

EDITORIAL

Multilevel developmental perspectives on child maltreatment

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The knowledge base on the effects of child maltreatment on developmental processes and outcomes has increased exponentially since the early stages of this research were initiated approximately 50 years ago. Although early studies were fraught with methodological flaws and limitations (for critical reviews, see Aber & Cicchetti, 1984; Cicchetti & Aber, 1980), current studies are empirically rigorous, and both intervention and social policy initiatives are increasingly informed by the results of research investigations (Cicchetti & Toth, 1993, 2000). A consensus now exists that child maltreatment exerts a broad impact across multiple domains and systems of biological and psychological development, beginning at the time the trauma occurs and, unless intervention or other protective factors are operative, extending into adulthood (Cicchetti & Toth, in press; Jaffee & Christian, 2014; Masten & Cicchetti, 2010; Moffitt & the Klaus-Grawe 2012 Think Tank, 2013; Toth, Gravener-Davis, Guild, & Cicchetti, 2013).

Moreover, the sophistication of research conducted on child maltreatment has increased substantially. Technological and statistical advances have opened up more avenues for elucidating the mechanisms and processes that contribute to the deleterious consequences associated with maltreatment, and to the development of resilient functioning in the face of adversity, as well as for shedding light on the development and implementation of effective prevention and intervention strategies (Bernard et al., 2012; Cicchetti, 2013; Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Toth, 2006; Dozier, Peloso, Lewis, Laurenceau, & Levine, 2008; Toth, Petrenko, Gravener Davis, & Handley, in press).

In addition, the gains in scientific knowledge that have accrued have resulted in a dramatic growth in the comprehen-

sion of the genetic and epigenetic, neurobiological, neuroendocrinological, immunological, cognitive/representational, and socioemotional processes underlying both the developmental pathways to and the consequences of child maltreatment (Cicchetti & Toth, in press; Danese et al., 2008; DeBellis, 2001, 2005; Heim & Binder, 2012; Heim, Newport, Mletzko, Miller, & Nemeroff, 2008; Miller, Chen, & Parker, 2011; Pollak, Cicchetti, Hornung, & Reed, 2000; Pollak, Cicchetti, Klorman, & Brumaghim, 1997; Tarullo & Gunnar, 2006; Weder et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2013). One outgrowth of these advances in understanding developmental processes has been that in order to grasp fully the complexity inherent to the examination of the human mind, normal and abnormal, it is important that a multiple levels of analysis approach and an interdisciplinary perspective be incorporated into the research armamentaria of maltreatment investigators (Cicchetti, 2008; Cicchetti & Dawson, 2002; Cicchetti & Valentino, 2007).

Prevention and intervention scientists need to incorporate measures at multiple levels of analysis into randomized control trial interventions to more fully capture and evaluate intervention effects and mechanistic processes consistent with theory (Cicchetti & Blender, 2006; Cicchetti & Gunnar, 2008; Hinshaw, 2002; Toth et al., in press). The contributions to this Special Issue exemplify the growth of research on child maltreatment from a multilevel perspective. As research of this nature continues to burgeon, findings can be translated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of developmentally sensitive interventions that can contribute to reducing maladaptation and psychopathology and to promoting resilience.

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