

Child Protection and Educational Neglect: A Preliminary Study

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Historically, intervention for children with school attendance problems has rested with the juvenile court system reflecting a definition of causation as an individual's pathology. More recent law changes in more than 25 states have moved the intervention for elementary age children (ages 6-11) who miss school to the child welfare system. These changes mirror research findings of absenteeism for young children having an ecological origin. These laws have resulted in child protection systems becoming involved in young truants under the definition of educational neglect. The purpose of this study is to begin the exploration of child protection intervention into educational neglect in the State of Minnesota. This exploratory study relies upon the linkage of two large secondary data bases; The Minnesota Social Services Information System (SSIS) which contains child protection data, and the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS), the public education data repository for the state of Minnesota.

Historical Relevance

For over 150 years absenteeism from schools was the responsibility of the juvenile justice system. Mandatory school laws date back to the mid-19th century and states came to institutionalize the enforcement of truancy through the juvenile criminal court. Truancy is considered a status offense, one of a number of behaviors attributed to adolescents that would not be considered a crime if they were adults. By the 1970's research had begun to show that status offenders were more likely to be detained, be placed in secure confinement, and spend longer periods of time in correctional institutions than juveniles who had committed serious crime (Sarri, 1974; National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1975; Russel & Sediak, 1993).

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Child welfare advocates in the 1970's, led by the recently created Children's Defense Fund, focused their energy on children and youth who were being excluded from access to education (Crossman-Tower, 2004). Their work culminated in Congress passing the Juvenile Justice and Protection Act in 1974. The Act mandated that states could no longer place status offenders in detention centers or institutions and encouraged interventions based in communities. The following year, 1975, saw the passage of Title XX amendments to the Social Security Act as well as the Passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The policy stage was being set to make resources available to families experiencing truancy issues; however the child welfare system was reluctant to take on the intervention responsibility.

With the main tools of incarceration and institutionalization being taken away from the juvenile justice system, the intervention in truancy began to flounder (Russel & Sedlak, 1993). No community structure stepped forward to take responsibility and juvenile corrections continued a non-interventionist approach which included case management and voluntary cooperation. This was an ineffective model. Truants were referred to social service agencies, divested from juvenile court jurisdiction, or punished within the juvenile justice system using non-secure alternatives (Korbin & Klein, 1983).

The passage of CAPTA in 1975 also included mandated reporting laws for child abuse which almost immediately increased the number of child abuse interventions by the child protection system. Most child welfare agencies did not proportionally increase their staff

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and case loads climbed. Sarri (1985) points out that traditionally, children who become societal concerns as a result of their own behavior (i.e. mental health issues, behavior problems) were not attended to by the child protection system. This system's model rests on intervention of the custodians who were abusing and neglecting children. Thus even with adequate resources the intervention model of child welfare may not be sufficient to deal with portions of the truant population.

The traditional juvenile justice model focuses on the offender's pathology. It was this process that led to high incarceration rates in the 1970's. Research into causes of truancy began to intimate that the problems were more than the individual. Several researchers began to conceptualize both the causations and the intervention strategies into the emerging ecological framework theories attempting to understand the relationships of not only the individual but the family, community, and the school systems (Barth, 1984; Levine, 1984; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). The discourse in the 1980's brought together these concepts and laid the foundation for the creation of new policies and intervention models as well as informing social work research.

In 1988 the Minnesota State Legislature recodified its juvenile code to create the Child in Need of Protection (CHIPS) statute. Besides rewriting the child protection code, the CHIPS statute included non-criminal offenses (i.e. truancy, run aways) which were previously covered under the juvenile delinquency codes. This fundamental change reflected the recognition of policy makers that these issues were likely family related. Despite these policy changes, intervention in Minnesota languished. The juvenile justice

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model used various forms of incarceration for intervention. The State policy changes made clear that truants were to be handled outside the formal arena of juvenile justice. The Minnesota child protection model focused on custodian neglect and abuse. This approach covered some truancy scenarios, but not the majority of them. Law changes at both the federal and state level were creating the need for local social welfare agencies to modify their policies and practice models to adequately intervene in absenteeism. The local child welfare agencies were reluctant to take on the task of intervening with young truants, viewing them as outside the abuse/neglect model (P. Moses, Personal communication, July 10, 2004).

Minnesota revisited the Juvenile Code in 1993 by creating the Maltreatment of Minors Act (1993). Included in this was a more concise understanding of truancy intervention and who was responsible for action. The State reflected the family/ecological component of truancy by delineating children age 11 and under as being covered by the child protection statutes (“Educational Neglect”) whereas children 12 and over would be sent on a juvenile justice track (“Truants”)¹. The legal standard for educational neglect is 7 or more days of unexcused absences and it is a required child protection report for mandated reporters.

¹ The law presumed 11 and under as the custodian’s responsibility, however this did not prevent these children as being truant due to their own behavior or 12 plus as being ed neglect by custodians.

Truancy

Communities:

Schools and their communities have struggled for years to reduce truancy. Studies consistently show there is a relationship between truancy and school drop outs with delinquency rates. Furthermore, there are significant overall social and financial costs (Schultz, 1987; Paterson, 1989; Berg, 1992; Corville-Smith, 1995; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Much attention has been paid to high school drop out rates as well as graduation rates rather than to daily attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Chronic truants are more likely to drop out of school and U.S. Department of Education statistics show that dropping out of high school is associated with lower earnings, increased risk of unemployment, greater risk of reliance on welfare, and a greater risk of serving time in prison by adulthood (Garry, 1996; White, Fyfe, Campbell, & Goldkamp, 2001). It is obvious that children who experience high absenteeism will probably fall behind in their school work and therefore experience a struggle to “keep up” with their grade level or, in the worst situations, completely give up. Browning, Thornberry, & Porter (1999) examined results of the 10 year Rochester Youth Development Study and found that weak school links (lacking relationships within the school) and poor school performance were associated with increased drop out rates which in turn were related to involvement in juvenile delinquency. In contrast, school success was associated with resilience in high risk youth. Youth who had better attachment to school and better performance had lower delinquency rates (Browning et al, 1999).

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Research in several communities has shown direct links between truant youth and crime. Police in Van Nuys, California reported that shoplifting arrests decreased by 60% following a three week truancy sweep program (Shuster, 1995; Garry, 1996). Police in St. Paul, Minnesota report similar crime decreases (50%) after instituting a truancy school attendance center in 1994 (Garry, 1996). In Tacoma, WA, police report that one-third of burglaries and one-fifth of aggravated assaults were committed between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. on weekdays by juveniles who should otherwise be in school (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). “Findings from OJJDP’s Study Group on Very Young Offenders indicate that chronic truancy in elementary school is linked to serious delinquent behavior at age 12 and under” (Baker et al, 2001, p. 2). Farrington (2003) points out that early intervention is effective for preventing young truants developing into more serious delinquents. Berg, Hullin, and McGuire (1979) found in their experimental study of court truants, that a reduction in truancy correlated with a reduction in delinquency.

Economics:

Both adolescent delinquency and school dropouts produce social and financial costs to families and communities. According to a 1993 U.S. Department of Education bulletin (cited in Baker et al, 2001, p. 5) adults who dropped out of high school have fewer job prospects, lower salaries, and are unemployed longer and more frequently than those who earned their high school diploma. The U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics (2001:2) has shown that in 1999 six percent of high school graduates were considered in poverty while fourteen percent of those in poverty had not completed high school. Baker et al (2001)

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purport that the financial impact of truancy can be measured in concrete ways:

communities have a less well-educated work force, businesses experience loss through youth shoplifting, daytime crimes rates may elevate, and social services spending could escalate in response to increased truancy.

The Role of Child Protection:

The Minnesota child protection system has intervened in educational neglect for more than a decade, yet there is little information on effectiveness. The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore the results of and factors related to child protection intervention into educational neglect in the State of Minnesota using links between secondary child protection and educational data.

METHODS:

The purpose of this study is to explore results of the intervention of the child protection system on those children and families who have a maltreatment finding² of educational neglect. A unique opportunity presented itself within the context of educational neglect and data collection. In January 2000 the State of Minnesota began collecting child welfare data statewide on the SSIS system. At the same time there was discussion of diverting most educational neglect reports to an alternative process that did not involve the traditional child protection system (and would result in no systematic data collection). Minnesota social services agencies eventually implemented this version and referred to it as *Alternative Response*, commencing in January of 2002. Thus, for one complete academic school year, 2000-2001, there is SSIS data on all traditional child protection

² *Maltreatment finding* refers to the child protection agency concluding the factual nature of the initial allegation.

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maltreatment findings of educational neglect in the State of Minnesota, providing a unique opportunity to study the attendance of these students before similar maltreatment situations were funneled into the new process.

This study examined all confirmed “substantiated” maltreatment reports of educational neglect (defined as 7 or more unexcused absences within the school year for children ages 12 and under) statewide,(47 counties out of 87), from September 1, 2000 through June 1, 2001 (N=696). Variables for each subject included race, age, geographic location, and gender. The child protection subjects were then matched with education attendance data to calculate the attendance rate for these children during the initial school year of 2000-2001. This academic school year corresponded to the time period during which these children were identified as having a substantiated educational neglect maltreatment finding. A total of 623 children were located in the education data system. The attendance data for this same group was gathered in the academic school year following the year in which the maltreatment finding was substantiated (the 2001-2002 school year). A subsequent comparison of the attendance rates for the two school years was made to describe the attendance rates of these students over this two-year time period, over which they received child protection services.

The Data Bases: MARSS and SSIS:

MARSS contains all attendance information for the Department of Education for students enrolled in public Minnesota schools (excluding charter, private, parochial, and specialty schools). Calculations of attendance can be time-consuming due to the multiple updates

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common to a single student record over the course of a typical school year. There are no standardized methods for keeping attendance records, resulting in individual schools in the same district having different data collection definitions and methods.

Attendance Rate:

Included in computations are students who were enrolled at any time during the school year. Attendance data is generated from the year-end MARSS database. Attendance rates for each grade, school, or district are based on the portion of time a student is enrolled in that grade, school or district. The rate is actually a ratio calculated by the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) divided by the Average Daily Membership (ADM). The ADA and ADM for each grade, school, or district are added together and the resulting figures are used for each grade, school, or district summary for a given student for a given academic school year. $(\text{Individual ADA}/\text{Individual ADM}) \times 100 = \text{Attendance Rate}$ for that individual. Perfect attendance would be represented by 1.0. Improvement in attendance is defined as an increase in the ratio of ADA/ADM from the school year 00-01 to 01-02.

SSIS is the State of Minnesota's database for child welfare. This database contains all descriptive information on child welfare cases and is the principal case management tool for Minnesota county child welfare agencies. SSIS provided the data of identified educational neglect maltreatment findings. SSIS allows for multiple maltreatment coding including a general neglect finding. SSIS does not collect information pertaining to type of intervention; therefore the study was able to identify 696 educational neglect maltreatment findings, but unable to track what the child welfare system's involvement

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was with the family (i.e. whether there were concrete services offered to the families and if so what services).

Findings: Age, Gender, and Race

Table 1 lists the results of variables within the child protection maltreatment results.

Table 1		
State Wide		
Characteristics of Educational Neglect Maltreatment Findings (N=696)		
9/1/2000 through 6/1/2001		
Age:	Number	Percent
5	53	7.6%
6	115	16.5%
7	117	16.9%
8	95	13.8%
9	93	13.3%
10	109	15.6%
11	101	14.5%
12	13	1.8%
Total	696	100%
Gender:		
Male	334	46.5%
Female	362	53.5%

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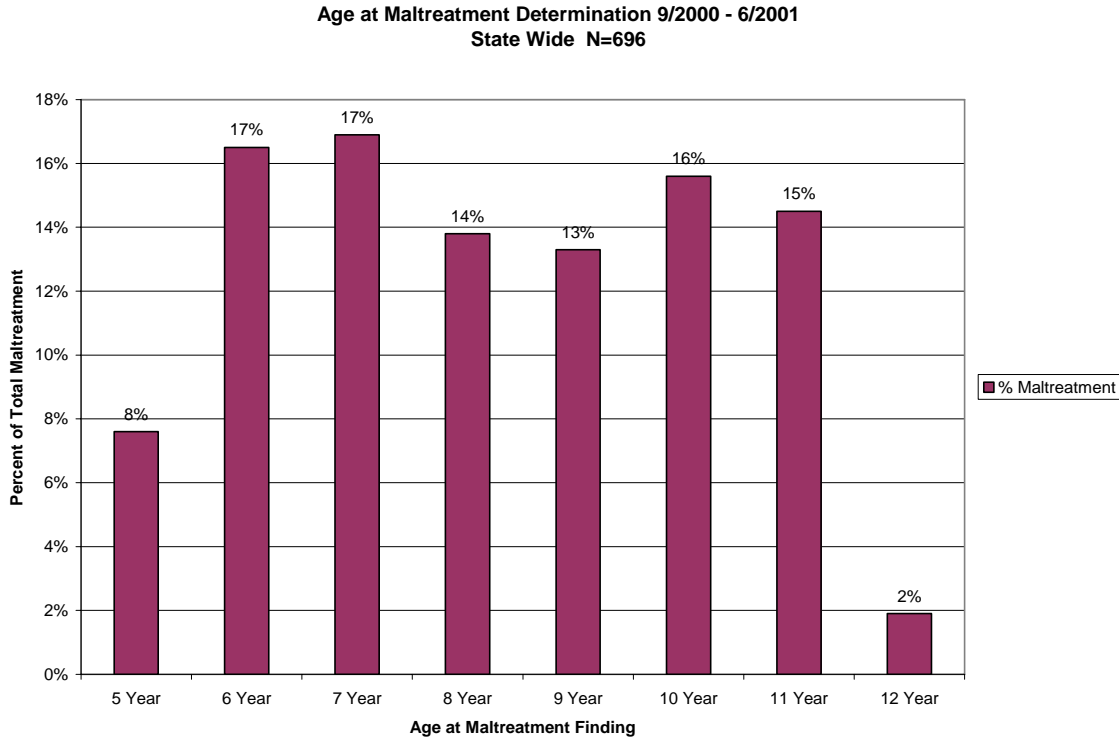


Figure 1

There was a small difference in child age in relation to maltreatment findings (**Figure 1**). Six and seven year olds have a slightly higher rate of maltreatment. (These age groups would be in the 1st and 2nd grades). There do not appear to be differences when examining the data by gender.

Similar to many studies of child welfare trends, certain racial groups are represented disproportionately in this data. Both African American and American Indian children are over- represented in the population while Caucasian children are under represented compared to their total state populations (**Table 2**).

Table 2		
State Wide Characteristics of Educational Neglect Maltreatment Findings (N=696) 9/1/2000 through 6/1/2001 and Minnesota Total Maltreatment for 2000 (N=11,169)		
Race: *	Ed Neglect	All Maltreatment
White non-Hispanic	18.8%	54.0%
Black non-Hispanic	44.0%	24.0%
American Indian	12.0%	7.0%
Asian	2.1%	4.0%
Two or More	10.2%	7.0%
Hispanic	6.6%	7.0%
Undetermined	6.3%	

* Due to rounding off totals may not be 100%

Figure 2 shows neglect findings by race and ethnicity compared to the 2000 census data. Caucasian children ages 5-12 comprise 84% of this age group (US Census, 2000), yet constitute only 19% of all educational neglect maltreatment findings. In Minnesota, African American children in the 5-12 year-old age group comprise 5% of the total population, yet they constitute 44% of the educational neglect maltreatment findings. Likewise, Indian children comprise 2% of the population for this age group yet are 12% of the educational neglect maltreatment findings.

Figure 2A compares the percent of educational neglect maltreatment findings by race, against all maltreatment findings statewide in 2000. The statewide Caucasian maltreatment rate in 2000 was 54% of the total but was approximately 19% of educational neglect for this group. There is a disparity in both African American and Indian maltreatment comparisons with African American children having a 24% rate of all maltreatment compared to a 44% educational neglect maltreatment finding and Indian

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children had a 7% maltreatment rate compared to a 12% educational neglect maltreatment rate.

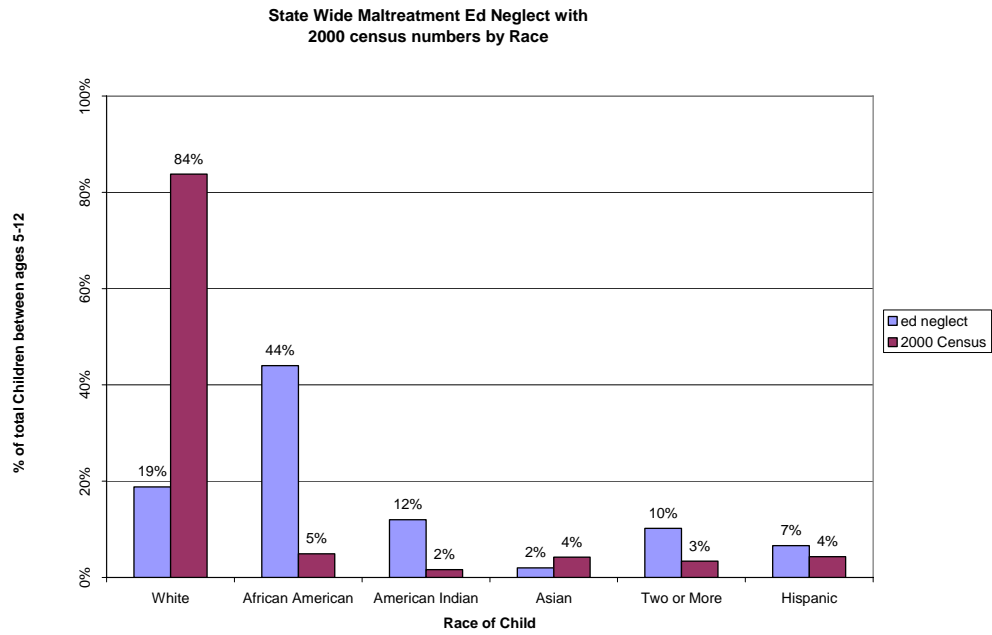


Figure 2

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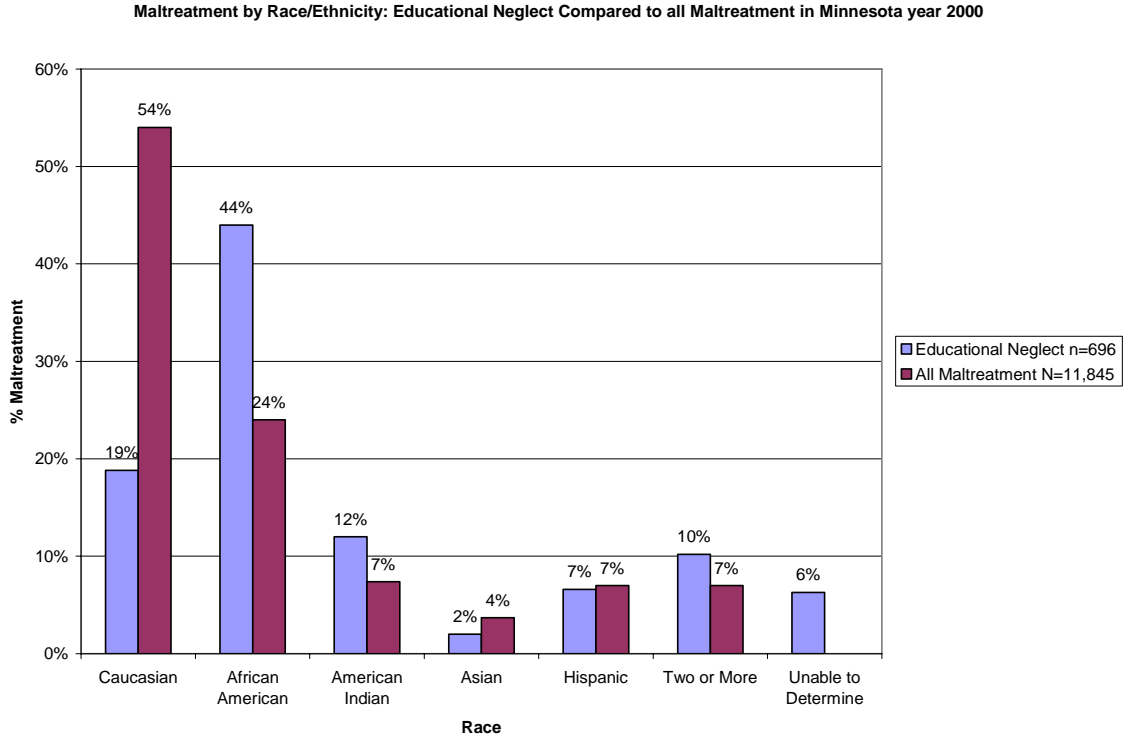


Figure 2A

The geographic orientation of this group bears mentioning. Urban areas in Minnesota have high concentrations of people of color. Since not all Minnesota counties are represented by this particular group (47 of 87 counties are included) and nearly 82% of the group's children reside in metropolitan counties (as indicated by the county in which their maltreatment finding was substantiated), this group is undoubtedly skewed by geography and the demographic, racial, and ethnic make-up of urban communities.

Geography: Age, Gender, and Race

The SSIS data was analyzed by geographic area with the 7 county metro area compared to the remaining counties in greater Minnesota. **Table 3** has the results of age and gender:

Table 3				
Characteristics of Educational Neglect Maltreatment by Geographic Location 9/1/2000 through 6/1/2001				
N=696 7 County Metro N=567 Non-Metro N=129				
Age:	Metro Counties		Non-Metro Counties	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
6	99	17.5%	16	12.4%
7	94	16.6%	23	17.8%
8	84	14.8%	11	8.5%
9	68	12.0%	25	19.4%
10	91	16.0%	18	14.0%
11	76	13.4%	25	19.4%
Gender:				
Male	274	48.3%	60	46.5%
Female	293	51.7%	69	53.5%
Note: Data confidentiality requires numbers less than 8 to not be reported, thus totals differ slightly (N=630)				

Overall both age and gender remain mixed, with the slight possibility of the non-metro counties maintaining a consistently high (19%) maltreatment finding for children ages 9 and 11. **Figure 3** shows this age/geography difference:

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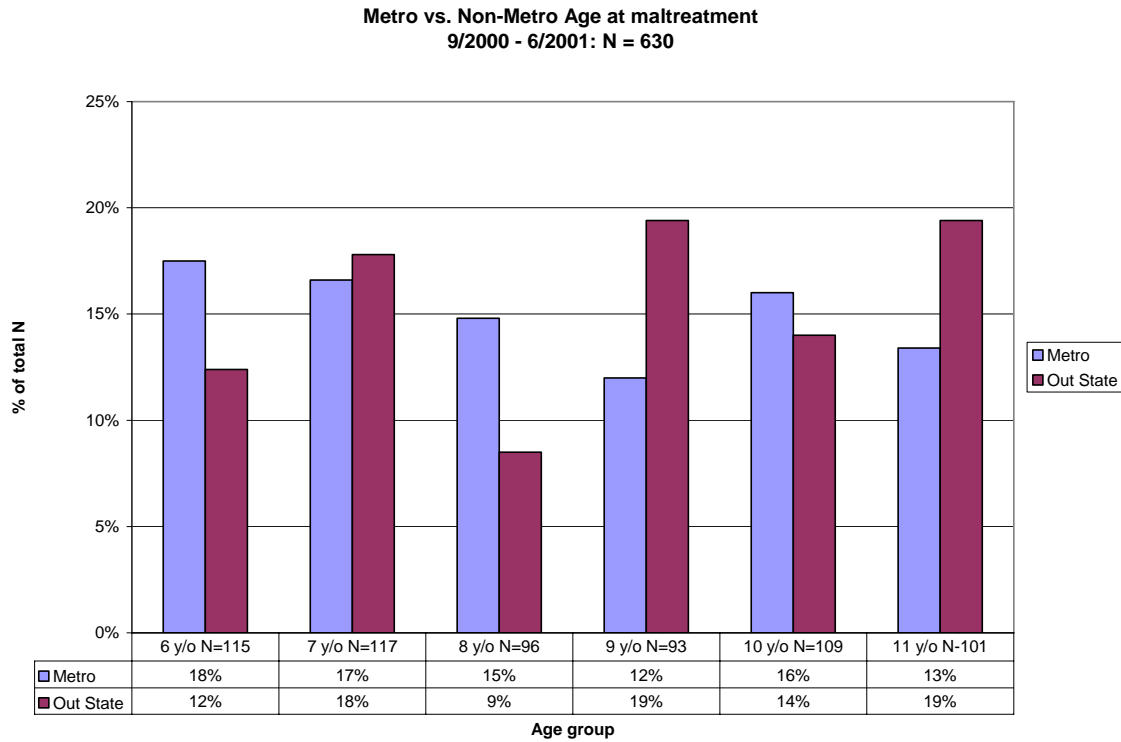


Figure 3

When race was examined by geography there were even greater disparities for African American children with their maltreatment proportions increasing in the metro area and American Indian children increasing in the non-metro counties (**Table 4**).

Table 4

**Characteristics of Educational Neglect Maltreatment by Geographic Location
9/1/200 through 6/1/2001**

N=696
7 County Metro N=567
Non-Metro N=129

	Metro Counties		Non-Metro Counties	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Race:*				
White	72	12.6%	59	45.7%
Black	296	52.2%	10	7.8%
Am. Indian	55	9.7%	29	22.5%
Asian	13	2.6%	0	0%
Two or More	51	8.9%	20	15.5%
Hispanic	36	6.3%	10	7.8%
Undetermined	44	7.8%	0	0%

*Both White and Black are Non-Hispanic

The data also show the disparity in minority maltreatment reports. African American children, ages 6-11, make up 9.1% of the metro area population by age group (U.S. Census, 2000) yet they account for 52.2% of all maltreatment findings for the maltreatment group. Likewise, American Indian children comprise 2.4% of their age group in the population in non-metro counties (U.S. Census, 2000) but constituted 22.5% of the non-metro maltreatment findings. **Figure 4** shows these differences by race and geographic location:

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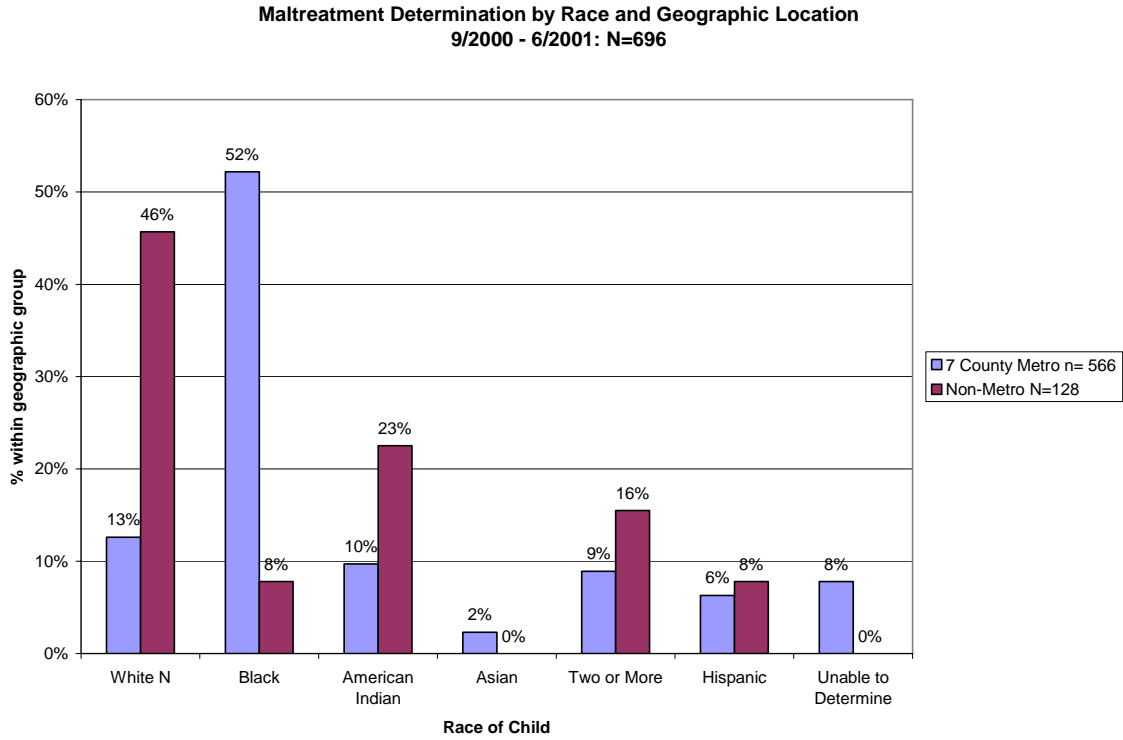


Figure 4

Attendance Results following Maltreatment Identification

Subjects were found using a combination of their last name and birth date, last name and first name, and last name plus any other unique identifier. The attendance distribution rates for the sample are:

N=623

Year	00-01	01-02
Mean	.8249	.8792
Median	.8400	.9011
Mode	.880	.940

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A graphic distribution more clearly shows the gradual improvement from the first to the second school year.

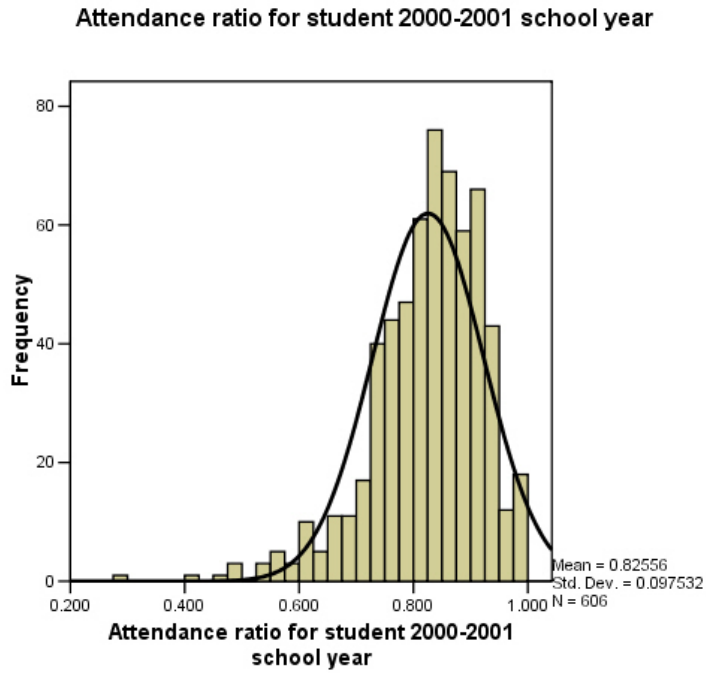


Figure A

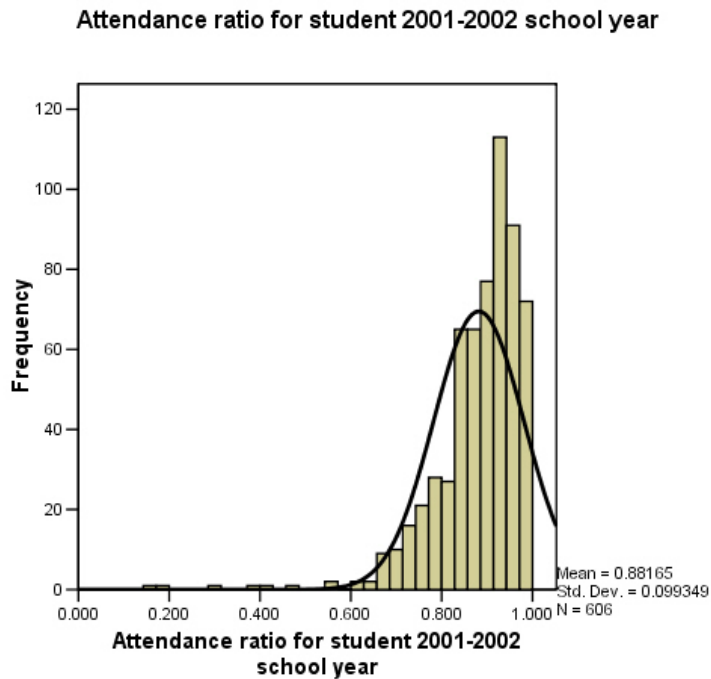


Figure B

There appears to be an improvement of attendance for the group from one year to the next. **Table 5** reflects a breakout of variables for the sample after calculating attendance change the following year. The overall sample had approximately a 70% improvement in attendance with a 30% non-improvement. In the analysis of age and attendance there appears to be a slight trend for less improvement in attendance as the sample ages. This is more clearly seen in **Figure 5**. Six year olds had an 80% improvement while eleven year olds had a 60%. Gender appears to not have an effect on in improvement rates.

Table 5
Characteristics of Educational Neglect Maltreatment Children Following an
Analysis of Attendance in Proceeding Year
9/1/2001 through 6/1/2002

Confirmed Educational Neglect Maltreatment children Found in the MARRS data base N=623

Age:	No Improvement		Improvement		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
5	9	20.0%	36	80.0%	45
6	20	19.4%	83	80.6%	103
7	25	24.3%	78	75.7%	103
8	26	30.0%	61	70.0%	87
9	26	31.0%	58	69.0%	84
10	26	27.7%	68	72.3%	94
11	37	39.4%	57	60.6%	94
12*					13
Gender:					
Male	85	26.6%	213	73.3%	298
Female	90	28.0%	235	72.0%	325

* Due to < 8 this age group could not be broken out

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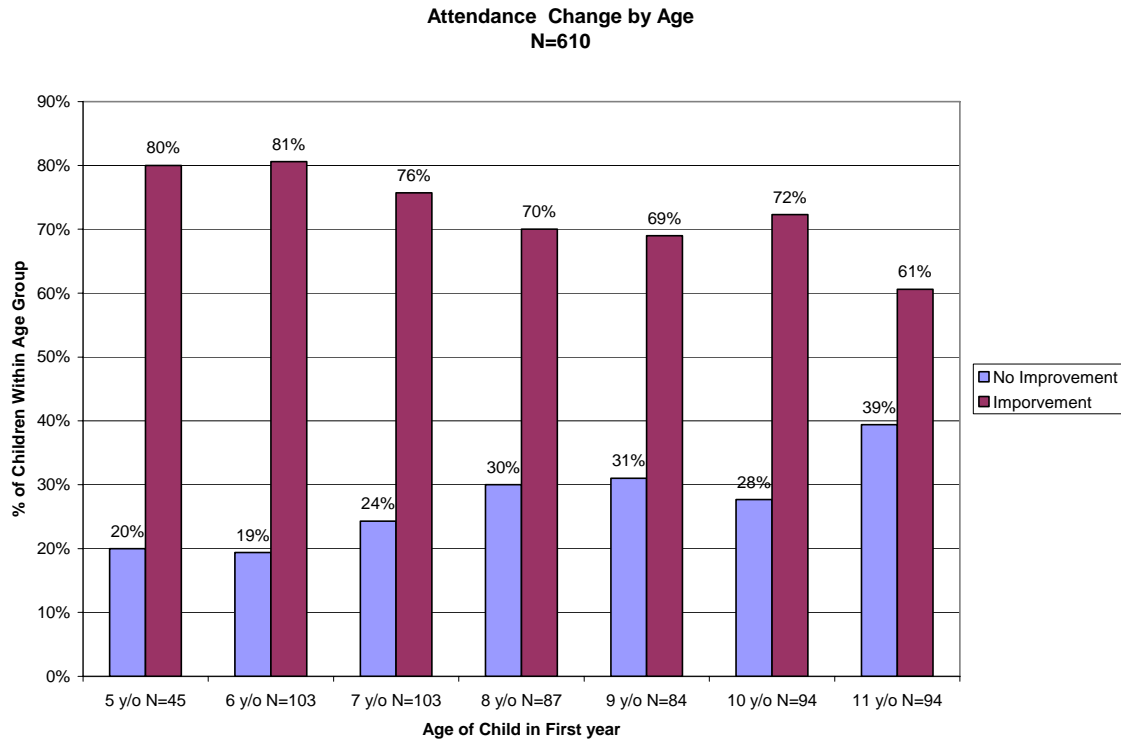


Figure 5

Note: N=610 for figure 5 due to the non-charting of the 12 years (n=13)

Table 6 continues to show a fairly consistent improvement rate of about 2/3 by both race and geography. There is a small difference in improvement change for American Indian children with 66% of the sample having improvement and 33% having non-improvement compared to other races. The race attendance changes are highlighted in **Figure 6**.

Table 6
Characteristics of Educational Neglect Maltreatment Children Following an
Analysis of Attendance in Proceeding Year
9/1/2001 through 6/1/2002

Confirmed Educational Neglect Maltreatment children Found in the MARRS data base N=623

	No Improvement		Improvement		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Race:					
White	35	28.0%	72	72.0%	127
Black	78	28.7%	194	71.3%	272
Am. Indian	25	33.3%	50	66.6%	75
All Others**	28	24.4%	88	75.6%	116
Unable to Determine	8	24.2%	24	75.8%	33
Geographic Location:					
7-County Metro	140	26.7%	362	73.3%	502
Other Counties	35	29.0%	86	71.0%	121
Out-of-Home Placement:					
No Placement	172	29.0%	427	71.0%	599
Placement	3	11.5%	23	88.5%	26

** Due to < 8 Asian, Hispanic, and Two or More are grouped into All Others.

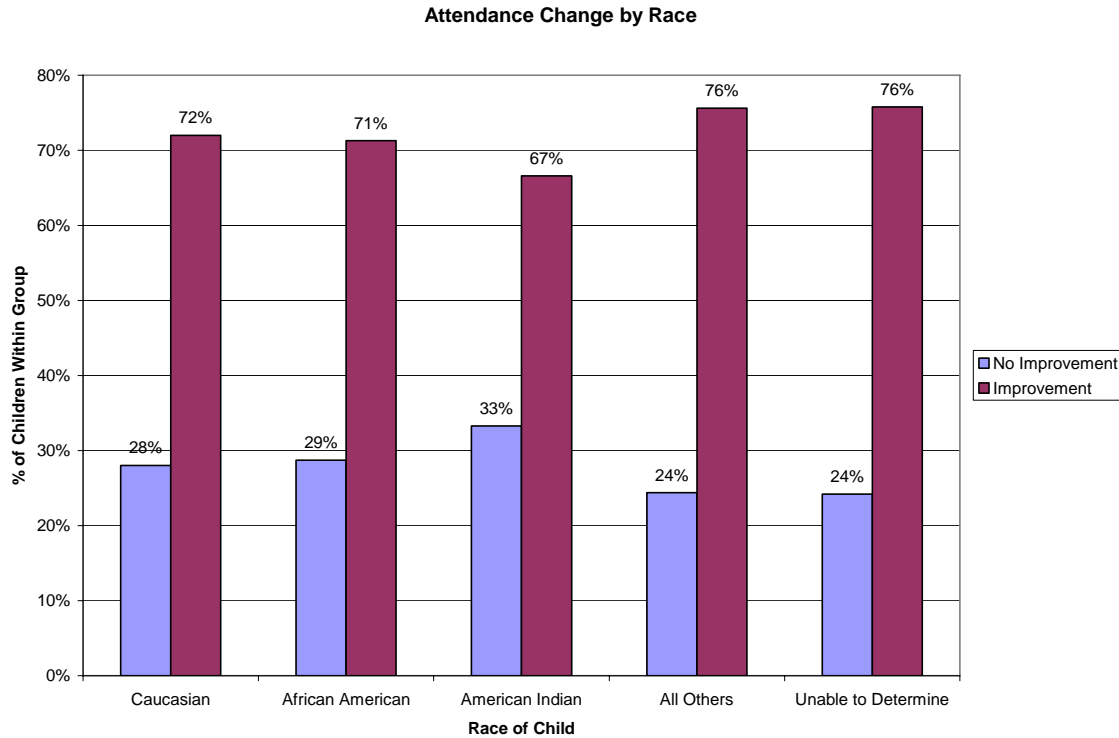


Figure 6

Discussion:

This study examined the school attendance of Minnesota children determined to be educationally neglected for the year in which that finding was determined and again in the year following determination. The results suggest that the current policy of child protection intervention in educational neglect may positively influence the attendance of children who experience absenteeism (approximately 70% of the sample had improved attendance). What is unknown is what specific proportion of the improvement in attendance can be attributed to the intervention provided by contact with county social services and what portion is due to error or factors affecting attendance improvement. To

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identify the specific effect of the child protection maltreatment a more rigorous experimental model would be needed. This descriptive study succeeded in illustrating the condition of the aggregated attendance rates for children identified with educational neglect and the resulting improved attendance rate some part of which is likely to be attributable to the child protection intervention.

Several characteristics of the educational neglect sample were analyzed including age, gender, race, geographic location, and out-of-home placement. Major disparities were revealed in maltreatment determination within race characteristics as well as across all maltreatment, statewide. Examining attendance improvement revealed some possible correlation with age of child; however race, gender, and geographic location were less salient factors. The geographic concentration of the group in the urban centers of Minnesota has an important bearing on the racial and ethnic trends observed in the data and needs to be taken into account when examining race and ethnic findings.

Several results in this study reflect the lack of 100% of the counties having any educational neglect findings on their SSIS data. As stated before, the study included 47 of 87 counties with the non-reporting counties generally being outside the metro area. Table 1 shows this missing information in the simple geographic breakout of the maltreatment findings with a full 81.5% being in the metro area. Data for the study was drawn from SSIS nine months after statewide implementation of the program and possibly several localities were not completely engaged in the case management system. Furthermore, there are no statewide practice standards of where to code educational

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neglect. It is possible that practice in some agencies dictate educational neglect to be coded as a more generalized neglect and this study would not have been able to refine a general neglect maltreatment finding that might have elements of educational neglect. This further mirrors the still developing sophistication of identifying educational neglect as a stand-alone maltreatment within the field of child protection assessment practice. Practice variation by county agency may also have some ultimate bearing on attendance rate changes. Any future study would need to control for agency practice as well as provide a comparison group to approach a level of experimental rigor.

Table 2 shows that there is a disparity of maltreatment findings for both African American and Indian children with 44% and 12%, respectively. Further breakout of race in table 4 shows an increase in the African American children's disparity to 52.2%, in the metro area and an increase in Indian children's disparity to 22.5% in non-metro counties. The results for race are mirrored in other studies showing disparity in the child protection system. In maltreatment reporting, African American and American Indian children are seven times more likely to have findings than Caucasian children in the State (Children Defense Fund/MN Child Welfare Report, 2000). Figure 2A compares educational neglect maltreatment findings to all maltreatment findings in Minnesota in 2000. There is a significant disparity in the percent totals of maltreatment findings in Caucasian, African American, and Indian children with Caucasian children having 19% of all educational neglect maltreatment and 54% of all maltreatment. African American children had 44% of educational neglect findings while having 24% of all maltreatment. Indian children had 12% of the educational neglect findings and 7% of the state wide

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maltreatment. Thus both African American and Indian children have a greater disparity in maltreatment determinations of educational neglect than determinations made with all maltreatments combined. Educational neglect maltreatment is unique in that schools are usually the only reporting source that county agencies accept. The disparity shown in this study suggests that African American and Indian children are at much greater risk of being reported for educational neglect or that agencies are more likely to determine educational neglect.

The disparity across maltreatment findings reflects the weighting of the educational neglect group toward the urban area, where the majority of children of color live. A further explanation affecting disparity might lie in the geographic reporting practices of educational neglect. Suburban schools in the metro area can be assumed to have more resources and might offer services for truant youth prior to reporting to the local county agency. Inner city schools might lack resources to intervene and therefore be more likely to report educational neglect to hand-off to county agencies earlier.

Race disparities disappear when improvement of attendance is analyzed for the year following a maltreatment finding of educational neglect. Table 6 shows that the rate of improvement is consistent for all races and reflects the rate of improvement for the total population. Thus, there is racial disparity in maltreatment findings that is not sustained in the improvement outcome of better attendance. The study data does not allow for detailed service intervention information for the children who have an educational neglect maltreatment finding. The data analysis for this study suggests that once there is a maltreatment finding of educational neglect, there is approximately a 72% chance of all

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children having improved attendance when they remain in their home, irrespective of their gender, race, or geographic location with age having some variation. What is unknown is what proportion of this 72% improvement chance is attributable specifically to the child protection intervention, what proportion occurs simply because an attendance problem is brought to the attention of the child and the family, or some unique characteristics of this particular child protection group.

Figure 5 shows a slight decline in attendance change as the child's age group increases. Six and seven year olds have an 80% improvement in attendance while 11 year olds have close to a 61% improvement. Assuming that the child protection intervention has some effect in attendance change, the age differential has implications for intervention models. As discussed earlier, current research and policy address educational neglect for young children as an ecological issue within the family, however for older children the paradigm remains one of individual pathology. The decrease in improvement across the age span might reflect the less effective ecological intervention for older children. The study did not parse out geography/age and attendance change.

The one intervention that the study was able to track was out-of-home placement. Of the total children followed for attendance change 4.2% * (n=26) ended up in out-of-home placement subsequent to their maltreatment finding and of these, 81% had improved attendance the following year. Albeit the placement sub-sample is small, the results show that out-of-home placement may be related to improved attendance.

* Placements of 24 hours or greater were tabulated.

Limitations of the Study:

This is an exploratory examination of educational neglect and attendance data; however this study is lacking a comparable group to provide an experimental design. Inferences must be made with caution. The study has very weak internal validity. For example, there is a history threat present because some other factor (i.e. Federal or State initiative) that might have affected attendance at the same time.

Another weakness in the design is the lack of understanding of developmental sequences. Farrington (2003) points this out when referring to the relationship between truancy and delinquency. If truancy is a causative factor for delinquency, intervening in truancy will subsequently lower delinquency rates. However, truancy and delinquency may be manifestations of other causal factors and may just happen to appear together in most cases. This might be true of educational neglect and child protection intervention. Perhaps educational neglect is present at high rates with other maltreatment factors of abuse or neglect and intervention in the abuse or neglect issues affects attendance.

A third issue with the study is the inconsistent recording practices of educational neglect findings among counties. With about approximately half of Minnesota counties reporting no educational neglect, it is probable that educational neglect is infrequently discerned from the broader neglect category. The statewide SSIS reporting lacks clarity in definition.

Implications for Further Study:

There is little research about the causation and intervention of high absenteeism among young children. Further work should include a more refined sample; possibly from one county which would control for a number of factors unique to local practice. Absent having a comparable group of children missing a lot of school without child protection intervention, a study design showing attendance change before and after the intervention should yield better validity in determining what portion of attendance improvement can be attributed to the child protection intervention activities.

Epstein & Sheldon (2002) showed in their study that factors that affect daily attendance are not the same factors that affected chronic absenteeism (defined as missing 20 or more days of school). They assessed effective interventions and found that referrals to truant officers and use of juvenile court helped to increase daily student attendance but was ineffective for a chronic truant population. Home visits, on the other hand, appeared to be beneficial for the chronic truant but not useful for increasing daily attendance. Further research could be done to focus on those children with very high absenteeism and determine if child protection intervention is as effective for those groups as others who miss some school. This study examined the entire group's improvement, but did not associate individual improvement of those who began by having chronic absenteeism.

Finally, Teasley (2004) points to the very complex nature of young truancy and the multiple factors of socio-economics, school, community, personal, developmental,

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family, and ethnic and cultural status. Further research should control for these aspects and would possibly yield differing results of child protection intervention depending on the group's dominant features.

Implications for Policy:

This study was hampered by the inability to discern excused from unexcused absences. The Department of Education should consider whether there is a need for the collection of this type of refinement in their current data systems. Anecdotal evidence further implies that schools often have no consistent procedure for recording attendance, thus making district or state data difficult to analyze.

The Department of Human Services could consider focusing more on differentiating education issues as they relate to child welfare. In the last five years of child welfare annual reports, Minnesota has failed to differentiate educational neglect data from the overall neglect statistics, yet educational neglect is labeled as a separate maltreatment in the juvenile code (Mn. Maltreatment of Minors Act, 1988). The Federal Child Service Reviews audit child welfare agencies attention to education of child protection children, yet the State of Minnesota does not focus on education outcomes.

Implications for Practice:

The study shows large disparities in race for maltreatment determinations for educational neglect. Child protection agencies could work much closer with schools in developing early identification and intervention strategies. Child welfare workers could be assigned to several schools within a district therefore building relationships with school

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professionals as well as children and their families. These workers could begin to use the informal resources children and communities share to build strength and resilience in young truants-to-be. Furthermore, a closer physical working relationship between child protection and school communities would allow child welfare workers to follow children through their early educational years, hopefully creating firm foundations for follow-through to graduation from high school.

Training and education is also needed for both child protection and school professionals in documentation and reporting of educational neglect. The lack of almost half of the counties reporting for this study speaks to a potential lack of knowledge by professionals or at the very least, very disparate practices.

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