



The pernicious effects of stress on children's development are well documented. Poverty, racial discrimination, and other stressors that often accompany growing up in a low-SES environment are powerful variables that forecast trajectories across the lifespan in multiple domains, including cognitive development, psychosocial development, educational attainment, and physical health (Heckman 2006 *Science*; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Miller Chen Parker 2011 *Psych Bull*; Yoshikawa, Aber, Beardslee 2012 *Amer Psyc*).

Despite these general patterns, not all children and adolescents from low-SES backgrounds and minority groups have, or go on to develop, such detrimental outcomes (Priest et al., 2013; Masten 2001). This observation raises a fundamental question for prevention scientists studying resilience and for clinical researchers developing applications: What enables some minority youth to remain healthy and competent whereas others show declines following acute or chronic stress exposure?

The role of protective caregiving

A strong empirical literature from basic research studies – along with an emerging set of findings from applied research – suggests the answer to this question involves experiences in the family environment (Luthar, 2006). In particular, the provision of protective caregiving – caregiving that includes high levels of emotional support and warmth, involvement, bi-directional communication, and cooperative problem solving – can devel-

op resilience in youth and can mitigate the negative developmental outcomes that beset children exposed to heightened levels of contextual stressors (Zapolski et al., 2016).

The centrality of supportive, nurturing caregiving in protecting children from stress and adversity is well established in basic research (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001). These benefits are manifested in children's educational, social, emotional, and behavioral functioning (Flouri, Midouhas, Joshi, & Tzavidis, 2014; Laucht, Esser, & Schmidt, 2001). Protective effects have also been documented with respect to children's physical health, with evidence indicating that parental warmth and sensitivity can favorably mold stress-response tendencies in vulnerable children (Cicchetti & Blender, 2006; Gunnar & Quevedo, 2007), as well as mitigating the wear and tear that adverse experiences exert on children's physiology (Chen et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2007).

Applied research on this topic that scientists at the Center for Family Research (CFR) have conducted in recent years provides key evidence for the causal effects of supportive parenting in protecting children from stress. CFR scientists leveraged data from multiple randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of family-based prevention programs for African Americans; such RCTs are uniquely suited to test causal hypotheses about family processes (see Cowan & Cowan, 2002). Programming can ameliorate associations of contextual stressors (e.g., poverty, racial discrimination) with subsequent

negative health and developmental outcomes, including impairments in brain development, physical health, and mental health (Brody et al., 2017; Brody et al., 2021; Brody et al., 2016). Program-related enhancements in protective caregiving were also found to be partially responsible for program effects on children's health.

Supportive parenting and minority families

Supportive parenting has been conceptualized in various ways in empirical research. Perhaps most commonly, supportive parenting is defined as a general overall climate of nurturance and warmth within the parent-child relationship (Simons et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2011; Flouri et al., 2014). Bidirectional communication, clear and consistent expectations, love, and expressions of affection are included in supportive parenting. Research beyond CFR has also considered specific parenting behaviors that exemplify supportive parenting. For racial minority youth, one particular practice of interest has been parents' use of racial socialization strategies. Racial socialization involves parents' teaching children about their race and ethnicity as a means to promote racial identity, raising awareness of racial discrimination, and preparing children to overcome racial bias and adversity (Neblett, Terzian, & Harriott, 2010). Parents' use of racial socialization has been found to buffer African American youth's experiences with discrimination in ways that preserve self-esteem (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007), sustain psychological well-being (Fischer & Shaw, 1999), promote stress coping ability (Brown & Tylka, 2010) and prevent problem behaviors (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). Racial socialization has also been documented as one of the mechanisms

through which family-based prevention programming can promote positive youth development outcomes in African American families (Beach et al., 2016).

Future research

Much more remains to be understood about the protective effects of supportive parenting. As a beginning, variables that contribute to supportive parenting remain under-identified. What differentiates parents who do and do not provide support when children encounter stressful life experiences? Undoubtedly, variation in the likelihood of engaging in protective parenting arises from numerous factors, including adults' individual characteristics, family history, child attributes, and contextual factors. As a second area, the existing literature on supportive parenting with respect to discrimination could also be advanced by considering the nature and consequences of specific activities in which parents engage following a discriminatory event. Pertinent questions in this area include parent-child discussion topics, concrete coping assistance, and subsequent child outcomes associated with these activities.

Key references:

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