Abstract

Objective: A call has been made for child welfare agencies to provide more tailored interventions. At the same time, research has shown that child welfare services (CWS) are provided to families based on the type of maltreatment, leaving neglected children underserved compared with abused children. This study tests whether this pattern holds true in a nationally-representative sample of children, and considering factors that have not yet been addressed. Method: Data are from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being, a longitudinal study of children investigated for maltreatment. Child welfare worker (CWW) accounts of 4,692 investigations are used to test the hypothesis that maltreatment type is related to post-investigative CWS, even when factors such as caregiver substance abuse, domestic violence, and perceived child harm are considered. Multinomial logistic regression is the primary method of analysis. Results: Sexual abuse is nearly 15 times more likely to generate CWW ratings of severe child harm and significantly less likely to lead to case closure compared with other maltreatment. Caregiver drug abuse, low cooperation, and multi-type maltreatment are associated with out-of-home placement. Conclusions: The maltreatment type-services link is supported, but is indirect overall, with services centering on alleviating child harm in cases of sexual abuse and services driven by caregiver concerns in cases of neglect. Greater recognition among practitioners and policymakers that each type of maltreatment poses unique threats to children’s safety and well-being may aid the design of services that are more heavily weighted on the individual needs of children and families.