Reviewer's report

Title: Child neglect in one-child family from Suzhou City of Mainland China

Version: 1 Date: 19 February 2013

Reviewer: Diane L Putnick

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript details a study of the rates and predictors of one-child families in mainland China. The sample is large and interesting and the question is worthwhile. However, there are some issues with the study report and interpretation which require attention.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The study needs stronger theoretical justification in the introduction. More information about neglect in China is warranted. Pan and Liu have used the SCNUC in China. How do their studies relate to the current investigation? Is there evidence within China that one-child and multiple-child families differ in their level of neglect? Would you expect the correlates of neglect found in other studies to be similar in this sample, or are there unique factors associated with neglect in one-child families? Why was Suzhou City chosen for the study? Is there something unique about this area that makes it well-suited for this study? The introduction really needs to be fleshed out more.

2. More explanation is needed for why cut-points were used for neglect instead of the continuous variables. I can see the reason for using “clinical” cut-points for describing the percentage of the sample that is neglected, but I think it would make more sense to use neglect as a continuous variable when predicting the factors that lead to neglect. Dichotomizing the distribution throws away important statistical information (e.g., a child that is grossly neglected is lumped with one who is only slightly neglected). The authors must provide a strong rationale for retaining dichotomized neglect variables in the main analyses, or they should strongly consider using the continuous neglect variables in regression models.

3. I don’t think it’s fair to compare the prevalences of neglect as measured by the SCNUC with those reported by other studies that didn’t use the same instrument or criteria. Specifically, comparing single-child families in China with potentially multiple-child families in the United States is a stretch. There are dozens of factors that likely contribute to differences in rates and relative prevalences of neglect in these 2 samples, and whether the family has a single child or not may or may not be among them. This study does not have the data to isolate single-child families as a causal factor. The discussion should be rewritten to avoid speculation about this issue in the absence of data to indicate that parents of single children are less likely to neglect them than parents of multiple children.
Minor Essential Revisions:

1. Overall, the language could use some attention. There are issues with missing or extra articles and subject-verb agreement.

2. The reliability statistics in the measures section are reported for the full SCNUC instrument (e.g., a total scale?). Because subscales are used in the study, reliability for the subscales should be reported on the sample used in the study, not on Pan's sample.

3. Why were categories of maternal age chosen to be <31 years, 31-41 years, and > 41 years? This division leaves very few mothers in the young and old age groups and I don’t see a theoretical reason for these categories. Please explain these groups, or choose another grouping that more evenly divides the subjects. All groupings like this should be explained.

4. There are only 2 Tables and no illustrations in the submitted version of the paper. The manuscript refers to Tables 2 and 3 in the results, which I believe should be Tables 1 and 2, respectively. The method refers to an illustration. Either include it or delete the reference to it in the text.

Discretionary Revisions:

1. Please be consistent in the number of decimal places used in the percentages in Table 1. Some are in whole numbers (14) are some have decimals (8.8).

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.