



Results from Longest National Study on Child Abuse and Neglect May Affect Health Policy and Practice

Researchers at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported the findings from a 25 year study on child abuse and neglect which could have an important impact on future decisions in this area of national concern

(October 3, 2011, Chapel Hill, NC) – Researchers from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported recently on the most significant findings from a twenty-five year study on families and children. The Family Child Study was initiated in North Carolina with the primary goal of improving the quality of policy and practice in order to promote child and family well-being based on sound evidence from the study. Two important findings from the study are that *we can identify children who are at risk for abuse and neglect from the moment they are born and parental social support reduces the risk and the consequences of abuse and neglect.*

The North Carolina Family Child Study became part of a larger national study, LONGSCAN (the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect), the longest such study ever undertaken in the US. LONGSCAN has four additional study sites around the country. Each of these sites has specific objectives and expertise to contribute to the group. The entire study is coordinated by UNC-Chapel Hill's Injury Prevention Research Center. North Carolina's Family Child Study is the oldest site in the study and has focused on the role of stress and social support in high-risk families and the factors that contribute to or lessen the risk of abuse and neglect. For two decades the Family Child Study followed North Carolina families and their children from infancy through young adulthood

“Child abuse and neglect is a dire problem nationally,” said Jonathan Kotch, MD, MPH, Principal Investigator on the study and Carol Remmer Angle Distinguished Professor of Children's Environmental Health in the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. “There is increasing interest in and support for programs that offer hope that abuse and neglect can be prevented.”

The first set of findings was presented at a meeting in Chapel Hill, NC, which included researchers, public health professionals, policy makers and alumni consultants from the study. The purpose of the meeting was to review the recently released findings so that they can be utilized more effectively to improve future policy and practice. A series of additional meetings will be held around the country to review the data from other sites, culminating in a national meeting in Washington, DC, in 2013.



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“We believe the findings from this study will help us advance new and more effective policies and programs that can lead to more children living safer, happier and healthier lives.” said Rosie Allen Ryan, President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina.

An important partner at this point in the study is the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation which recognized the need for the research findings from LONGSCAN to reach an audience broader than just the scientific community. The Foundation is supporting a project called *From Science to Practice*, led by Elizabeth Dawes Knight of the UNC Injury Prevention Research Center. The goal of the project is to effectively communicate the findings from LONGSCAN to professionals working to help families and children, to policy makers who make budget decisions and pass laws affecting families and children, and to communities and parents throughout the country as well.

“The families in this study made a critical contribution by helping us understand better about how families and children are affected by stress and social support,” said Desmond Runyan, MD, DrPH, Jack and Vicki Thompson Professor of Pediatrics at The University of Colorado and former Principal Investigator of LONGSCAN. “Families and children everywhere owe the participants in this study their thanks.”

The Family Child Study was funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS). LONGSCAN is supported with funding from the Children’s Bureau of USDHHS, with additional support from the National Institutes of Health, to the Injury Prevention Research Center of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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