

## Early Head Start Home Visitor's Identification of Risk for Maltreatment

**Project Team:** Alayna Schreier, M.A. (Scholar) and David J. Hansen, Ph.D. (PI)  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**Grant or Contract Number:** Head Start Research Scholar (90YR0082)

**Period of Funding:** 2014–2016

### Project Description

Infants and toddlers enrolled in EHS tend to be at increased risk for maltreatment due to the presence of numerous risk factors. However, prior research has indicated that home visitors are often ill-equipped to identify and address risk factors highly associated with maltreatment. The purpose of this study is to identify how Early Head Start (EHS) home visitors understand and determine risk for maltreatment, whether the risk factors identified by EHS home visitors effectively predict likelihood of maltreatment among families enrolled in EHS, and how home visitors refer families identified as at-risk to relevant EHS and community based resources. Further, this study seeks to determine the combination of risk factors that best predicts occurrence of court-substantiated maltreatment.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between evidence-based risk factors and family maltreatment status in Early Head Start families?
2. What factors do Early Head Start home visitors use to determine risk for maltreatment? What is the relationship between these risk factors and family maltreatment status?
3. What model of risk factors best predicts maltreatment status?
4. What is the relationship between the risk model that best predicts maltreatment and service referral and utilization for Early Head Start families?

### Sample

The archival component of this study includes data collected from 749 children enrolled in EHS Home-Based services between 2008-2015.

The qualitative component of this study included 14 EHS home visitors and supervisors (82.3% participation rate). Participants ranged in age from

22 to 57 ( $M = 36.57$ ,  $SD = 11.58$ ). All 14 participants were female and 11 (78.6%) identified as White. The remaining three participants were Hispanic or Black. Ten participants (71.4%) had a Bachelor's degree and four (28.6%) attended some college or had an Associate's degree. Participants had between six and 189 months of experience ( $M = 52.21$ ,  $SD = 51.09$ ).

### Method

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods approach, pairing quantitative analyses of archival data with qualitative analyses of semi-structured interviews with program staff. The quantitative analyses use archival data collected through an ongoing partnership between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the local EHS, and include EHS program files and clinical records. Online juvenile court records from the Nebraska JUSTICE system are used to identify court-substantiated instances of maltreatment. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 14 EHS home visitors and supervisors to examine their identification of risk factors for maltreatment and subsequent response to identified risk.

### Progress Update

The archival database is currently being updated to include all relevant quantitative variables for children who have enrolled in EHS since 2012. The complete dataset is expected in January 2016. Prior research using a subset of this sample found that 11% of enrolled families have a substantiated case of maltreatment during enrollment.

Qualitative interviews were completed in March 2015 and interviews were transcribed in April 2015. Preliminary data analysis has been completed; a second coder will begin coding the data in January 2016 to demonstrate credibility. Initial findings indicate variability between home

visitors in how they define maltreatment, identify risk for maltreatment, and work with families who have been identified as at risk.

### **Implications for Policy/Practice**

Findings from this study will provide information to EHS researchers, practitioners, and policy makers on how to better serve families through increased ability to identify and target risk factors for maltreatment. Further, findings will provide crucial information about the role home visitors play in this process, and may provide direction for future staff trainings related to gaps in knowledge and strategies to successfully engage families in services in a manner that reduces risk for and prevents maltreatment.

### **Implications for Research**

The findings from this study will contribute to future research efforts in this area. This study utilizes mixed methodology to explore how EHS home visitors work with families at risk for maltreatment. The inclusion of juvenile court records provides an official estimate of maltreatment occurrence.

### **For more information**

<http://www.chapinhall.org/fellowships/fellows/alayna-schreier>

### **Contact**

Alayna Schreier, M.A., Doctoral Candidate  
David J. Hansen, Ph.D., Professor and Director of  
Clinical Training  
Clinical Psychology Training Program  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Phone: (734) 347-7576  
Email: [alayna.schreier@gmail.com](mailto:alayna.schreier@gmail.com) or  
[dhansen1@unl.edu](mailto:dhansen1@unl.edu)