

Child Maltreatment Fatalities Risk Factors and Perpetrator Profile

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Background

- In FY2005 it was confirmed that 1,460 children in the United States died as a result of maltreatment by their parent or caretaker (US DHHS, 2007).
- Almost 77% of children were younger than 4 years of age
- 36% of these deaths resulted from neglect, 28% from physical abuse, and 29% from multiple maltreatment types (US DHHS, 2007)
- A substantial portion of children who died from maltreatment were already known to the child protection agencies

Child Characteristics as Risk Factors Identified by Previous Research

Risk factors are any individual or contextual characteristics that contribute to potentially harmful conditions that may lead to the child's death

- Younger age
- Minority status
- Child behavior problems
- Gender – inconsistent findings

Caregiver Characteristics as Risk Factors Identified by Previous Research

- Younger age
- Perpetrators' mental health problems
- Gender – inconsistent findings
- Type of a caregiver - inconsistent findings

Florida State Child Abuse Death Review

- Established by statute in 1999 (Chapter 383.402 F.S.)
- Florida Child Abuse Death Review Team consists of a multidisciplinary committee
- Conducts detailed reviews of the facts and circumstances surrounding child abuse and neglect deaths
- In 2004, the Florida Legislature expanded the role of the team to include the review of all verified child abuse and neglect deaths

Child Abuse Death Review – Perpetrator Risk Factor Study

- Funded by the Department of Children & Family Services, Task Force for Children’s Justice Act
- Collaboration between the Florida Department of Health and Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute
- Overall study goal:
to identify various risk factors for fatal maltreatment in order to create effective prevention programs

Child Abuse Death Review – Perpetrator Risk Factor Study

Procedure:

Review records of maltreatment cases in the State of Florida for a period of four years, 1999-2002

- **Child abuse-related fatalities**
- **Child neglect-related fatalities**
- **Nonfatal child maltreatment cases**

Data

- DCF records as well as other available documentation, i.e., autopsy report, medical records, law enforcement report, social services history
- Medicaid Claims administrative data
- Child Welfare Information System (HomeSafenet)

Child Abuse Death Review – Perpetrator Risk Factor Study

Two substudies:

- **Child Characteristics Predicting a Fatal Assault**
- **Profiles of Child Maltreatment Perpetrators and Risk for Fatal Assault**

Child Characteristics Predicting a Fatal Assault

Goals of the study:

- To identify child characteristics associated with fatal assault
- To assess the “risk” of neglect-related child fatalities and abuse-related fatalities over time and to identify the distinct covariates associated with these outcomes

Study Design

- Two-group comparison: children who died as a result of maltreatment ($n = 126$) and maltreated children with similar characteristics who did not die as a result of maltreatment ($n = 70$). These groups were matched.
- Two-group comparison: children who died as a result of abuse versus children who died as a result of neglect

Participants

- 58% of the victims were male
- The racial/ethnic composition was:
 - 48% Caucasian
 - 40% African American
 - 11% Hispanic
 - 1% Other
- Average age was 5 years ($M = 5.4$, $SD = 4.1$), ranging from birth through 17 years
- 12% had behavioral health problems
- 5% had serious medical or physical problems

Child Characteristics Predicting a Fatal Assault

Predictor Variables (Child's Characteristics):

- Gender
- Minority status
- Age
- Mental Health Problems
- Physical/Medical Problems
- Enrollment in daycare
- Involvement with the child protection agency

Analytic Approach

- Event History Analysis:

Cox Regression (Cox, 1972)

- Logistic regression analysis

- Bivariate and multivariate analyses

Results of Logistic Regression Analysis

Predictors for a fatal assault:

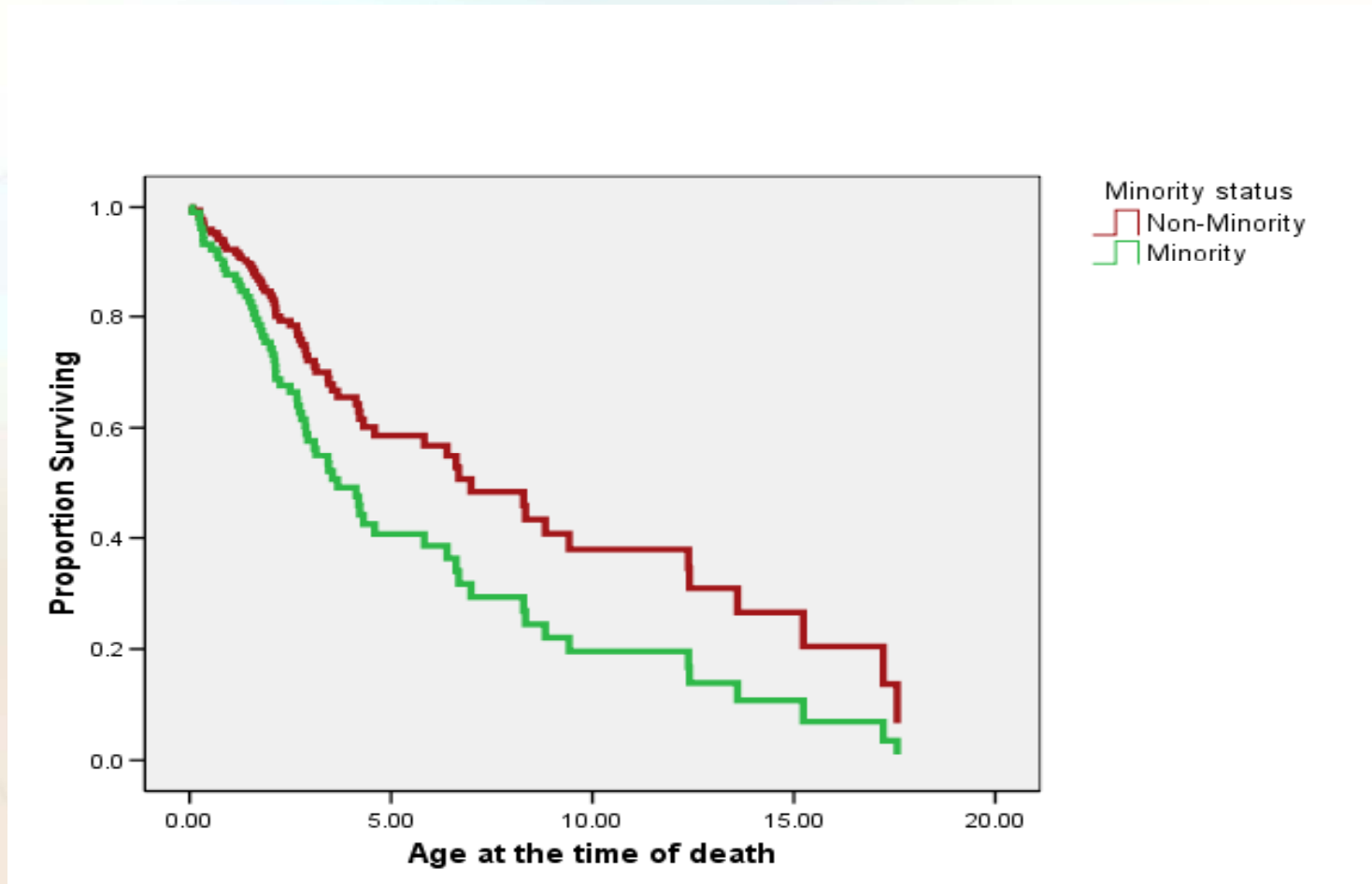
- Children whose families were seen by the protection agency were 2.6 times more likely to become victims of fatal assault
- Children who were enrolled in daycare or school were 4 times less likely to die as a result of maltreatment
- Gender, minority status, presence of mental health or physical health problems were not associated with death as a result of maltreatment

Results of Event History Analyses

- 15% of minority children died before the age of 1 compared to 9% of nonminority children
- 33% of children with identified mental health problems died before the age of 5
- Median life expectancy for children without mental health problems was approximately 2 ½ years compared to 12 ½ years for children who had mental health problems
- Median life expectancy for children who had health problems was 4 years compared to 13 ½ years for those who did not have medical problems

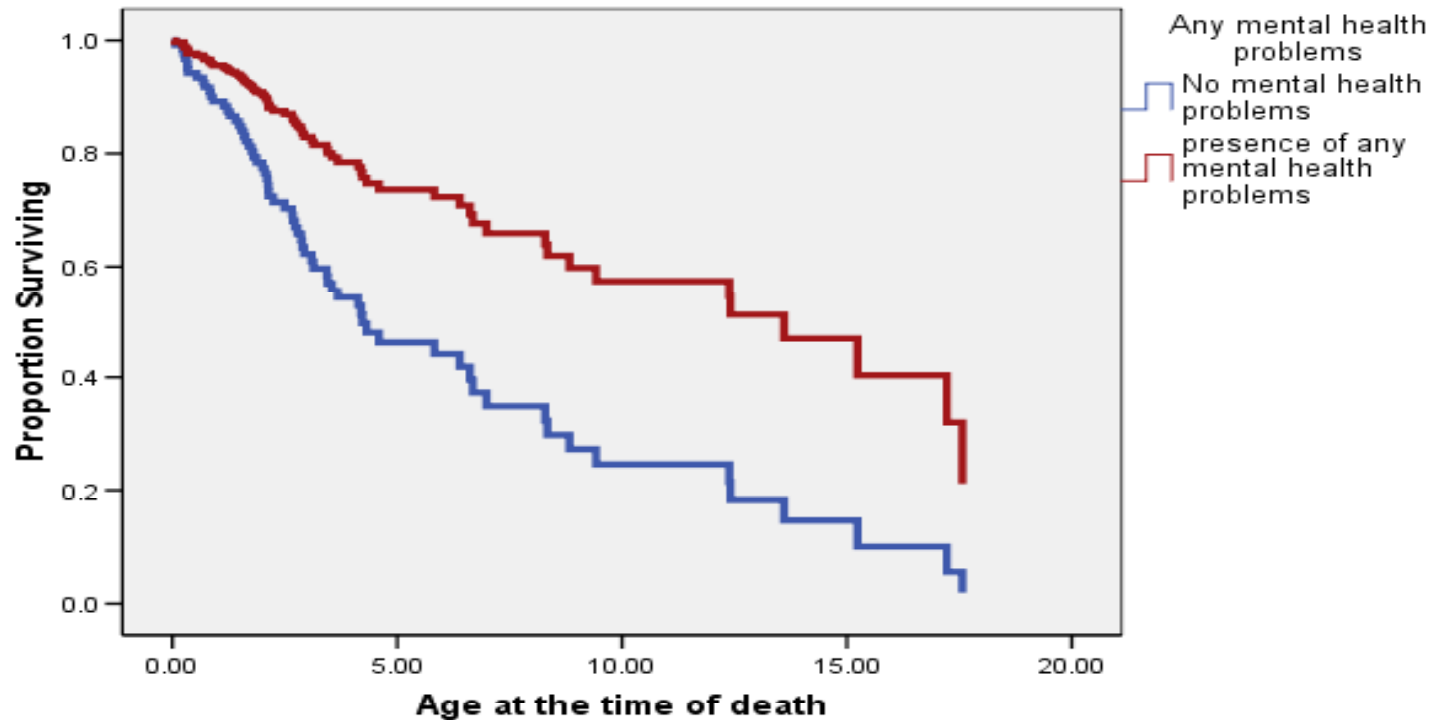
Competing-risks survival analysis

Model 1: Death as a Result of Abuse by Minority Status



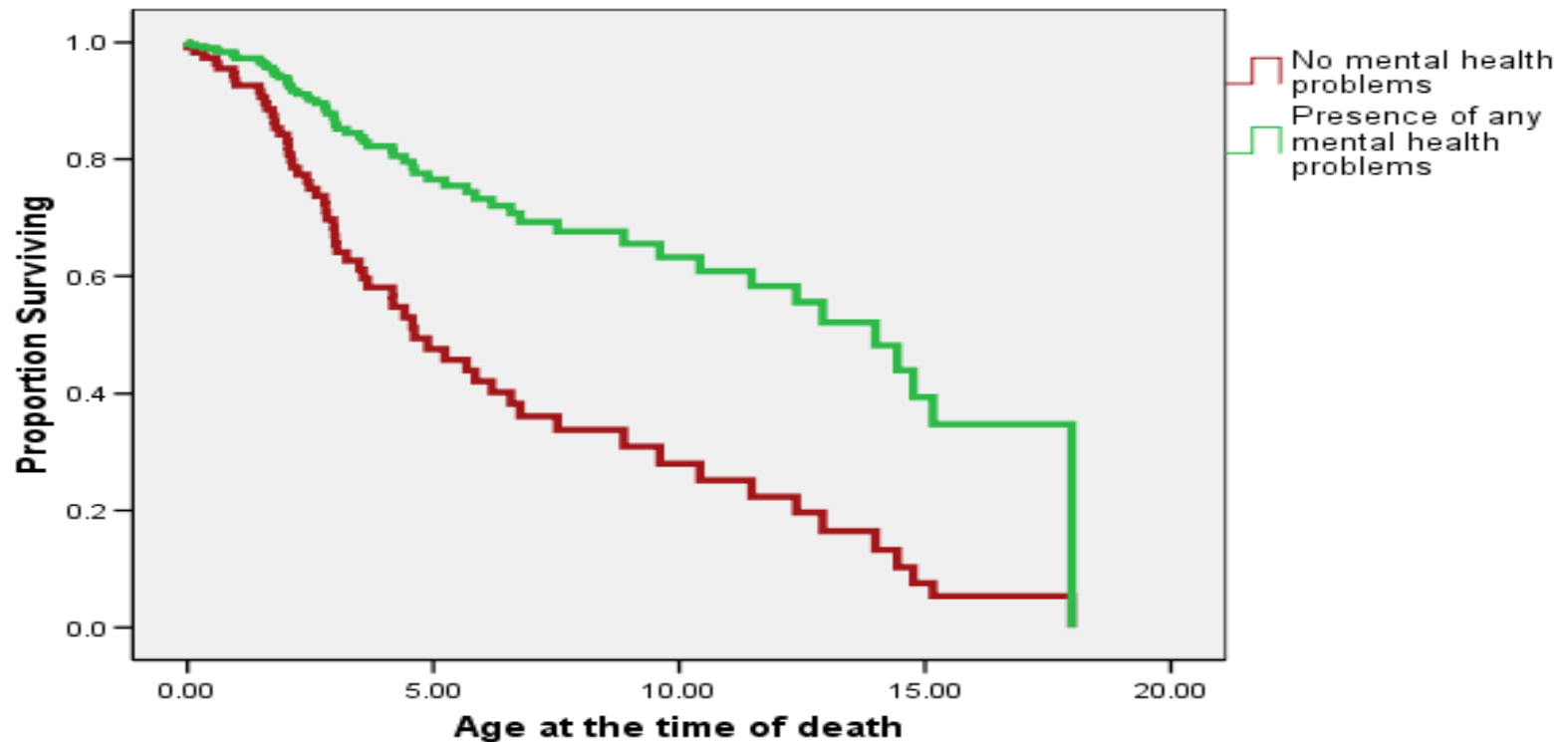
Minority children were almost 1.7 times more likely to die as a result of abuse than non-minority children (Odds Ratio = 1.68, $p < .05$).

Model 1: Death as a Result of Abuse by Presence of Mental Health Problems



Children who had identified mental health problems were two and a half times less likely to die from abuse than children who did not have identified behavioral health concerns (Odds Ratio = 2.52, $p < .05$).

Model 2: Death as a Result of Neglect by Presence of Mental Health Problems



Children who had mental health problems were almost 3 times more likely to die from neglect (Odds Ratio = 2.87, $p < .01$)

Competing-risks survival analysis Global Model

Factors examined in the Global Model:

- Gender
- Minority Status
- Mental Health Problems
- Physical/Medical Problems

Children who had mental health problems were 2 ½ times less likely to die by the age of 17 years (Odds Ratio = 2.68, $p < .05$) than children who did not have an identified behavioral health issue

Conclusions

- Involvement of a child protection agency with the child's family at the time of incident was significantly associated with increased likelihood of fatal maltreatment
- It appears that greater involvement with the community plays a protective role for children who were attending daycare or school prior to their death
- Results from this study revealed an unexpected trend associated with maltreatment fatalities; specifically, a child's increased social visibility, even if it is due to mental health problems, prolongs child's life whereas being seen by protection agencies predicts the opposite outcomes

Profiles of Child Maltreatment Perpetrators and Risk for Fatal Assault

Goals of the study:

- To identify perpetrator characteristics associated with fatal assault
- To identify subgroups or classes of child maltreatment perpetrators who are at higher risk for fatal child maltreatment

Participants

- 43% of the victims were male
- The racial composition was:
 - 57% Caucasian
 - 39% African American
 - 4% Hispanic
- Perpetrator ages at the time of the incident ranged from 16 to 80 ($M = 32.97$, $SD = 11.08$)
- 22% had behavioral health problems
- 18% had medical or physical problems

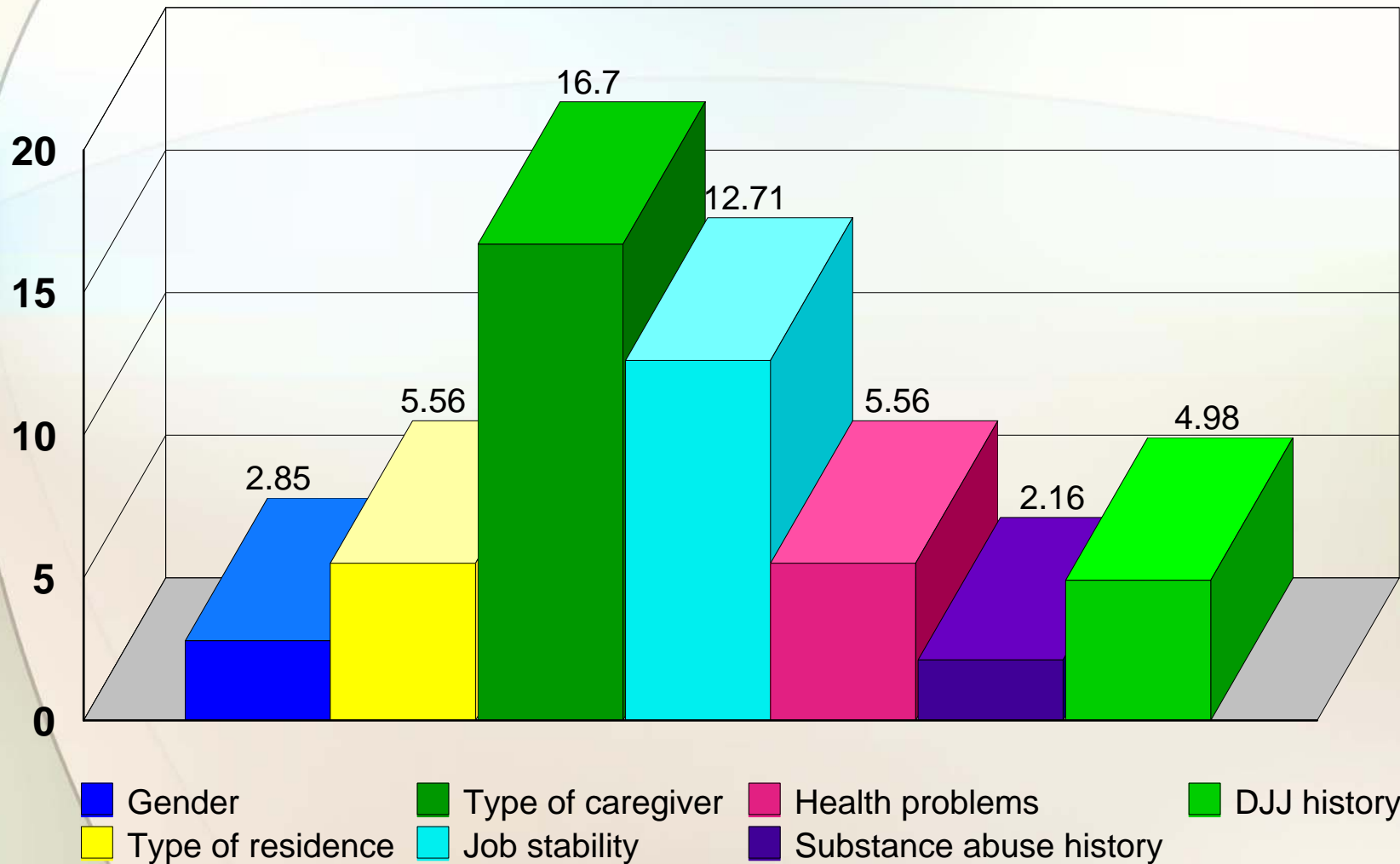
Perpetrator Level Predictors

- Gender
- Age
- Minority status
- Relationship to child
- Mental health problems
- Physical health problems
- History of domestic violence
- Criminal history
- Number of prior arrests
- Number of prior maltreatment reports
- Substance abuse history
- DJJ history
- Maltreatment history of perpetrator as a victim
- Job stability

Analytic Approach

- Logistic regression analysis
- Latent class analysis

Predictors for Fatal Assault



Predictors for Fatal Assault

Results of multivariate logistic regression indicated:

- If a perpetrator was a nonbiological parent the child in was almost eight times more likely to die compared to maltreatment by biological parents
- Perpetrators with a history of juvenile justice involvement were four times more likely to commit a fatal assault compared to perpetrators without such history

Perpetrator Profile

Class 1. *Biological Mothers with Behavioral Health Problems*

- Average age--29 years
- 86% females
- 65% White
- All perpetrators in this class were natural parents
- All lived at home with their children at the time of the incident

Perpetrators in this class had

- 46% probability of having mental health problems
- 30% probability of having physical health problems
- 54% probability of having substance abuse problems

Overall, class 1 was comprised primarily of biological mothers with physical and behavioral health problems, with a 39% probability of committing a fatal assault

Perpetrator Profile

Class 2. Male Perpetrators with Domestic Violence History

- Average age--37 years
- 71% males
- 47% white
- Only 31% of perpetrators in this class were natural parents
- Only 48% lived at home with their children at the time of the incident

Perpetrator Profile

Class 2. Male Perpetrators with Domestic Violence History

Perpetrators in this class had

- 46% probability of having mental health problems
- Few (9%) had physical health problems
- 37% had substance abuse problems
- 10% had history of involvement with the juvenile justice system
- 59% of them had a history of domestic violence

Overall, class 2 was comprised primarily of biological unrelated males with high proportion of them having domestic violence history and they had 89% probability of committing a fatal assault

Perpetrator Profile

Class 3. *Multiple-Problem Perpetrators*

- The average age of perpetrators in this class was 31 years
- 63% males
- 52% white
- 60% of perpetrators in this class were natural parents
- 88% lived at home with their children at the time of the incident

Perpetrator Profile

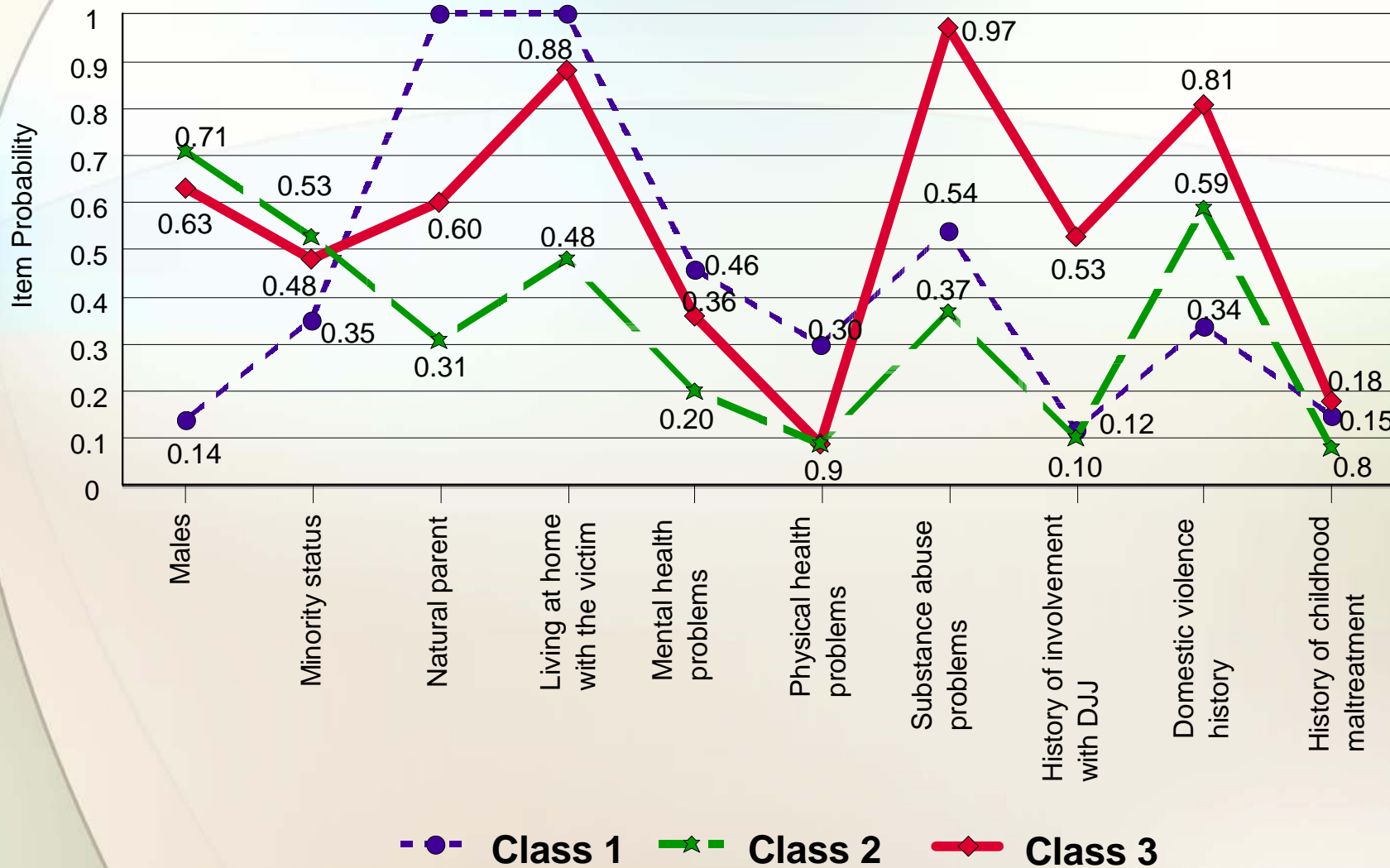
Class 3. *Multiple-Problem Perpetrators*

Perpetrators in this class had

- 36% probability of having mental health problems
- Few (9%) had physical health problems
- 97% had substance abuse problems
- 53% had history of involvement with the juvenile justice system
- 81% of them had a history of domestic violence
- On the average they had 5 prior arrests

Overall, Class 3 was comprised primarily of male caregivers with multiple problems including domestic violence, substance abuse, and criminal history. They had 82% probability of committing a fatal assault.

Perpetrator Profile



Conclusions

Association with fatal assault:

- Compared to *Biological Mothers With Behavioral Health Problems*, *Multiple-Problem Perpetrators* were seven times more likely to fatally maltreat their victims
- *Male Perpetrators With Domestic Violence History* were 12 times more likely to fatally maltreat their victims
- No significant difference between *Male Perpetrators With Domestic Violence History* and *Multiple-Problem Perpetrators*

Implications

- Child safety assessments should be refined to include more comprehensive assessment of risk factors found to be associated with a fatal outcome
- Specific practices should be implemented when child protection workers discover that a biologically unrelated male caregiver lives with the victim's family, thereby necessitating more close monitoring of the family
- Targeted intervention(s) should be developed to focus on caregivers with criminal justice history and in particular, juvenile delinquency history

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