



*MCHB Research Program
Research Roundtable Series*

Special Research Presentation

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African-American Adolescent Mothers, Their Babies, and Their Babies' Fathers

This special presentation is a cooperative venture between the Office of Minority Health (OMH) and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The presentation will include findings from select studies funded by the MCHB Research Program.

The purpose of the OMH, which is directed by M. June Horner, is to serve as HRSA's principal advisor and coordinator for special needs of minority and disadvantaged populations. This includes linking HRSA minority and disadvantaged program efforts to potential partners and providing agencywide expertise on the development of culturally appropriate programs and materials. The MCHB Research Program is directed by Dr. Gontran Lamberty and administered through the MCHB's Division of Research, Training, and Evaluation. The purpose of the program is to support applied research relating to maternal and child health (MCH) services that is likely to make a substantial contribution to the advancement of these services.

About This Series

The Research Roundtable Series, sponsored by MCHB, disseminates results of MCHB-funded research to policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in the public and private sectors. The results of these projects influence future service, research, and policy development. The Research Roundtable sessions provide an opportunity for researchers to discuss their findings with policymakers, MCH program directors, service providers, and other health professionals.

About the Speaker

Maureen Black, Ph.D., is a professor in the Department of Pediatrics and director of the Growth and Nutrition Clinic at the University of Maryland. She is a fellow in the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Psychological Society (APS). In addition, she is a past president of the Society of Pediatric Psychology and of APA's Division of Child, Youth, and Family Services. She has published more than 100 journal articles and book chapters on topics such as child development, child neglect, failure to thrive (also known as pediatric undernutrition), feeding behavior, adolescent parenting, and prevention of adolescent risk behavior. Her research interests include the evaluation of intervention strategies to promote the growth and development of vulnerable children.

Research Questions/Objectives

This special research presentation, "African-American Adolescent Mothers, Their Babies, and Their Babies' Fathers" will disseminate findings from three MCHB-funded research projects. The first project was a study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of home intervention on the growth, development, and feeding behavior of children with failure to thrive. The second project was designed to follow up on the first by evaluating the long-term effects of the intervention. The third project was a two-phase study. The first phase examined the ethnotheories of adolescent African-American mothers and African-American grandmothers regarding parenting, adolescent development, and child rearing. The second phase of the study was a 1-year, three-generation, development-oriented intervention, in partnership with community family-support organizations,

consisting of biweekly home visits, monthly support groups, and coordination with community services.

Findings

The presentation will have three objectives. The first is to make available information on the relationship between paternal roles and the well-being of children from African-American families with low incomes. Study findings support ecological theories linking paternal involvement with children's well-being. Discussants will argue for the institution of family-oriented policies that promote positive father involvement.

The presentation's second objective will be to provide an ecological perspective on the role of fathers whose babies are born to urban African-American women with low incomes, and to explore the processes by which a father's involvement with his child is shaped. Study findings suggest that several ecological factors encourage fathers' involvement with their children, while others discourage it. Discussants will argue that young fathers need help overcoming barriers to involvement with their child; such barriers include differences in mothers', fathers', and maternal grandmothers' view of fathers' role (particularly regarding their ability to make expected financial contributions to the family). Fathers may require job training, access to jobs, and other support services.

Finally, information will be presented on the determinants of feeding practices and the intergenerational factors involved in decision-making about infant feeding. Study findings confirm that African-American cultural feeding norms include the early introduction of nonmilk foods to infants. The studies also suggest that African-American grandmothers play a dominant role in the decision-making process about how and what to feed their grandchildren. Discussants will emphasize the importance of programs that target grandmothers as well as mothers in efforts to ensure that infants' diets are nutritionally adequate and that behaviors discouraging the development of early childhood caries are adopted. They will argue that the use of qualitative research methods with an ecological, multigenerational focus can provide a rich description of the context within which infant feeding decisions are made.

For more information about the MCH Research Program, contact Kishena Wadhvani, c/o Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 5600 Fishers Lane, Parklawn Building Room 18A-55, Rockville, Maryland 20857; phone: (301) 4443-2927; e-mail: kwadhwan@hrsa.gov.

