

Attachments Past and Present: Implications for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment



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Focus of Prevention Programs in the Early Years of Life

- On infants



- On parents



- On parent/caregiver-child relationships



Goals

- Summarize findings regarding the inter-generational cycle of maltreatment and discuss factors associated with breaking the cycle of abuse
- Discuss the consequences of maltreatment and identify protective factors related to competence and resilience
- Discuss implications of these findings for prevention and intervention within a relational paradigm.

Intergenerational Hypothesis of Maltreatment

Parents' own experience of having been maltreated has long been hypothesized as a cause of maltreatment in the next generation

- Steele & Pollock (1968) found rate of maltreatment across generations to be 100%
- Kaufman & Zigler (1987) review:
 - Retrospective rate = 80%
 - Prospective rate = 30%

Patterns of Caregiving From First to Second Generation

Of 47 mothers known to be abused in their own childhood:

- 40% abused, neglected, or abandoned their children during early childhood
- 30% provided borderline care
- 30% provided good quality care
- Of mothers who received good care as a child, 3% maltreated their children

(Egeland, B., Bosquet, M., & Levy, A.K., 2002)

Evidence for Intergenerational Transmission of Other Aspects of Parenting

- Parental attitude (van IJzendoorn, 1991)
- Parental control & discipline (Covell et al., 1995)
- Harsh parenting (Simons et al., 1991)
- Negative parenting, negative affect, and authoritarian style (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1994)
- Positive aspects of parenting (Benoit & Parker, 1994)

Conclusions

- There is considerable evidence for continuity of parenting behavior across generations.
- However, this research, especially prospective studies, shows considerable change in parenting quality across generations.
- Many maltreated individuals break the cycle of abuse. Why?

Major Characteristics Associated with Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

- Availability of emotionally supportive adult during childhood
- Supportive relationships
- Psychotherapy as adolescent or young adult

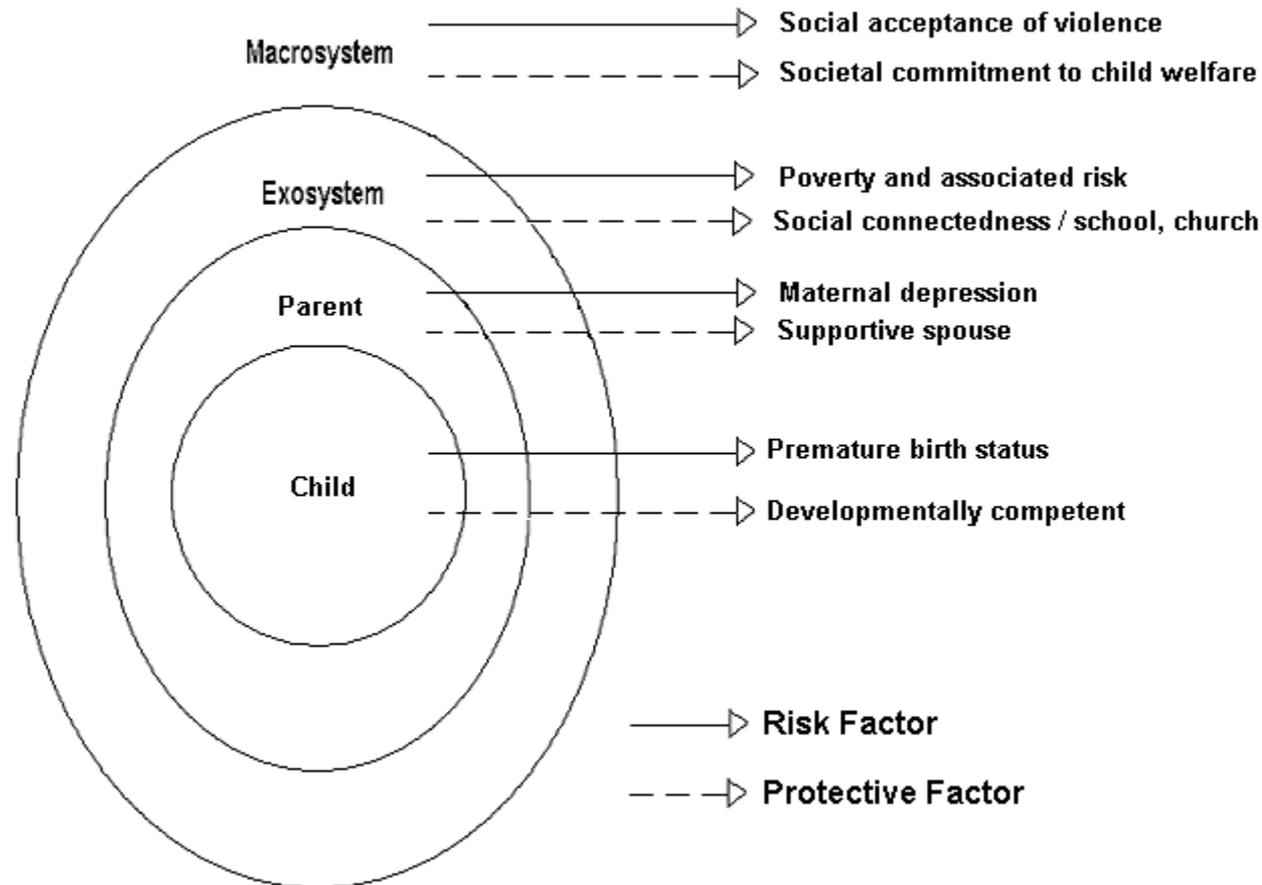
Explaining Intergenerational Cycle: Models and Mechanisms

- How do we explain the continuity and discontinuity (breaking the intergenerational cycle) of maltreatment across generations?
 - ecological perspective
 - attachment theory & inner working models

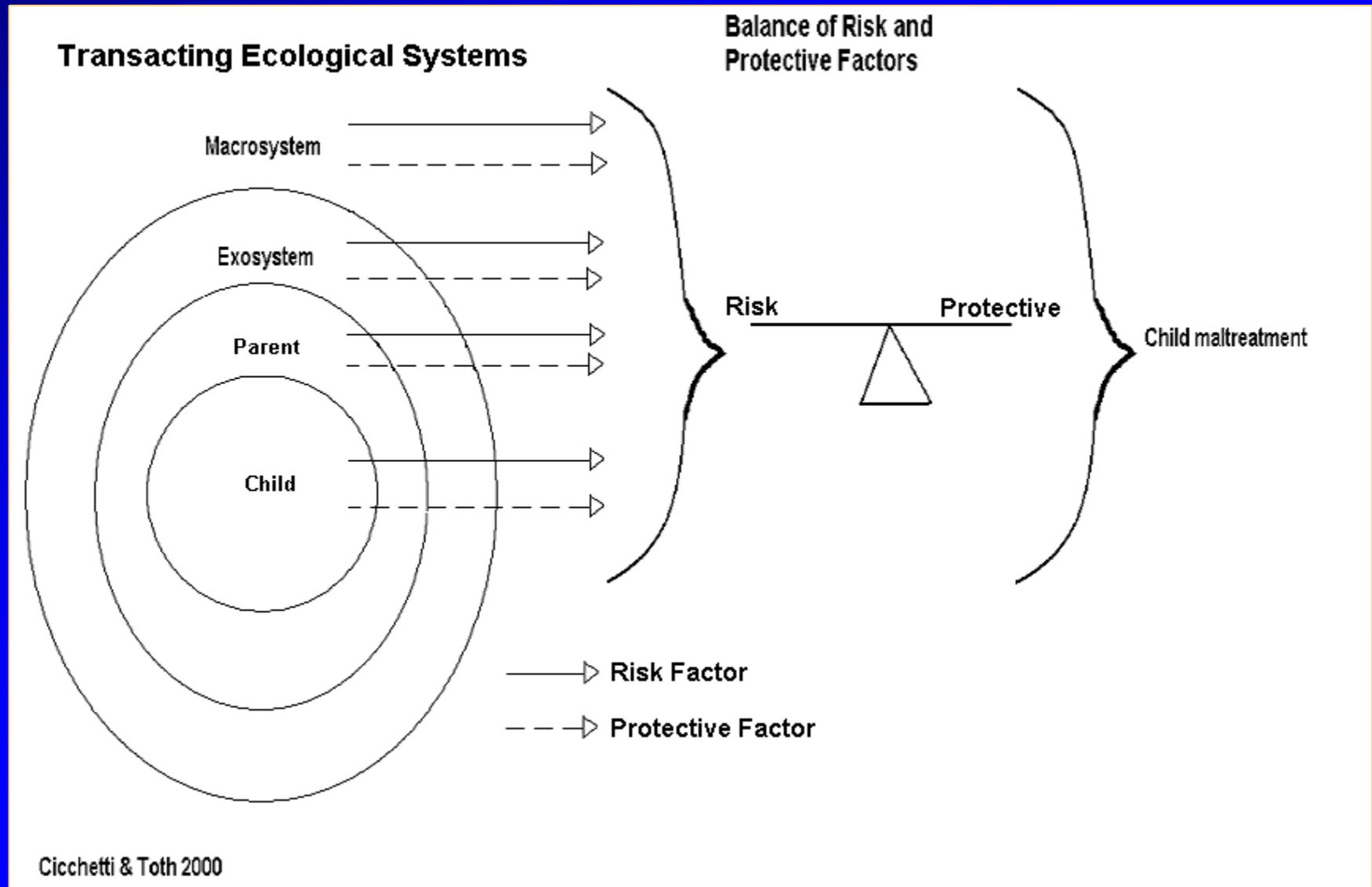
Ecological model explaining how maltreatment is transmitted across generations

Transacting Ecological Systems

Examples of Risk and Protective Factors



Ecological model explaining how maltreatment is transmitted across generations



Attachment Theory

- Enduring emotional bond that develops between infant and parent (or primary caregiver) over time
- Caregiver's response to infant's signals (e.g. crying) and bids for attention (e.g. smiling) shapes the quality of the attachment relationship
- A securely attached infant has a history of sensitive and responsive care
- From this first relationship infants form mental representation of self and relationship with others

Bowlby's Inner Working Models (IWM)

- Child develops cognitive model (IWM) based on quality of early parent-infant interaction
- This model influences one's expectations about self and relationship with others
 - e.g., secure child has developed an internalized view of self as lovable and others as caring and trustworthy
 - e.g., maltreated child has developed view of self as unlovable and of others as not dependable

Significant effects of maltreatment (birth to age 6) on developmental outcomes in adolescence

	Academic Achievement	Behavior Problems Total*	Internalizing Problems*	Externalizing Problems*	Alcohol Use	Drug Use	Problems with Drugs &/or Alcohol	Thoughts of Suicide	Tuancy	Expulsion from School	Drop Out
Physical abuse	X	X		X		X	X		X	X	X
Neglect	X	X		X	X				X	X	X
Psychological unavailability		X	X	X				X			
Sexual abuse		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	

*Composite teacher, parent, and youth rating on the Child Behavior Checklist at age 16 years

Conclusions

- 1) Early maltreatment has serious long term consequences
- 2) Psychological unavailability is a form of maltreatment that has devastating long-term consequences
- 3) Early maltreatment has highly varied consequences

Promoting Resilience

Classical definition of Resilience -- the achievement of competence despite the experience of major adversity

- Protective Factors Against Adverse Effects of Maltreatment:
 - History of competence in early years
 - Alternative caregiver and social support
 - High quality educational milieu and attentive teachers
 - Stable and organized home environment

Resilience as Process

Resilience is a developmental concept that characterizes the dynamic process by which the child acquires the ability to use both internal and external resources to successfully negotiate adversity.

- Implications:

- Resilience is not a static personality trait or personal attribute
- Resilience does not “cause” children to do well in the face of adversity
- Resilience reflects a developmental process over time

Approaches to Prevention and Intervention

- Risk oriented
- Asset oriented
- Process oriented

Process Approach to Prevention and Intervention

- Intervene with parents and child with goal of assisting child in developing ability to use internal and external “resources” for coping with adversity
- For an individual to use social support from a variety of sources requires social skills and competence.
- Such competencies can be enhanced through relationship based interventions

Major Goals

- a) Promote secure attachment relationship between parent and infant
- b) Modify parents' negative beliefs and expectations
- c) Enhance parents' understanding of child's behavior and development
- d) Promote competence in ability to cope with stressful living conditions