Research Highlights

Topic: Family Quality of Life


**BOTTOM LINE**

In this literature review, the authors summarized research on the impact that poverty has on a family with a member with a disability. The review is organized according to five domains of family quality of life including: health, productivity, physical environment, emotional well-being, and family interaction. The authors point out implications for policy, service provision, and research.

**TIPS**

- If you are a policy maker, address the connection between poverty and family quality of life by considering what may be done with respect to the following 5 domains:
  - Health
    - Increasing access to free health care, food stamps and free school meals
    - Increasing incentives for medical professionals to care for patients who have Medicare.
  - Productivity (education)
    - Increasing federal funds to schools who serve children experiencing poverty.
  - Physical Environment (housing)
    - Improving access to physically accessible, affordable housing for families of children with disabilities.
  - Emotional well-being
    - Enhancing effectiveness of community-based mental health services.
• Family interaction
  ♦ Increasing adoption subsidies to benefit children with disabilities
  ♦ Increasing efforts to intervene earlier in case of child is treatment
  ♦ Allowing Medicare funds to be used to pay families to support their child with a disability.

• If you are a school administrator, teacher, or other practitioner
  ♦ learn how poverty affects a child’s learning ability and customize the lesson to fit the child’s needs.
  ♦ use existing school resources to meet the needs of low-income children
  ♦ partner with social service agencies to share resources.

• 5 Quality of Life (QOL) indicators were identified and examined. Poverty experts influence over all five in the areas of

**KEY FINDINGS**

• Health
  ♦ Hungry children are twice as likely as well-nourished children to suffer from unwanted weight loss, fatigue, headaches, irritability, inability to concentrate and frequent colds. The adverse effects of *hunger* put entire families at a disadvantage, when they are unable to afford a nutritionally adequate diet.
  ♦ *Lack of prenatal care* and under-nutrition during pregnancy can cause respiratory, neurological, and cognitive problems for children.
  ♦ Families have limited access to *health care* and health supplies when they cannot afford it. Medicaid does help, but many doctors do not accept it because of low reimbursement rates.

• Productivity
  ♦ Poor families cannot pay for quality childcare or stimulating toys for their child to play with and therefore have fewer opportunities for enhancing their *children’s cognitive development* and providing them with stimulating experiences.
  ♦ Poverty tends to restrict opportunities for families to enjoy *leisure and recreational activities* together. When this happens members may look for unhealthy activities to participate in, such as smoking or drinking.

• The physical environment
  ♦ Poverty can be a barrier in making a positive *home environment* for a family when the family does not have heat, electricity, other utilities, or household necessities, including repairs that may cost more than the family can pay. Families living in older houses also have a greater chance of having high levels of lead in their blood due to old paint and plumbing.
  ♦ Poor families generally do not live in safe, supportive neighborhoods. Therefore, they are often excluded from good schools, and safe playgrounds. They may have access to fewer positive adult role models.
• Emotional well-being
  ◆ Children who grow up in low-income families have higher levels of stress, anxiety, and dependence.
  ◆ These families do not have some of the choices that may assist them lower the occurrence of stress, anxiety, and dependence.
  ◆ Economic hardship is linked to the self-esteem of the child. Parents who worry constantly over money matters often do not have the time or energy to praise their children.

• Family interaction
  ◆ Parent-Child Interactions – Parents who face multiple challenges, including poverty, are often inconsistent or unresponsive to their child’s needs. In addition parents show less positive behavior towards their child such as hugs, praise, or supportive statements. Data also shows that families in a higher economic class may have greater parenting assistance from the father and the siblings.

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**KEY FINDINGS**

**RELATED PUBLICATIONS**


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