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Child362 4/5/10

Ecological Systems Theory Paper

Poverty is a growing problem all over the world. It is touching closer to

home in the past few years due to the economic recession our country is

facing. One in five children in the United States is poor. (Emon p.256-266

2001) Urie Bronfenbrenner developed a theory called the Ecological Systems

Theory. This theory consists of five systems. Bronfenbrenner uses a circle

diagram to demonstrate his theory. In the center of the circle is the

individual. Surrounding the individual are the five systems. These systems

are; Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The system closest to the individual is the microsystem.

The microsystem contains direct influences on the individual. Family,

school, peers, church, and daycare are all included in this system. Poverty drastically affects the microsystem. Families are directly affected by poverty in many ways including household violence and marital status. Parents of low income families are more likely to divorce. (Evans p.1352007) Fathers tend to be more aggressive and less warm towards their children and spouses. (Evans p.135 2007) Poverty is the main reason for neglect and abuse. “Children who live in families with annual income less than $15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than children living in families with annual income of $30,000 or more”. (2008 poverty para.1)

Almost 17% of low income families didn’t know their child’s whereabouts

within their own neighborhoods. (Evans p.135 2007) Parents begin treating

their children as young as infancy more harshly and are less responsive to

their needs. (Evans p.135 2007) Parents of low socioeconomic status are

less likely to take their children to the library on a monthly basis and be

involved in their school work. They are also less likely to speak

sophisticatedly to their children, especially their young children. (Evans

p.136 2007)

Children in daycares are affected also. “Contact with aggressive peers is

related to parent education and occupation.” (Evans p.134 2007) Three to

four year olds are 40% more likely to associate with “aggressive peers” in

their own neighborhoods, 70% more likely to have aggressive friends, and

25% more likely to interact with aggressive peers in a daycare setting.

(Evans p.135 2007)

The exosystem is the community, media, and the neighborhoods impact on the individual. Parents of low income families face more “psychological

distress” than middle to upper class families, due to less access to social

support systems.(Emon p.256-266 2001) There are inappropriate role models

for children within the communities of families with lower socioeconomic

status. In these communities there are also damaging peer influences and

less community resources. (Emon p.256-266 2001) Neighborhood violence is on

the rise in the neighborhoods of low-income families. (Emon p.256-266 2001)

“Smaller social networks, fewer organizational involvements, and less

frequent contact with social network members” (Evans p.136 2007) “Social

resources vary by neighborhood quality”. (Evans p.136 2007) Therefore

neighborhoods in poverty have less social resources then those of higher

economic status. “New York City, low-income neighborhoods average 17 square

yards of park space per child, compared with 40 square yards for the rest

of the city”.(Evans p.137 2007) Socioemotional development is also effected

by the child’s socioeconomic status. Their status can disrupt their stages

of development, which in the end can change their attitudes towards life as

they get older.

The macrosystem is the cultural attitudes and beliefs of the individual.

Due to increased moves in low-income families some children change schools

and neighborhoods often. (Evans & Wachs p.225-238 2010) This can affect

their cultural beliefs. For example if a child moves from a low income

neighborhood in northern California to a low income neighborhood in

southern or central California their entire way of life could change. This

can result in their beliefs and attitudes towards life to change. For

example adolescents can be affiliated with aggressive peers or even gangs,

which are more prevalent in low-income communities.

The two remaining systems are the mesosystem which fallows the microsystem.

The mesosystem is the interactions among the Microsystems. The last system

is the choronosystem. The chornosystem is historical events and their

impacts on the individual over the life time. This system also includes the

environmental impacts that affect the individual. In conclusion poverty

directly affects the five systems of Bronfenbrenners ecological systems

theory. Poverty changes how children live their lives. Not only does

poverty effect the family situation, but also school and neighborhoods.

Since children in middle childhood spend more time with peers than with

family they can be negatively affected. Being in a low- income neighborhood

can affect all aspects of a child’s development. The world needs to focus

on helping to eliminate poverty and provide networks and support groups for

those families who are dealing with poverty.

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