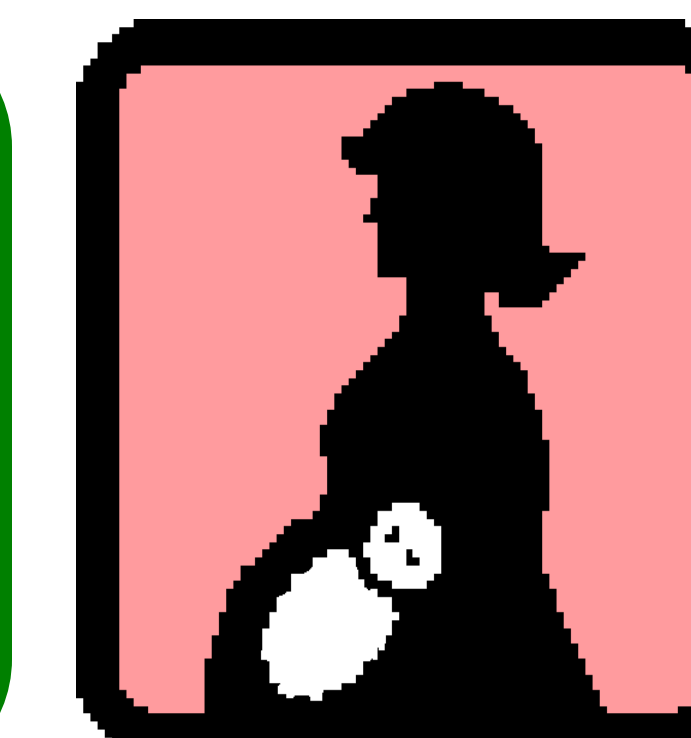




# Predicting Child Abuse Potential During Pregnancy

Kylene M. Krause, B.A. and Alissa C. Huth-Bocks, Ph.D.  
Eastern Michigan University



## INTRODUCTION

Despite the well-known consequences of child abuse and the enactment of mandated reporting laws in all 50 states, the incidence continues to rise in the United States (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005) especially in children 0 to 3 years of age (16.5 children per 1,000 are victims). Past research has identified connections between child abuse and numerous short (direct) and long-term (indirect) consequences. Child abuse potential has been found to be more complex than originally thought (Oakes & Bross, 1995), and an ideal prevention program has not yet been established. Predicting child abuse potential, or risk for actual child abuse, and taking steps to prevent maltreatment before it occurs is a promising resolution that has received less attention than models which intervene after maltreatment has been confirmed.

**AIM:** To examine how mothers' perceptions of their childhood relationships with parents, expectations about being a mother, and perceptions of social support are related to a woman's risk status with regard to child abuse potential during pregnancy.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS:

A community sample of pregnant women ( $N = 100$ ) were recruited from public locations, programs, and agencies primarily serving low-income families. Woman participated in a 2 1/2 hour interview during their last trimester of pregnancy and received \$25.00 compensation. During this interview, which often took place in the women's homes, participants completed a semi-structured interview about their feelings about pregnancy and motherhood and verbally completed numerous questionnaires about their history, current and past relationships, psychosocial experiences, and general health.

- Age: Mean = 26 (Range = 18 – 42,  $SD = 5.8$ )
- Race/ Ethnicity: 50% = African American, 35% = Caucasian, 15% = Other Ethnic Groups
- Education: 23% = High School Diploma/ GED or less, 41% = Some College or Trade School, 35% = College Degree
- Income: Median = \$1,650.
- Family Status: 62% = Single Parents  
30% = First Time Mothers

### MEASURES:

- 1 - Child abuse potential. The Brief Child Abuse Potential Inventory (B-CAP; Ondersma, Chaffin, Mullins, & Lebreton, 2005) is a 34-item questionnaire that assesses dimensions believed to be related to risk for child abuse such as parental rigidity, loneliness, and general distress. The 24-item Abuse total was used for this investigation (Random and Lie subscales were excluded).
- 2 - Mothers' perceptions of their childhood relationships with parents. The Mother-Father-Peer Scale (MFP; Epstein, 1983) is a 70-item measure to assess recollections of childhood experience pertaining to dimensions of acceptance-rejection, independence-overprotection, and defensive idealization of parents. The 60 items pertaining to mother and father were used in this study.
- 3 - Expectations about being a mother. The Prenatal Maternal Expectations Scale (PMES; Coleman, Nelson, & Sundre, 1999) is a 46-item self report assessing a mother's expectations about her baby and how her baby will affect her after birth, including her level of enjoyment with motherhood and changes in her social life and physical image.
- 4 - Perceptions of social support. The Perceived Social Support Scale (PSS; Procidano & Heller, 1983) is a 40-item measure assessing perceptions of emotional support from friends (20 items) and family (20 items).

## RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive Data for Study Variables

| Measure            | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Possible Range | Alpha |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|---------|---------|----------------|-------|
| BCAP               | 6.5   | 5.1                | 0       | 21      | 0 – 24         | .82   |
| MFP – Total        | 173.9 | 24.8               | 108     | 216     | 60 – 300       | .92   |
| MFP - M (mother)   | 86.4  | 14.7               | 52      | 111     | 30 – 150       | .90   |
| MFP - F (father)   | 85.5  | 16.4               | 41      | 109     | 30 – 150       | .91   |
| PMES               | 186.9 | 14.6               | 142     | 226     | 46 – 230       | .82   |
| PSS - Total        | 30.2  | 8.1                | 3       | 40      | 0 – 40         | .92   |
| PSS - FR (friends) | 15.4  | 4.6                | 0       | 20      | 0 – 20         | .89   |
| PSS - FA (family)  | 14.8  | 5.2                | 0       | 20      | 0 – 20         | .91   |

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for all Study Variables

|           | BCAP    | MFP-T  | MFP - M | MFP - F | PMES | PSS-T  | PSS - FR | PSS - FA |
|-----------|---------|--------|---------|---------|------|--------|----------|----------|
| BCAP      | 1.0     |        |         |         |      |        |          |          |
| MFP-Total | -.457** | 1.0    |         |         |      |        |          |          |
| MFP - M   | -.427** | .808** | 1.0     |         |      |        |          |          |
| MFP - F   | -.306** | .850** | .375**  | 1.0     |      |        |          |          |
| PMES      | .015    | .179   | .292**  | .022    | 1.0  |        |          |          |
| PSS-Total | -.492** | .595** | .591**  | .458**  | .139 | 1.0    |          |          |
| PSS – FR  | -.237** | .367** | .276**  | .384**  | .075 | .791** | 1.0      |          |
| PSS – FA  | -.548** | .618** | .667**  | .378**  | .148 | .843** | .338**   | 1.0      |

\*\*  $p < .01$

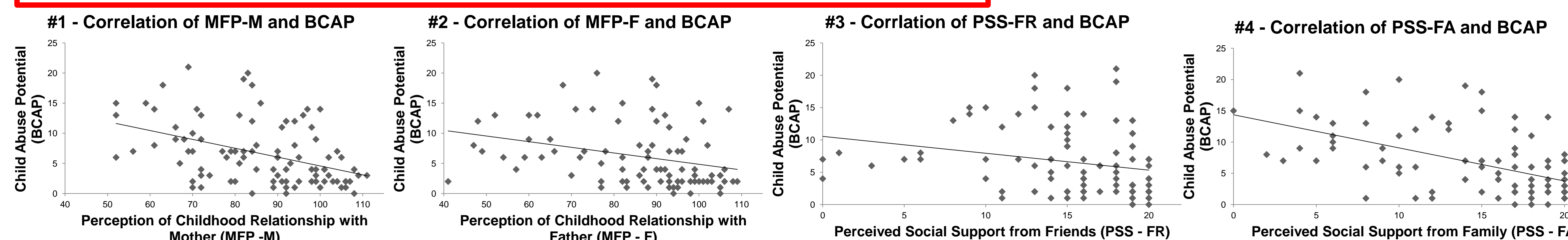
Correlations revealed significant negative associations between mothers' perceptions of their childhood relationships with parents and child abuse potential. Perceptions of better relationship quality with mother and father was related to lower child abuse potential (see scatterplot #1 and #2 below). There were also significant negative correlations between perceptions of social support and child abuse potential. Perceptions of increased social support from friends and family was related to lower child abuse potential (see scatterplot #3 and #4 below). Expectations about being a mother was unrelated to child abuse potential but was significantly correlated with mothers' perceptions of their childhood relationship with their own mothers. Perceptions of childhood relationships with parents were correlated with each other as well as with perceptions of social support from both friends and family which in turn were correlated with each other.

Table 3. Predicting Child Abuse Potential using a Multiple Regression

|              | Variable                                 | Child Abuse Potential $\beta$ |
|--------------|--|-------------------------------|
| First Block  | Maternal Age                             | -.177                         |
|              | Income                                   | -.118                         |
|              | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                  | .032                          |
| Second Block | F Value                                  | 2.310                         |
|              | Maternal Age                             | -.170                         |
|              | Income                                   | -.053                         |
| Third Block  | Childhood Parental Relationships (total) | -.439***                      |
|              | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                  | .215                          |
|              | F Value                                  | 8.309***                      |
|              | Maternal Age                             | -.139                         |
|              | Income                                   | -.038                         |
| Fourth Block | Childhood Parental Relationships         | -.262*                        |
|              | Perceived Social Support                 | -.312**                       |
|              | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                  | .271                          |
|              | F Value                                  | 8.431***                      |

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

When mothers' age and income was entered in a multiple regression to predict child abuse potential, the model was insignificant. When mothers' perceptions of their childhood relationships with parents was added to the model, it was significant. Twenty-two percent of the variance in child abuse potential was accounted for by this model. When perceptions of social support was added to the model, there was a significant increase in variance accounted for. Twenty-seven percent of the variance was accounted for by this model.



## DISCUSSION

These results indicate that mothers' perceptions of their childhood relationships with parents and perceptions of social support are related to a woman's risk status with regard to child abuse potential during pregnancy. This suggests that parenting may already be compromised, before the child is even born, among women who experienced less positive relationships with parents and who perceive less social support currently. Results indicate that talking to pregnant women about their childhood relationships with parents and increasing social support before the child is born may be possible intervention points and greatly impact mothers' parenting.