Journal Highlights

Patti A. Beekman, BS

Early Experiences of Child Maltreatment and Educational Well-being

National reports have indicated that family risks, such as poverty, homelessness, and maltreatment in early childhood, can have adverse effects on children's educational well-being. In this study, the researchers examined how the timing of a child's first experience of maltreatment or homelessness, or both, might influence academic achievement.

The study was conducted in a large county using an entire cohort of second grade students during the 2004–05 academic year. Data were extracted from the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS). The number of students with complete data ranged from 9,871 to 10,639, depending on the academic outcome measure. The authors found that 12% of the children in the sample had experienced substantiated child maltreatment, and 8% had experienced homelessness.

The study found that child maltreatment had a more pervasive influence on children's academic achievement than did homelessness, and it was also associated with decreased performance on each of the standardized academic achievement measures. The academic area(s) most influenced by maltreatment were different, depending on the age that a child first experienced maltreatment. The authors suggest that developmental science may explain how and why some risk factors have a greater or lesser influence on different areas of development over time.

The authors highlight the importance of collaboration between social service and education professionals as a way to improve educational well-being for children who have experienced early childhood risks. They conclude that study findings support the importance of high-quality early childhood education programs for children who have been maltreated or experienced homelessness.

Perlman, S., & Fantuzzo, J. (2010). Timing and influence of early experiences of child maltreatment and homelessness on children's education well-being. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(6), 874–883.

School Change, Academic Progress, and Behavior Problems in Foster Youth

Educational success is an essential component of successful transition into adulthood for all adolescents, and youth in foster care often face challenges that can undermine their educational success. In this study, the authors examined the behavioral and educational outcomes related to changes in school placement for children in foster care. The authors hypothesized that educational achievement would decrease and the number of observed behavior problems would increase as the number of school changes increased.

The authors conducted this study in a group home that operated an on-site public school. The study sample included 159 foster youth who entered the group home between October 2001 and June 2005. The researchers interviewed the youth and reviewed their child protective service files. The youth completed a Youth Self-Report (YSR), which gave researchers information regarding internalizing, externalizing, borderline, and clinical behaviors.

The data indicated the average number of foster care placements to be 7.35, and over 40% of the youth reported more than eight school changes. The authors were unable to confirm the relationship between the number of school changes and academic progress; however, they did find that externalizing behaviors and total behavior problems had a significant relationship with the number of school changes.

The authors suggest that separation and loss experiences may be associated with school changes, and that these may affect a youth's behavior and educational achievement. The authors caution that foster children are not the only population that can be affected by school change. Children of families with high residential mobility may also experience behavior and educational issues.

Sullivan, M. J., Jones, L., & Mathiesen, S. (2010). School change, academic progress, and behavior problems in a sample of foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(2), 164–170.

School-Based Humane Education as a Strategy to Prevent Violence

The Humane Education Program (HEP) is a violence prevention program for elementary schools that uses animal-related stories, lessons, and activities to foster empathy and responsibility in children's relationships with both people and animals. Curriculum-blended lesson plans met state educational standards by combining academic skills with humane concepts and character education. Because most children have an affinity for animals, humane education classes are more likely to capture their attention.

This article provides an evidence-based rationale for the program, reviews history and methods, and offers recommendations for implementing HEP in elementary schools. Research explains the relationship of empathy and aggression. Empathy is a protective

factor, inversely related to aggression, and empathy for animals is positively associated with empathy for people. Exposure to abuse or violence by young children may disrupt their normal development of empathy and may increase their risk for aggressive behavior toward people during adolescence. HEP emphasizes the connections between exposure to violence, cruelty to animals, and aggressive behavior.

Children's cruelty to animals is another area of study that supports the need for HEP. Cruelty to animals and empathy deficits are associated with bullying and are diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder (CD). Children with serious conduct problems are also at risk for antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood. Numerous studies of adults indicate that cruelty to animals is associated with perpetration of child abuse and other violent and nonviolent crimes. In conclusion, given high levels of violence in families and communities, the author advocates collaboration among humane organizations, child welfare, and elementary schools to implement this strategy for violence prevention.

Faver, C. A. (2010). School-based humane education as a strategy to prevent violence: Review and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(3) 365–370.

Pairing Nurses and Social Workers in Schools

It is difficult for families to access needed services for children who are struggling in school and to utilize these services effectively. This article describes the school-based Child and Family Support Team Initiative (CFST), established in 2005 by the North Carolina General Assembly to help children at risk of school failure or out-of-home placement. The program provides a certified school nurse and a licensed school social worker in 101 schools with high-risk students. State officials coordinate CFST, and the evaluation team at the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University assesses the program's effect on academic outcomes. A key component is the involvement of state level and community agencies in family support teams.

Any school faculty or staff member may refer a student for academic factors, social and behavioral issues, and health or services needs, including child welfare. A CFST leader meets with the family to assess needs and develop a single, strengths-based service plan that integrates all service providers, a program goal summarized as "1 child, 1 family, 1 plan." The agency relevant to the student's primary need leads the interagency team, which addresses barriers to services and monitors the child's progress.

A Web-based case management system tracks student data and aggregates trends to inform service needs. During the first two years the program served 13,902 students, half of whom were in elementary schools and the remainder, divided half between middle and high school students. Racial and ethnic composition roughly matched school composition. Student needs were as follows: 73% academic; 65% social services, including child welfare; 49% health/mental health, substance use, or developmental; and 6% legal. Most students had needs in more than one service area.

Now finishing its third school year, the program has met challenges of competing pay scales for nurses, principals who are wary of nurses and social workers leaving school grounds to make home visits, and a need to assimilate roles of CFST and traditional school nurses. The authors conclude by reinforcing how schools, given their primary role in children's lives, are a logical base for interagency teams to address students' needs.

Gifford, E. J., Wells, R., Bai, Y., Troop, T., Miller, S., & Babinski, L. (2010). Pairing nurses and social workers in schools: North Carolina's school-based child and family support teams. *Journal of School Health, 80*(2), 104–108.

Needs and Outcomes for Low-Income Youth in Special Education

While poverty, educational disability, and child maltreatment separately have been associated with negative outcomes, this is the first study to use longitudinal data to examine the needs and outcomes of low-income children in special education by level of child welfare involvement.

Authors used data from a larger longitudinal study of maltreated and low- income students compared with low-income only children born 1982 through 1994 in a Midwest urban school

district. For the current analysis, they narrowed the data to 471 special education students with emotional disturbance (ED). The study compared students' risk for negative outcomes (mental health issues, school problems, and juvenile offenses) with levels of child welfare contact (no report, child maltreatment report but no services, in-home child welfare services, and foster care placement).

Overall, special education students involved with child welfare were most likely to have an ED diagnosis, and they experienced more negative outcomes, such as emergency room treatment for mental health problems, school problems, or delinquency. Prior research has indicated that ED youth in foster care had more negative outcomes than those not in the child welfare system, but the current study suggested that students with in-home child welfare services or reports of maltreatment without services generally had equal or even greater levels of needs than those placed in foster care.

The authors believe their findings underscore the problems and unmet needs of students with ED. They urge schools, child welfare agencies, and the mental health systems to respond with greater coordination and collaboration to provide comprehensive services for these children.

Lee, M., & Jonson-Reid, M. (2009). Needs and outcomes for low-income youth in special education: Variations by emotional disturbance diagnosis and child welfare contact. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*(7), 722–731.

Kinship Care, Sibling Placement, and School Outcomes

Although literature separately addresses issues of kinship foster care and sibling placement, no prior studies have examined outcomes from both types of placement, including possible interactions when placements involve kinship foster care of sibling groups. This study examines data from youth, caregivers, teachers, and caseworkers to investigate relationships among kinship foster care, sibling placement, and child welfare outcomes, including youth behavior, family and caregiver relationships, and school performance.

The authors used samples from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW) to analyze 2,488 observations of 1,415 different children. Although data were not conclusive regarding interaction between kinship foster care and sibling placement, both placement settings offered advantages, particularly from children's perspective; they reported feeling supported, they felt close to a primary caregiver, and they liked living with the family. School performance findings predicted lower academic performance for white children in kinship placement with siblings. While children in the kinship care of Hispanic, black, and other ethnicities performed as well in school whether siblings were present or not, those in nonkinship placements performed better when placed with siblings. A pattern of conflicting and questionable behavior assessments sug-

gested using multiple reporters of children's behavior and checking any differences in perceptions.

The authors concluded that additional research can investigate if optimal placement would include siblings together in a kinship home. Current practice and policy should continue to promote kinship care, sibling placement, and contact between separated siblings to bolster children already very much at risk in the child welfare system.

Hegar, R. L., & Rosenthal, J. M. (2009). Kinship care and sibling placement: Child behavior, family relationships, and school outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*(6), 670–679.

Child Victims of Human Trafficking: Challenges for Child Welfare

This article examines child welfare services to United States and international child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Child victims are most often girls aged 13–14 when taken, and they may be runaways, homeless, delinquent, or in the foster care system. Traffickers may lure children from their parents using lies, coercion, and narcotics, or they kidnap victims from movie theaters, schools, and shopping malls. Children who live close to international borders are at increased risk.

Child victims are survivors of sex slavery and have experienced violence and many abusers. Child welfare agencies may need to repatriate or develop permanent plans for foreign children trafficked across international borders. Paradoxically, victims may be arrested for prostitution after years in captivity and may still not receive help for the emotional trauma and physical abuse they endured.

The authors review current treatment for victims after escape or rescue. Conventional sexual abuse therapy cannot address the complex needs of trafficked children who may have experienced torture, rape, or drug abuse. Victims may exhibit mental and physical trauma, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, and abortion-related complications. In addition, they face stigma and shame about their experiences and may need anonymity in group therapy because traffickers use family death threats to enforce compliance. The authors cite two successful treatment programs: Angela's House in Atlanta and multisystemic therapy (MST).

The authors conclude the article with practice and policy recommendations. They contend that child welfare agencies should collaborate in the community to identify victims, and agencies should use treatment programs with the expertise and cultural knowledge needed to serve victims of child trafficking.

Fong, R., & Berger Cardoso, J. B. (2010). Child human trafficking victims: Challenges for the child welfare system. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 33*(3), 311–316.