

# Culture and Ethnicity in Social, Emotional and Academic Development

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# The Importance of the Socio-- Cultural Niche

Defined by:

- ◆ SES
- ◆ Gender
- ◆ Ethnicity

Children of color occupy specific Socio-cultural niches:

- ◆ Social, family, community strains
- ◆ Limited resources

Social and academic adjustment are correlated  
with culture, ethnicity and SES

# Mental Health and Academic Achievement

- ◆ 14 - 22% of school-aged kids have behavioral, emotional & developmt. problems
- ◆ 8 - 10% have a diagnosable mental disorder
- ◆ “Behavioral problems frequently co-occur with depression and anxiety”
- ◆ Children and adolescents of color more likely to internalize disorders, and kids in poverty report more depressive symptoms than norm

(Percentages from Mash & Barkley, 1996)

# Children of Color

- ◆ In 1994, 40% of AA children failed at least one subject (Barbarin, Whitten & Bonds).
- ◆ 23% repeated at least one grade (Barbarin & Soler, 1993).
- ◆ Dropout rate: Hispanics 46%, African Americans 26%, Caucasians 17% ('95)
- ◆ Welfare system: 3-10x more AA than W (Goerge, Wulczyn & Harden, 1994).

# The Role of Poverty and Ethnicity

- ◆ AA children poverty rate – 46%
- ◆ Poverty limits access to services; increases morbidity & mortality; increases chance of poor academic success, aggression, substance abuse, delinquency, under-employment and unstable family life
- ◆ The gap b/t AA and W academic progress “gets wider the higher up the SES scale you go”

# High-Risk Niches

- ◆ Risks and resources are associated with gender, poverty, ethnicity & culture.
- ◆ Higher AA and Latino male incidents of disruptive behavior & attention difficulties compared to W boys (not found in females).
- ◆ Cultural beliefs & practices and poverty-related stress influence/predict aggression, anxiety & conduct problems.
- ◆ Parent cultural beliefs play a strong role in interactions w/school & child learning.

# Ethnicity & Culture

- ◆ Ethnicity: psychological identification; beyond the level of family
- ◆ Culture: shared system of beliefs, values, practices, symbols, language; defines roles, social behaviors, obligations and rights among people with a common identity

# Case Study: AA Children & South African Children

- ◆ From Barbarin (2001)
- ◆ AA children have higher risk of psychological dysfunction and internalizing symptoms
- ◆ AA boys: more behavioral & emotional problems
- ◆ Poverty was key factor for children in the U.S., but poverty made no difference for SA kids
- ◆ Protecting factors in SA: black majority status; poverty as temporary, not stigmatizing; extended family support
- ◆ Ex. of poverty niche with positive qualities

# Stress Diathesis Model

- ◆ Children of color & social niche
- ◆ Poverty & related stressors in family and community (including racism)  
“severely test [children’s] capacity to cope”

# Stress Diathesis Model & Family Role

Protective forces of importance (individual, familial & environmental):

- ◆ High expectations
- ◆ Consistent & fair discipline
- ◆ Culture & ethnic identification
- ◆ Supportive family & community relationships/structures
- ◆ Parental optimism & positive self-perception
- ◆ Social support
- ◆ Individual coping styles

# Differential Access to Service

- ◆ AA and Latino children are under-represented in public mental health system
- ◆ Often not identified or inappropriately treated
- ◆ Therefore, less prevention early in life, and more interaction later with juvenile justice and child welfare

# Conclusions & Recommendations (1)

Increase access to safe, stable, supportive & stimulating (4-S) env. for all children:

- ◆ Early childhood programs - full funding of Head Start & universal voluntary Pre-K
- ◆ Enhance teacher multi-cultural understanding
- ◆ Strengthen relationships among teachers, children & families

# Conclusions & Recommendations (2)

- ◆ Improve pay, training & support for preschool teachers
- ◆ Conduct research to identify and specify culturally sensitive practices with children in early childhood programs
- ◆ Provide high-quality mh services in primary health clinics, schools & community programs

# References

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