

Punching Out, Not Down: The Impact of Paid Sick Leave on Child Maltreatment

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Background



- 7.7 victims per 1,000 children in 2022 (US HHS)
- Lasting harms in health & behaviors
- This paper: focuses on **child abuse**

Paid Sick Leave (PSL)

- What:** Job-protected, **short-term** leave for **minor** health needs (self/family)
- How:** **Accrual** of 1 hour per 30–40 hours worked; fully **employer-financed**
- Where:** **Gradually adopted** by 15 states, D.C., 20+ cities since 2007
- Evidence:** ↑ Coverage, preventive care, job security, women health, parental time (Callison & Pesko, 2020; Maclean & Pabilonia, 2024; Maclean et al., 2025; Slopen, 2024)

How PSL might affect child abuse:

- Income effects:** ↓ financial/time strain ⇒ ↑ caregiver well-being ⇒ ↓ risk
- Substitution effects:** ↑ safer caregivers' time/power ⇒ ↓ risk; ↑ family instability/ ↑ exposure ⇒ ↑ risk

Event-Study Design

$$Y_{act} = \sum_{\tau=-6, \tau \neq -1}^3 \beta_{\tau} \mathbf{1}\{t - t_a^* = \tau\} + \mathbf{X}'_{at} \Psi + \mathbf{Z}'_{ct} \Phi + \gamma_a + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{act}$$

- Outcome** (Y_{act}): child victim counts by **agency-year** from National Incident-Based Reporting System, (**NIBRS**), 2007-2019
- Treatment** (t_a^*): year of **local** PSL adoption
- Controls:** agency ($\mathbf{X}'_{at}$) & county ($\mathbf{Z}'_{ct}$) covariates, agency & year FE

Results

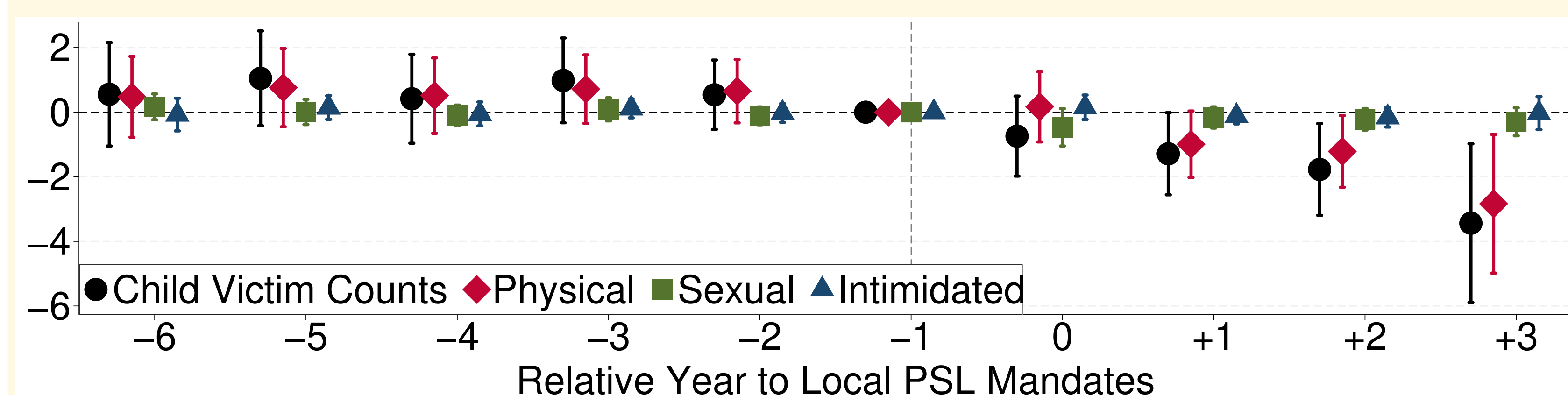


Fig 1. Interaction-weighted estimators (Sun & Abraham, 2021)

- Main effect:** PSL mandates ⇒ **10 %↓ reported child victims**
- Heterogeneity:**
 - concentrated in **physical abuse**
 - girls: ↓ sexual abuse; boys: ↓ physical abuse
 - larger effects: **Black children** & **low-income counties**
 - greater reduction in abuse by **female caregivers**
- Robustness:** Alternatives specification (no covariates, log-counts); reporting corrections (balanced panels, county aggregation); further identifications checks (IPW, concurrent policies, PSL heterogeneity)

Mechanism

Using CPS, ATUS, and NIBRS:

- Financial security:** ↑ **Mothers'** income & job security
- Health:** ↑ **Maternal** self-reported health
- Time with children:** Partnered mothers ↑, single fathers ↓ ⇒ ↓ **high-risk male caregiver exposure**
- NOT family dynamics:** No change in cohabitation or intimate partner violence

Conclusion and Implication



PSL mandates reduce child victims by 10% through:

- Improved **maternal** financial security & health well-being
- Reduced exposure to high-risk **male** caregivers through time reallocation

- Impact:** **0.057 ↓ victims per 1,000 children** yearly
⇒ \$3.54B annual savings (\$831K/case) (Peterson et al., 2018)
≈ 30% federal child welfare spending in 2024
⇒ 30% coverage gain in 5 years; only 6¢/hour labor cost (Maclean et al., 2025)

- Policy Implications:** **Substantial social returns** at minimal cost; evidence supporting **PSL expansion**
- Contribution:**
 - Shows **PSL** boosts **child safety**, linking labor & child welfare
 - Uses **local mandates** & **incident-level data** to examine offender-victim dynamics

Main References

- Bullinger, L. R., et al., "More than snuggles: The effect of paid family leave on infant maltreatment," *Child Maltreatment*, 2025.
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- Maclean, J. C., & Pabilonia, S. W., "Paid sick leave and childcare," *NBER*, 2024.
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