

Proposal for CYFC Co-Funded Faculty Position in Child Maltreatment
Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Health and Human Development

This proposed hire will focus on the reduction of risk and prevention of child maltreatment. The strong emphasis in HDFS on prevention research and the department's close collaboration with the Prevention Research Center (PRC) make it an ideal location for a faculty member who focuses on the reduction of risk and prevention of child maltreatment, including sexual abuse, violence and other forms of maltreatment.

1. Description of the Position

The position is for an open-rank faculty member whose research focuses on the reduction of risk and prevention of child maltreatment, including sexual abuse, violence and other forms of maltreatment. We are particularly interested in hiring someone whose research focuses on the development and testing of novel approaches to reducing risk or enhancing protection for child maltreatment that target individual, family and/or community/societal processes. The growing interest in the primary prevention of child maltreatment suggests a variety of areas and approaches that would fit well with and complement the broad social-ecological perspective of the department and Prevention Research Center.

Child maltreatment is a serious and prevalent public health concern. The Administration of Children and Families within the US Department of Health and Human Services estimated that 754,000 children were victims of maltreatment in 2010. All youth are potential victims of abuse and neglect, but the highest rates of victimization occur among 0-3 year olds (34% of all cases). The most common form of maltreatment reported in 2010 was neglect (78%) followed by physical abuse (18%) and sexual abuse (9%). Individuals who have experienced maltreatment are likely to experience lifelong health, psychological and economic consequences. For society, the economic costs directly connected to the victims of abuse and neglect, not including costs associated with treatment of the perpetrator or family, were estimated to be \$103.8 billion per year in 2007 (Wang & Holton, 2007). The breadth of the individual and societal consequences of maltreatment, coupled with the health and economic costs to individuals and society, highlight the need for developing more effective prevention programs.

Approaches to the prevention of child abuse and maltreatment have typically come under the auspices of state supported Child Protective Services and focus primarily on prevention of the *recurrence* of child maltreatment. There is a particular need for developing and testing new models of primary prevention that focus on the early detection of risk, and on enhancing protective mechanisms prior to the occurrence of maltreatment. We seek a faculty member with expertise in the development and evaluation of preventive interventions that specifically target, *or could potentially target* developmental processes that contribute to the reduction of risk for or prevention of child maltreatment.

A variety of individual, family and community-level approaches have demonstrated promise as preventive interventions. One potentially fruitful area for investigation involves utilizing a growing knowledge of the epidemiology of risk and protection for child maltreatment to enhance, broaden and/or expand existing prevention models. These skills-based enhancement approaches have been successful in related areas, such as reducing peer-to-peer physical and sexual victimization. One approach is to build the social emotional competencies of children who might be exposed to situations of potential maltreatment. Personal safety programs have shown to be modestly effective in increasing children's skills and knowledge of maltreatment, their reporting of situations that make them uncomfortable, and their use of self-protection strategies when threatened. Further research is needed using enhanced programs that build social and emotional competencies in children.

A second area of promise has been promoting safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children and caregivers. The most basic approach is through parent training and behavioral family interventions. Interventions such as Parent Child Interaction Therapy reduce rates of maltreatment in families who are identified as being at-risk, while the Triple-P parenting program has been shown in a randomized trial to reduce rates of confirmed maltreatment at the county level. The Nurse-Family Partnership, a home-visitation model of intervention, has also demonstrated positive results for preventing child maltreatment. Although there is accruing evidence that family and parenting programs can reduce maltreatment, research on the effectiveness of these programs for different populations and in different settings is needed. Research is also needed on effective strategies for broadening the reach of these evidence-based family/parenting interventions to families and communities most in need.

Third, there is considerable interest in understanding the effectiveness of community-based approaches to preventing maltreatment. Maltreatment is concentrated in communities represented by high levels of poverty and racial disparities. Broad-based community programs that target risk and protective factors, such as the Strengthening Families Approach, attempt to reform the community systems for identifying and addressing maltreatment while simultaneously altering the community context toward supporting parents' intention to parent effectively. These programs attempt to build a community's collective responsibility for ensuring children's safety and promoting healthy development by expanding formal and informal resources. These kinds of community approaches may also target changing the practices of service providers, developing stronger partnerships across social service agencies serving the community, and expanding the capacity to serve families.

Search Strategy: The position will be open rank, but we have a preference for senior candidates (Associate or Full Professor). Because of the challenges inherent in designing, implementing and testing effective preventive interventions for child maltreatment, we believe a senior faculty member is needed to provide leadership in building this capacity at Penn State. In order to facilitate the interdisciplinary collaborations we expect of a person filling this position, we will include a faculty member from another department (e.g., Psychology, Sociology) on our search committee, as well as a member of the CYFC Steering Committee. We will place print and online advertisements in the APA Monitor, APS Observer, and other newsletters as appropriate (e.g., Society for Research on Child Development, Society for Prevention Research, American Public Health Association). We will send announcements to listserves and make personal contacts with colleagues who train graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. We will also approach and directly recruit individuals whom we identify as promising potential candidates.

2. Justification for a Position in HDFS

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies offers a rich array of resources that can facilitate development and enhancement of a high quality research program on reduction of risk and prevention of child maltreatment, including sexual abuse, violence and other forms of maltreatment. HDFS has a long and distinguished record of research in child and adolescent development and on how families influence normal development and problem behaviors ranging from misconduct to substance abuse. The Department offers a strong program of prevention research that is informed by and, in turn, influences studies of normal development and the risk and protective factors for child and family problems. Research programs targeting families and schools focus on prevention of behavioral and mental health problems among children, strengthening families and enhancing positive development for children and parents. Many of these studies involve economically-disadvantaged populations from both urban and rural areas, which have high risk for sexual and other forms of child maltreatment. HDFS and PRC faculty members have developed working relationships with child care centers, preschools and

elementary and middle schools throughout the state, as well as with state officials. Another important resource developed by HDFS and PRC faculty members is the systematic study of the processes by which empirically-validated prevention programs can be disseminated effectively at the community level. Faculty members are also using network analysis tools as part of research in schools. A new faculty member would thus have access to resources that could lead to research at multiple levels for addressing child maltreatment, including lowering risk, development and evaluation of prevention and other intervention programs and rolling out programs to reach the wider community.

A faculty member in HDFS who focuses on reduction of risk and prevention of child maltreatment could also draw upon a superb group of research methodologists. Departmental research aimed at child development, risk factors for substance abuse, obesity and sexually risky behavior, and minority youth and families is bolstered by unparalleled expertise in research methodology and multivariate statistical approaches. The Methodology Center has a specific emphasis on innovative research designs for developing and evaluating intervention modules. The Prevention and Methodology Training Program (PAMT) is run jointly by the Prevention Research Center and Methodology Center. This program creates a forum for discussion of methodological issues in prevention research, and provides support to doctoral and postdoctoral students who could work with a faculty member in prevention of maltreatment.

Another emerging focus in the Department is the use of neuroscience approaches to study development and for assessing outcomes of prevention programs. In addition to on-campus facilities (MRI, EEG), a specially-equipped recreation vehicle is available for mobile data collection, which has been used to investigate changes in brain functioning from a school-based intervention. A neuroscience perspective could provide valuable information on the effects of programs on risk and prevention of maltreatment. Faculty members conducting research on families also bring resources relevant to the development of a program of reduction of risk and prevention of child maltreatment. Of note are studies of family stress related to workplace settings and the spillover of work to family life. Faculty expertise in HDFS and Biobehavioral Health (BBH) in methods of assessing daily variability of stress hormones is another tool for risk and prevention research focused on child maltreatment. We also note that the proposed child maltreatment positions in HDFS and BBH have been designed as complementary. The focus on biological processes and health in child maltreatment in the BBH position would broaden opportunities for collaborative research integrating behavioral, social and biological dimensions.

A new faculty member with a focus on child maltreatment will fill an important role in undergraduate and graduate education and outreach. Several years ago, we identified the need for an undergraduate course on child maltreatment. We saw this course as critical to training of our students, many of whom take front line human services jobs when they complete their degrees. This course has been developed and was approved by the Faculty Senate (HDFS 452—Child Maltreatment). It has been offered annually for the past 3 years by a fixed-term faculty member and has been very popular. The proposed new faculty member would be able to enrich the content of the course. We would be able to offer the course every semester in most years, rather than just once a year. A new faculty hire in this area would also be helpful in guiding undergraduate students to career paths for prevention and treatment of child maltreatment. A small endowment is available to enhance undergraduate training in this area.

The proposed faculty member would add an important substantive dimension to our graduate program by offering courses that complement current emphases in prevention science on children and families at risk. This person would offer a topical graduate seminar on risk and prevention of child maltreatment, as well as a best practices course (HDFS 508). Our graduate prevention seminars draw many students from other graduate programs, particularly Psychology and the College of Education, so the impact of

this new graduate course would extend beyond HDFS. We would also anticipate that this person would provide leadership in mentoring doctoral students interested in child maltreatment.

3. Description of how the position would facilitate interdisciplinary connections to strengthen Penn State efforts in research, outreach and teaching

In the previous section, we described the strong links of the Department with the PRC and Methodology Center. Many faculty members hold appointments in both the Department and one or both of these centers. A person with a position in child maltreatment would be given an appointment in the PRC, and if appropriate, in the Methodology Center as well. These centers would provide one vehicle by which the person in this position would be able to identify potential collaborators from across the University. Both centers regularly sponsor interdisciplinary colloquia and have a strong record of interdisciplinary research.

HDFS faculty members also have strong connections with other groups relevant to child maltreatment, including the Child Study Center's Parenting-at-Risk group. Faculty members have worked with the Population Research Institute on grants, conferences and other activities. HDFS faculty members participate in the Penn State network analysis initiative, which has potential applications to risk and prevention of child maltreatment. Several faculty now have active collaborations in the College of Medicine, particularly around children's health issues (obesity prevention, infant development), as well as through the CTSI program. These relationships would assist a new faculty member develop contacts with College of Medicine faculty working on child maltreatment and related topics. HDFS has also worked with Lucy Johnson at the Law School in development of the undergraduate maltreatment course, and in identifying internship sites. The expertise in the Law School on legal issues and policies around child abuse will be a very helpful component in guiding prevention research in this area. HDFS also has a range of other productive interdisciplinary relationships that could become relevant to specific research questions, including ties to arts and architecture, communications arts and sciences, engineering, neuroscience and statistics.

Besides facilitating interdisciplinary research, these connections could enhance teaching. Current undergraduate course could be enriched through perspectives offered in other departments. A longer term plan could include development of a set of courses that explore child maltreatment from several perspectives, and which could form an undergraduate minor. At the graduate level, courses could be co-taught across departments, or coordinated to assure complementary graduate offerings. We have taken this type of approach with network analysis and in neuroscience.

The strong interdisciplinary relationships through HDFS and its associated research centers would facilitate outreach programs that disseminate findings about child maltreatment to the broader community, relevant state and local agencies, as well as research conferences that identify the most promising approaches in risk reduction and prevention.

4. Support from the College of Health and Human Development

Dean Nan Crouter supports this proposal. She is aware that the SSRI will cover half of the salary, not to exceed \$60,000 plus benefits. If the new faculty member's salary exceeds \$120,000, the college will cover the remainder of the salary and will work collaboratively with the SSRI and the provost's office to cover start-up costs. If someone is selected who is in the first decade of their career, he or she will be eligible to receive an endowed career development professorship for their first three years. The college has two to award, one focused on children and one on families.