

Failing to provide for kids leads to aggression and delinquency

April 21 2015, by Bert Gambini

A new study by two researchers in the University at Buffalo School of Social Work has shown that parents who chronically neglect their children contribute to the likelihood that they will develop aggressive and delinquent tendencies later in adolescence, and the one factor that links neglect with those behaviors appears to be poor social skills.

While [child neglect](#) can include many different aspects, the study examined two: failure to provide for a child's basic needs and a lack of adequate supervision.

Failure to provide, which includes not meeting a child's basic needs for food, shelter and clothing, was the key aspect of neglect that linked to later aggression and delinquency. The study also found that lack of adequate supervision did not link to the same outcomes, even after accounting for the contributions of other forms of maltreatment.

"When you have a neglected child whose basic needs are not being met, they're not getting the socialization that enables them to grow to be a happy adolescent and adult," says Patricia Logan-Greene, whose study with Annette Semanchin Jones will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

Logan-Greene says failing to provide for children may result in poor hygiene or a tendency toward illness, making some of them unappealing to their peers.

"These children are often rejected and lack the kind of social stimulation that would lead them to have positive, strong, social ties," she says.

A downloadable image of Logan-Greene is available here:
<http://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2015/04/056.html>.

"We expected lack of supervision—leaving children unattended—to be more contributive than it was. So that was a surprise; but remember, this is different from parental monitoring: knowing who their friends are or what they might be getting into when parents are not around."

The groundbreaking research adds to a growing body of literature highlighting the effects of chronic neglect on child development, an understudied research area despite neglect being the most common form of maltreatment in the U.S. and among the most costly segments of child welfare systems.

"Neglect is hard to study," says Logan-Greene. "It's not like physical abuse or sexual abuse where there are specific incidents that we can ask people about. It's more difficult to answer the question, 'How often were you neglected?'"

Logan-Greene says neglect is quietly insidious and it took a long time to understand its powerful impact.

The absence of a consensus definition also compounds the difficulty of studying chronic neglect. There is no clinical threshold that establishes the point at which neglect becomes chronic.

For this study the researchers considered neglect in terms of a continuum and examined effects of neglect across development using LONGSCAN, a comprehensive resource of maltreatment data, tracking not only neglect, but physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and exposure

to violence.

Their findings and the presence of a social connection suggest possible prevention strategies that Logan-Greene says are obvious and simple.

"Give them interventions that improve their social skills," she says.

"We have these interventions now; they exist and we know they work on other levels. So there's a lot of promise that we can prevent these behaviors from occurring."

The researchers also found that boys are more likely to respond to chronic [neglect](#) with aggressive or delinquent behavior than girls. Although the research did not address what's responsible for that difference, historically boys have been more prone to engage in aggressive behavior than girls, but over the past 20 years that margin of difference has been decreasing. Women are the fastest growing population in both the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, according to Logan-Greene.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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