RESEARCH: NATION BENEFITS WHEN “PART C” PROVIDES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS “AT-RISK” FOR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Study highlights lessons learned from four communities around the nation that focus on risks: Boston; L.A. County; Doña Ana, NM; and SE Kansas – with implications for all 50 states

New York City – Infants and toddlers who are at risk for future social and emotional problems because of a host of variables – such as living in poverty, or being part of a single-parent family – have a markedly better shot at overcoming obstacles and succeeding in school and later, as adults, if they get supports and interventions early, according to a poverty think tank at Columbia University.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), part of Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health, studied how four localities (Boston, Los Angeles County; Doña Ana, N.M.; and the southeast Kansas region) administer “Part C” of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). The promising practices and policies they found can be models for the country.

“Young children at-risk for social and emotional problems have not been universally covered,” says Sheila Smith, PhD, one of the co-authors of the NCCP report, along with Taniesha A. Woods, PhD, and Janice L. Cooper, PhD. “A large body of research shows the pitfalls associated with multiple risk and their often cumulative and deleterious impact. By taking a risk-based perspective to eligibility for services and supports, communities can intervene early, ameliorate and even avert suffering and put children on a more positive trajectory. If we can prevent problems for very young children with strong indicators for developmental delays, American society will benefit, not only because the country benefits from a healthy population of course, but also because it makes fiscal sense to stop a problem in it’s tracks than to let it unfold.”

Background on Part C – why is it important?

Early Intervention programs that are provided through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act provide unique supports for children birth to 3 years old (and their families) who have a developmental delay (such as cognitive, physical, communication, social, and emotional).

One of the areas of particular concern is social and emotional delays, where, for example, children do not form healthy attachments with caregivers or they are not able to manage their
emotions. Social-emotional competencies are critical for success in school and life, say the researchers.

The last authorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act expanded Part C so that children who are involved in substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect are referred to Part C for screening or evaluation. These are vulnerable children, and thus, they would greatly benefit from early intervention services.

NCCP interviewed 66 state and local stakeholders in communities that were diverse in geographic region, racial and ethnic background as well as in linguistic background, explains Dr. Woods. “We learned about the extent to which communities developed a collaborative approach to providing effective Part C early intervention services to young children and their families,” she says. “We also asked about communities’ approaches to improving their policy frameworks so that they better supported children and families served by Part C programming.”

**Recommendations**

The use of valid and reliable screening tools that are appropriate for diverse populations is an important part of communities’ capacity to identify infants and toddlers with social-emotional delays, continues Woods. “Providing early intervention services for infants and toddlers who are at-risk of developing serious delays can reduce the likelihood of long-term costly conditions and later interventions.”

The researchers also recommend providing early intervention professionals with the training necessary for them to be effective early interventionists.

The complete NCCP report, “Promoting the Social-emotional Wellbeing of Infants and Toddlers in Early Intervention Programs” can be accessed free online at: [http://www.ncep.org/publications/pub_946.html](http://www.ncep.org/publications/pub_946.html).