How Poverty Effects Children & Development


The Idea in Brief

Poverty effects children and their development and health through physiological and psychological responses, social and physical environments.

“Children inherit not only their parents’ genes but also the family ecology and its social milieu. Thus, parenting skills, housing, neighborhood, schools, and other factors (eg, medical care) all have complex relations to each other and influence how each child’s genetic canvas is expressed.”

Toxic Stress: Childhood toxic stress is the high level of prolonged activation of the body’s stress response during childhood that has detrimental physiological and psychological consequences that last into adulthood. Toxic stress can lead to neuroendocrine (neurotransmitters and hormones) disruption that can impair affect and impulse control, learning, interpersonal relationships, and can lead to maladaptive behaviors, such as substance abuse, overeating, and unsafe sex practices.

Two-Gen Health: Parental anxiety and depression has adverse effects on relational and emotional development of their children. Children exposed to poverty have higher incidence of mental health diagnoses than children in homes with adequate income. This is connected to higher incidence substance abuse, conduct poor academic achievement and relational health. Parent engagement and good relational health can protect child from the effects of poverty related health. Relational healthy children are more able to turn off physiological stress responses and avoid adverse effects.

Relevance

This technical report was published by the American Academy of Pediatrics as a summary of what is known about children in poverty and mediating factors to health outcomes. This technical report is interdisciplinary, drawing from physiology, sociology, psychology, economics and epidemiology.

Mediator: In this research, the mediators are the mechanisms that explain how poverty effects the health and well-being of children.

Environment: Children in poor families are more likely to be sedentary due to lack of opportunities for physical activity. They are also more likely to have asthma, living in neighborhoods with crowding, pollution, dampness, and pests. Children in poverty also experience more dangerous environments with housing that has no fire and CO detectors, unprotected windows, unsafe stairs and roofs, and poor ventilation; pedestrian and cycling paths shared with dense car traffic that leads to increased injury and death, along with increased incidence of chemical burns and poisoning.

Nutrition and Growth: 40% of children in poverty experience food insecurity. By age 4, 6% of children qualified for SNAP/WIC were of short stature, 3.7% of all US children aged 4. Low-income children also have measurable gaps in language development, including delayed first words and few words by the time they enter kindergarten.

Academic progress: Poor achievement in school is linked to experience in poverty, mediated by many factors: school violence, parental involvement at school and at home, nutrition and food security, exposure to environmental toxins and noise pollution, timely treatment of chronic health conditions.

If you wish to share your ideas and inquiries on summaries of other emerging topics in poverty research and services, please email results@umn.edu with “Understanding Poverty: [insert topic]” in the subject line.
Read the full article:

Connections to Human Service Redesign
The factors that impact children in poverty and their adverse outcomes have been extensively researched. We know what many of the contributing factors are. These findings can inform human service programming and practice in many ways -

- Resources and services for safe and secure housing, including renters’ rights enforcement
- Strategic planning for healthful food access
- Align policies and practice to promote family relational, emotional, and physical health
- Address policies and practices that inflict undue stress on families and children in poverty
- Reach out to stakeholders that are involved in these policy and practice areas

Spheres of Use
☐ Board members ☐ Program planning ☐ Training
☐ Policy making

Explore Further

Visit Frontline: Poor Kids – A series of reports and stories on children in poverty

Notes