Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families: Interventions, Research and Policy Course

Week _____

What is Society's Stake in Marriage?

Why Does it Matter?

Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.

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Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationships and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children & Families

Project funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
Oct. 2003 – Sept. 2008

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Learning Objectives

- **D**emonstrate an ability to apply knowledge regarding public policy, private and public child welfare services, and systems that influence family health, well-being and formation.
- **L**earn and apply assessment tools, skills, and practices appropriate to the target population for couples, children and families as a whole in order to discern challenges and supports to family health, well-being and formation
- **D**emonstrate an understanding of the impact of oppression, racism and prejudice on the formation, development and status of families and couples.

For Better or Worse: Marriage, Cohabitation and Children

The aggregate research indicates that children do best when raised by their two married, biological, heterosexual parents who have a low-conflict marriage.

(Parke, 2003)

Other family structures and dynamics may increase the risk for children and give us reason for concern. However, it is important to note that the majority of children grow up without serious risk within a variety of families.

Consider

- Is couple functioning related to child, family and community well-being?
- How does family and couple make-up impact child, family and community well-being?
- Is there evidence of positive impact?

What is Good For Kids?

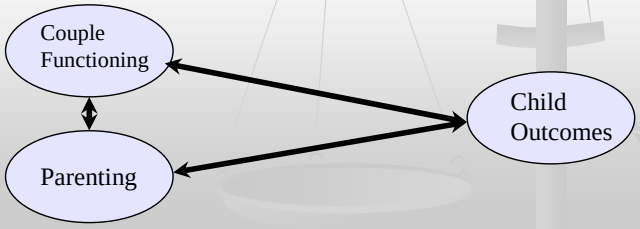
- Positive Parental Involvement
- Positive Parenting Practices
- Family Stability

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE LINKED TO:

- Parent Involvement
- Positive Parenting
- Family Stability

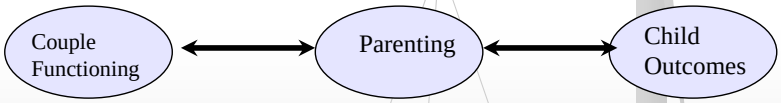
A Family Systems Approach

- Couple relationships, parenting practices and child outcomes are interrelated.
- Much literature exists on associations between parenting and couple functioning and child outcomes



Couple Functioning as A Mediator

Work on couple functioning can be beneficial to parent-child relationships and promote child well-being.



Research has demonstrated:

- Evidence of elements of the couple relationship spillover into parenting. (El Sheikh & Elmore-Stanton, 2004)
- Evidence of links between couple functioning and individual well-being of the parent. (Seifer & Dickstein, 2000)
- Links between individual well-being of parent and parenting practices. (Seifer & Dickstein, 2000)

Marriage Mediates Risk and Conveys Benefits or Does It?

(Parke, 2003)

- There are mediating factors other than the act of marriage that may be more attributable to this decreased risk. Some include:
  - Improved family economic, legal and social status – improved access to health insurance, tax advantages, public acceptance and other resources.
  - Attributes of the parents such as commitment, loyalty and future orientation that make them more likely to be in a stable marriage and committed to their children.
  - The actual act of getting married changes attitudes and behaviors of couples in positive ways as well as those of others towards them.
  - Access to 2 sets of relatives, support systems and networks.

Family Structure

- Family situations and structure vary widely today.
  - Frequent changes in a family's situation makes the study of impact difficult.
  - Many children live in more than one type of family during the course of their childhood.
  - The degree of disadvantage to a family structure is also mediated by poverty, race and other factors.

(Parke, 2003)

Some Types of Family Structures

- Single parent
- Divorced families
- Widowed families
- Step families/Blended families/Foster families
- Fluid Families/Multi-partner fertility.
- Co-habitating, biological parent families
- Biological parent and non-biological parent cohabitating
- Same-sex parent families
- Grandparents parenting
- Mother and Daughter raising grandchildren/children
- Etc.

(Parke, 2003)

Because child in the child welfare system do not get to pick who parents them, the worker must be able to apply interventions for all types of couple relationships.

Fluid families – when family make-up forms and reforms as a result of short-term, live-in relationships that often result in children within the same household having different combinations of biological parents many of whom maintain relationships with their children and the other biological parent. Often the result of a mother having several children by multiple partners. Sometimes called ***multi-partner fertility***.

What is the impact of not living in an "ideal" family ?

Children who do not live with both biological parents (married) are roughly twice as likely (from 10% to 20% for example)

- to be poor,
- to have a birth outside of marriage,
- to have behavioral and psychological problems,
- to not graduate from high school, and
- have higher health risks such as accidents, injuries and poisonings.

In any case, the majority of children grow up without serious problems, especially if they live in a stable situation.

(Parke, 2003)

Recent Research on Fragile Families

- Children living with stably single mothers and children who live with mothers who experience multiple partnerships changes show
  - Higher levels of aggression
  - Higher levels of anxiety/depression
- Children who live with parents who are stably cohabitating do not differ from children raised by married parents.

(McLanahan, 2008)

Cited from the Osborne & McLnahan 2007 article: Osborne, Cynthia, Sara McLanahan. 2007. Partnership Instability and Child Wellbeing.*Journal of Marriage and Family*. 69(4): 1065-1083.

Non-marital childbearing Reduces Children's Life Chances by

- Lowering parental resources
- Lowering the quality of parenting because
  - Unmarried non-cohabitating parents experience
    - Less income growth.
    - More mental health problems.
    - More maternal stress than married mothers.
    - Fathers are generally less involved.

(McLanahan, 2008)

Two Causal Mechanisms in the Link between Family Structure and Child Outcomes…..

- Partnership instability
- Multi-partner fertility.

Two conditions fostered from the process in which women (as single parents) have children while they continue to search for a permanent partner. (McLanahan, 2008)

However, many children grow up successfully under these circumstances. The resilience of these families needs to be studied for elements of transferability.

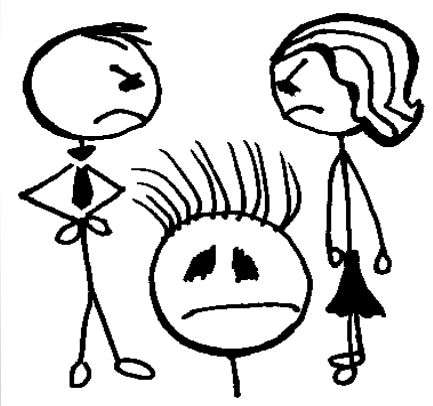
Factors Associated with Poverty Play an Important Role in Family Formation

Macro Issues

- Low education attainment
- Unmarried, noncohabitating parents often come from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Multiple co-parenting increases the likelihood that an individual father's contributions of time, finances and other resources are spread over a number of households.
  - Also often causes jealousy, distrust and conflict between parents.

(McLanahan, 2008)

Couple Distress and Children



The members and dyads of the family system affect and are affected by significant family processes such as couple conflict.

(Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp, 2001)

Video Clip: Young Children Speak Their Minds About Divorce

Although children are influenced, they also influence couple conflict

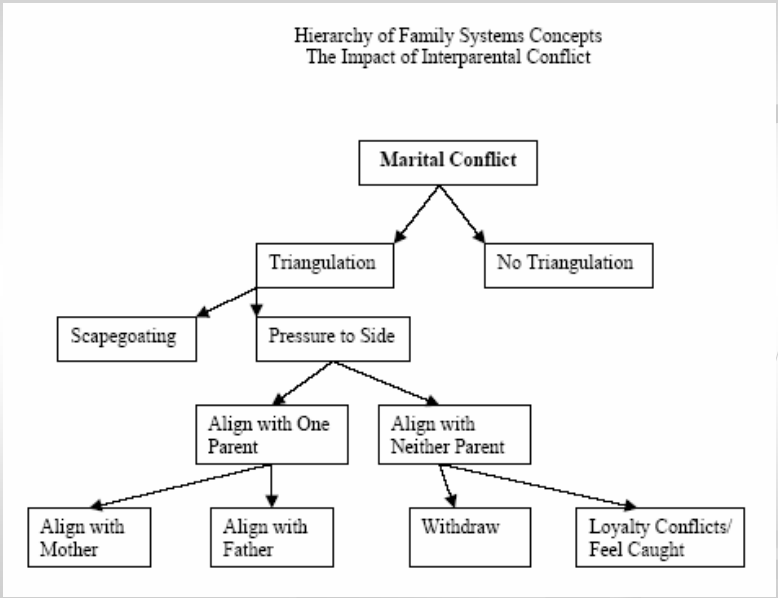
- Marriages are typically the most discordant during the childrearing years.
- Children may become involved in the marital conflict – to ameliorate, support one or the other, direct reactions such as increased aggression by child, etc.

(Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp, 2001)

Children's Adjustment Problems

- Consistent research support for the association between marital conflict and children's adjustment.
- It is reported cross-culturally
- Examples include –
  - Externalizing problems via aggression and conduct issues.
  - Internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal. (Most often)
  - Increased aggressiveness and other problems between siblings.
  - Others are lower social competence with peers, academic problems and poor intellectual achievement.

(Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp, 2001)


Hierarchy of Family Systems Concepts
The Impact of Interparental Conflict
Marital Conflict
Triangulation
No Triangulation
Scapegoating
Pressure to Side
Align with One Parent
Align with Neither Parent
Align with Mother
Align with Father
Withdraw
Loyalty Conflicts/ Feel Caught

Positive Marital Relations Are Associated with

- Powerful foundation for healthy family functioning and stability.
- Future marital satisfaction is linked with secure father-child, mother-child and parents-child attachment.
- Positive marital relations mediate past insecure attachment by parents to their own parents thus allowing them to foster secure attachments with their children.

(Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp, 2001)

REFER TO THE WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS HANDOUT = Many more positive associations.

Case Study: Quidel-Thomas Family

Required Reading

- Parke, M. (2003). Are married parents really better for children? What research says about the effects of family structure on child well being. *Couples and Marriage Series, 3*, 1–7.

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