Promoting the Well-Being
of Young Children

Early Intervention in a
Cultural Context

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Presentation Goals

- **Understand experiences of young children at risk**
  – African American children
- **Consider benefits of early intervention programs for this population**
- **Explore cultural perspectives on early intervention for young children at risk**
  – African American children/families

Each Day in America…..

Children's Defense Fund

2,483 babies are born into poverty.

1,154 babies are born to teen mothers.

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2 mothers die from complications of pregnancy or childbirth.

928 babies are born at low birthweight.

78 babies die before their first birthdays.

Refugee Women Struggle to Feed Their Infants

2,421 children are confirmed as abused or neglected.

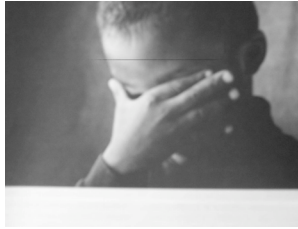**4 children are killed by abuse or neglect.**

830 children enter foster care.

8 children or teens are killed by firearms.

3,477 children are arrested.

5 children or teens commit suicide.

Children at highest risk …

Grow up in poverty.

Have depressed mothers.
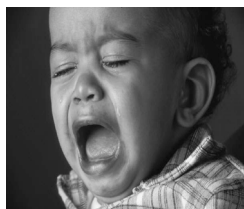

Experience protracted losses.

Are exposed to violence and trauma.

Receive compromised parenting.

Are part of minority groups.

A Profile of the Young Black Child

- **A black infant…**
  - **Is 3 times more likely to be born to a mother with no prenatal care**
  - **Is more than twice as likely to die in the first year of life**
  - **Has a 2 in 5 change of being born into poverty**
  - **Has a higher likelihood of being maltreated and being placed in foster care**
  - ***A black baby boy has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison!***

A Profile of the Black Young Child

- **A black child…**
  - **Is more likely to be sick, have no regular source of health care, have an unmet medical need, and have had no dental visits**
  - **Has 3-1/2 as many cases of pediatric AIDS**
  - **Faces a 1 in 3 change of attending a school with 90% or more minority enrollment**
  - **Is more than twice as likely to be behind grade level or be labeled mentally retarded**

A Profile of the Young Black Child

- **A black child….**
  - **Is more likely to have a mother who goes out to work sooner, works longer hours, and makes less money**
  - **Is 3 times as likely to depend solely on a mother's earnings**
  - **Is more likely to be enrolled in full-time day care arrangements than white children**
  - **Is 7 times as likely to be on welfare**

How do we improve the "developmental niches" of young children at environmental risk?

Children at high risk are NOT doomed to have poor outcomes!!!

Early Childhood Programs

- **Play major role in promoting adaptation in children at high risk**
- **May compensate for risky early childhood experiences**
- **Can serve as long-term protective factor**

Early Childhood Programs

- **Relationships are key!** (parent, teacher, etc)

"A relationship is placing one's heart and soul in the hands of another while taking charge of another in one's soul and heart."
…Kahlil Gibran

Early Childhood Programs

- **GOALS**
  - **To modify risk and protective factors**
    - **Target specific child/family risks**
  - **To influence short-term child (and proximal & distal ecological) outcomes**
  - **To influence long-term child (and proximal & distal ecological) outcomes**

Early Childhood Programs

- **Prior to intervention design and implementation, know population and outcomes of interest**
  - **Risk and protective characteristics in target population**
  - **Likely developmental pathways leading to specific outcomes**
  - **Mechanisms through which intervention can produce positive behavioral change**

Early Childhood Programs

- **Comprehensive**
  - Multiple interventions
  - Multiple settings
  - Two-generational approach
  - "whole child" focus
- **Varied teaching methods**
  - Active, experiential
  - Skills-based component

Early Childhood Programs

- **Sufficient dosage**
  - Quantity and quality of contact
  - Length, frequency, spacing, duration
- **Appropriately timed**
  - Initiated early to affect development of problem
  - Sensitive to developmental needs of children and parents
  - Intervention at time of crisis

Early Childhood Programs

- **Staff competence**
  - Reflective Practice
  - Background education/training
  - Expertise based on knowledge of intervention, not clinical experience
  - Mental health
- **High-fidelity**
  - Manualized interventions
  - Adherence to intervention protocol
    - Monitoring of implementation

Early Childhood Programs

- **Socioculturally relevant**
  - Tailored to community & participants
  - Include target group in planning
  - Staffing reflective of culture
  - Intervention approach consistent with culture
- **Positive relationships**
  - Promote strong relationships
    - Between parents and children
    - Between staff and families
    - Among staff at all levels

Early Childhood Programs

- **Evidence-based**
  - Theoretical justification
  - Empirical support
  - Practice based on science, not art
  - Direct research-practice link
- **Outcome evaluation**
  - Clear goals and objectives
  - Document process & goal-specific outcomes

Early Care and Education

- Goal: to promote child development
- Target: development-promoting contexts that affect "whole" child
- Focus: high-quality early intervention can compensate for biologic/environmental risks
- Large evidentiary base

Effective Programs

- **Early Head Start**
  - **Broad range of modest outcomes**
    - **Center-based – cognitive/language**
    - **Home-based – family; social-emotional**
  - **Larger effects early (age 2,3)**
  - **Mixed model programs most effective initially**
  - **Home-based programs more long-term effects**
  - **Implementation matters!**

Effective Programs

- **Infant Health and Development**
  - **Improved health, cognitive, and social-emotional outcomes for low birth weight infants**
- **Abecedarian**
  - **Improved cognitive outcomes for children of mothers with lower IQ's**
- **Chicago Parent-Child Centers**
  - **Improved school readiness, child development, and life course outcomes for children in poverty**

Home Visiting Programs

- **Goal: varies with program**
  - **Improve child health**
  - **Promote child development**
  - **Enhance parenting**
  - **Promote child development**
- **Service delivery** *mechanism*
- **Target varies with goal**
- **Large, "sobering" evidentiary base**
  - **Family support=strong effects on parent and parenting outcomes**
  - **Child development=fewer effects**

Effective Programs

- **Nurse Family Partnership**
  - **Better birth & child health outcomes**
  - **Reductions in child maltreatment**
  - **Improved life course outcomes**
- **Healthy Steps**
  - **Child health effects**
- **Family Check-up**
  - **Reductions in child behavior problems**
  - **Improved parenting skills**
  - **Reduced maternal depression**

Effective Programs

- **Healthy Start/Families**
  - **Improved child health**
  - **Enhanced child development**
  - **Improved parenting**
  - **Reductions in child maltreatment**
- **Parents as Teachers**
  - **Enhanced child development**
  - **Improved parenting**

Infant Mental Health Treatment

- **Goal: to promote child mental health**
- **Target: infant-parent relationship**
- **Therapeutic focus: parental conflicts and practices misattuned to infants' needs**
- **Patterns of mental health transmitted across generations**
- **Limited evidentiary base**

Effective Treatment Programs

- **Infant-Parent Psychotherapy**
  - **Attachment Disorders** (Leiberman et al.)
    - **No effect on attachment security**
    - **More frequent partnered interaction**
    - **Greater maternal empathy and communication with infants**
    - **Infants less angry, avoidant, resistant**
  - **Child Abuse and Neglect** (Toth/Cicchetti)
    - **Decreased child abuse/neglect**
    - **Similar results to home-based, psychoeducational model**

Effective Treatment Programs

- **Infant-Parent Psychotherapy**
  - **Depression** (Clarke et al.)
    - **Reduced depressive symptomatology**
    - **Enhanced parent-infant interaction**
  - **Multiple risks** (Heinicke et al)
    - **Mothers less likely to be punitive restrictive and more likely to promote infant autonomy**
    - **Infants less likely to be insecurely attached and more likely to have greater sense of autonomy and that their needs would be met**

Cultural Considerations

- **Extant programs focus on diverse families**
  - **African American families more likely to participate in early care and education (center-based) programs**
  - **Latino families more likely to participate in home-based programs**
  - **Newer immigrant families- low participation**
- **Importance of context**
  - **Poverty and other demographic risks**
  - **Family structure distinctions**
  - **Neighborhood factors**

Cultural Considerations

- **Enrollment/participation**
  - **KNOW population**
    - **Characteristics, needs, perspectives**
  - **Community-based advisory group that is gatekeeper for families**
  - **Program approach consistent with cultural prescriptions**
    - **Infants in home-based care for many immigrant families**
    - **Resistance to mental health intervention for many minority groups**
    - **Import of reflection vs. directiveness distinct among groups**
      - » **Interaction Guidance**

Cultural Considerations

- **Culture-specific meanings of intervention targets**
  - **Parenting**
    - **Autonomy**
    - **Discipline**
    - **Warmth/affection**
  - **Child Care/Education**
    - **Didactic vs. play-based**
    - **Teacher-directed vs. child-directed**
  - **Linkage with outcomes**
    - **Parenting processes and child outcomes**
    - **Cultural validity of measures**

Cultural Considerations

- **Cultural style of intervention**
  - **Validation of social experience of cultural group** (discrimination, immigration)
  - **Addressing cultural goals**
    - **Biculturism**
    - **Child development and family functioning**
  - **Incorporation of participants' style of cultural expression**
    - **Religiosity and spirituality**
    - **Movement**
    - **Story-telling**
    - **Human connection (more fluid boundaries)**

Cultural Considerations

- **Using evidence re: intervention**
  - **Effectiveness with cultural group**
- **Cultural match/sensitivity of staff**
  - **All staffing levels**
    - **Direct service providers**
    - **Supervisory staff**
    - **Management teams**
  - **Professional Development**
  - **Staff reflective capacity**
  - **Community members as practitioners**
    - **Teacher aides, parent aides, interpreters**
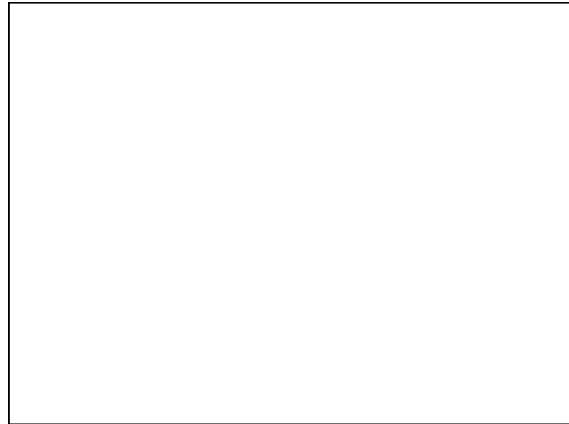
Toward optimal development

Early childhood programs targeting
- **specific cultural populations**
- **specific family needs**
- **specific intervention strategies**

can enhance the developmental niches of high-risk young children.