Promoting Strengths and Resiliency in Single Mother Families

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INTRO

- Being a mother can be a challenging role for even the most successful, educated, or invested woman (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2015).
- Single mothers are often are both the primary caregivers and wage earners for their children.
- High levels of financial and emotional stressors result in SMs having a high risk for emotional distress and disruptions in parenting, which contributes to their children’s adjustment problems (Taylor & Conger, 2014).
- Important to identify ways to effectively intervene in promoting positive adjustment for single mothers.
PURPOSE

- Identifying processes and mechanisms that help SMs function well, despite the challenges they face, may be the best approach to improving the lives of children in single mother families.
  - Resilience literature consistently finds that having a warm, competent parent protects children against adversities.
- Model highlights two resilience factors implicated in the well-being of single mothers.
  - Social Support
  - Internal Strengths: Dispositional optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem
Resilience Factors

• Social Support
  ◦ Vital to healthy psychological well-being, coping with stress
  ◦ SMs with higher levels of social support have higher positive parenting behaviors, self efficacy, and warmer relationships with their children, and lower depression and anxiety

• Internal Strengths
  ◦ Optimistic individuals report less distress across a range of challenging situations
    • Linked to positive parenting/lower depression in SMs
  ◦ Self-efficacy can determine an individual’s coping strategies
    • Mothers with lower self-efficacy more frequently use punitive child disciplinary practice
  ◦ Maternal self-esteem positively predicts regular family routines, involvement, and warm relationships in SM families
Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Mothers’ Social Support
- e.g. perceived support, authentic connections, relationship satisfaction

Mothers’ Well-Being
- e.g. positive mental health, efficacious and competent parenting, positive coping behaviors and strategies

Mothers’ Internal Strengths
- e.g. optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem

Positive Child Outcomes
- e.g. social competence, lower behavioral & emotional problems, appropriate developmental tasks

Arrows:
- a
- b
- c
- d
- e
- f
- g
Interventions: Social Support

- Improving Social Support
  - Interventions often group sessions with a combo of education and social support
  - Participation in such programs may allow SMs to form social networks that provide much needed emotional support and mentorship
    - cost-effective, empathetic peers, opportunity to forge authentic connections with others facing similar challenges
    - May be crucial for maintaining gains made in treatment
Interventions: Bolstering Internal Strengths

- Internal resources are linked to effective coping strategies
  - fostered through psychosocial intervention
  - CBT is effective at increasing optimism
    - Unclear if such procedures have pervasive or long-lasting effects

  - “Strengths of the heart” traits such as gratitude, zest, and hope are associated with life satisfaction and well-being (Seligman, et al., 2005).

  - Overall, interventions that target specific internal resources that are linked to coping skills through reformatting negative thinking patterns appear to benefit single mothers.
Interventions that target the well-being of SMs are needed

We propose that a strength-based multicomponent group intervention that provides peer support in a group environment, and that additionally combines elements of cognitive-behavioral training, would be highly effective at improving adjustment in single mothers.

Need to acknowledging SMs as a multifaceted group deserving to be studied in their own right

- allows for better insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of this type of family structure
- allows for more effective intervention efforts