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Developmental Research and Legal Policy: Toward a Two-Way Street*

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With distressing frequency, children are arriving at hospital emergency rooms with lacerations, deep bruises, head trauma, burns, and internal injuries sustained at the hands of their caregivers. They are discovered alone in inner-city apartments suffering from malnutrition, underweight for age, and inadequately clothed in garments reeking from urine and feces. They are born showing signs of acute drug withdrawal and may experience enduring behavioral problems owing to an intrauterine environment that was marked by maternal ingestion of crack cocaine, heroin, or other drugs. They grow up in environments in which they are terrorized by gang warfare, domestic violence, and/or the economy of drug trafficking. They report experiencing traumatizing episodes of sexual abuse. They are kept from receiving a normal education in school, are persistently belittled, threatened, and rejected by caregivers, and are sometimes denied much-needed medical treatment. With alarming regularity, these are the conditions that children in America experience as they are growing up.

Is it any surprise that those who are concerned about children, including developmental researchers, are strongly motivated to contribute to interventions on their behalf? According to a report released recently by the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990), the number of reports of child maltreatment reached 2.4 million in 1989, compared to about 60,000 cases reported in 1974. Of these, more than 900,000 cases in 1989 were officially substantiated as maltreatment, which likely underestimates the actual frequency of child abuse and neglect. Perhaps more disturbing was their conclusion that maltreatment is becoming a more complex phenomenon, tied to increased poverty, changing family and child-care patterns, heightened substance abuse in new subpopulations, neighborhood dysfunction, and the growing incidence of sexual maltreatment. Even more concerning was their conclusion that current circumstances represent "a national emergency" because the child protection system that was designed to respond to child abuse and neglect is broken and failing.

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Why is it failing? The Advisory Board cited the dramatic rise in reports of child maltreatment coupled with declining revenue and resources during the 1980s as a major contributor (see also Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, 1987; Thompson, 1993). As a consequence, most child protective systems must focus primarily—and often inadequately—on investigating and substantiating abuse reports and consequently can devote fewer resources toward devising helpful interventions or monitoring their efficacy. High turnover, low morale, and poor training of social service caseworkers is both an outcome of, and a contributor to, this broken system. Moreover, realistic interventions are becoming constrained by the inherent difficulties of some cases (involving maltreatment in the context of substance abuse, mental illness, neighborhood dysfunction, or poverty), obstacles to the effective prosecution of alleged offenders (especially in sex abuse cases), and significant problems in the foster care system, which at times perpetuates rather than prevents the maltreatment of children. Moreover, when abuse is intrafamilial—which is the focus of this chapter—detection is more difficult, interventions involve a more challenging calculus of benefits and costs, and evaluating progress is more problematic.

Problems in the child protection system are also revealed in the extraordinarily difficult questions a caseworker must consider in deciding whether, and how, to intervene in situations of reported child maltreatment. For example, what factors should determine whether an initial report warrants immediate investigation, based on the potential of serious harm to the child? How should children be treated during this initial investigative phase (e.g., under what conditions is removal from the home warranted)? What factors in the family, offender, and/or child best predict the *recurrence* of maltreatment? How do these factors differ for different kinds of maltreatment, children of different ages, or different offenders? How well can one predict likely maltreatment based on the parent's current status (e.g., spouse abuse, substance abuse, emotional or mental disorders, etc.), even without evidence of immediate harm to the child? If maltreatment is substantiated, for which children is out-of-home placement preferable, and for which children is remaining in the home (with the provision of social services to the family) the best option? For what kinds of offenders are different intervention options best? How are children affected by their experience with the social service and legal systems if abuse allegations are criminally prosecuted?

Other questions mingle knowledge and experience with value judgments. How strongly should family reunification goals influence casework decision-making? How important is permanency planning in out-of-home placements? What are its consequences for children, their families, foster families, and the child protection system? If treatment and counseling of parents is provided, by what criteria of change or improvement in family and/or parental conditions should the child be allowed subsequently to return home? Is preventive parental screening likely to be an effective means of reducing future child maltreatment?

How helpful is current developmental research in resolving these thorny legal policymaking questions? Unfortunately, it is not usually very helpful. One reason is that many of these dilemmas depend, not on pertinent research findings, but on value judgments, made proximally by the caseworker but also by society at large. Decisions concerning the kinds of parental behavior that fall outside an "acceptable" range and warrant legal intervention, for example, or the extent to which family privacy and integrity should be safeguarded, or the importance of remedial versus criminal interventions when abuse is substantiated all rely on broader social values concerning children, families, and the state. These values evolve and are frequently the focus of intense debate as they change in response to changing social conditions. Nevertheless, they provide an important and legitimate foundation for sociolegal policymaking concerning child maltreatment as the core consensual assumptions upon which relations between individuals and the state are based. I shall argue that researchers can advance this debate about underlying values as their research contributions modify public perceptions of children's and family's needs, but that these contributions primarily help to alter the consensual values applied to such policy problems rather than providing direct research-based solutions in themselves.

A second reason for the limited assistance of developmental research is that many of these policymaking questions cannot easily be addressed using current research methodologies. Even a cursory effort to plan a well-designed study that would address any one of the questions outlined above reveals the significant ethical and technical obstacles a developmental researcher would encounter. Access to relevant subject populations of satisfactory size, random assignment to different experimental and control conditions, the design and selection of valid outcome measures, and addressing pertinent ethical issues (e.g., privacy violations, compliance with mandatory child abuse reporting laws) are significant ingredients to valid and generalizable—and thus useful—research findings. But these factors also constitute formidable (if not insurmountable) obstacles to successfully conducting the research at all. This puts the researcher in the difficult position of determining whether the results of research using significantly compromised design features will ultimately advance knowledge of policymaking relevance, or prove more misleading in the end. This difficult issue will also be discussed later in this chapter.

The third reason why developmental research often does not provide substantive assistance to policymakers is that it is usually not formulated to do so. Indeed, policy-relevant research applications—or "usable knowledge" (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979)—is unlikely to emerge unless researchers design their studies and apply their findings with a thorough knowledge of the policymaking process and its implementations. As the assortment of decision-making dilemmas outlined above may suggest, policy-relevant questions are forged in the practical contexts of trying to fashion and implement effective child protection, and developmental investigators whose theories and research concern children in

more typical rearing conditions are unlikely to be familiar with these concerns. One of the most important reasons that current research does not provide many helpful solutions to policymakers, therefore, is that it is usually not designed or conceived to do so, and one of the reasons that the policy recommendations of researchers are not embraced by policymakers is that they are often irrelevant to the dilemmas that policymakers truly face. In other words, for developmental research to provide "usable knowledge," there must exist a two-way process of knowledge dissemination between the research and policymaking communities. This does not exist at present, and this chapter is devoted to strengthening this linkage.

This is not to say that developmental research has few useful applications to the problem of child maltreatment. As the chapters in this volume abundantly reveal, current developmental research and studies devoted specifically to problems of child abuse and neglect have important applications to clinical intervention (Cicchetti & Toth, this volume), educational policy (Toth & Cicchetti, this volume), and program evaluation (Daro, this volume). This is due, in part, to the close collegial ties between researchers and educators, clinicians, and members of related professional communities, and to their shared questions and perspectives. In some specific domains of policy relevance, moreover, there exist well-developed research literatures, such as studies concerning children's eyewitness accounts and influences on their testimony (see Ceci, Nightingale, DeSimone, & Putnicle, this volume; Goodman, this volume). In addition, the study of child maltreatment yields profound insights into developmental processes in normal as well as atypical populations, consistent with the claims of students of developmental psychopathology (e.g., Cicchetti, 1990; Cicchetti & Howes, this volume). Developmental research on child maltreatment has thus yielded considerable usable knowledge for a variety of professional applications as well as advancing basic knowledge about human development.

But with respect to legal policy, the contributions of developmental research have been more limited. This chapter is devoted to examining the useful applications that exist as well as to exploring why they are so difficult to enumerate. To describe the policymaking process and the tensions inherent in generating "usable knowledge," I will first examine how policies concerning children and families are developed at two levels of analysis. One level concerns the broad and overarching values guiding child and family policy in America (what I call "fundamental values"), and the other level concerns how these values are implemented at the practical level of local case-by-case decisionmaking (what I call "the trenches"). In a sense, these two levels of policy analysis can be regarded as the Constitutional "blueprint" of fundamental values that is the basis for legislative and courtroom policymaking, on the one hand, and how that blueprint is applied by child protection caseworkers, social service personnel, lawyers, judges, and program administrators in local jurisdictions, on the other. Understanding each level is essential to understanding the tensions that exist in

policymaking concerning child maltreatment and in policy applications of developmental research. A discussion of current policy proposals concerning the psychological maltreatment of children exemplifies these tensions.

Following this, I will also consider the diverse ways that research can inform the policymaking process. This is important because researchers often have an impoverished view of the relevance of research, regarding it primarily in terms of its direct problem-solving applications and neglecting its more general and indirect influences. Considering the diverse uses of research knowledge can also assist researchers in determining the ways their research is (and is not) applicable to specific policymaking problems: Does it help to identify and/or describe a problem? provide tools for its assessment? conceptualize solutions? test specific remedies? By understanding the tensions inherent in policymaking and the diverse kinds of research applications to policy, developmental scientists can, I argue, strengthen their contributions to the policymaking community. In the final section, I will suggest specific directions in which such contributions can proceed.

FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

Although our concern about maltreated children reflects a fundamental interest in protecting children from harm, other interests are also entailed in policy considerations. When a child protection caseworker appears at the home, perhaps in response to an anonymous complaint of suspected child abuse, parents and children have a legitimate concern that children are not removed without just cause and that parents have a chance to defend themselves against abuse allegations. When a father or mother is accused by a spouse of sexual maltreatment, perhaps in the context of divorce and a child custody dispute, they have a legitimate interest in insuring that unproven allegations do not unjustly prejudice their efforts to maintain contact with offspring. When an alleged offender is tried in court, he or she is legitimately concerned that the use of videotaped child testimony or clinical evidence using unvalidated assessment techniques does not unduly bias the jury toward assuming that abuse allegations are true. In short, there is a tension in child protection between the efforts of the state to protect its young citizens, and other protections that all citizens legitimately expect (see Melton & Thompson, 1987).

In the legal system, these fundamental values and interests are institutionalized in judicial deference to the rights explicitly or implicitly identified in the Constitution, especially the Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment (the latter concerning "equal protection" under the law and "due process" guarantees). The Supreme Court has long recognized these rights as *fundamental*, which means that the State's intrusion into these rights is strictly limited. More specifically, the state must demonstrate that any regulation intruding on these rights is

(a) motivated by a compelling state interest, (b) involves regulation that is closely related to this compelling interest, and (c) the regulation is the least intrusive means of insuring the state's interest. In short, any action by the state that intrudes on fundamental Constitutional guarantees to citizens is strictly scrutinized by the courts.

What fundamental rights or interests apply to child protection? The Supreme Court has long recognized that parents have a fundamental right to the custody, care, and nurturance of offspring (e.g., *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923; *Pierce v. Society of Seven Sisters*, 1925; *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 1944; *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 1972; *Santosky v. Kramer*, 1982). There are several reasons for this (McCarthy, 1988). Parental autonomy has been defended by the presumption that parents are usually most knowledgeable and motivated to advance the interests of offspring, and that children are likely to benefit when parents are protected from interference in their individualized childrearing decisions by authorities who are less knowledgeable or committed to the particular child's needs. Moreover, parental autonomy is a guarantee of desirable pluralism in childrearing goals and philosophy, consistent with democratic principles and ensuring heterogeneous views in a democratic society. Parental autonomy preserves ethnic and cultural heritages, for example, from intrusion by the majority culture. Finally, parental autonomy is important because of the disutility of state-governed childrearing practices or discretionary interventions by authorities into family life: quite simply, the state is likely to do more harm than good by trying to closely regulate childrearing practices. To this list contemporary developmental psychologists would probably add the importance to children of maintaining strong, consistent attachments to caregivers that are not easily threatened by the intrusion of authorities into family life (e.g., Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1979).

It is important to note that, even though these justifications for parental autonomy rely heavily on children's interests, a judicial finding of child maltreatment does not eliminate this fundamental parental right. In *Santosky v. Kramer* (1982), the Court affirmed that a high standard of proof was still necessary to terminate parental rights even when parents had been found neglectful. The Court argued, in essence, that parents do not automatically lose their responsibilities and rights even when they have failed. Although this decision was based on a fundamental rights analysis, it is supported also by a recognition in the psychological literature that children often maintain strong emotional attachments to caregivers who have maltreated them, and that severing their relational ties sometimes poses greater potential harm than benefit to offspring.

However, the state has a compelling interest in preventing harm to its minor citizens. In stating that the family is not beyond state regulation, the Court has affirmed that, although parents may become martyrs if they wish, parents are not "free . . . to make martyrs of their children" (*Prince v. Massachusetts*, 1944, p. 170). In legal doctrine, the state's power to intervene into families to protect children is based on its *parens patriae* power, a 17th-century doctrine enjoining

the sovereign to prevent the exploitation of children by third parties (Areen, 1975), and which has expanded in recent years with the recognition that minors enjoy many of the Constitutional guarantees of mature citizens (*In re Gault*, 1967). At a minimum, therefore, the state is empowered to intervene into family life in circumstances that warrant significant concern for a child's safety, health, and well-being. It can do so punitively (by criminalizing parental misconduct as a strong statement of social values concerning appropriate parental behavior), and/or it can do so preventively (by acting to minimize the incidence or recurrence of abuse through either in-home interventions or out-of-home placements when children have been maltreated).

One of the tensions in child protection, therefore, is the intrusion on a fundamental value (parental autonomy in childrearing) by a compelling state interest (prosecuting and preventing harm to its minor citizens). As earlier noted, Constitutional analysis requires that state action in such circumstances is closely related to its compelling interest and provides the least intrusive means of accomplishing its interest. With respect to child protection, this means several things. First, the state must be explicit in its criteria for intervention into family life (see, for example, *Alsager v. District Court of Polk County, Iowa*, 1975, with respect to interventions leading to removal of children from the home). Vague, highly discretionary, and/or broad, general criteria are Constitutionally impermissible because they do not clearly define the parental conduct that warrants state intervention, and they permit the arbitrary exercise of judicial discretion. When ill-defined criteria are used, in other words, parents are not forewarned about the conditions warranting the intervention of legal authorities, and similar cases may be treated differently depending on the personal opinions and viewpoints of the judges, lawyers, and caseworkers involved in each case. These are significant violations of distributive justice principles. This means that the criteria defining child maltreatment must be clear, explicit, and operational.

Second, the individual(s) accused of maltreatment must be provided certain other due process guarantees, such as the right to a hearing, representation by counsel, confrontation with witnesses, appellate review, and other provisions. This has important implications for the adjudication of child maltreatment, including evidentiary issues (e.g., direct contact with child witness in criminal proceedings) as well as practical problems concerning the duration of adjudication and its costs as well as benefits to children. One of the most difficult problems in the criminal prosecution of alleged child abusers, for example, is that doing so can involve prolonged adjudication that provides no immediate solutions for the child and may, in fact, involve long-term stresses.

Third, the state's efforts to punish and prevent child maltreatment must be closely related to its compelling interest in protecting children, and the procedures it uses must not be unnecessarily broad or expansive. For example, proposals to prevent maltreatment by conditioning welfare (AFDC) benefits on parent training, or requiring mandatory parent education for all teenagers, or by

“licensing” parents (e.g., Mangel, 1988; McIntire, 1973) would likely be deemed Constitutionally impermissible because the proposals involve unduly sweeping interventions into fundamental rights, and are not narrowly tied to the state’s specific interests in abuse prevention (e.g., Sandmire & Wald, 1990). From a Constitutional standpoint, it is one thing to treat or prosecute abusive parents to prevent the recurrence of abuse; it is another thing to regulate all parenting behavior in order to reduce the incidence of abuse, because the latter remedy is a broad infringement on the rights of parents without just cause or clear evidence that it advances the state’s interest in abuse prevention.

It should be apparent that, from the standpoint of fundamental values, child and family policy involves a delicate balancing of state interests in child protection and Constitutional guarantees of family integrity and parental autonomy. This balancing derives from the importance of the family as the foundational unit of social organization and the arena for child development, and from the fact that the state is ill-equipped to assume its functions. Consequently, great care must be taken to avoid erroneous or unnecessary intrusions into the family, even in the interests of child protection. Policy proposals offered by researchers to remedy child maltreatment must take this delicate balancing of interests and concerns into account.

Not surprisingly, the manner in which this balancing of compelling state interests and Constitutional protections is achieved evokes considerable debate. Some child advocates argue that an emphasis on parental autonomy and family privacy undermines legitimate state interests in child protection, and specifically undermines child welfare by hiding parental misconduct from detection and intervention (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1976, 1978; Garbarino, 1977; Garbarino, Gaboury, Long, Grandjean, & Asp, 1982; Garbarino & Stocking, 1980). They would risk infringing on parental rights and the possibility of unwarranted interventions into family life in order to maximize the state’s capacity to detect and combat child maltreatment. Other advocates also question current safeguards of parental autonomy and family privacy from the standpoint of child empowerment: They argue that children should be enabled to exercise independent decision making concerning their own needs and interests, and that the parental autonomy tradition undermines children’s autonomy and privacy (Melton, 1982, 1983). On the other hand, some current child advocates would strengthen rather than reduce protections of parental autonomy against state intervention in suspected child maltreatment (Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973, 1979). Their argument derives from observations that state interventions to remedy child abuse—especially those in which children are removed from the home—are often more psychologically traumatizing to children than the experience of abuse, and sever attachments to caregivers who remain important to children.

These alternative views underscore that the current balance of state interests and Constitutional protections is neither static nor resolved, and that the tensions between fundamental values remain significant catalysts within policy analysis.

However, any effort to contribute to this policy debate must recognize seriously and encompass these tensions in order to provide a useful contribution.

THE TRENCHES

Fundamental values are applied in the statutory guidelines, regulations, and procedures that underlie the child protection system in local jurisdictions. Because of the exceedingly complex and case-specific decision making of child protection caseworkers, lawyers, judges, social service personnel, program administrators, and other professionals at the local level, however, it is arguable that true reform in the child protection system will derive, not from broader statutory reform, but instead from changes in procedures, resources, and training in local casework activity.

The child protection system itself has changed significantly in recent decades (Wald, 1988). The system has been beset by a rapidly escalating series of demands as public consciousness of child maltreatment and the apparent incidence of child abuse has grown significantly. Moreover, the nature of child maltreatment has become both more diverse and more complex. Public concern that was initially galvanized by the discovery of the “battered child syndrome” (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962) in the early 1960s has now widened to include concerns over the prevalence of neglect and its links to family poverty in the late 1960s, the “discovery” of sexual abuse in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the contemporary concern with drug-exposed babies and the effects of poverty on children. In addition, the range of intervention options has also been subjected to recent scrutiny. In the mid-1970s, for example, a number of commentators voiced great concern over the experience of children in the foster care system, in which children could remain in a series of changing “temporary” foster care placements interminably with little hope for a permanent, stable placement, and in which the possibility of further abuse was distressingly high (e.g., Mnookin, 1973). These concerns remain current, together with worries about the diminishing availability of suitable foster care placements. A continuing decline in funding and other resources for child protection systems during the last decade has exacerbated these dilemmas over what beneficial interventions the state is capable of providing to the children it identifies as maltreated.

What happens when a report of possible child maltreatment is received by local authorities? Although specific procedures vary (sometimes substantially) by local jurisdiction, some common characteristics are usually evident (Cunningham & Horowitz, 1989; U.S. Advisory Board on Abuse and Neglect, 1990; Wald, 1988). With the advent of mandatory child abuse reporting laws in all states (especially since the federal 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment

Act), this initial report may come from an identified or anonymous informant, from a professional specialist (such as a physician, teacher, day-care worker, or researcher) or a nonprofessional source, from someone who has directly observed maltreatment or suspects abuse without certainty, or from someone who is either intimately or distally connected with the family. The report may go to a child protection office, an emergency 24-hour hotline, the police, or another agency.

Once the report is received, most state reporting laws require an immediate investigation, although resource restrictions in many jurisdictions require that cases are prioritized according to the threat of immediate danger to the child (Giovannoni, 1991; Rosenberg, 1987). In light of the variety of reports that may be received and the quality of available information, making this determination can be extraordinarily difficult. Once an investigation is initiated, however, interviews with parents, other caregivers, the child, siblings, and (in most cases) the informant ensue, together with a direct physical and/or mental health examination of the child and an inspection of the home. Existing records (e.g., school, medical) may also be examined. Needless to say, this initial investigation is disruptive to the child and family, and can be highly coercive if parents are uncooperative. This investigation is usually conducted by social service personnel, although the police may also be involved. Throughout this investigation, caseworkers are striving to answer several questions. First, did child maltreatment take place—and if so, by whom and under what circumstances? Second, do these conditions entail a continuing danger or threat of danger to the child? Third, in light of the foregoing, can the child safely remain in the home, or should he or she be removed? Fourth, if maltreatment is substantiated, what initial plans for proceeding with this case should be considered (e.g., services to the family, criminal prosecution, etc.)?

A high proportion of abuse reports fail to be substantiated, and although this does not necessarily mean that maltreatment did not occur, the case is likely to be closed. Substantiating abuse allegations after an initial investigation can be difficult because evidence of maltreatment is often elusive, inconsistent, and nondeterminative. Substantiating abuse thus depends very much on the investigative skills and experience of the caseworker, although more objective child abuse potential inventories are being used in an increasing number of jurisdictions to systematize and organize how caseworkers gather and evaluate pertinent information (Wald & Woolverton, 1990). Often these inventories yield a summary score or categorization of the seriousness of the circumstances related to maltreatment, and they guide the caseworker's evaluation of the current situation as well as consideration of possible interventions. In general, however, caseworkers do not have many resources when investigating abuse allegations.

If maltreatment is deemed substantiated, the caseworker must decide whether immediate removal of the child from the home is warranted, based on the seriousness of existing or potential harm to the child. If removal is deemed

necessary, the caseworker (sometimes with police assistance) often has authority to temporarily remove the child at the time of the initial investigation. This must be followed soon afterward, however, by a court order authorizing removal (in some states, the order must precede removal) and a hearing at which parents may be present. The child, meanwhile, may be placed with friends, relatives, or in a temporary foster home that will be the child's residence for an indeterminate period, and supervised visitation with the parent(s) may be arranged, especially when eventual reunification is expected.

The caseworker must also decide on a case plan. Most commonly this involves an agreement with the family involving the enlistment of supportive social services such as counseling, parent education classes, detoxification and/or substance abuse rehabilitation programs, the enlistment of welfare benefits, vocational counseling, child care services, and similar provisions. Parent participation is mandatory but no further legal action is usually expected. These services are typically organized and evaluated by a different caseworker than the one who conducted the initial investigation, and who assumes responsibility for monitoring parental compliance and progress toward case closure.

Alternatively, legal action may be recommended, at which time the case involves legal authorities who proceed with investigation and prosecution, in collaboration with the caseworker. This can involve civil charges that may lead to the state assuming greater control over the child's welfare (including custody of the child), and/or criminal charges that may lead to incarceration of the parent. In civil action (usually in juvenile or family court) the focus is on the child's welfare; in criminal action (in criminal court) the focus is on punishing the alleged offender. Thus the purposes and goals underlying legal action vary. In some civil cases, for example, the capacity of the family to obtain needed social services depends on a judicial finding of child abuse or neglect, and a case plan involving these social services is presented as a proposed treatment for the family with the child remaining at home. Thus the family is adjudicated as a means of obtaining services to benefit the child, in the form of a case plan that is approved by the court. This case plan can be modified from time to time as the case proceeds and the family's circumstances change. In other civil cases, circumstances are sufficiently serious that a temporary removal of the child from the home is necessary, and circumstances may warrant an eventual adjudicated termination of parental rights and the adoption of the child by a new family. In still other cases legal action is based on criminal prosecution, in which the parent(s) may be incarcerated because of abusive behavior.

These alternative actions involve different court systems, procedural rules, and actors and agencies. In each case, however, a series of hearings occurs at which parents and their legal representatives, representatives of various state agencies, and a legal representative for the child are present. The evaluations of psychological experts as well as medical and social data concerning the child and the family may assume an influential role in the adjudication. So also do

concerns about the admission and weighing of pertinent evidence related to child maltreatment, which may include the parent's prior behavior, medical testimony, circumstantial evidence, second-hand reports of the child's behavior or utterances on earlier occasions, the child's responses to anatomically correct dolls used during the investigatory interviews, and the extent to which the alleged abuser fits the profile of an abusing parent or the child a profile of the "battered child syndrome" (Kempe et al., 1962) or the "sexual abuse accommodation syndrome" (Summit, 1983).

There are also important evidentiary issues concerning child testimony, especially when there is little evidence of abuse other than the child's allegations, and these issues may concern the child's emotional distress or trauma at having to testify in the presence of the alleged abuser, the age of the child and the reliability of the testimony, the child's fears of parental retribution or of what will happen to the parent and the family, and the child's subsequent recanting of initial abuse allegations. These issues are sometimes addressed by enlisting expert witnesses to clarify the meaning of the child's statements or behavior. At times, there are efforts to introduce procedural reforms that protect children from some of these potential harms, such as videotaped testimony or testifying on closed-circuit television or behind one-way mirrors, special admission of forms of hearsay evidence, and similar procedures. There is considerable variation between different states about how these issues can be resolved in court, as legislatures and state courts struggle with the relative calculus of child protection concerns and due process guarantees to defendants (see, e.g., *Coy v. Iowa*, 1988).

If the child is temporarily or permanently removed from the home, further legal action on the child's behalf ensues. Since the passage of the 1980 federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, a child's out-of-home placement must be reviewed by the court every 6 months, and, although these reviews can be extremely cursory events, they underscore the importance of child protection agencies seeking permanent, stable homes for children who are wards of the state, consistent with a policy emphasis on "permanency planning." In addition, the long-standing policy goal that guides casework decision making is the eventual return of the child to the original home. This means that child protection systems must also make "reasonable efforts" to foster the child's return home. Importantly, whatever the child's placement (in home, with a relative, family friend, or foster family), children very rarely receive treatment, counseling, or other mental health or special educational services related to their experience of abuse (U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1990).

This scenario is a "bare bones" outline of what happens in the trenches, and it can be complicated by a number of factors in particular cases: criminal prosecution of parents for substance abuse, the enlistment or denial of welfare benefits to the family, inconsistent action by juvenile and criminal courts, inadequate communication between various agency representatives involved

with the case or representatives of different jurisdictions, turnover in child protection caseworkers, and many other factors. This outline also indicates mandated procedures in case investigation and management, and in jurisdictions with very heavy caseloads social service personnel may be unable to complete all the important facets of an investigation or to follow the case appropriately to its closure. Indeed, this may be true in most jurisdictions. It is worth noting, however, that the large majority of substantiated cases of child maltreatment do not result in criminal prosecution of the alleged offender. Instead, case plans are usually negotiated between families and child protection caseworkers, with court action largely entailed in ratifying and monitoring this agreement. Moreover, it is important to note that the majority of abuse reports concern child neglect, which poses a different set of intervention challenges than do physical or sexual abuse (Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, 1987).

Implications

Despite these caveats, however, this outline of what happens in "the trenches" reveals several important features of the child protection system. First, there is a great amount of discretionary decision making by caseworkers, police, social service administrators, prosecutors, judges, and others who are directly involved with children and families. These decision makers differ significantly in the training, background, institutional commitments, interests, resources, and perspectives they bring to each case of alleged child maltreatment—and in these characteristics they also differ significantly from those who usually propose and design policy reforms. Consequently, it is incumbent on those who offer proposals for policy reform to appreciate that new policies are likely to be implemented by individuals who vary significantly in their underlying assumptions and interpretations of policy, and that policy proposals may thus not extend as far as they were initially intended, or may be applied in unexpected or potentially inappropriate ways, because of the diverse and discretionary decision making incorporated throughout the system.

This underscores the need for clear and explicit definitions of child maltreatment, and emphasizes that policy reformers should become acquainted with the variations in viewpoint, resources, and backgrounds of social service personnel in their efforts to alter current practices. What are the assumptions about children and their needs that guide the specific decisions of these local policymakers? On what do they base their underlying views about the nature of family functioning and how it can be changed when families become dysfunctional? With what assumptions do they make judgments concerning the likelihood of future abuse? In what ways do existing resources guide casework decisionmaking (e.g., availability of temporary foster care placements) or program eligibility requirements shape the portrayal of a child's problems? By posing questions such as these, research scientists who hope to influence the policy process can become better

acquainted with their intended targets of reform, and can also begin considering how proposals for policy reform are likely to be implemented by local jurisdictional decision makers.

Second, evaluations of current procedures within the child protection system, and proposals for procedural reform, must start from a utilitarian balancing of the benefits and risks of alternative policies. These benefits and risks must take into consideration existing resource constraints and limitations of social service and legal agencies, as well as the nature of the social conditions related to child maltreatment. Procedural or institutional reforms may remedy certain problems at a cost to other aspects of the child protection system. For example, if current efforts to provide assistance to dysfunctional families are undermined by the overwhelming demands of investigating escalating numbers of child abuse allegations, what happens to the system if statutory definitions of maltreatment are broadened to include new kinds of abuse? Will this require greater emphasis on prioritizing incoming case reports according to suspected severity? Should mandatory abuse-reporting laws instead be tightened to reduce the frequency of unsubstantiated abuse reports and thus reduce demands on investigators (Besharov, 1988; Meriwether, 1988; Repucci & Aber, 1992)? If so, how likely is this to result in serious amounts of undetected maltreatment?

Utilitarian cost-benefit analysis is also relevant to the weighing of alternative intervention options. For example, given the problems of the foster care system and severe limitations in the counseling, mental health, and other support services typically available to the victims of child maltreatment, under what conditions does state intervention provide a significant benefit to children? What sorts of services are needed to provide meaningful assistance to maltreated children? How do we weigh existing benefits of state intervention against the costs of service delivery to children, especially when intervention involves family disruption, privacy violations, and coercive case plans in which the child is the locus of family conflict and state remediation efforts? When children suffer from neglect owing to poverty, which kinds of state interventions benefit children and which do not? Does prosecuting substantiated abusers aid children, and in what circumstances?

It is partly due to these kinds of utilitarian considerations that recent commentators have recommended that the "best interests of the child" standard for state intervention into families be replaced by a standard of "least detrimental alternative" to remedy a specific harm to the child when maltreatment is concerned, given the limitations in the state's capacity to benefit the children it takes into its care (e.g., Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1979; Lloyd, 1990). Others argue that the focus of limited public resources should be on intervening less frequently into families but doing so more effectively, rather than on intervening more but doing it poorly (Besharov, 1988; Wald, 1975, 1980). Such utilitarian considerations must prevail until there are realistic, optimistic indications that the child protection system will benefit immediately from dramatic increases in resources and training of personnel.

Third, this summary of child protection in the trenches also reveals the number of important and (for the most part) researchable questions that merit attention from developmental scientists. More systematic study of the etiology of various forms of child maltreatment (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, drug-exposed babies, educational neglect, emotional maltreatment, etc.) might yield proposals for different intervention options that are well suited for particular kinds of maltreatment. A comprehensive examination of the outcomes of children who experience different intervention alternatives (e.g., placement with relatives, foster-care placement, remaining at home with services to the family, etc.) might yield useful information about which children and families benefit from which kinds of placements. Systematic study of the factors that contribute to the recurrence of abuse after contact with local authorities would contribute to the development of more valid and reliable child abuse prediction inventories for use by child protection caseworkers. The development of well-designed and operational outcome measures concerning parental and child behavior might assist caseworkers who must determine when a child is ready to return to the home, or when a case is ready to be closed. In short, a careful examination of how casework occurs at the level of local jurisdictions reveals a number of important questions for which useful answers do not currently exist, and about which developmental scientists can assist practitioners.

In the end, an acquaintance with policymaking in the trenches is as important as an understanding of policymaking involving fundamental values because each reveals the tensions inherent in formulating and implementing effective interventions on behalf of maltreated children. Although the impulse to act effectively to assist these children is as strong in developmental scientists as it is in others who are concerned about child abuse and neglect, this impulse does not lead to "usable knowledge" or useful policy recommendations unless it entails due consideration of these inherent tensions in child and family policy.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT AS AN ILLUSTRATION

These tensions in formulating public policy concerning child maltreatment—from both fundamental values and the trenches—and the enlistment of developmental researchers in this process are usefully illustrated in current debates concerning the definition and assessment of psychological maltreatment.

In recent years, a number of developmental investigators have strongly urged that definitions of *child abuse and neglect* be expanded to include the psychological maltreatment of children (sometimes called "emotional abuse or neglect," "psychological harm," or "mental injury"). The parental behaviors that constitute psychological maltreatment are varied: they can include "rejecting," "degrading," "isolating," or "exploiting" the child (Hart, Germain, & Brassard, 1987), "psychologically unavailable caregiving" (Egeland & Erickson, 1987), "ignoring," "corrupting," or "terrorizing" children (Gar-

barino, Guttman, & Seeley, 1986), or "any communication pattern" that may potentially damage the child psychologically, especially by undermining the child's resolution of important developmental tasks (McGee & Wolfe, 1991). According to some commentators, psychological maltreatment is also involved in prejudice and racism, living in dangerous environments, families with substance abuse problems, and the child's exposure to "negative and limiting models" (Telzrow, 1987) in certain social environments (see contributors to Brassard, Germain, & Hart, 1987). From this perspective, psychological maltreatment is not only extensively involved in other forms of child abuse, but it is also the most prevalent and destructive form of child maltreatment (Hart & Brassard, 1987; McGee & Wolfe, 1991).

It is reasonable for developmental scientists to be concerned about the psychological maltreatment of children. Their awareness of the potentially deleterious effects of parental behavior has been enhanced by a generation of research examining the psychological effects of parenting practices on offspring, the most recent of which include longitudinal studies of the effects of secure or insecure attachments in infancy (see, e.g., Lamb, Thompson, Gardner, & Charnov, 1985; Maccoby & Martin, 1983, for reviews). A considerable research literature now attests to the fact that children who consistently experience insensitive, unresponsive, and unhelpful parental care often show long-term consequences, including impaired peer relations, diminished self-esteem, and behavioral problems at home and school. When these studies are considered together with research on the etiology of childhood psychological disorders, as well as the literature on the causes and consequences of child maltreatment, there is rather convincing evidence that the quality of parental care that children receive has important consequences for their mental health and psychological well-being (Cicchetti, 1990).

On the basis of this conclusion, efforts to increase public awareness of the origins and outcomes of psychological maltreatment can have a number of beneficial effects. In clinical interventions, for example, therapists are alerted to the psychological consequences of abusive parental behavior that can be included in a treatment plan. In the design of preventive and educational programs targeted for at-risk populations, an awareness of the origins and consequences of psychological maltreatment can inform program design and implementation. When maltreated children are placed in foster homes or provided in-home services, knowledge about psychological maltreatment can sensitize caseworkers to significant dimensions of children's needs. More generally, the results of developmental research and advocacy efforts concerning the psychological maltreatment of children can promote changes in social values concerning the parameters of "appropriate" parenting practices. In this sense, the debate concerning psychological maltreatment advances public discourse about the range of parental behaviors that are deemed "acceptable."

When concepts of psychological maltreatment are proposed as the basis for

reforms in legal policy, on the other hand, additional issues must also be considered (Melton & Thompson, 1987; Thompson & Jacobs, 1991). As we have seen, these pertain to fundamental values guiding the state's intrusion into family life, and practical problems in the implementation of policy in local jurisdictions.

With respect to fundamental values, the concept of psychological maltreatment poses significant challenges to the need for clear, explicit criteria governing intrusions on parental autonomy and family privacy. At present, researchers have provided few explicit guidelines for how psychological maltreatment can be operationalized and assessed in the home by social service caseworkers. Is a parent who is overwhelmed with marital problems or struggling to juggle domestic and employment responsibilities likely to be accused of being "psychologically unavailable" to offspring? Are a farm couple who require children to assist with chores guilty of "exploiting" their children? Is a parent who conditions praise on the child's compliance with toilet training, self-care, or other maturity demands imposing "communication patterns" that might be psychologically damaging? These are disturbing questions if current conceptualizations of psychological maltreatment are proposed as the basis for policy reform, and the uncertainty of the answers makes it likely that any current proposal would, if adopted, be deemed unconstitutional because of vagueness in the standards for state intervention into family life.

Moreover, it is arguable that such broad, vague portrayals of psychological maltreatment are impermissible also because they are not narrowly tailored to the state's compelling interest in preventing specific forms of child abuse or neglect. Our society has reached consensus that broken bones and sexual trauma warrant state intervention into family life, but there is less consensus about insecure attachment or diminished self-esteem, which are also affected by many influences besides parenting practices. Until researchers provide clear evidence to convince a skeptical public that specific forms of parental behavior are reliably linked to specific harms to children that are sufficiently severe to warrant state concern, current portrayals of psychological maltreatment seem unduly expansive to be a basis for policy reform.

In the trenches, current conceptualizations of psychological maltreatment are problematic for other reasons. Although terms like *missocializing*, *exploiting*, or *isolating* offspring may enjoy shared, intuitive meaning among the developmental research community, it is likely that their intuitive meaning is much different to the social service personnel, child protection caseworkers, lawyers, judges, program administrators, and others who must implement these criteria on a case-by-case basis. As a consequence, the applications of these terms may extend much farther than they were originally intended, or not far enough, and this can result in many unwarranted or inappropriate interventions into family life. Families are likely to feel unfairly treated by a system that deems certain behavior maltreating—by one caseworker's, police officer's, prosecutor's, or

judge's viewpoint—whereas the same behavior may be deemed nonmaltreating by other personnel or in another jurisdiction. Cultural or socioeconomic bias in the definition of psychological maltreatment becomes likely. Such violations of distributive justice principles are inevitable when vague and broadly worded definitions of maltreatment are used for policymaking.

Furthermore, the expansion of the concept of maltreatment to include psychological maltreatment is likely to have other consequences for policymaking within the trenches. Given the extraordinary and escalating demands upon social service agencies in the context of diminishing resources, it seems likely that statutory provisions concerning psychological maltreatment would either divert attention and resources from other, potentially more serious, forms of child abuse, or be functionally ignored as incoming cases are prioritized according to suspected severity (Giovannoni, 1991). In either case, children do not benefit from such an expanded definition of maltreatment. Although an emphasis on psychological maltreatment could also be justified as a preventative approach to more severe forms of maltreatment—that is, identifying and helping dysfunctional families early before abuse becomes more serious—the experience of other sociolegal systems suggests that this strategy is unlikely to prove successful. Programs in the juvenile justice system, for example, have sometimes used more expansive definitions of target populations to identify “youth at risk” or “pre-delinquents” in an effort to identify problem children early. This phenomenon (described as “widening-the-nets,” [Austin & Krisberg, 1981]) has meant, however, that the system has also labeled children and intervened in the lives of many families who did not, in fact, require services, and has also placed greater strain on limited program resources as additional numbers of youth have been served (Osgood & Jacobs, 1985). The same consequences are likely within a more expansive statutory definition of psychological maltreatment: Many children would be targeted who probably do not warrant state concern, and the system's overstrapped resources would be further depleted.

These utilitarian cost-benefit considerations extend also to questions of how best to intervene in the lives of children who have been identified as psychologically maltreated. Given that state intervention—whether it involves the provision of in-home services to the child, out-of-home treatment for the abusing parent, or placement of the child with a relative or foster family—is necessarily psychologically invasive and distressing to children, to what extent do these interventions provide more benefit than harm to children who have been psychologically maltreated by a parent? When children experience psychological maltreatment that is unaccompanied by other forms of abuse (which is rather rare; see Daro, 1988), this question becomes an issue of how well the state can assist children in emotional need without doing them emotional harm in the process. When children experience psychological maltreatment that is accompanied by physical abuse, marked neglect, sexual abuse, or other forms of maltreatment, on the other hand, the concept of psychological maltreatment is probably redun-

dant as an intervention tool, and may be useful only as a means of defining new dimensions of concern for children who have already been identified by social service agencies for potentially more severe forms of abuse. In short, including the concept of psychological maltreatment in policy reform may not help social agencies identify and assist a distinct new population of children needing state protection—and when it does, the state may have few guarantees of effective intervention. If considerable debate currently exists concerning whether protective interventions into the family to address manifest physical or sexual abuse prove more damaging than helpful to children, then it is wise to be cautious about extending the basis for intervention to include cases of psychological maltreatment alone.

These tensions in policymaking, therefore, create tensions for researchers who seek to contribute meaningfully and helpfully to the policy debate concerning child maltreatment. What should developmental scientists do? As suggested earlier, there is considerable potential value to the concept of psychological maltreatment as a catalyst for clinical efforts, prevention and educational program design, and the organization of services for maltreated children. Basic research on the causes and consequences of different kinds of parental practices can advance these efforts. Furthermore, researchers have a legitimate role to play in advancing the public debate on the parameters of acceptable parenting behavior in our society (Garbarino, 1991). They can do so by offering research findings that demonstrate the consequences of improper parenting practices on offspring, although ultimately this debate is a question of social values and priorities for which research findings can be informative and influential, but nondeterminative (Giovannoni, 1991; Thompson & Jacobs, 1991). Finally, there is a considerable amount of policy-relevant research that remains to be done if scientists are truly interested in advancing the concept of psychological maltreatment for purposes of policy reform. Developing clear and operational definitions of the various dimensions of psychological maltreatment (and their associations with other forms of maltreatment), establishing causal links between specific forms of inappropriate parenting behavior and specific consequences for offspring, and demonstrating the efficacy (and cost-effectiveness) of interventions that are within the state's capacity to provide would be a good start to such a research agenda.

When the discussion turns to policy reform, however, developmental scientists have an ethical responsibility to be cautious in their recommendations based on current evidence, for several reasons. First, if researchers do not have a serious understanding of the tensions involved in policymaking, they are likely to offer well-meaning but naive policy proposals that understate the possible costs and emphasize the potential benefits of policy reform. As a consequence, their recommendations will foster greater confidence in policy reform than is perhaps warranted. It is one thing, for example, to advance portrayals of psychological maltreatment that are useful in therapeutic or research contexts where the costs of

inappropriate application are minimal and errors can be fairly easily detected. It is quite another to offer the same portrayals in proposals for legal policy reform when these safeguards cannot as easily be guaranteed, and when the costs of misapplication are very high.

Caution is also required because the application of developmental research findings to policy problems usually assume value judgments that are not scientifically determined. Is the state's interest in children who are psychologically maltreated a "compelling" interest, as it is with other forms of maltreatment? Does sufficient social consensus exist concerning the acceptable parameters of the psychological treatment of offspring to warrant state intervention? Are the deleterious outcomes of psychological maltreatment sufficiently severe to warrant the state's concern? These are not scientific questions but value judgments, and policy recommendations based on developmental research usually presume answers to these questions, even though research cannot provide the answers.

Finally, caution is warranted in proposing policy reform because it is easy to inadvertently overstate the scientific basis for policy recommendations. When exploring a phenomenon as complex as child maltreatment, researchers rely on subject populations that are sometimes different from those to whom findings are generalized, recruit samples that are often rather small, depend on theory to affirm links between cause and effect, and conduct their research using ecological settings and methods that are sometimes much different from the settings in which children live. Their intervention recommendations are usually based on assumptions concerning behavioral remediation that have not been tested and evaluated in a programmatic manner in field settings. These problems are especially apparent in the research literatures pertaining to the psychological maltreatment of children. Given the caution and critical skepticism that attends theory development in the behavioral sciences, developmental researchers must extend that healthy self-criticism to their presentation of research and policy recommendations in applied forums, and be cautious in offering proposals for policy reform based on current research evidence.

At times, an understanding of the tensions in policymaking can highlight rather than obscure the policy implications of developmental research, and this is also true concerning the psychological maltreatment of children. Although Melton and Thompson (1987) criticized the concept of psychological maltreatment as it is applied to the regulation of family functioning, for example, they noted that the same concept might have useful applications for the regulation of institutions affecting children, such as state hospitals and schools. They argued this from a fundamental values perspective, noting that state interests conflict with fundamental values when intervention into families is concerned, but fundamental values *require* the regulation of institutions on behalf of the children who reside there. They also advanced this argument from a trenches viewpoint, noting that the risks to children of unwarranted interventions into institutions are significantly less than the risks of inappropriate intrusions into family life. In

short, an understanding of the policymaking process significantly complicates efforts to apply research findings to legal policies concerning child maltreatment, but in ways that may reveal as well as curtail avenues for policy reform, hopefully to the benefit of the children we hope to assist.

MODES OF RESEARCH APPLICATION

Thus far, the discussion has focused on errors to avoid in efforts to enlist developmental research in the generation of legal policies benefitting maltreated children. But it is also worth recognizing that research *does*, in fact, affect the policymaking process in diverse ways. Recognizing the various modes of research application to policymaking can help developmental researchers appreciate the multiple and complex ways their studies influence the policymaking process, and can make their contributions more precise. Research that is useful to the description or conceptualization of maltreatment may not, for example, contribute directly to problem solving, and thus research should be applied and disseminated in a manner that is appropriate to its specific policymaking contributions. Moreover, these alternative modes of research application influence the policymaking process in different ways. Research that contributes to problem solving becomes enlisted in fashioning alternative policy proposals, but research that describes or conceptualizes the problem influences the core assumptions by which policymakers in local jurisdictions (e.g., caseworkers, police, lawyers, judges, etc.) interpret and implement policy guidelines, and lastly, the technological contributions of research are instrumentally employed locally by various actors in the child protection system. Thus an appreciation of the diverse modes of research application highlights the different actors, applications, and dissemination modes that are relevant to the enlistment of developmental research in policymaking concerning child maltreatment. These are the issues of this section.

Research as Problem Solving

As Weiss (1978, 1987) and other students of research-policy applications have noted, researchers most commonly and intuitively think of their studies in terms of their direct problem-solving applications: How can research be enlisted to resolve an important social problem like maltreatment? We have already noted that this involves a giant leap between research findings and policy reform because (a) research is ill-equipped to address the thorny problems of defining and balancing fundamental social values, (b) many policy problems are difficult to study given existing research technology and ethical constraints, and (c) research is often limited by sampling problems and measurement difficulties that constrain direct applications to policy problems. This means that designing and

conducting problem-solving research not only encounters formidable conceptual obstacles, but also requires considerable funding resources in an environment of declining research support from federal and private agencies.

Nevertheless, a number of recent investigations illustrate the uses of developmental research for problem-solving policy applications concerning child maltreatment. One is an ambitious longitudinal study conducted by Wald, Carlsmith, and Leiderman (1988) that sought to examine whether maltreated children were best served by foster care placements or in-home services. Wald and his colleagues took advantage of a unique historical opportunity: In 1977 the California legislature created an experimental project in two counties in which many maltreated children who would otherwise have been removed from their homes were instead provided intensive services while maintaining at home. In these jurisdictions, in other words, foster care was reserved for only the most serious cases of abuse or neglect. The purpose of this legislation was to determine whether children would show better developmental outcomes in the context of in-home rather than foster-care placements—consistent with ongoing controversies concerning the efficacy of foster care as a remediation regime for child maltreatment—and the targeted counties were provided supplementary funding to provide special in-home services for these children.

This research group thus embarked on a 2-year longitudinal study examining the developmental progress of a sample of 5- to 10-year-old maltreated children maintained in their homes in one of the targeted counties with a matched group of children in foster care placements in nearby counties. The nature of child maltreatment was comparable between the samples, and the children in the targeted county were those who, according to caseworkers, would have been placed in foster care prior to the legislative change. Both of these maltreated groups were also compared with a sample of nonabused children of similar social class. Children were followed for 2 years following their identification by the state as maltreated, and outcome measures concerning the academic, socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical functioning of the children were derived from the children themselves, their teachers, caregivers, and social workers involved in their cases. The children were observed and interviewed at 6-month intervals, their caregivers every 3 months, and other data sources were periodically sampled over the 2-year period.

The results provided a very depressing portrayal of these placements and their efficacy in remediating the consequences of maltreatment. Children who remained at home were reabused in the majority of cases, and even with the additional services provided by the targeted counties many families received no services at all, and in no case did services last longer than 6 months by legislative mandate. Children in foster care were frequently moved from one home to another, and most experienced a drastic decline in contact with their original parents that distressed them. Although children in foster care fared somewhat better on several developmental measures, children in both groups continued at

substantial risk. As Wald and his colleagues concluded, "we must ask who were worse off—the foster children who longed to return to their original homes, or the home children who longed for a loving relationship, free of pain, fear, and insecurity" (p. 144).

The findings of this study have some limited policy implications. They suggest that the extremity of concern about the detrimental consequences of foster care for children of this age may be softened somewhat, at least in comparison to the outcomes for children who are instead maintained at home. They suggest that funding for intensive services that will enable maltreated children to remain at home will not always reach the targeted families, and in any case are likely to be ineffective if they are maintained for only a few months. Wald and his colleagues also recommended that permanency planning in out-of-home placements should be emphasized more than current policies do, and that services to children—whether in home or foster care placements—should be strengthened.

But these implications were offered cautiously, in light of the difficulties Wald and his colleagues encountered in completing this research. Their overall sample size was small—consisting of only 19 children at home and 13 children in foster care—because of sample attrition, changes in placements during the study, and ethnic and minority group confounds. As the authors recognized, this is hardly a sufficient sample size to instill confidence in the reliability of the findings emerging from this project. Moreover, the in-home and foster-care samples also differed initially on several developmental measures in ways that made later outcome differences harder to interpret. Indeed, the volume emerging from this research is a unique study of the problems and challenges inherent in conducting good problem-solving policy-analytic research, which are discussed honestly and insightfully by the authors. But in illustrating these difficulties and the cautions they require in the interpretation of results, this research also contributes to a useful model of the kinds of future studies that are needed in this field.

Other problem-solving research concerning maltreatment consists of field tests of intervention programs that can provide the basis for planning state interventions for maltreated children. One example is the Elmira Prenatal/Early Infancy Project, designed by Olds and his colleagues (e.g., Olds & Henderson, 1989) to examine whether home visitation beginning prenatally could reduce the incidence of child maltreatment in a high-risk sample. A large sample of first-time mothers (which included mothers who were predominantly young, poor single parents) was divided into four treatment groups using stratified random assignment: one group received only periodic infant assessments during the child's first 2 years of life; another group also received free transportation to regular prenatal and well-child visits during this period; and a third group, in addition to these services, also received biweekly visits from a registered nurse during the mother's pregnancy. The fourth group received the most intensive

services of all: in addition to the foregoing, the nurse continued to visit weekly after the child was born, eventually tapering off to visits every 4 to 6 weeks by the time of the child's second birthday. Home visits (averaging more than an hour each) focused on parent education and childrearing practices, enhancing the mother's personal growth, strengthening informal supports to the family, and consolidating ties with formal health and social service agencies in the community. Each of the four comparison groups numbered 90–116 mothers at the beginning of the study, although the proportion of high-risk mothers was less than half of each group.

The intensive, long-term interventions provided the fourth treatment group had a small but important effect: these mothers were less likely than mothers without nurse visits to be identified by local social service agencies for child maltreatment, although the difference was statistically marginally significant. Mothers who had received only prenatal nurse visits also showed lower abuse rates than mothers without this service, although the difference was not as large. The mothers receiving intensive services also showed more positive reactions to their infants: during home observations they were less likely to punish or restrict the child, were more likely to provide appropriate play materials, and they generally reported more positive temperamental characteristics in offspring than did mothers without nurse visitation.

These results are both encouraging and discouraging in their policy implications. Given the limited success of many child abuse prevention programs, evidence of demonstrated efficacy from an intensive program of home visitation is hopeful (see contributors to Willis, Holden, & Rosenberg, 1992). Moreover, the apparent success of a home visitation program suggests that one way to insure that families benefit from available social services (a problem noted by Wald and colleagues) is to provide services at home, rather than elsewhere. Families may be more responsive to home-based services, and their efficacy does not depend as much on the parent's willingness to make personal effort to attend and participate. However, it is important to note that the effects of these intensive services were fairly minimal in relation to the overall costs of the program (which included the intensive services of well-trained nurse visitors over a 2-year period), and may have been specific to the population of young, poor, single mothers. Although this is precisely the population at greatest risk for child abuse, this study raises difficult questions concerning the cost-effectiveness of universally providing such an intensive, long-term program for this population to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment. Systematic follow-up studies to determine more precisely which elements of the intervention strategy were effective are also needed.

The potential importance of sample-specific intervention efficacy is further underscored by a third example of problem-solving policy-relevant research reported by Daro (1988), which will be described more briefly here (see Daro, this volume). This study was initiated and funded by the National Center on

Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN), a federal agency of the Department of Health and Human Services created by Congress in 1974 to foster research, service delivery, and policy development concerning child maltreatment. In 1978, NCCAN provided funds for 19 existing social service agencies throughout the country to develop or enhance child maltreatment intervention programs in order to explore the efficacy of distinct treatment and prevention programs on different maltreatment subpopulations. These subpopulations included families in which either physical abuse, physical neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse was predominant. The major goals of the evaluation component of this project were to identify the distinguishing etiological characteristics of each maltreatment subpopulation and the extent to which each subpopulation required distinct investigatory, treatment and preventive interventions. Outcome measures of the 986 families involved in this project primarily emphasized clinical judgments of likely abuse recurrence and the quality of child and family functioning. Comparisons of the treatment regimes characteristic of each site—which ranged widely from parent-centered individual therapy to broadly based multisystemic approaches for the family—were also systematically conducted.

In general, the results of this project confirmed that different forms of child maltreatment are characterized by different etiological features, with different treatment and prevention implications. Not surprisingly, for example, financial difficulties were almost uniform in families characterized by physical neglect, while emotionally maltreating parents showed greater rates of substance abuse, social isolation, and mental illness, and sexually abusive families exhibited greater interspousal conflict. More importantly, group differences were also apparent in treatment and recurrence. With respect to sexual abuse, for example, clinical judgments of the family's progress and of recurrence were most optimistic, especially when the parent recognized that a problem existed and complied with remediation efforts, often in the context of individual therapy. By contrast, the prognosis was much less optimistic with respect to physical neglect, partly due to the multiple problems faced by these families at intake, and family counseling together with broad community service referrals and education and skill development classes proved most helpful. In all instances, outcome judgments were positively influenced by the duration of treatment, the length of the prior history of abuse, and parental compliance with the treatment regimen.

This research underscores that the term *maltreatment* embraces a heterogeneous variety of family conditions and parental behavior, and that policies addressing this problem should tailor different intervention and prevention strategies to different maltreatment subpopulations. It makes little sense, for example, to remove children from a physically neglectful home or incarcerate the parents if the provision of much-needed social services can remediate these conditions at much less cost to the state and less trauma to children. Understanding the efficacy of in-home services versus out-of-home placements is also enhanced by considering what kind of maltreatment is to be prevented: physical abuse,

emotional maltreatment, and sexual abuse are differentially affected by different placement alternatives. However, this investigation is also distressing in its reliance on clinical judgments (provided by individuals who had been intimately involved in the delivery of services to these families), the absence of control groups for comparison purposes, and impoverished statistical analysis of large-sample data. Moreover, outcome measures did not include the actual recurrence of abuse, only clinical judgments of likely reabuse. However, this research illustrates the strong need for systematic and comprehensive monitoring of the kinds of services provided maltreated children and their families by local child protection agencies, and their effects on the targeted families. Only in this manner can researchers and policymakers have useful information concerning the kinds of interventions and services that are normatively available, and their efficacy, for different maltreatment subpopulations.

Challenges to problem-solving applications. It is no surprise that the three examples of problem-solving policy-relevant research discussed in this section are each large-scale, expensive, longitudinal projects. The kind of research that is likely to contribute directly to addressing the dilemmas of policymakers (at both national and local levels) is commonly difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. But like most of the goals underlying ambitious and difficult research projects, efforts to provide "usable knowledge" concerning the prevention and treatment of child maltreatment justifies such efforts.

The challenges in conducting problem-solving policy-relevant research raise a formidable problem, however. Given the need for effective interventions to address a growing and disconcerting number of child maltreatment reports and the lack of a large problem-solving policy-relevant research literature, to what extent should researchers offer informed judgments based on more limited, compromised, and/or incomplete studies (such as those using unvalidated measures, or limited subject samples, or which may not easily generalize to child maltreatment issues)? Do responsible research applications derive only from well-designed, comprehensive studies of the kinds described above (despite their limitations), or are researchers ethically responsible for taking *whatever* pertinent research exists—however limited—to provide empirically based recommendations to the policymaking community?

It seems clear that developmental scientists should contribute to the policymaking debate even when they lack comprehensive studies that provide direct problem-solving applications. The information they provide even from limited research can contribute usefully to a more complete picture of the considerations necessary for responsible policymaking. But a heavy responsibility accompanies this contribution, because it is easy for researchers to inadvertently misrepresent the strength of their research or its policy relevance. This is, therefore, another reason why the cross-fertilization of ideas and concerns between research and policymaking communities is essential. It is likely that researchers will offer more informative (and less misleading) recommendations from limited or com-

promised data when their knowledge of the policymaking process can guide their appreciation of whether—and how—the research is germane to the policy problems under consideration.

When policymakers are making utilitarian judgments, for example, of the consequences of alternative policy options based on erroneous assumptions about child development (e.g., that children necessarily benefit from removal from an emotionally abusive family), research findings can be enlisted to question these assumptions even when they do not offer specific intervention alternatives. Indeed, developmental research might be especially useful for challenging prevailing assumptions within the policymaking community even though it may be more difficult to specify what new assumptions should replace them (cf. Gardner, Scherer, & Tester, 1989). Similarly, researchers can provide information that highlights dimensions of concern about policy alternatives (e.g., the importance of a child's sense of time and permanency in placement alternatives at various developmental periods) that might not otherwise be included in the calculus of policy considerations. In the end, limited data allow limited and cautious applications to policy problems, with due consideration of both what is known and what is *not* known about policy-relevant developmental issues. Although this sometimes undermines researchers' authority and expertise in the minds of policymakers, it is consistent with the scientific mandate to inform rather than mislead policymakers about the state of existing knowledge.

These tensions in research applications to policy are especially important to acknowledge because of the strong desire to *do something* about the problem of child maltreatment. As a consequence, it is easy to assume that a stronger research foundation exists for policy proposals than is actually true. In the area of child sexual abuse, for example, heightened public concern has resulted in a proliferation of policy initiatives, ranging from support for sex abuse prevention programs in public schools to the enlistment of anatomically correct dolls in the initial interviewing of children (Levy, 1989). Yet despite these efforts, we still know remarkably little about the origins, detection, treatment, and prevention of child sexual abuse. In two recent authoritative reviews of the child sexual abuse prevention literature (Finkelhor & Strapko, 1992; Melton, 1992), for example, both reviewers concluded that we still do not know whether prevention programs actually reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse, and the potentially negative effects of these programs (e.g., heightening fear and anxiety in children) cannot be ruled out. These are, of course, the central concerns to policymakers in evaluating child sexual abuse prevention programs, and thus claims concerning the state of our knowledge about child sexual abuse prevention should be duly cautious and constrained. When developmental scientists remain cognizant of the limitations of existing research concerning important policy-relevant dimensions of child maltreatment such as these, they can inform rather than mislead policymakers concerning the state of knowledge, and can advance new research initiatives with useful problem-solving applications.

Research as Conceptualization

Although a small proportion of developmental research studies have direct problem-solving applications to policy problems, a much larger literature contributes to policymaking through the manner in which social problems are conceptualized by legal and social authorities. The importance of research as conceptualization should not be underestimated: Weiss (1987), Caplan (1979), and other students of research utilization have emphasized the "knowledge creep" by which social science findings become absorbed within the policymaking community through the mass media, presentation by advocacy groups, reports by expert commissions, and other sources. Concepts, ideas, and theories from developmental research become part of the background framework of assumptions and values by which policymakers weigh, evaluate, and organize the specific considerations involved in alternative policy proposals and their implementations. This occurs despite the fact that the research that constitutes the basis for problem conceptualization may be only distally relevant to the problem itself.

A good example of the use of research as conceptualization to the field of child maltreatment is the application of "psychological parenting" theory in general—and attachment theory in particular—to how policy alternatives in this area are conceptualized. As a consequence of the now widespread realization that children develop attachments to significant caregivers that are central to psychological health and well-being—and that these attachments are not specific to biological kin—some of the policy options concerning maltreatment are now framed differently. In particular, policymakers are more concerned with the effects on children of removal from the home, and of the detrimental consequences of severing emotional attachments to caregivers who may also be abusing them. Policymakers are also concerned about the attachments children are likely to develop to foster families with whom they have temporary placements. Indeed, the emphasis on "permanency planning" in the federal 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act derives in fundamental ways from how problems of child protection have been reconceptualized owing to an increased recognition of the importance of attachments and "psychological parenting" in a child's experience.

Importantly, these conceptualizations do not in themselves lead directly to new policy alternatives or even to strong recommendations for reform (i.e., to problem solving); more commonly, they complicate rather than resolve existing policy dilemmas. But in doing so, they help to reorient prevailing ideas concerning maltreatment interventions in ways that hopefully better reflect children's interests and needs. Moreover, research-as-conceptualization contributes to the evolution of public perceptions of the characteristics and needs of children, the nature of family functioning, and the potential benefits of various kinds of interventions into family life. In so doing, research contributes to gradual

changes in the consensual values by which alternative policy proposals are developed and evaluated.

Research as Description

At times, the most important use of developmental research in policymaking is as a potent description of children's conditions. Indeed, the modern awareness of child maltreatment was inaugurated with the compelling description of the "battered child syndrome" by Kempe and his colleagues (Kempe et al., 1962), which alerted medical authorities to a constellation of symptoms revealing physical abuse and highlighted the likely prevalence of this problem. This research report subsequently became the basis for advocacy efforts (spearheaded by Kempe himself) within the policymaking community that contributed to the early genesis of mandatory reporting laws, changes within the child protection system, and the enlistment of other federal efforts on behalf of maltreated children. More recently, descriptive data have been the basis for the discovery of the prevalence of child neglect, child sexual abuse, and prenatal drug exposure, and descriptive data have also been helpful in elucidating the social conditions surrounding these forms of child maltreatment.

The influence of research-as-description on policymaking concerning maltreatment includes, among other things, the uses of social indicators that reveal the conditions in which children in America are currently growing up (Zill, 1991; Zill & Rogers, 1988; Zill, Sigal, & Brim, 1983), the presentation of statistical data concerning the incidence and prevalence of various forms of maltreatment (now typically gathered by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect and the American Association for Protecting Children), and gathering social service data concerning the availability of services for maltreated children and their families. But research as description can also include smaller scale studies of children and families that focus on the conditions surrounding child maltreatment and the efficacy of intervention alternatives (cf. Wald et al., 1988). In this respect, intensive descriptive small-sample and case studies can be as potentially informative as social indicators data.

As noted throughout this discussion, the availability of descriptive data of this kind not only can inform policymaking decisions, but can also become (like Kempe's seminal study more than 25 years ago) the basis for advocacy efforts on children's behalf. As policymakers and the public at large become aware of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect, concern about children becomes galvanized into funding for new policy initiatives. However, it is important to keep in mind that research-as-description is not the same thing as research-as-problem-solving. Understanding the conditions associated with child maltreatment does not lead directly to intervention strategies, because interventions require a variety of additional considerations, such as the availability of social

resources, priorities among the various goals underlying intervention strategies, and the relative costs and benefits of alternative intervention options. Thus while the availability of descriptive data concerning child maltreatment can contribute significantly to well-informed and clearly conceived policy options, descriptive research should not be portrayed as providing intervention solutions.

Research as Technology

At times, the most useful contributions of researchers to policymaking are not the research findings they provide, but the assessment tools they develop that can be applied in field settings. As we have noted, many of the utilitarian deliberations related to child maltreatment policies concern the extent to which various forms of child abuse and neglect can be reliably detected by child protection caseworkers, how the consequences of maltreatment to children can be validly appraised, and how the efficacy of various intervention alternatives on children and their families can be assessed. To the extent to which considerable doubt exists about the ability to validly detect maltreatment or to measure the effectiveness of treatment, policymakers tend to narrow the range and scope of interventions on behalf of maltreated children. One important manner in which developmental scientists can contribute to policymaking is in the development of sensitive, reliable, and valid assessment tools to assist in the practical implementation of social interventions to assist targeted children and their families.

This is a more formidable challenge than may at first appear. Developing effective and useful assessment tools requires identifying the child outcomes of greatest concern to the child protection system and to society in general, and this is a question of values as well as of social utility. When evaluating the results of treatment interventions, for example, should the state be concerned solely with reabuse rates? the child's physical well being? the child's happiness or self-esteem? the nature of parent-child interaction? the adult's knowledge of child development? all of these? Beyond these conceptual hurdles, many assessment tools used by developmental researchers are ill suited to field settings, either because they require laboratory-based assessments, extensive interviews, observational procedures, or highly skilled assessors. Moreover, they are likely to be used by caseworkers, social service personnel, and perhaps also police who do not share the conceptual orientations, backgrounds, and prevailing assumptions of the research community, and this enhances the challenges of adapting existing assessment tools to field applications, or developing new assessment methods altogether. Finally, a considerable amount of additional research is needed to develop some of the assessment procedures that would be most useful to policymakers in the area of child maltreatment. Procedures for predicting the likely recurrence of abuse based on child, family, and situational conditions, for example, requires extensive knowledge about the conditions associated with

abuse recidivism following the intervention of legal authorities—and there currently exists little information concerning these conditions.

Because of the strong public impetus to develop new and effective interventions, however, a number of assessment tools have already been developed and used extensively in field settings. An important technological contribution of developmental scientists, therefore, is to study the validity and reliability of these instruments in order to better define their uses and limitations and, at times, correct erroneous assumptions about their utility. In the area of child sexual abuse, for example, the need for useful interviewing devices led quickly to the widespread use of anatomically correct dolls that were presumed to facilitate the interviewing process, especially with young children whose lack of knowledge or understanding of the abusive experience, or reticence to disclose, could undermine effective reporting. It is only recently that serious questions have been raised concerning the interpretation of children's behavior with these dolls, and the ways that interviewing may be misdirected rather than facilitated when anatomically correct dolls are incorporated into the interview protocol. At the same time, developmental scientists are beginning to examine how nonabused children respond to such dolls to provide a baseline of normative data with which the responses of sexually abused children can be compared (e.g., Goodman & Aman, 1991).

This means that some of the more important contributions of research-technology is defining the strengths and limitations of existing assessment instruments, as well as developing better tools, based on scientific knowledge of test construction and validation. In an increasing number of jurisdictions, for example, child protection caseworkers use one of a variety of risk assessment instruments to provide a more objective basis for gathering and weighing pertinent information concerning the family. The summary judgments derived from such instruments can, as noted earlier, influence immediate decisions concerning the severity of the family conditions and the likelihood of reabuse of children, as well as longer term considerations pertaining to case planning. Given the interpretive and dispositional burden these instruments assume, it is important to note a number of methodological and conceptual problems inherent in their construction and implementation (see Sandmire & Wald, 1990, and Wald & Woolverton, 1990, for summaries). First, there is very limited research knowledge concerning the factors predictive of abuse recidivism after a family has been involved with the child protection system, so necessarily such instruments are based on quasi-clinical estimations of the most powerful predictive factors. Second, given that the overall base rates of reabuse are rather low and the predictive factors are only moderately discriminating, it is likely that there will be a rather high proportion of false positives yielded by such assessment instruments—that is, families identified as potentially reabusive who will not, in fact, maltreat their children again. High rates of false positives have important public policy implications,

because they permit the continuing intervention of the legal system in families when other circumstances may not warrant it. Third, when risk assessment instruments also use scores derived from their inventories to identify families in "high," "moderate," and "low" risk groups, there are further assumptions concerning the extremity of the factors predictive of differing risk levels that have no substantive empirical basis, and defining the meaning of risk levels in absolute rather than relative terms is also problematic (e.g., does *high* risk mean that families will reabuse offspring 70% of the time? 50%? 20%? 5%?). In sum, it is important for developmental scientists to remind users of risk assessment instruments of the very limited research foundation for their design and implementation, and thus that the decisions derived from reliance on such assessment tools are not scientifically well-founded and may be invalid. Moreover, to the extent to which they are used by caseworkers with differing perspectives, training, and prior experience, their implementation is potentially unreliable as well.

These examples suggest that researchers have both a deconstructive and a constructive role to assume in the development of assessment tools for the investigation and treatment of child abuse and neglect. On the one hand, their most important contributions may be, at times, to cast a critical light on assessment instruments that have been quickly developed and implemented in the rush to intervene effectively in child maltreatment cases. They must indicate the limitations of these tools, necessary cautions in their interpretation, and the steps necessary to improve their validity and reliability. On the other hand, caseworkers, clinical evaluators, and family lawyers will experience justified frustration if developmental researchers do not assume their positive responsibility for assisting in the development of better instruments to replace those they criticize. In these dual tasks of deconstruction and reconstruction, research-as-technology can assume an important role in improving how the child protection system addresses the problem of child maltreatment.

Researchers as Child Advocates

The research community has at least two resources to offer the child protection system: the research findings it generates, and the perspectives of researchers themselves. It is important not to neglect the latter. As the result of professional careers devoted to understanding child development and its challenges, developmental scientists are likely to be sensitive to dimensions of child protection that might be neglected from other perspectives. They can pose important questions about the experience of children within the social service system, for example, that are useful catalysts for the development of more child-oriented procedures. They can define dimensions of child functioning as the basis for outcome assessments (and aid in the development of assessment tools) that will help caseworkers consider the experience of children in the evaluation of treatment

plans. They can raise concerns about how children are affected by dispositional alternatives that may currently be framed according to the interests of other family members, and propose child-centered options that may not have yet been considered. In short, as a result of their professional training, developmental scientists may provide a uniquely child's-eye-view of the child protection system that can be an important contribution to policy reform, especially when it is combined with the advocacy efforts that developmental scientists are also capable of contributing.

For these contributions to be most useful, however, developmental scientists must know enough about the child protection system to offer pertinent critique and constructive alternatives. Otherwise their recommendations are either irrelevant, inapplicable, or uselessly general. Thus whether their contributions are in the form of research evidence or advancing values, researchers must engage in the two-way dialogue with policymakers at various levels of the system to discover how their contributions can be most useful and valuable.

TOWARD A CHILD-ORIENTED CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

These diverse potential contributions of developmental scientists are urgently needed. In portraying current circumstances as a "national emergency," the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990) urged the development of a new child protection system that is both neighborhood-based and child-oriented. A neighborhood-based system, according to the Advisory Board, requires building on the resources of local communities and integrating prevention and intervention efforts with community initiatives and supports. A child-oriented system, in turn, addresses the treatment, remediation, and support needs of children as a paramount priority in child protection efforts.

The Advisory Board has specified a general blueprint for child protection reform, but most aspects of this plan remain to be developed. What would a child-oriented child protection system look like, for example (Thompson, 1993)? One feature of such an ideal system is that its effectiveness would be measured in terms of the child's developmental achievements during the period immediately following intervention owing to maltreatment. There would be a focus on remedial and treatment efforts that restore the child's functioning to age-appropriate norms, in other words, and alleviate the consequences of earlier abuse or neglect. Currently, child protection efforts are primarily concerned with abuse recidivism, which is arguably the most important policy goal for intervention efforts. After all, we do not want children to be victimized again. However, such a goal orients the system toward the remedial and treatment needs of the perpetrator, with children receiving little therapeutic, educational, or other supportive assistance in a system of limited resources (Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, 1987; U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and

Neglect, 1990). In a child-oriented child protection system, intervention efforts would be deemed unsuccessful, not only if the minimalist goal of preventing reabuse was not achieved, but also if intervention occurred at a cost to the child's developmental achievements, or if the child was not provided living conditions that supported age-appropriate functioning and mental health, or if the psychological consequences of earlier maltreatment were unremediated. In a sense, the needs of the victim of abuse as well as of the perpetrator would be primary in such a system.

This has important implications for how the child protection system would be designed. For example, systematic, periodic, long-term follow-up data concerning children taken into its care would be required to evaluate the effectiveness of child protection interventions. Designing practical, age-appropriate assessment tools that could be used for such purposes thus becomes an important research task. In addition, systemic changes in service delivery and funding provisions would be required to insure that children receive the therapeutic, educational, and other assistance required by their developmental needs and prior experience of maltreatment. Currently, service delivery for maltreated children is encumbered by the idiosyncratic eligibility requirements and agency jurisdictions of different programs such that children's needs are fitted into program requirements rather than programs accommodating to children's needs. In a child-oriented system, services would be coordinated around an individualized treatment plan that takes into account the child's age and developmental level, the type of maltreatment, the nature of the family and its circumstances, other challenges or disabilities the child faces, and specific factors in the child's background that are relevant to treatment and intervention. Developmental, community, and clinical researchers could fruitfully explore how such individualized service delivery models would be realized.

Another feature of a child-oriented child protection system would be respect for the child's family, recognizing the importance of the emotional ties that bind children to family members, even when they are abusive. Current child protection policies recognize this in their emphasis on family preservation and reunification, but there would be more substance to this concept in a child-oriented system. For example, parents would commonly be enfranchised in case planning and treatment decision making concerning the child, whether the child receives services at home or is placed out-of-home (except when there is little home of family reunification). In out-of-home placements, parents might become involved in aiding the child's transition to the foster placement (e.g., accompanying the child during the initial visit to the foster family, helping to select toys and other security/transitional objects, etc.), visiting regularly and assisting with the child's care in that placement, and eventually participating actively in planning the child's transition home. Members of the extended family would be sought as support agents on the child's behalf. In such a system, interventions in cases of child neglect (which constitute the majority of abuse allegations) would focus on

providing needed social services to enable the family to remain intact while also remediating problems of inadequate care or supervision, rather than removing children from the home. And the system would seek alternative avenues to enlisting children as informants concerning their own maltreatment within the family, recognizing the psychological risks to children of the resentment and recrimination of family members that may result. Each of these elements of a child-oriented system defines a research agenda to better understand the strengths that can be enlisted even in abusive families, the kinds of intrafamilial and extrafamilial supports that maltreated children might be able to draw upon, and how these and other elements of a system that respected a child's family ties could be tested and evaluated.

A third aspect of a child-oriented child protection system is that it would provide supportive assistance to children throughout the various phases of investigation, prosecution, treatment, and remediation. In current child protection efforts, children are sometimes victimized by the system that has been designed to protect them because the system itself is not "child friendly:" the agencies that assist them are not primarily concerned with children, few actors within the system have substantive background in child development, and other agenda (e.g., procedural due process, resource constraints, etc.) compete with a primary concern with maltreated children. In a child-oriented system, by contrast, tangible efforts to provide support to children who have been abused or neglected would be incorporated throughout the design of the system. For example, individuals in a child's extended family or neighborhood who have prior acquaintance with the child would be formally enlisted as special advocates to accompany the child throughout the various phases of case planning and disposition, informing the child of decisions that have been made and their implications, helping the child anticipate future events, soliciting the child's own preferences and opinions concerning case planning, and communicating the child's views to social service and legal personnel. A special investigative unit within the police or county attorney's office would include well-trained personnel who specialize in investigating child abuse allegations and who would also assist in interviewing children with sensitivity to the child's experience and developmental needs. These and other aspects of a "child friendly" child protection system would need to be carefully crafted in relation to children of different ages, and this is also an important task for developmental researchers.

Finally, a child-oriented child protection system would recognize that maltreated children are often multiproblem children who each possess a rather unique constellation of vulnerabilities and resiliency owing to their developmental level, intrinsic capabilities, and experiential history (cf. Maccoby, 1983; Thompson, 1990). They come to child protection agencies, not only with a history of abuse or neglect, but also often with mental illness, learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, behavioral problems, and other challenges. Moreover, the resources and supports within the family and neigh-

borhood ecology that children can draw upon are also likely to be unique. An individualized treatment, educational, and remediation plan recognizes this, but incorporating this awareness of individualized needs and resources throughout the system is perhaps the greatest challenge of reforming current child protection efforts.

There is a considerable research agenda incorporated into this sketchy outline of what a child-oriented child protection system would look like, and further development of a detailed portrayal of such a system is required. Moreover, other elements of a research agenda await the attention of developmental researchers. We must know more about what happens to children when they enter the child protection system—what are the decision-making processes by which their life experience is guided and directed, and what are the alternative pathways by which they are directed through the system. We require more systematic testing of the efficacy of alternative in-home intervention efforts, especially with respect to identifying the most significant features of the programs that work and identifying the essential requisites of effective intervention strategies. Similarly, we need to know much more about abuse prevention, especially strategies that enlist informants besides children, and that are systematically tested so their efficacy can be demonstrated. In short, a considerable amount of important, developmentally oriented research is needed for progress toward a child-oriented child protection system.

CONCLUSION

By describing the tensions inherent in policymaking concerning child maltreatment, and outlining various modes of research applications to policy, the purpose of this chapter has been to underscore the importance of an ongoing, mutual dialogue between developmental scientists and policymakers. Without an intimate knowledge of policymakers' concerns, developmental scientists are more likely to propose solutions that are irrelevant, unrealistic, or excessively broad in the eyes of the policymaking community. Moreover, their research will continue to neglect many of the significant—and challenging—questions for which answers are desperately needed. In turn, without an awareness of the conceptual and scientific contributions that the developmental research community can potentially offer, policymakers are more likely to devise interventions that neglect children's needs, based on conceptualizations of family functioning, descriptive information and assessment instruments that are potentially misleading. Policymakers can additionally benefit from the overall framework of knowledge about child development that researchers can provide with which to evaluate policy alternatives and prioritize values in child protection (cf. Monahan & Walker, 1986, 1988). In a sense, each community needs the other to devise the most effective remedies to this national problem.

It is appropriate that these concerns about research and policymaking are being raised at this time, shortly after the 30th anniversary of the founding of Head Start. For developmental researchers, Head Start was the most important of the Great Society initiatives affecting children, and its continuing legacy has been a source of pride to policymakers and researchers alike. For present purposes, Head Start has also been an influential model of the kind of dialogue that can occur between researchers and policymakers, with researchers generating basic insights into developmental processes to whom policymakers could turn for advice and assistance in addressing social needs. The current generation of interest in the social policy applications of developmental research derives, in part, from the experience of earlier developmental scientists who found that their basic studies of cognitive and intellectual processes in early childhood assumed an authoritative role in the development of a major, federally funded intervention on behalf of disadvantaged children.

But the Head Start model of the role of research in policymaking is fundamentally misleading if it contributes to the view that developmental scientists may remain disinterested but authoritative academics to whom the policymaking world turns for answers. The complexity of the problems of child maltreatment, the diversity of the social service systems that assume a role in intervention and treatment, the intractability of many of the social conditions contributing to child abuse and neglect, and the challenges of most of the fundamental policy questions in this area require that developmental scientists themselves must become immersed in the system they hope to improve. The policymaking world will not turn to developmental scientists for answers they cannot provide. If the developmental research community is concerned about the problem of child maltreatment, and seeks to address this problem as part of its ethical mandate to improve the conditions of people (American Psychological Association, 1990), it requires a radical change in how developmental scientists regard their roles vis-à-vis policymakers, and in the approaches they take to designing research, conceptualizing problems, and applying knowledge to practice (Thompson, 1991).

The kind of two-way street envisioned here has broader implications for the professional research community. With respect to the dissemination of knowledge, for example, it suggests that the publication of research and empirical reviews exclusively in academic journals is an inappropriate means of influencing the policymaking process. The journals, periodicals, and books that are influential with different policymaking groups are unfamiliar to most developmental scientists, but they should not be: thoughtful reviews of research findings pertinent to policy questions can be part of academic psychology's contributions to these forums. With respect to professional affiliations, moreover, it is essential that developmental scientists not only read but talk to the individuals who formulate policies concerning maltreated children to discover what their concerns and interests are. These individuals are not hard to find, and they are important contributors to policy reform.

When the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990) declared that current protections of maltreated children constitute a "national emergency," it also declared the need for generating, diffusing, and responsibly applying knowledge concerning child abuse and neglect. It did so with the confidence that knowledge is one of the most important foundations for developing more effective interventions on behalf of children and their families. It thus presented an important challenge to the developmental research community.

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