

Singling out and mixed schooling

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There is an argument that some parents choose to homeschool some children and not others because they are carefully choosing the best mode of schooling for each child. (For an example of this argument, see Watson and Lee’s article “[Clapping Back at Homeschooling’s Perennial Foes and Fallacies](#)”; see also [our broader response to that article](#).)

While many parents homeschool selectively in their children’s best interest, it is unclear that this is always the case. Here we describe evidence from our analysis of several hundred incidents of abuse in homeschools that indicates that, in abusive home environments, there is a tight link between mixed schooling (what Watson and Lee refer to as “sector mixing”) and singling out homeschooled children for additional or worse abuse than their siblings. (That some children are singled out for worse abuse does not mean that their siblings are not also abused or neglected; it just means that some children are subjected to more than the others.)

CRHE manages the [Homeschooling’s Invisible Children database](#), a database that contains more than 500 cases of publicly documented abuse and neglect cases occurring in homeschool settings. To be included in our database, a case must involve abuse or neglect of one or more homeschooled children. Here we look not at whether homeschooled children were abused or not—at least one homeschooled child was, in every one of these cases—but at whether, in families that engaged in mixed schooling, homeschooled children were more likely to be singled out for worse or additional abuse than their traditionally schooled siblings.

First, some overall statistics: two-thirds of the 518 cases in our database (65%, n=339) involve multiple children known to be school-aged whose school status was known. (This excludes

107 cases where there was only one child or only one school-aged child in the household, plus 72 cases where not enough information was available to determine whether other children were in the household or to determine age and school status.)

Of these 339 households with multiple school-aged children whose school status was known, 78 households (23%) engaged in mixed schooling, a percentage roughly in line with the 26% that Watson and Lee cite. In the remaining 261 households (77%), all school-aged children were homeschooled.

For the all-homeschooling households (n=261), in a little under half of cases (43%, n=111) perpetrators singled out one or more children for worse or additional abuse or neglect. **In contrast, in mixed-schooling households (n=78), nearly all cases—94% (n=73)—involved perpetrators singling out some children for worse or additional abuse or neglect. This was over twice the rate of singling-out of the all-homeschooling households, suggesting that mixed schooling contributes to differentially targeting some children with increased abuse/neglect.**

When we look at these 76 households where singling out occurred in the presence of mixed schooling, we find that **virtually all singled-out children were homeschooled**. In every case, one or more homeschooled children were singled out. In only two cases was a traditionally-schooled child additionally singled out.

In short, 94% of mixed-schooling families in our database singled out one or more school-aged children for worse/additional abuse. In 100% of those cases, at least one singled-out child was homeschooled and in 97% of those cases (n=74) all singled-out children were homeschooled. While we would expect elevated rates of singling out homeschooled children in a database whose inclusion criteria include abuse or neglect of a homeschooled child, nothing about our inclusion criteria require that their traditionally schooled siblings be subjected to less abuse, making this finding striking.

This suggests a remarkably tight relationship, among abusive families in the sample, between choosing to homeschool only some children and singling out those children for worse or additional abuse or neglect. While it may be true that some caregivers selectively homeschool to maximize their children’s educational opportunities, it also seems clear that when caregivers are abusive, selectively homeschooling goes hand-in-hand with worse abuse or neglect for the homeschooled children. This is likely in part due to lack of access to mandated reporters: children who are in public school have access to mandated reporters every time they are at school, while children who are homeschooled only have access to mandated reporters if their parents choose to facilitate that access, for example by voluntarily taking the children to a doctor—which they may not do, especially if their goal is to hide the abuse.

Selective homeschooling should not be assumed, in and of itself, to be evidence that caregivers are homeschooling in the child’s best interests, nor that homeschooling will automatically serve the child’s best interests.