

Constrained Parenting Decisions: Toward a General Model of Child Maltreatment

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Abstract

Standard parental investment models from the biological sciences and economics suggest that parents can be expected to care for their children subject to personal characteristics (e.g. altruism) and resource constraints (e.g. money). While previous research has clearly established links between personal characteristics, resources, and maltreatment behaviors, the field lacks any examples of formal attempts to test the predictions of these models with respect to maltreatment behaviors. The goal of this paper is to test a biologically and economically informed model of behaviors associated with child maltreatment. Using data from the National Survey of Early Childhood Health (NSECH), the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES), and the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), estimates of altruism, parental efficiency, income, and other control variables were calculated. A dependent measure of the probability that all reported discipline strategies would be Type-II strategies was also calculated. All variables were subjected to Bayesian Model Averaging (BMA) across quasibinomial GLMs to determine the most probable set of covariates. The BMA results estimate that the model with the highest posterior probability is a model which only includes the household and parental investments (household altruism) and the natural logarithm of their annual income. In other words, households with higher levels of altruism and higher incomes tend to report higher levels of discipline strategies that are not associated with maltreatment. Results are discussed in terms of implications for social work practice and child welfare practice in particular.

Keywords: Income, Altruism, Child maltreatment, Child Abuse, Child Neglect, Discipline

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