Connections: Families and Schools Supporting Our Youth (Year 2)

Co-Investigators: Diana Formoso, Ph.D. and Mercedes ter Maat, Ph.D.

This project is a collaborative effort among NSU’s Center for Psychological Studies, Fischler School of Education and Human Services, and Broward County Public Schools to enhance the quality-of-life of low-income, ethnic minority children by developing and evaluating a pilot program to increase the family and school support available to them. This intervention seeks to enhance child coping skills, bicultural competence, positive family relationships, effective parenting practices, parent involvement and school-home communication, and relationships with supportive adults and peers, which are expected to promote children’s academic achievement and mental health. In Year 1, we used evidence-based practices to change the targeted protective factors and innovative research methods, including focus groups and interviews, to adapt such practices to the needs of low-income, ethnic minority and immigrant families. This was an important first step in a program of intervention research seeking to enhance the cultural competence and contextual relevance of evidence-based practices for use with low-income families from Latin America, Haiti, and the English-Speaking Caribbean. In Year 1, we established the feasibility of the intervention and acceptability of many intervention strategies for families from diverse income, ethnic, and language backgrounds. Year 1 also revealed the need for additional cultural adaptations and modifications to recruitment and retention strategies and the program schedule. We seek a second year of funding to determine if these changes enhance participation rates and further increase the program’s acceptability to families. In addition, if funded, Year 1 and Year 2 data will be combined to evaluate intervention effectiveness using a single-group, multiple-baseline design. We will examine pre- to post-intervention changes on protective factors and child outcomes using repeated-measures ANOVA and multiple regression models. Study results will be used to seek additional funding for replication and dissemination.

Validation Study of the Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey (LEOSS)

Principal Investigator: Ryan A. Reddin, M.S.

The negative impact of stress on police officers has been well documented and includes a wide range of negative physical (e.g., cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal disorders), and mental health (e.g., anxiety, depression) sequelae. In addition, the impact of stress on the law enforcement family (e.g., marital dysfunction, divorce, domestic violence) has been demonstrated in numerous studies. Despite the increased attention directed to the problem of police stress over the past several years, few investigative endeavors have focused on development of psychometrically sound assessment and screening strategies, which are critical to the determination of heuristic intervention approaches. The purpose of the proposed project is to extend research on a brief, early warning screening measure of stress among law enforcement officers: the Law Enforcement Stress Survey (LEOSS; Van Hasselt et al., 2003, 2008). Development of the LEOSS followed the behavioral-analytic model of test construction, which incorporates stress situations directly identified by the consumer group: police officers. The proposed project will expand on previous research on this instrument by: (1) obtaining normative data on a clinical sample of police officers, and (2) developing a scoring system that can be
employed to detect stress, and stress levels, in this population. It is expected that this effort will yield a measure that will be of considerable utility in stress screening and evaluation for law enforcement professionals nationwide. This project is a collaboration involving Nova Southeastern University, the Broward Sheriff’s Office Employee Assistance Program, the Behavioral Science Unit of the FBI, and the Warrior Resiliency Program of the United States Air Force.

A Comparison of Two Models of Parenting Support for Families with Children with Autism

Principal Investigator: Nurit Sheinberg, Ed.D.

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder characterized by difficulties in social interaction, impairments in communication, and a restricted repertoire of interests and activities. Current reports by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate the prevalence of autism to be one out of 150 children. Parenting a child with autism places extra stress on families, negatively affecting parent-child interactions and overall family dynamics. (Kuhn & Carter, 2006; Symon, 2001). Thus, implementing effective intervention is critical to ensure positive outcomes for these children (Nores, et al., 2005; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000).

In Broward County, last year there were about 100 children under the age of 3 diagnosed with autism. Therefore, there is a critical need to offer parenting training to this group of families. The goal of this study, being conducted as a collaborative effort between several centers at Nova Southeastern University, the Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood Studies (MSI), the Center of Psychological Studies (CPS), and the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences’ Family Therapy Program (SHSS); and two community partners, Early Steps and the UM-NSU Center for Autism and Related Disorders (UM-NSU CARD), is to compare the effectiveness of two parenting interventions, a didactic and an interactive model, aimed at parents with a child between the ages of 18 and 36 months diagnosed with autism. Twenty families will be randomly assigned into two parenting intervention models. A quasi-experimental, pre- and post- design will be used to evaluate the impact the interventions have on parenting stress, parenting self-efficacy, life satisfaction, parental engagement, children’s socio-emotional functioning and social communicative skills. The results of this project can have an important impact on the services available to families with a child under the age of 3 diagnosed with autism living in Broward County.

The Nova Project for Twice Exceptional Children

Principal Investigator: Fawzy Ebrahim, Ph.D., Ed.D.

This project is an effort to address gifted and talented students who have learning difficulties. The research team will carry out a coordinated program of scientifically based research to build and enhance the ability of elementary and secondary schools to meet the special educational needs of gifted and talented students.

The project will concentrate on the recruitment of gifted elementary students in Broward County with “general intellectual ability” or “specific ability aptitude” who also have learning difficulties in two broad areas—Autism or Specific Learning Disabilities. The project uses a 5-D Model—Discovery, Description, Documentation, Development, and Dissemination. Discovery
implements comprehensive evaluation to discover highly abled students with learning difficulties or social impairments; Description offers greater understanding of learner characteristics, evaluation procedures, and learning needs of twice-exceptional students; Documentation will result once a system to regularly analyze the characteristics and programming needs of twice exceptional students is created and established; Development of student academic talent areas will occur through the presentation of appropriate interventions; and, Dissemination will take place through publications, reports, and presentations of the program’s research and evaluations.

As a result of this project educators will: (1) increase their awareness and understanding of the number and characteristics of twice-exceptional students; (2) have knowledge of effective systems to comprehensively evaluate twice-exceptional students; (3) improve their attitudes about providing appropriate interventions for twice exceptional students; (4) have improved skills to understand the unique learning needs of twice-exceptional students; and (5) change their behavior by applying their new knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills as they implement more appropriate procedures and interventions for twice-exceptional students.

When Obama Became President: Meanings of Aging in a Time of Paradigm Shifts

Principal Investigator: Jacquelyn Browne, Ph.D., L.C.S.W.

Barak Obama became the 44th President of the United States on January 20, 2009. His election heralded a sense of change and possibility in a time of economic, social, and global crises. Within this harsh economic climate, the experience of aging contains its own shifting grounds. Entitlement programs and savings, meanings of retirement, leisure, and work have been and will be affected by the current state of the US economy. Already considered vulnerable and marginalized, this study will ask: what does it mean to be an older adult in these changing times?

Qualitative research is advocated as a method of choice in gerontology (Longino & Powell, 2009). Using a phenomenological approach, the structure and meaning of aging in a time of paradigm shifts will be explored. Data will be collected through taped in-depth interviews with a diverse number of older adults (Patton, 2002), and analyzed by the principal investigator and two graduate students. Sample will be purposive and derived in partnership with four Broward community agencies.

Broward County will be one of ten counties in the US to have the highest number of older adults (US Census Bureau, 2000). Addressing a growing need, recent reports like Re-engAGE for Good (The Community Foundation of Broward, 2008) describe the need to provide innovative opportunities for the growing number of baby boomers to be civically engaged as they age; the Updated Elder Analysis for Broward County (2006-2007) describes the need to listen to the voices of older adult in planning; the G.R.E.A.T. G.E.C. at NSU is seeking ways to promote gerontology education and practice at HPD and the larger community.

In light of these profound changes, this study is launched to improve services and learning opportunities for older adults and those who serve them by expanding meanings of aging in this turbulent time.
A Program Evaluation of the Summer Supported Training & Employment Program (STEPS)

Principal Investigator:  Maribel Del Rio-Roberts, Psy.D.

Transition services are an essential component of adequately preparing students with special needs to live and work in our community. Supported employment programs are particularly important in the transition process because they provide these students with community-based work experiences that enrich their overall quality of life and ability to function autonomously in the community. The Summer Supported Training & Employment Program (STEPS) funded by the Children’s Services Council of Broward County was established to prepare students in the transition process to enter the workforce after graduation by providing them with jobs in a variety of locations throughout Broward County. Also, the focus of Summer STEPS is to promote the acquisition of skills that will help its participants integrate into their communities and promote independence while enhancing their quality of life. Therefore, given the importance of this program, it would be extremely beneficial to conduct a formal program evaluation of Summer STEPS, in order to determine whether it is successful at preparing students to obtain and sustain employment after graduation. In addition, it is important to evaluate the impact that the program has on its participants overall quality of life and ability to function independently. Analysis of the program’s strengths and weaknesses will further contribute to promoting the efficacy of this important and much needed program in the lives of students with special needs residing in Broward County.