THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR SCALE,  
FORM A:  
ADOLESCENT AND ADULT-RECALL VERSION ¹

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Abstract

Standardized and easily administered measures are needed to facilitate research on  
child neglect. The Multidimensional Neglectful behavior Scale (MNBS) is intended to measure  
neglect of four basic developmental needs: (1) neglect of physical needs such as food, clothing,  
shelter, medical care; (2) emotional needs such as affection, companionship, support; (3)  
supervisory needs such as setting limits, attending to misbehavior, knowing child's whereabouts  
and friends; and (4) cognitive needs such as reading to the child, and explaining things. The  
version of the MNBS described in this paper can be used in interview or questionnaire format  
with adolescents to describe their current situation, or for adults to describe neglectful behavior  
when they were growing up. Preliminary psychometric data based on a college student sample  
is presented for the full 20-item scale (including the four subscales) and for an eight and a four  
item short form. The preliminary psychometric data indicate that the MNBS has a high level of  
internal consistency reliability. There is also evidence indicating construct validity. Limitations  
of the MNBS are discussed. Modifications of the MNBS to enable it to be used with a variety of  
populations are described.

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This is a revision of the first of a planned series on the Multidimensional Neglectful  
behavior Scale (MNBS). Other papers will describe parent-report and child-report version of the  
MNBS. The child-report versions (for children 6-9 and 10-13) are pictorial and do not require  
reading ability. The parent-report versions can be administered as an interview or by as a self-  
administered questionnaire. If you would like to receive copies of these instruments, send an  
email request to murray.straus@unh.edu.

The revisions in this paper include: (1) Change in the recommended time-period for recall  
of neglectful behavior. (2) Frequency of occurrence response categories in order to improve  
measurement of the chronicity of neglectful behavior. Although we believe these changes will  
improve the MNBS, empirical research to determine this has not yet been done.

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Neglect is the form of child maltreatment that is most frequently reported to Child Protective Services (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1995). Moreover, there is evidence that neglect, especially of the child’s emotional needs for love and support, may be the form of maltreatment carrying the greatest risk of serious social and psychological problems to children (Bowlby, 1982; Robbins, 1966; Spitz, 1959). Despite this, there is little research on neglect compared to research on physical and sexual abuse (Wolock & Horowitz, 1984).

One reason for the relative lack of research on neglect may be the absence of a brief yet valid measure that can be used in epidemiological research on neglect. Such measures exist for sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1986) and physical abuse (Straus, 1979, Strauss, 1997 #2723) and their use has made important contributions. The absence of a similar brief measure of neglectful behavior may be the result of the view that measuring neglectful behavior requires an on-site investigation (as exemplified in the rating scales developed by Trocmé, 1992). The same can be said for physical and sexual abuse of children, yet brief measures of these forms of maltreatment have been found to be extremely useful. The research reported in this paper is based on the assumption that the availability of a relatively brief measure of neglectful behavior will result in a similar facilitation of research. The present paper presents the findings on the first phase of a program to develop such an instrument, called the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (MNBS). In addition to an overall neglectful behavior score, the MNBS provides scores on subscales to measure neglect of a child’s physical, emotional, cognitive, and supervisory needs.

**DEFINITION OF NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR**

Another impediment to research on neglect is a lack of consensus in definition. Given this situation, it is essential to identify the definition which provided the conceptual basis for the study. Readers of the study may not agree with the definition, but they at least will know how the investigators defined the phenomenon. For the research reported in this paper, we used the following definition (see Straus, 2001 for):

*Behavior by a caregiver which is characterized by failing to engage in behavior which is needed to meet the developmental needs of a child and which is the responsibility of the caregiver to provide.*

The italicized words identify important parts of this definition that need to be emphasized and explained. (See Straus, 2001 for a more extensive analysis of definitional and measurement issues.)

**Two Critical Elements in The Definition**

“Behavior by a caregiver” was emphasized in the definition because we believe it is essential to avoid confounding the definition and measurement of neglectful behavior with either the causes of neglectful behavior (such as poverty or motive) and with the effects of neglectful behavior such as physical or psychological damage to the child. It is crucial to also measure causes and effects, but for reasons to be explained below, causes and effects of neglectful behavior must be measured separately from the pattern of caregiver behavior that constitutes neglectful behavior.

“Responsibility of the caregiver” was emphasized because there may be a division of labor between caregivers. If there are two caregivers and only one is expected to provide food, and only one does, the other caregiver has not been neglectful. However, if both are expected to
provide food and one does not, that is neglectful behavior, even if the child gets enough to eat from the other caregiver. The rational for these distinctions is explained below.

Focus on Caregiver Behavior Rather than Outcomes

The example of a child obtaining food, or for that matter emotional nourishment, from someone other than the caregiver who has this responsibility is one reason measures of neglectful behavior must focus on behavior of the caregiver rather than on harm to the child. Many cases of neglectful behavior will be missed if injury to the child is the criterion because neglectful behavior does not always result in manifest harm. This view is based on research on the effects of many adverse circumstances. For example, epidemiological research shows that a third of heavy smokers will die of a smoking related disease (Mattson, Pollack, & Cullen, 1987), which means that two thirds will not. Studies of physical abused children show that only about a third manifest serious life problems (Widom, 19??). Similarly, only about ?? percent of children who have been sexually abused manifest serious life problems (??19??). But kicking or punching a child or having sex with a child is maltreatment regardless of whether there is harm attributable to the physical attack or the sexual contact. The MNBS is based on the principle that failing to provide for a child’s needs is neglectful behavior regardless of the motive or reason, and regardless of whether the child is actually damaged by the neglectful behavior.

It is central to the design of the MNBS that it is a measure of behavior by parents, not a measure of the parent’s motivation or the effect of neglectful behavior on the child. This characteristic of the MNBS permits it to be used to test hypotheses about the causes of neglectful behavior, including motives and circumstances leading to neglectful behavior, and hypotheses about the effects of neglectful behavior. If the MNBS were to measure neglectful behavior on the basis of whether the child suffered physical or psychological injury, it would not be possible to use such an instrument to examine the extent to which neglectful behavior results in injury because only children who were injured would be identified as having been neglected (See Straus, 1990; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998, for further discussion of the importance of measuring caregiver behavior and outcomes separately).

THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR SCALE

Efforts to operationalize neglect have emphasized the importance of identifying specific subtypes of neglect in order to produce a comprehensive measure (Magura & Moses, 1986; Zuravin, 1991). Zuravin (1991) distinguished 14 subtypes of neglect and Magura and Moses (1986) 18 areas. Development of the MNBS began by reviewing these measures and identifying four general but basic development needs of needs of children.

* **Physical needs** such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care

* **Emotional needs** such as affection, companionship, support

* **Supervision needs** such as limit setting, attending to misbehavior, knowing child's whereabouts and friends

* **Cognitive needs** such as being played with or read to, assisting with school homework

Items to measure behavior indicative of neglect of each of these four dimensions were
developed based on the conceptual criteria just described and on the basis of reviewing previous measures. The version of the MNBS described in this paper (Form A, see Appendix) is designed to be completed by adolescents and adults. In the case of adults it provides recall data about their childhood. The MNBS is designed to permit the same set of items to be used to create forms for use with parents or younger children, or for use as a guide to clinical investigation. These potential additional forms are described later.

Parent Versus Child As The Unit of Analysis

The MNBS uses the caregiver as the unit of analysis. However, there will be many situations in which the child is the appropriate unit of analysis. That can be accomplished by repeating the MNBS items for each caregiver on whom the child depends.

Child's Experience Versus Parent's Behavior

The MNBS measures what a child has experienced or what a caregiver has done, depending on how it is administered and how the data is used. If the MNBS is used in research on the etiology of neglectful behavior, the data measures parental behavior. But if the same data is used to test hypotheses concerning the effect of neglectful behavior on children, the data measures the child's experience of neglectful behavior by that caregiver.

Distinguishing Neglectful behavior From Abuse

It is often difficult to distinguish neglectful behavior from abuse. We regard abuse as occurring when a parent actively engages in behavior which has a high probability of damaging the child (physically or psychologically) such as punching the child or sexual intercourse with the child. The problem of distinguishing abuse from neglectful behavior is most acute in the case of neglect of the child's social/emotional needs. If the parent is hostile and verbally abusive, that can be very damaging (Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991) but it is an act of psychological abuse, not neglect, as conceptualized for purposes of the MNBS. In fact, a hypothesis worth investigating is that some attention, even if it is abusive, is less damaging than neglectful behavior. But to test that hypothesis, the MNBS must be focused exclusively on failure to attend to the child. With this in mind, we tried to exclude items that are mainly psychological abuse, such as “Told me I'm a worthless brat.”

Clinical and Legal Identification of Neglect

The MNBS is primarily intended for use in research. However, it may also be useful for initial screening in clinical settings where in-depth investigation of all cases for neglect is not practical. If used for screening, a high score would suggest the need for in-depth investigation. In addition, although a high score on the MNBS does not necessarily indicate conditions that meet a legal definition of neglect, it may indicate parental behavior that poses a serious developmental risk for children. The findings reported in the section on construct validity present preliminary data that is consistent with that hypothesis.

METHODS

Initial Item Pool

When designing a new scale it is important to generate a large set of items to increase the
probability of having indicators of the many ways in which the phenomenon can occur, and to provide for a reliable measure. In general, the more items, the better. However, it is also important that a scale be brief enough for it to be practical to use. To reconcile these conflicting criteria we decided on a goal of 20 items, consisting of five items representing each of the four domains of neglect.

To produce a 20 item test requires starting with a much larger pool of items so that psychometric techniques can be used to select the most suitable items for inclusion in the final test. We began the process of generating the pool of items by drawing on our own knowledge and experiences in the field of child abuse and neglect. This resulted in 46 items.

We then consulted previously developed measures of child maltreatment to identify items that could be modified to fit the format planned for the MNBS. The instruments consulted included: The EMBU (Eisemann, Gaszner, Perris, & Richter, 1990), the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 1986), the ?? (Langer, 1978), "Draft Guidelines for Psychosocial Evaluation of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment in Children and Adolescents" of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (Hart & Brassard, 1994), and the HOME scale (Caldwell & Bradley, 1984). We had also planned to draw on the instrument developed by Susan Zuravin, but it arrived after the data reported in this article had been gathered. An additional 17 items were created, making a total of 67 items.

This process resulted in a pool of 63 items. To meet the limits of the testing time available, we selected 40 items for the test development version: ten items to represent neglect of each of the four types of needs, making a total of 40 items. Forty items is double the target length, which allowed ample scope to use psychometric criteria to select the best items for inclusion in the final scale.

Sample

Sample Selection. The preliminary version of the MNBS was administered to students in undergraduate sociology courses in the spring of 1995. The test booklet included the pool of 40 potential MNBS items as well as preliminary versions of a Social Integrations scale (Ross & Straus, 1995), and the preliminary version of the revised Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1997; Straus et al., 1996).

 Altogether 377 questionnaires were distributed. The subjects were told that they could omit any question they did not wish to answer, and that they could omit the entire questionnaire by putting the blank questionnaire in the box at the front of the room when other students started handing in their questionnaire, and 15 did return blank questionnaires. Three questionnaires were omitted because the answer sheets were improperly marked. A total of 359 completed questionnaires were obtained. Because some subjects omitted an occasional question, the effective sample size varies from 340 to 357, depending on which questions and scales are included in the analysis.

Sample Characteristics. Two-thirds of the sample (65.7%) were female and 95% were between the ages of 18 and 23. Approximately one-quarter were from each of the four class levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior). The racial and socioeconomic status of the sample is consistent with the demographic composition of the state in which the study was done and the high cost of attending the state university. Specifically, 96% were white, 54% of the fathers and 39% of the mothers of the respondents were college educated, and 72% were from
households with both biological parents.

Instructions To Subjects

Purpose of the study. The data analyzed for this paper were obtained as part of the development of a multi-scale instrument called the Personal And Relationships Profile or PRP (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999). The subjects were told that the questions "describe a number of different behaviors and characteristics. Many of these...are about social relationships you are now in or have been in the past, although many are about you as an individual." The questions were in a test booklet and the subjects responded by darkening ovals on a machine scorable answer sheet.

Caregiver referent. (1) For the adult-recall version of the MNBS used to obtain the data reported in this paper, "parents" were described as "the person or people who raised you." (2) For use with adolescents to describe their current situation the parallel instructions should describe "parents" as “the person or persons who are raising you.” (3) If information on specific caregivers, usually the mother and the father, is needed, the questions should be repeated for mother and for father. The respondents would also need to be told that if they are living with one parent, to skip the questions referring to the other parent.

To deal with stepparents and other caregivers, respondents were told: "Parents refers to the person or people who raised you. ... If you lived with different parents at different times, please answer for the parents you think had the most influence on your life."

Response Categories And Time-Period Covered. Respondents were asked to indicate "...what it was like when you were living with your parents." by indicating for each item "how well it describes your life with your parents." There were four response categories: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, and 4 = Strongly Disagree. The full set of explanations and instructions is given with the test in the Appendix. An alternative set of response categories is suggested in the section on “Modifications And New Versions.”

Psychometric Analyses

Prior to the psychometric analyses the scoring of the "positive" items was reversed so that a high score would indicate that the subject strongly agreed that the item describes their parents' behavior. In addition, the questionnaires were scanned to read the comments about the questions that the subjects were asked to provide. The quantitative analyses can be grouped under three headings.

Item Analysis to Select Items. The steps included: (1) Inspection of frequency distributions for bimodal items. (2) Item analysis to determine the correlation of each item with the total score and the reliability of each sub-scale and the reliability of the total scale. The Reliability program in SPSS/PC was used. (3) Elimination of the half of the items least highly correlated with the total score of the respective scales, and calculation of alpha for the resulting subscales for each domain, and for the overall 20-item scale (which we will refer to as Form A20).

Factor Analyses. The items in Form A20 were analyzed using the principle components analysis with Varimax rotation of SPSS/PC. The subscales for each of the four neglectful behavior domains were also examined using this program.
Construct Validity Analyses. The data available permitted us to compute the correlations between the MNS scales and a number of variables which theoretical analyses or previous empirical research suggests should be associated with a history of neglectful behavior.

RESULTS

Selection Of items To Be Retained

The item analysis procedures described in the Method section were applied to the ten items in each of the four subscales. Fortunately, reducing the number of items to the target of five per subscale did not reduce the alpha coefficients of reliability because the loss of items was counterbalanced by the greater average item-total correlation of the remaining items. Alpha for the overall 20 item MNBS was found to be .93 for this sample. Table 1 gives the items making up each of the five item subscales, and the alpha coefficients of reliability for each subscale. The alpha coefficients range from .80 to .89. Although Table 1 groups the items by subscale, the test forms actually used (see Appendix) presented the items in a random order.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Factor Analyses

Two factor analyses were performed on the 20 items. One analysis used all twenty items and found two factors. The factor loadings are given in the columns of Table 1 headed "20 item Scale." Factor I explained 45.0 of the variance. Eleven of the 20 items had loadings of .41 or greater on this factor. Examination of the factor loadings in Table 1 shows that the items in the Emotional Needs scale have the highest loading on this factor, followed by the items in the Cognitive Needs scale. Factor II explained 10.7% of the variance in these 20 items. The factor loadings in Table 1 show that the items in the Supervisory and Physical needs scales tend to have high loadings on this factor.

The same 20 items were also subjected to a factor analysis that used oblique rotation to allow for correlations among the resulting factors. The factor solution was stable across rotation methods. The oblique analysis produced two factors almost identical in nature to those described above. Factors I and II from the oblique analysis correlated .57 with each other.

We also did a preliminary factor analysis of the full set of 40 items and this revealed a similar pattern of item loadings. The first two of the seven factors to emerge in that solution (explaining a total of 46% of the item variance) were items from the Emotional/Cognitive Needs scales and the Supervisory/Physical Needs scales, respectively. The remaining five factors, which collectively accounted for only 15% of the item variance) contained between one and four items which were distributed across all four subscales.

Finally we did a simple confirmatory factor analysis of each of the four subscales by constraining the number of factors to 1. In each case the first factor explained between 60% and 70% of the variance in the five items making up the scale. Most item loadings ranged from .70 to .90. The one exception was a loading of .44 for item #106 (kept the house clean) on the Physical Needs subscale. Taken together, however, the results of these analyses support the proposition that each subscale represents a unitary dimension of neglectful behavior.
Correlation of Scales With Each Other

Since the items in the emotional and cognitive neglectful behavior scales both have high loadings on Factor I, it is not surprising that they are highly correlated with each other (.79). Similarly, the items in the physical and supervisory need scales are all highly loaded on Factor II, and these two scales are correlated .71 with each other. Although the other correlations between scales are lower, as expected on theoretical grounds, they are still substantial: Cognitive with Physical = .52, Cognitive with Supervisory = .62, Emotional with Supervisory = .61, and Emotional with Physical = .48. These high correlations, however, do not mean that there is no difference between them. Even for the scales with the highest correlations with each other (Emotional and Cognitive neglectful behavior), a third the variance is not explained by the other scale. For the next highest correlation (Physical with Supervisory neglectful behavior) half the variance of each scale is independent of the other scale.

Short Forms

(In Insert Table 2 about here)

If a study requires data on many variables and the total interviewing or testing time is limited, some of the variables must be measured using very brief instruments. To meet this need, we examined the utility of two short forms of the MNBS.

Form A8. This is an eight-item version of Form A. The eight items were selected by choosing the two items in each subscale with the highest item-total correlation. We chose the best two from each domain in order to preserve the representation of the four domains in the short form. Table 2 shows that the reliability of this scale is high (alpha = .89). We also did a factor analysis and found essentially the same two factors as with the full set of 20 items. Form A8 is highly correlated with Form A20 (.95).

Use of Form A8 in 17 countries in the International Dating Violence Study (Straus & Members of the International Dating Violence Research Consortium, In Press, 2004) revealed one item that had a different meaning in some of these cultural contexts. Consequently, it was replaced. See Table 2X.

Form A4. An even shorter version was created by selecting the item from each subscale with the highest item-total correlation. Despite its brevity, alpha coefficient of reliability of Form A4 was found to be .81. The factor analysis identified one factor. The column of factor loadings in Table 2 shows that all the items have high loadings on this factor. Form A4 is also highly correlated with the full scale (.92).

Construct Validity Analyses

(In Insert Table 3 about here)

Construct validity is judged by investigating the correlation of a test with variables with which it should be correlated if the test does measure what is intended (Cronbach, 1970). The selection of variables for the analysis of construct validity is based on what is known from previous research on the construct being measured and theoretical analysis. The data available for this sample includes a limited number of variables which meet this criterion, i.e. they are variables which we believed should be associated with a history of neglectful behavior. They were selected for the analysis by picking out from the data available for this sample all variables for which it
seemed plausible to expect a correlation with a history of neglectful behavior. They are listed in the right column of Table 3.

The panel of Table 3 headed "Correlation with Form A20" gives the correlations for the overall MNBS scale, the four subscales with the variables selected to examine construct validity, and the panel on the right side gives the correlations of these variables with the two short form. Although almost all of the correlations are in theoretically predicted directions, most are quite low and not significant. The low and non-significant correlations may be the result of having to use extremely skewed variables. For example, only 1.7% of the sample was brought up by anyone except their biological or adoptive mother, and only 8.1% by someone other than their biological or adoptive father. But despite the low correlations, when the differences are plotted, as in Figure 1, they show clear relationships.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

Parents Education and Income. This sample of New England university students contains almost no students from truly impoverished families. Consequently it is not surprising that parental income was not found to be associated with neglectful behavior, with the exception of neglect of cognitive needs for women. Parent’s education was also found to be correlated with cognitive neglect. The fact that education and income are primarily correlated with neglect of cognitive needs can be interpreted as evidence of what Campbell & Fisk (1959) call discriminant validity. The sample probably did not include families which were so lacking in economic resources that they could not provide food, clothing, or shelter; hence the near zero correlation of parental income with the physical neglect scale. However, relative to higher education and income families, they may have had fewer cognitive resources, and this may explain the tendency for cognitively neglectful behavior to decrease as income increases.

The pattern of correlations of parental income and education with the four neglectful behavior scales also tends to support the value of distinguishing between the four domains of neglect and of retaining those conceptual distinctions in the form of separate scales for each domain of neglect.

Physical And Psychological Assaults on Dating, Cohabiting, or Marital Partners. One of the research interests which led to developing the MNBS was a desire to test the theory that neglectful behavior is part of the etiology of couple violence. More specifically, our theory holds that experiencing neglectful behavior increases the probability of low social attachment or integration, which in turn increases the probability of all types of deviant and criminal behavior, including assaults on a partner. The correlations in Social Integration rows of Table 3 are consistent with that theory (see also Figure 2). All show that the higher the neglectful behavior experienced the lower the degree of social integration. The correlations are especially high for men (part B of Table 3).

The correlations in the last row of parts B and C of Table 3 show that the higher the MNBS score the greater the amount of physical violence against a partner, but only for men. The lack of association between neglectful behavior and violence against a partner among women is surprising because in this sample, as in all other studies of student couples, the female-to-partner violence rate is approximately the same as the male-to-partner rate (See review by Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). One possible explanation may be that violence by women against a partner may be more a marital system effect rather than the effect of inadequate socialization. This issue will be examined in future paper.
Validity of the Short Forms. The short forms, even Form A4, which has only four items, seem to have about the same construct validity as the 20-item form. The main limitations of the short forms are a much more skewed distribution than Form A20, slightly lower reliability, and loss of the ability to investigate the correlates of different domains of neglect.

Descriptive Statistics And Norms

(Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here)

Descriptive statistics for the overall scale, for subscales and for the two short forms are given in Table 4. The frequency distributions show that each of the subscales and short forms are extremely skewed. The total score for form A20 is much less skewed. The means show that this sample experienced somewhat more emotionally and cognitively neglectful behavior than physical or supervisory neglectful behavior. Table 5 gives percentile norms, but in view of the limited data used for this study, these norms must be regarded with caution.

LIMITATIONS AND CAUTIONS

Skewed Distributions

It is inherent in a phenomenon such as neglectful behavior that low scores predominate. Hence the frequency distributions in Table 4 are extremely skewed. It may therefore be advisable to use a normalizing transformation before carrying out statistical analyses that assume normally distributed variables. Alternatively, the scores can be dichotomized using a cutting point that is appropriate for the purpose of the analysis.

Multicollinearity Of Subscales

Since each subscale is strongly correlated with at least one other subscale, it may not be possible to include all four in a regression analysis because of multicollinearity. If regression diagnostics indicate a problem with multicollinearity, one way of using all the subscales to examine the effect of different types of neglectful behavior is to perform a series of overlapping regressions. Each regression analysis would include only pairs of subscales that are not extremely highly correlated, which is any pair except the Cognitive with the Emotional scale or the Physical with the Supervisory scale. Another alternative is to create scores representing Factor I by summing the items in the Emotional and Cognitive neglectful behavior scales and scores representing Factor II by summing the items in the Supervision and Physical neglectful behavior scales.

Lack of Concurrent Or Predictive Validity Evidence

In the introduction, we pointed out that the MNBS does not directly measure the most extreme level neglectful behavior. This does not mean that the MNBS has no clinical utility. One way the MNBS may be appropriate is as a screening tool. This assumes that the higher the score on the MNBS, the higher the probability of clinical level neglectful behavior, and therefore a need to pursue a more in-depth clinical investigation. However, this assumption needs to be confirmed by empirical evidence that MNBS scores are correlated with clinical level neglectful behavior.

Another way in which the MNBS scores may be clinically relevant is based on the assumption that even sub-clinical neglectful behavior increases the risk of impaired social and psychological development, but not as much as more extreme neglectful behavior. A plausible
case for this view can be made by analogy with findings on the effects on children of spanking and other legal modes of corporal punishment, as compared to "physical abuse." Legal corporal punishment seems to have the same adverse psychological effects as physical abuse, except that the relative risk ratios are lower (Straus, 2001).

Response Set

One source of error for an instrument such as the MNBS can occur when subjects consciously or unconsciously respond in socially desirable, rather than accurate ways, or complete the test carelessly. To help prevent these problems, 20% of the items are worded positively. For the positively worded items, agreement with the item indicates parental attention rather than neglect. (The scoring of those items is reversed when the items are summed to obtain the scale scores.) The positively worded items make it more difficult to respond to all the items in the socially desirable direction. It also forces the subject to think about each item more than would be the case if they were all scored in the same direction.

A study using the 8-item short form with students in the International Dating Violence Study found only very low corrections with a version of the Marlowe-Crown social desirability scale, and that controlling for social desirability did not importantly affect the construct validity analyses (cite Idl15, ID21

Recall limitations and recall period. When Form A is used to ask adults to recall events of their childhood, it probably describes only what happened from middle childhood on because recall of events as a toddler is rare, and only somewhat greater for early school age years. Although this is a serious limitation, the construct validity evidence suggests that even neglectful behavior at those ages can have serious consequences.

There are two other problems with asking about the entire period of childhood. One problem is that the data will refer to different points a child’s development for different respondents and there is therefore no information on at what age or ages the neglectful behavior occurred. A second problem is that because the instructions ask about the entire period of a child’s life, it was not possible to ask about the number of times each neglectful behavior occurred. A possible solution to this problem is presented in the section on Alternative Recall Periods below.

Biased perception. A problem which Form A shares with all measures of neglectful behavior that are not based on direct observation is that the subject may have a biased perception of the care he or she received. Subjects who did not like a parent, or who had serious conflicts with a parent, may perceive the parent as neglectful. This may be more likely to happen with the Emotional and Supervisory neglectful behavior scales.

Form A does not indicate which parent was neglectful. The items in Form A are intended to identify needs of the child which have not been met, regardless of which parent was neglectful. The reasons for this aspect of Form A include:

(1) The neglect of certain needs cannot be attributed to just one of the parents when there are two parents. Meeting the needs of a child is responsibility of both parents. Thus, in many cases it would be misleading to identify only one as neglectful. This is especially likely to be the case for parent behaviors in which there is a division of labor between the parents. Take, for example, the item "Did not give me enough to eat." If, in the agreed division of labor in a family,
one parent has responsibility for feeding the child and fills that responsibility, the other parent may
never feed the child, but that would not be grounds for identifying the other parent as not giving the
child enough to eat. Similarly, if one parent was responsible for keeping the house clean, the fact
that the other did not would not necessarily indicate neglectful behavior, and in fact, the house
could be clean even though the other partner did nothing.

(2) The most critical issue may be whether neglectful behavior occurred, not which parent
was responsible.

(3) Two practical considerations also led to a "parents jointly" version. First, many children
have only one parent or caretaker. If the MNBS included items for both parents the test could not
be scored in a comparable way for those children. In addition, for research use, we felt it was
important to keep the test brief. Identifying neglectful behavior for each parent would double the
length of the scale. However, Form A can easily be modified to present the items in pairs, with
one item in each pair referring to the mother and the second to the father.

MODIFICATIONS AND OTHER VERSIONS

The MNBS was designed to permit creation of parallel versions for use with parents and
with children to describe the current level of neglectful behavior, and for use by clinicians as a
means of standardizing and quantifying the results of their investigation of a case.

Minor Modifications

Some of the modifications listed below are minor and easily made changes. However, if
the test is modified, the psychometric data reported in this paper will not necessarily apply to the
modified version. We plan to try out a number of modifications, and future papers will report the
effect on the psychometric characteristics of each modification.

Alternative Recall Periods. When Form A is used to measure neglectful behavior currently
being experienced by adolescents, they should be asked about what happened in the previous 12
months.

When Form A is used as an adult-recall measure, no recall period is clearly superior. The
period used for this study was the entire childhood of the respondent. This has the advantage of
capturing neglectful behavior that occurred at any point in the respondent’s life with his or her
parents. But it has the disadvantage of not providing information on the developmental stage at
which the neglectful behavior occurred. It also has the disadvantage of making it unrealistic to use
response categories which ask for the number of times each neglectful behavior occurred.

An alternative recall period is a specific year. This is the last year the respondent lived with
the caregivers for which the questions were answered. The disadvantage of this is that neglectful
behavior is generally considered a more serious problem for children who are younger and more
dependent on parents. However, adults cannot be expected to remember what happened at the
young ages when children are probably most vulnerable to the harmful effects of neglectful
behavior. A compromise is to ask for recall of what happened when they were about age 12.
Focusing on age 12 is based on the assumption that it is an age when children are still very
dependent on parents, and that it also an age when they can recall neglectful behavior by their
parents.
An advantage of asking about a specific year is that it permits use of response categories indicating the number of times each neglectful behavior occurred that year, such as those described below. A limitation of asking about a specific year is that it misses neglect at other ages.

The best approach when Form A is used for adult-recall may be to ask the respondents to indicate the age when felt their parents most often did not do things they were supposed to do in caring for them. Consequently, the introduction specifying the recall period and response categories has been replaced by one asking the respondent to answer for that year. Both the new and the old introduction and response categories are given in the Appendix with the MNBS. The new recommended recall period also provides data on the age when neglectful behavior is most likely to be perceived. However, that information must be used with caution because children do not remember much if anything about neglectful behavior experienced as an infant or toddler.

Another reason for recommending use of a specific year or other specific time period such as the last six months, is that an injury index has been added to the MNBS Form A. The shorter recall period makes it possible to ask about the number of injuries in that period.

**Numerical Response Categories.** The response categories in the Appendix were used because the MNBS was administered as part of the steps to develop a new multi-scale instrument (Straus et al., 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999) which required those categories. However, categories that ask how often each of the caregiver behaviors occurred in a given referent period have the advantage of permitting estimates of the chronicity of neglectful behavior. The following categories from the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus et al., 1998) have been used in thousands of personal interviews, telephone interviews, and written questionnaires. If a one-year recall period or a shorter referent period is used (see above), these categories are recommended.

1 = Once in the past year (or “that year” or “that month” etc)
2 = Twice in the past year or
3 = 3-5 times in the past year
4 = 6-10 times in the past year
5 = 11-20 times in the past year
6 = More than 20 times in the past year
7 = Not in the past year, but it happened before
0 = This has never happened

**Instructions For Adolescents.** The instructions in Appendix A are for adults recalling the behavior of their parents when they lived at home with them. For adolescents currently living with parents, the response categories for number of times should be used, and the instructions at the top of the page should read:

These questions are about things that your parents have done or didn't do in the past 12 months. “Parents” refers to the people you are currently living with and who take care of you, even if they are not your own parents.

If you lived with different people at different times in the past year, answer for the people you are now living with.

**Referent Period For Adolescents.** If Form A is completed by adolescents, the instructions
to respond about "...what it was like when you were living with your parents" must be replaced by a specific referent period. The main alternatives are "...what it was like growing up" or "what it was like in the last 12 months" or some other recent time period such as the last six months. If "when you were growing up" is used, it probably puts the emphasis on earlier childhood.

Instructions for stepparents and other care givers. An alternative to the instructions used for this paper (to answer about the parent or parents who had the most influence) would be instructions to answer for the parent the subject lived with the longest. Research is needed on the effect of these alternatives.

Interview Administration. The MNBS can be administered as part of an interview by omitting the heading "My parents" and asking if the item applies to “your parents”

Specific Parent Focus. The MNBS can be modified to obtain information about each parent by presenting the items in pairs, with one item in the pair referring to "my mother" and the other to "my father" (or "your mother" and "your father" in interview format).

More Extensive Modifications

Parent Form. It is possible to create a version of the MNBS for completion by a parent about what has happened in a specified time period, such as the past year, past month, since the last visit of a case worker, etc. This can be used in either an interview format or questionnaire format for parents with a 7th grade or higher reading level.

In two-parent households, each can be asked to complete the MNBS. If two parents are present, but only is available for testing, respondents can be asked about both their own behavior and that of their partner by presenting the items in pairs. The first item in the pair would refer to the subject completing the test will begin with “I....” and the second item in the part will begin with “My husband / wife / boyfriend / partner.....”

Rating Scale. It is also possible to use the items in the MNBS as a means of standardizing and quantifying the results of clinical investigation. That is, a clinician can use the MNBS as a guide for issues to investigate and can then complete the test based on what has been learned.

Children's Version. A version picture version of the MNBS that can be administered as an interview with children as young as six is being developed. However, it might be possible to use Form A with minor modifications provided it is administered as an interview rather than a questionnaire. Group administration to children from the 3rd grade on is also possible if the examiner reads the questions and the children answer using a large type clear answer form.

Scoring

Three the ways to score the MNBS are given below. The items that need to be reversed should be reversed before scoring.

Sum Score. The most usual procedure is to sum of the scores for the items in each subscale and the sum of all the items for the overall scale. This produces scores with a theoretical range of 5 to to 20 for each subscale and 20 to 80 for the overall scale score.
Mean of the items. The advantage of this method is that it avoids losing a case when just one item has not been answered. If you use SPSS to compute the mean for each scale, you can specify how many items must be present and tell it to compute mean score for the items that have been answered, provided the number meets the level you set. For the five item subscales, I suggest requiring that there be at least four answered items. For the 20 item total scale, I suggest requiring that at least 15 items have been answered. SPSS will compute the mean for the items for which there is data, provided there are at least four or fifteen. The resulting scores all have values that range between 1 and 4.

Number Of Neglectful Behaviors Experienced. The advantage of this method is that it produces a score with a clear and interpretable meaning. A score of 0 means that the subject experienced none of the behaviors in the scale, a score of three indicates that they experienced three of them, a score of 11 that they experienced 11 of them, etc. To use this method, dichotomize the items coding anyone who responds Agree or Strongly Agree as 1 and others as zero. Then sum the dichotomized items. This produces subscales with scores ranging from 0 to 5 and a total score that ranges from 0 to 20.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper described the development of a standardized scale to measure neglectful behavior by parents of children’s needs in four domains: physical needs, emotional needs, cognitive needs and supervisory n. Preliminary psychometric analyses indicate a high level of reliability for the overall scale, for each of the four subscales, and for an eight item and a four item short form. There is also evidence of construct validity.

The short forms of the MNBS make it a practical instrument to use in research where only a very limited amount of time can be devoted to obtaining data on neglectful behavior, but at the cost of not providing separate scores for each of the four domains.

Since this paper was written, another self-report neglect scale has been published, the Child Abuse and Trauma Scale or CAT (Saunders & Becker-Lausen, 1995). The CAT is longer, which means that, in principle, the alpha reliability should be higher than the MNBS, but the two are virtually the same (alpha = .93 for the MNBS and .90 for the CAT). One reason the CTA does not have a higher reliability despite the greater number of items is that many of the items do not seem to be indicators of neglectful behavior. Some are measures of sexual abuse. Others are measures of violence between the parents, and one is a measure of help-seeking. Still others measure parental punitiveness, which in a certain sense is the extreme opposite of neglect. The fact that punitiveness, sexual abuse, and witnessing violence between the parents are harmful to children does not make them indicators of neglectful behavior.

By contrast with the CAT, the MNBS is based on a conceptual framework that specified four domains of children’s developmental needs. Items were than selected in a ways that ensured that each these domains is represented in the scale. This approach increases the likelihood of content validity. Even the short forms of the MNBS were constructed in a way that ensures that the four need domains are represented. The conceptual grounding of the MNBS, as well as the preliminary evidence of reliability and validity provide grounds for believing that it could be useful in research on the causes and consequences of neglectful behavior, and as a before-after measure to evaluate the extent to which primary prevention and treatment programs for neglectful behavior have succeeded in improving the quality of parenting.
FIGURE 1  TYPE OF PARENT FIGURE AND LEVEL OF NEGLECT

- OTHER PARENT FIGURE
- NATURAL OR ADOPTIVE

NEGLECT INDEX

- MOTHER
- FATHER
FIGURE 2  SOCIAL INTEGRATION BY NEGLLECT INDEX SCORE

SOCIAL INTEGRATION (MEAN)

WOMEN

MEN

NEGLECT INDEX
Table 1. Reliability and Factor Loadings of Subscales, Form A20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Scale E: Emotional Needs (Alpha = .89)</th>
<th>Scale C: Cognitive Needs (Alpha = .82)</th>
<th>Scale S: Supervision Needs (Alpha = .82)</th>
<th>Scale P: Physical Needs (Alpha = .80)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97.</td>
<td>did not help me when I had problems</td>
<td>87. did not help me to do my best</td>
<td>88. did not make sure I went to school</td>
<td>86. did not keep me clean.</td>
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<tr>
<td>85.</td>
<td>did not comfort me when I was upset</td>
<td>94. helped me when I had trouble understanding something*</td>
<td>89. did not care if I got into trouble in school.</td>
<td>90. did not make sure I saw a doctor when I needed one.</td>
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<td>98.</td>
<td>did not praise me</td>
<td>96. did not read books to me</td>
<td>100. did not care if I did things like shoplifting.</td>
<td>107. did not give me enough clothes to keep me warm</td>
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<td>101.</td>
<td>did not tell me they loved me</td>
<td>80. were not interested in my activities or hobbies</td>
<td>91. were not interested in the kind of friends I had.</td>
<td>93. did not give me enough to eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>did things with me just for fun*</td>
<td></td>
<td>83. wanted to know what I was doing when I was not at home.*</td>
<td>106. kept the house clean*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates items to be reversed when computing scores

20 Item Scale

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Table 2. Multidimensional Neglectful behavior Scale Forms A8 and A4

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<tr>
<td><strong>Form A8 (Alpha = .89)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* NOTE: Form A8 has been replaced by the 8-item version in the Personal And Relationships Profile or PRP (Straus, et al. 1999). The main difference is the replacement of item 88 by item 100. We recommend using the PRP version, and it is given in Table 2X.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>86. did not keep me clean</td>
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<tr>
<td>*88. did not make sure I went to school</td>
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<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89. did not care if I got into trouble in school</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107. did not give me enough clothes to keep me warm</td>
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<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97. did not help me when I had problems</td>
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<td>.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>85. did not comfort me when I was upset</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87. did not help me to do my best</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81. did not help me with homework</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Form A4 (Alpha = .81)**                                           |         |         |
| 89. did not care if I got into trouble in school                    | .84     | --      |
| 87. did not help me to do my best                                   | .82     | --      |
| 97. did not help me when I had problems                             | .77     | --      |
| 86. did not keep me clean                                           | .74     | --      |

The above version of the MNBS short form has three items stated positively (marked with R). These need to be reversed when scoring the scale. In the original MNBS in the Appendix, these three items were not stated positively and therefore did not need to be reversed.
Table 3. Correlation of Multidimensional Neglectful behavior Scale Forms A20, A8 and A4 with Hypothesized Antecedent or Consequence Variables

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Corr with Short Forms</th>
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<td>Social Integration</td>
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<td>-.34**</td>
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<td>R-to-P Violence</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<td><strong>B. Male Subjects</strong></td>
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<td>Non-Bio. Father</td>
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<td>Non-Bio. Mother</td>
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<td><strong>C. Female Subjects</strong></td>
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* p < .05. ** p < .01. (one-tailed tests).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 27.0  6.2  7.1  6.3  7.4  10.4  5.1
S.D.:  8.0  1.8  2.8  2.0  2.8  3.4  1.7
Median: 23.0  5.0  6.0  5.0  6.0  9.0  4.0
N:   339  352  349  352  346  350  353
Table 5. Norms Based On a Sample of 350 College Student Dating Partners

<table>
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<th>Percentile</th>
<th>20 Item form</th>
<th>8 item short form</th>
<th>4 item short form</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mean | 26.98 | 10.45 | 5.11 |
Median | 23 | 9 | 4 |
Std. Deviation | 8.02 | 3.39 | 1.73 |
Minimum | 20 | 8 | 4 |
Maximum | 60 | 24 | 13 |
N | 339 | 350 | 353 |
Appendix

ABOUT MY PARENTS
MNBS Form A. Copyright 1995 by Murray A. Straus, Milling Kinard, and Linda M. Williams

(Discrete the demographics and the instructions to Part 2 to match the type of respondent)

Part 1. Some Questions About You And Your Parents

1. What is your sex? (Circle an answer number or mark number 1 or the number 2 on the Answer Sheet)  1 = Male  2 = Female

2. How old are you? _______

3. What is your racial or ethnic identity?
   1 = Asian
   2 = African American (Black)
   3 = Caucasian (White)
   4 = Native American (American Indian, Samoan, or Hawaiian)
   5 = Hispanic (Latino)
   6 = Other

4. How much education have you completed?
   1 = Some high school, but did not graduate
   2 = High school
   3 = Some college but did not graduate
   4 = College degree
   5 = Post-Graduate degree such as Masters or Doctoral degree

Part 2 Things My Parents Did And Did Not Do

Instructions to use for adolescents currently or recently living with parents:

These questions are about things that your parents have done or didn’t do in the past 12 months. “Parents” refers to the people you are currently living with and who take care of you, even if they are not your own parents.

If you lived with different people at different times in the past year, answer for the people you are now living with.

Instructions to use for adults recalling when they lived with their parents:

These questions are about what it was like when you were living with your parents. “Parents” refer to the person or people who raised you.

If you lived with different parents at different times, or if there is a question that applies only to part of the time when you were growing up, you should answer for the parent or the part of the time that you think had the most influence on you.
5. For which of the following “father figures” will you answer the questions? (circle only one category number):
   1 = Father or adoptive father
   2 = Step father
   3 = Grandfather
   4 = Other male relative I lived with
   5 = Foster father
   6 = Unrelated man I lived with
   7 = There was no male who was responsible for me
   8 = I lived in an institution and will answer for that place

6. For which of the following “mother figures” will you answer the questions? (circle only one category):
   1 = Mother or adoptive mother
   2 = Step mother
   3 = Grandmother
   4 = Other female relative I lived with
   5 = Foster mother
   6 = Unrelated woman I lived with
   7 = There was no woman who was responsible for me
   8 = I lived in an institution and will answer for that place

NOTE: The questions below are the initial set of 40 items from which Form A was developed. All 40 items are given for the record. If you use this instrument, you will probably want to administer only the 20 items that were selected for Form A, as given in Table 1.

IMPORTANT CHANGE: The recall period and the response categories used for the study reported in this article (and given below with lines through the text) are no longer recommended. The recommended recall period is now the year the respondent says their parents were most likely to fail to do things they are supposed to do. This information is obtained using the introduction and answer categories which follow the crossed out instructions. See the section of the article on Modifications for a discussion of the advantages and limitations of alternative referent periods and response categories.

For each of the following statements, decide how well it describes your life with your parents. Mark or circle a “1” for “Strongly Agree” if it is a very good description of either or both of your parents or a “4” for “Strongly Disagree” if it does not describe either of them at all. Choose “Agree” or “Disagree” if the description falls somewhere between:

1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Disagree
4 = Strongly Disagree
Bringing up children is difficult. Many parents do not do some things for their children that they should do. For example, a parent might not take an interest in how well the child is doing in school, or they might leave the child alone when it is dangerous to do that. About how old were you when this sort of thing happened or happened the most? _____ years old.

- Please answer the questions about things your parents did or did not do when you were that age
- If do not write in an age when this happened the most, answer the questions for how often these things ever happened.

For each of the following things that parents might do or not do, please circle the answer number that comes closest to how many times it happened when you were the age you just wrote down. If you did not write down an age,

1 = Once that year
2 = Twice that year
3 = 3-5 times that year
4 = 6-10 times that year
5 = 11-20 times that year
6 = More than 20 times that year
7 = Not that year, but it happened before
0 = This has never happened

70. Took me places where I could learn things, like a zoo or library
71. Paid no attention to me
72. Made sure I saw a dentist when I needed one
73. Did not care if what I did was right or wrong
74. Left me alone without an adult when I was too young for that
75. Did not hug me
76. Locked me out of the house on purpose
77. Ignored my feelings about things
78. Did things with me just for fun
79. Made sure I got enough sleep
80. Were not interested in my activities or hobbies
81. Did not help me with homework if I needed help
82. Did not give me clean clothes
*83. Wanted to know what I was doing when I was not at home
84. Were proud when I succeeded in something
85. Did not comfort me when I was upset
86. Did not keep me clean
*87. Did not encourage me to do my best in school
88. Did not make sure I went to school
89. Did not care if I got into trouble in school
90. Did not make sure I saw a doctor when I needed one
91. Were not interested in the kind of friends I had
92. Did not make sure I did my homework
93. Did not give me enough to eat
94. Helped me when I had trouble understanding something
95. Forgot about things they were supposed to do for me
96. Did not read books to me
97. Did not help me when I had problems
98. Did not praise me
99. Did not care if I did things like shoplifting
100. Did not show interest in my grades in school
101. Did not tell me they loved me
102. Let me know when I did something right
103. Put clear limits on what I was allowed to do
104. Did not give reasons for wanting me to do something
105. Worried about my getting into trouble after school
106. Kept the house clean
107. Did not give me enough clothes to keep me warm
108. Did not talk about things in the news with me
109. Did not give me presents for my birthday or holidays
REFERENCES


