

# Williams Family: RISK ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

## Family: Williams

The Williams children are living in a family environment that poses **moderate risk of overall severity**. Although the current injuries sustained by James are minor in nature, there is a history of James being physically disciplined and the mother uses an implement (a belt) in the disciplining process. In addition, there appears to be a history of the older children caring for themselves as it relates to school attendance and getting ready for school in the morning. The older children appear to have experienced emotional harm as a result of the past and current discipline used in the home. This is shown in the behaviors exhibited by the children as they attempt to interact with other children in an aggressive fashion. The "X" rating for David regarding emotional harm does not appear to impact the severity rating, because there is nothing to indicate that David has been abused or neglected to the point that he has experienced any emotional harm, and his young age prevents a thorough assessment of this factor at this time.

The **overall risk** in the Williams family is in the high range. There is a prior history which indicates that the mother is capable of disciplining her children to the point of more serious injuries, per the past indicated report of abuse regarding Susan. Although Susan reports that her mother hasn't hit her since the last incident, the children are frequently caring for themselves and are often hungry. This history, combined with the young ages of the children, makes them vulnerable to further abuse/neglect, and supports the high rating.

Mary Williams appears to be the sole caretaker of the children even though the father, Frank, lives in the home. He subscribes to a strict, stereotypical division of labor within the home, specifically believing that the mother should be the sole caretaker and the father should have no responsibility for child care. This attitude results in Mary being overwhelmed with child care responsibilities, particularly in her attempts to control James. She also is allowing Susan to assume some of the parenting responsibilities for David because she feels overwhelmed. She appears to have a limited knowledge of disciplining measures, relying on the use of a belt to control James.

Although there is no evidence that suggests the father has been abusive to his children, he does believe in physical discipline. His overall parenting ability could not be assessed due to his reluctance to meet with the worker. This reluctance also resulted in the inability to rate the father's current functioning or his history of abuse/neglect as a parent or a child. His relationship with the children may be more like that of an absent parent in many respects. He drinks alcohol on a daily basis but there is no evidence that his drinking raises the risk to the children at this point.

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(continued)**

The mother was at first, deceptive in her responses, however readily admitting once confronted with statements made by her children. She allowed access to her home and children and participated in the interview process. Although the father did not interact, he did not prohibit intervention with the family. The mother has not readily admitted to the problems within the family but there appears to be some recognition on her part that her method of disciplining her children needs to change. This is supported by the fact that she stopped using physical discipline with Susan after the last agency involvement.

The relationship between the parents is of concern because of the constant yelling and the physical pushing by the father. There is no evidence that the interaction between the two has progressed to anything more violent. The absence of supports for the family shows how isolated this family really is. The two older children do attend school, although attendance and tardiness have been issues, allowing their day-to-day care to be monitored.

There are stressors within the family, particularly financial. The living arrangements are small; however, there does not appear to be any health hazards or other concerns that would raise risk to the children. Family has moved frequently.

The children appear to be safe in the home at this time, based on mom's history of being able to stop using physical discipline during agency involvement and the lack of fear being expressed by the children.

The major problem within the family appears to be Mary's current state of being overwhelmed with child care and her past reliance on physical discipline when stressed. The children's aggressive behaviors, particularly James' fighting behavior at school which appears to mirror the interaction of the adults in the home, need to be addressed. This would help to reduce the mother's need to rely on physical discipline of the children when they are misbehaving, while attempting to teach her more effective disciplining methods. The biggest obstacle to reducing the verbal and physical abuse between the parents is the father's unwillingness to be involved with the agency.

Another problem within the home is the mother's total responsibility for child care. There may be no way to change the father's strict belief in appropriate roles within the family, however the agency could reduce her responsibilities for caring for the children by providing day care for David and other supportive services for the older children. Perhaps, after building a stronger relationship with the mother, and hopefully with the father, additional family supports may be identified.