investigating the content and origins of the parent belief systems that function consciously (and often unconsciously) as implicit frameworks of assumptive understanding guiding parental actions (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Harkness & Super, 1996; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992; Smetana, 1994). Recent investigators are also exploring the differences between automatic and controlled cognitive processes governing parental actions, inquiring (as does Milner) into how interventions to strengthen competent parenting can alter schemas enlisted automatically and improve the quality of controlled cognitions during encounters with offspring (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Those seeking to understand the parental representations that contribute to abusive behavior would be wise to explore these developmental literatures because of the conceptual tools they offer to elucidating

the belief systems of abuse-prone adults, and also because of their implications for family healing.

These representations have diverse origins in a parent's personality and life history, cultural and subcultural ethnotheories of development, current experience with children, and the marital and family ecology—although these origins are not well-understood (Holden, 1995; Okagaki & Divecha, 1993; Smetana, 1994). They also originate, as attachment theorists remind us, in the parent's prior experience of close relationships (Crittenden, 1993, 1996). In this view, a child's early attachment to parents helps to shape emergent representations of what other people are like, what relationships are like, and how one participates in relationships, and these representations contribute to trust or distrust in intimacy. These early experiences also shape broader representations of self that contribute to a sense of security or uncertainty in relating to partners. These representations of self, other people, and relationships constitute the "internal working models" arising from early attachments that are, to some extent, continuously modified and updated as new relationships are formed with other caregivers, and later with close friends, romantic and marital partners (Thompson, 1998). Adults thus experience parenting as another close relationship—albeit a relationship of unique qualities—to which these long-developing representations are applied. As Milner describes in his research review, adults who experience diminished self-efficacy and loss of self-esteem as parents, who are insensitive to and unempathic with children's emotional cues, who perceive their offspring negatively and expect children to betray them with disobedience, and who relate negatively to their children may be reflecting a relational history that has become internalized in biased interpretations of offspring behavior, inappropriate behavioral strategies, and negative self-regard.

Family healing thus may begin with an understanding of the representations underlying parental behavior, and the relationships (both past and current) that contribute to those representations. It is not surprising to find that this conclusion has implications for treating troubled families and for preventing child maltreatment from occurring. Many of the treatment programs described in Lutzker's chapter, including the author's own Project 12-Ways and Project Safe-Care based on his ecobehavioral model of family services, emphasize strengthening family relationships and the relational representations

they reinforce through strategies that include personal counseling, developing supportive relationships with community parents, improving interpersonal problem-solving strategies, and social skills development. The child abuse prevention efforts described by Daro also reveal the importance of relationships when young families are offered a sensitive, compassionate home visitor who is concerned about the parent's and child's well-being as well as providing access to needed services. Furthermore, the Healthy Families America initiative that she describes emphasizes strengthening the formal and informal social supports that typically characterize well-functioning families—in extended family networks, workplace settings, and the neighborhood and community—but are often absent or dysfunctional for families at risk of child maltreatment (Thompson, 1995). Taken together, in the context of the approaches outlined by Milner that directly address the social information-processing deficits of abuse-prone adults, there may be considerable value in considering treatment and prevention strategies that provide adults with supportive relationships that inspire trust and provide care. In a sense, such "rehabilitative attachments" in the adult years may contribute also to reworking the "internal working models" that have developed from past relationships, and contribute to more healthy representations related to parenting. In the words of campaign sloganeering, one might conceive of the origins of child victimization and of the bases of family healing as "it's the relationships, stupid."

Public Policy: A New Approach to Prevention

Treatment heals the wounds caused by prior victimization on a family-by-family basis. But a public problem like child maltreatment deserves a public response, hopefully one that addresses the social ills that lead to abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, Daro's compendium of the problems in local and national child protection efforts is consistent with those of other critics of the system (e.g., National Commission on Children, 1991; Pelton , 1992, 1997; Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, 1987; U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1990, 1991). Local CPS workers are not perceived by families as helpful or accessible sources of assistance because they also have the power to remove children from their homes and thus are regarded as having dual, mutually inconsistent, responsibilities.

The typical practices of CPS agencies are unduly inflexible, personnel too overburdened, and relevant services needlessly categorized and fractionated to provide effective assistance to troubled families. Child protection agencies devote considerable time and effort to investigating reports of suspected abuse, with few resources remaining to meaningfully aid families so identified. When interventions are provided, they are rarely integrated into the natural fabrics of family life and social networks to provide a structure for enduring support for healthy family functioning after time-limited interventions have ended. Moreover, the interventions that are provided to troubled families are often ineffective and, when children are concerned, may actually be harmful (such as many foster care placements). Most strikingly, children rarely receive the treatment they need for coping with the consequences of their victimization.

Perhaps the most central and significant limitation of CPS agencies is their mandate to intervene only after a report of suspected child maltreatment, leaving other troubled families unaided until they reach the point that a child is victimized. Although there are many programs that can provide assistance to families (e.g., WIC, Title XX assistance), none are oriented toward the unique problems of abuse-prone families and the stresses that lead to child victimization. Child protection agencies, by contrast, are specialized to work with such families but do so only after a child has been harmed, rarely preventively. It is reasonable to ask whether a society has made a serious commitment to reducing child maltreatment when families are helped only after, not before, their troubles have reached the threshold of child harm.

These considerations make it easy to concur with Daro's contention that prevention is the crucial effort to combating child maltreatment. But prior prevention efforts have yielded mixed and inconsistent results, whether their success is defined in terms of reducing the incidence of child maltreatment, improving family functioning, or strengthening child development. What is new and significant about the proposals Daro discusses is the focus on prevention efforts that are *universally available* to families, offered within a *flexible framework* that can be tailored to the specific needs of family members, oriented toward embedding families within a *network of supports* that can continue to foster healthy family functioning after intervention has ended, and with the eventual goal of *systemic reform* of health

and social services to better serve family members. These ambitious goals are not just theoretical proposals: the Healthy Families America initiative that Daro describes has already succeeded in implementing many of these goals in the provision of preventive services to families throughout the country.

The Healthy Families America initiative is part of a national shift of perspective concerning the most effective strategies for reducing child maltreatment. As reflected also in the report of the Executive Session on Child Protection profiled in Daro's chapter, as well as reports of the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b) and other agencies (e.g., the National Commission on Children, 1991; the National Research Council, 1993), thoughtful students of the child protection system are urging a redirection of focus from short-term interventions to strengthen the parenting skills of abusive adults to a broader focus on neighborhood-based supports and services that can strengthen healthy family functioning. Moreover, this new shift of perspective includes greater concern with the experience of children in troubled families, and attention to their developmental needs through direct services and by improving the capacities of parents to provide appropriately for them. The central focus of this shift in national perspective is on enabling troubled families to receive assistance before their problems have reached a crisis.

This new national perspective to child maltreatment is reflected in the Healthy Families America initiative, and in other approaches also. One of these is the proposal of the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b) that a comprehensive national abuse prevention strategy should be neighborhood-based and child-centered. The view that child protection should be "neighborhood-based" means that effective abuse prevention efforts should be decentralized and local in their orientation, and should strengthen and rely on the informal support systems that typically characterize healthy neighborhoods and well-functioning families (Melton & Thompson, in press). National and local child protection efforts should seek to support community-based initiatives that strengthen the capacities of neighbors to help each other through the advice, material assistance, referrals, and other supportive aids that family members naturally offer other families within caring communities. The "neighbor helping neighbor" goal is complemented by

the view that child protection should also be "child-centered," which means that it includes a focus on the needs of children (Thompson & Flood, in press). This includes individualized treatment and other services for children who are victimized by abuse, but it also includes community-based initiatives that improve the support that all children receive from neighbors, school personnel, community programs, and other agencies and individuals who are regularly involved in their lives.

Another way of conceiving this new national perspective to child maltreatment is that it is oriented toward "preventive family preservation". By strengthening community networks of support that can provide enduring assistance to troubled families, and offering services that can be flexibly tailored to the needs of individual family members, the overarching goal is to enable families to function better before they ever come to the attention of child protection agencies. Such an approach to prevention is far more broadly-based than the targeted services conventionally offered to identified families, but given the enormous expense of the current child protection system it is also likely to be more cost-effective. Healthy Families America is thus a contributor to the new landscape of child protection efforts that seek to help families before a child has been harmed.

Conclusion

The contributors to the 46th Annual Nebraska Symposium on Motivation offer insightful perspectives on the dynamics of child maltreatment and, in doing so, address broader questions concerning human motivation. In elucidating the complex and contingent sequelae of maltreatment, their discussions of child harm highlight the complex interaction of risk factors and the interplay of risks and protections in the life experience of victimized children. In considering the importance of the representations and relationships that contribute to abusive parenting, their discussions of family healing underscore the importance of the internal, relational dynamics of troubled parent-child interaction. In presenting new perspectives to child protection, their discussions of preventive strategies emphasize how troubled families are embedded in neighborhoods and communities that can either support healthy family functioning or undermine it. Consistent with the field of human motivation more generally, these chapters are

a reminder of how challengingly complex, but crucially important, is our understanding of these forces in the lives of children, their families, and the communities in which they live.

References

Bugental, D. B., & Goodnow, J. J. (1998). Socialization processes. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (5th ed., Vol. 3). *Social, emotional, and personality development* (N. Eisenberg, Vol. Ed.) (pp. 389–462). New York: Wiley.

Cicchetti, D., & Cohen, D. J. (1995). Perspectives on developmental psychopathology. In D. Cicchetti & D. J. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: Vol. 1. Theory and methods* (pp. 3–20). New York: Wiley.

Cicchetti, D., & Rogosch, F. A. (1997). Equifinality and multifinality in developmental psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology, 8,* 597–600.

Cicchetti, D., & Toth, S. L. (this volume). Developmental processes in maltreated children. In D. J. Hansen (Ed.), *Motivation and child maltreatment. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 46. Motivation and Child Maltreatment.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Crittenden, P. M. (1993). An information-processing perspective on the behavior of neglectful parents. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 20,* 27–48.

Crittenden, P. M. (1996). Research on maltreating families: Implications for intervention. In J. Briere, L. Berliner, J. A. Bulkey, C. Jenny, & T. Reid (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (pp. 158–174). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Daro, D. (this volume). Child abuse prevention: New directions and challenges. In D. J. Hansen (Ed.), *Motivation and child maltreatment. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 46. Motivation and Child Maltreatment.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Dodge, K. A., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. (1990). Mechanisms in the cycle of violence. *Science, 250,* 1678–1683.

Dunn, J., Brown, J. R., & Maguire, M. (1995). The development of children's moral sensibility: Individual differences and emotion understanding. *Developmental Psychology, 31,* 649–659.

English, D. J. (1998). The extent and consequences of child maltreatment. *The Future of Children, 8,* 39–53.

Emery, R. E., & Laumann-Billings, L. (1998). An overview of the nature, causes, and consequences of abusive family relationships: Toward differentiating maltreatment and violence. *American Psychologist, 53,* 121–135.

Goodnow, J. J., & Collins, W. A. (1990). *Development according to parents.* Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.

Grusec, J. E., & Goodnow, J. J. (1994). The impact of parental discipline methods on the child's internalization of values: A reconceptualization of current points of view. *Developmental Psychology, 30,* 4–19.

Grusec, J. E., & Kuczynski, L. (Eds.) (1997). *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory*. New York: Wiley.

Harkness, S., & Super, C. M. (Eds.) (1996). *Parents' cultural belief systems: Their origins, expressions, and consequences*. New York: Guilford.

Holden, G. W. (1995). Parental attitudes toward childrearing. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting. Vol. 3. Status and social conditions of parenting*. Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.

Kempe, C. H., Silverman, F., Steele, B., Droegemueller, W., & Silver, H. (1962). The battered child syndrome. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 181*, 17–24.

Kochanska, G., & Thompson, R. A. (1997). The emergence and development of conscience in toddlerhood and early childhood. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and children's internalization of values* (pp. 53–77). New York: Wiley.

Lutzker, J. R. (this volume). Balancing research and treatment in child maltreatment: The quest for good data and practical service. In D. J. Hansen (Ed.), *Motivation and child maltreatment. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 46. Motivation and Child Maltreatment*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Melton, G. B., & Thompson, R. A. (in press). The conceptual foundation: Why child protection should be neighborhood-based and child-centered. In G. B. Melton, R. A. Thompson, & M. A. Small (Eds.), *Toward a child-centered, neighborhood-based child protection system*. Westport CT: Praeger.

Milner, J. S. (this volume). Social information processing and child physical abuse: Theory and research. In D. J. Hansen (Ed.), *Motivation and child maltreatment. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 46. Motivation and Child Maltreatment*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

National Commission on Children (1991). *Beyond rhetoric: A new American agenda for children and families*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Research Council, Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993). *Understanding child abuse and neglect*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

Okagaki, L., & Divecha, D. J. (1993). Development of parental beliefs. In T. Luster & L. Okagaki (Eds.), *Parenting: An ecological perspective* (pp. 35–67). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.

Parke, R. D., & Buriel, R. (1998). Socialization in the family: Ethnic and ecological perspectives. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (5th ed., Vol. 3). *Social, emotional, and personality development* (N. Eisenberg, Vol. Ed.) (pp. 463–552). New York: Wiley.

Pelton, L. H. (1992). A functional approach to reorganizing family and child welfare interventions. *Children and Youth Services Review, 14*, 289–303.

Pelton, L. H. (1997). Child welfare policy and practice: The myth of family preservation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 67*, 545–553.

Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families (1987). *Abused children*

in America: Victims of official neglect. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Sigel, I. E., McGillicuddy-DeLisi, A. V., & Goodnow, J. J. (Eds.) (1992). *Parent belief systems* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.

Smetana. J. G. (Ed.) (1994). *Beliefs about parenting: Origins and developmental implications.* (New Directions for Child Development Series #66; W. Damon, General Editor). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sroufe, L. A., & Rutter, M. (1984). The domain of developmental psychopathology. *Child Development, 55,* 17–29.

Thompson, R. A. (1995). *Preventing child maltreatment through social support: A critical analysis.* Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Thompson, R. A. (1998). Early sociopersonality development. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (5th ed., Vol. 3). *Social, emotional, and personality development* (N. Eisenberg, Vol. Ed.) (pp. 25–104). New York: Wiley.

Thompson, R. A. & Flood, M. F. (in press). Toward a child-oriented child protection system. In G. B. Melton, R. A. Thompson, & M. A. Small (Eds.), *Toward a child-centered, neighborhood-based child protection system.* Westport CT: Praeger.

Thompson, R. A., & Jacobs, J. E. (1991). Defining psychological maltreatment: Research and policy perspectives. *Development and Psychopathology, 3,* 93–102.

Thompson, R. A., & Wilcox, B. L. (1995). Child maltreatment research: Federal support and policy issues. *American Psychologist, 50,* 789–793.

Thompson, R. A., & Wyatt, J. M. (1999). Current research on child maltreatment: Implications for educators. *Educational Psychology Review, 11,* 173–201.

U. S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990). *Child abuse and neglect: Critical first steps to a national emergency.* Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U. S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1991). *Creating caring communities: Blueprint for an effective federal policy on child abuse and neglect.* Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U. S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993a). *The continuing child protection emergency: A challenge to the nation.* Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U. S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993b). *Neighbors helping neighbors: A new national strategy for the protection of children.* Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Widom, C. S. (this volume). Motivation and mechanisms in the "cycle of violence." In D. J. Hansen (Ed.), *Motivation and child maltreatment. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 46. Motivation and Child Maltreatment.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Widom, C. S., Ireland, T., & Glynn, P. J. (1995). Alcohol abuse in abused and neglected children followed-up: Are they at increased risk? *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 56,* 207–217.