

Personal Agenda

My goal is to become an independent scientist who engages in longitudinal intervention research in the field of mental health with a specific emphasis on behavior problems in African American children. My current research examines the effects of parental involvement, structured extracurricular activities, and religious participation on the mathematics and science achievement of students in elementary school.

My interests can be broadly categorized as understanding protective factors that lead to appropriate development in early childhood. Specifically, my research agenda is divided into two interconnected areas of inquiry: (a) The development of behavioral problems in African American children and (b) Factors related to the development of high academic achievement in children at risk. Specifically, I am interested in pursuing ecological approaches to the study of psychopathology; particularly conduct disorder/aggression and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in African American populations. Of particular interest are the developmental pathways of these disruptive behavior disorders, implications for assessment and treatment, and exploration of the resiliency factors that protect some individuals from the negative outcomes that others experience. In addition, I seek to gain a better understanding of how constructs such as parent involvement, teacher-child relationships, and school quality serve as protective factors in relation to positive outcomes.

Previous efforts in this area

In pursuit of answers to my aforementioned research interests, I am using large scale datasets such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) and the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS). These studies have primarily focused on academic achievement by conducting secondary analysis of existing data. While this

has been a good starting point for my research, the next step in my professional development is to conduct longitudinal field based studies.

Specific questions to be addressed through the proposed research agenda

In particular I would like to determine how familial and social contexts effect behavioral problems in African American children. A key aspect of my proposed research would examine ecological correlates and the longitudinal trajectories of behavior problems and academic achievement in African Americans enrolled in kindergarten. These children would be followed for 3yrs in as part of a small scale longitudinal study.

Specific implications for the practice of psychology in the schools

This research is intended to inform parents and policy makers concerned with the ever increasing incidence of behavior disorders and poor achievement of African American children in public schools. With the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education and their underrepresentation on college campuses, significant research is necessary to provide solutions to these problematic issues.

Abstract

Educational research has consistently demonstrated the underachievement of African American males starting at school entry. Accounting for gender and ethnicity, African Americans males have the lowest performance on standardized assessments of academic achievement. In 2005/2006, less than half of all Black male students received diplomas with their cohort. The rate at which Black males are dropping out and being placed in Special Education far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement. Specific factors that contribute to this trend include the subjective placement of African American males in special education, underachieving peer groups, and low teacher expectations. While there are a multitude of studies that discuss the negative outcomes of African American males, the same cannot be said of the availability of studies that document the antecedents and possible interventions to these problems.

This proposed study seeks to identify the longitudinal correlates of behavior problems and academic achievement in elementary school. As such, this project contributes to the understanding of healthy development with a particular emphasis on African American youth. Utilizing a multilevel framework, this project will focus individual and contextual factors such as parent involvement and extracurricular activities that are hypothesized to influence child development. This project will gather detailed information from direct youth assessments, parental interviews, and teacher interviews.

In addition, the project will add to the current research base by determining if there are differences in the impact of ecological factors on subgroup behaviors of children, as defined by race and gender. Results from the study are expected to help researchers, policy makers, and practitioners understand the types of services stakeholders should invest in to improve behavioral and academic functioning.

Proposal

Extensive research has described the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education category of Emotional and Behavior Disorders (Losen & Orfield, 2002). However, the ability to identify processes underlying these social problems has been constrained by several factors. First, many research designs lack an ecological approach to the measurement of social behavior. There is danger in evaluating social behavior out of context because the appropriateness of any social response depends heavily on situational demands. Second, although comparisons between different ethnic groups are valuable, African Americans are not a homogenous group and many studies fail to take this into account (Meece & Kurtz-Costes, 2001). As stated by Wong and Rowley (2001) comparisons between ethnic groups imply that non-European Americans are deficit in some way and this type of research yields little when attempting to describe certain features associated with valuable outcomes. Comparative studies that use national databases to conduct research assume that all educational opportunities are equalized and that a shared ecological context exists between racial groups, but unfortunately this is not reality. Furthermore, ethnic groups have different economic and political histories (i.e. slavery and Jim Crow laws) that impact how society at large views and treats them and these micro-level differences cannot be assessed or controlled for utilizing between group comparisons. This is consistent with other researcher's suggestions that instead of using European Americans as the norm, more research focusing of ethnic minority children should be undertaken and this could result in a normative research database for various ethnicities (McLoyd, 1998). As such, due to differences in culture, opportunity, and context it cannot be assumed that process that lead to behavior problems in European American children have the

same effect in their African American peers. This is due to factors that are generally unique to African American children such as racism and discrimination (Garcia Coll et al., 1996).

The necessary context and participants required to address the question(s)

A longitudinal school based pilot study of behavior problems of African American children will be conducted in Toledo Public School System. New data will be collected to refine and develop measures related to behavior problems in African American children. This school-based study will explore how multilevel contexts contribute to the development of behavior problems. The following is a description of the participants, recruitment methods and instruments that will be used in the study.

Toledo Public Schools is a school district in Northwest Ohio, the fourth largest in the state. The school district serves students of Lucas County, the township of Washington and the city of Oregon to the city of Toledo. Of the nearly 36,000 K-12 served by the district's 62 schools, 54 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. The Toledo's public school population is 46 percent African American, 44 percent white, and 7 percent Hispanic, with 2 percent representing other groups. This district operates 38 elementary schools, which will be the target population for the study. The target enrollment for this study will be based on a beginning population of 150 children.

An estimate of the requisite number of participants

This project will involve assessing 150 children via direct assessments, teacher reports, parent reports, and student observations related to emotional control, aggressiveness, and non-compliance. These children will be following from kindergarten through 3rd grade. Repeated measures data will be collected on these children over the course of the study, which will enable the research to examine changes in relevant constructs related to behavioral problems in children.

An estimate of the budget necessary to accomplish this research

Subject Expenses (\$3,200 per year for the 3yr project): Expenses for this project will include incentives for parents/children and teachers for their research participation. Teachers will be paid \$10 and Parents/children \$20 for each year of the pilot project.

Supplies (\$700 for the total project): Survey and methodological supplies will be needed for the longitudinal study. These include the ASEBA, BASC-II, Carey Temperament Scales, Student-Teacher Relationship scale, Children's Behavior Questionnaire, Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale for Children, Behavior Assessment for Children of African Heritage, Parents Experience of Racial Socialization Scale, Family Involvement Questionnaire for Elementary School, and the Beck Depression Inventory. In addition computer scoring programs for the ASEBA, BASC, and BACAH will be purchased for computer scoring purposes.

The relative advantages and challenges of a collaborative multi-site research program to address the question(s).

This conference will enhance my ability in designing longitudinal studies of children. The conference affords a unique opportunity to interact with senior scholars who have completed such longitudinal studies, which will greatly benefit my development.