

**Drug Endangered Children:
Ecology, Psychological
Profiles & Long-term Risk**

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Drug Endangered Children Conference**

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DEC Stats

80% of children in the Child Welfare System
have prenatal drug exposure

- (Zero To Three April/May 2002 Dicker, S & Gordon, E. Page 28)

DEC STATS

Substance abuse contributes to 75% of
incidence of child abuse and neglect of
children in foster care

(No Safe Haven: Children of Substance Abusing Parents, National
Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia
University, January 1999)

DEC STATS

- The literature and the professionals who study and even serve the Drug Endangered Child still question;
 - Whether drugs endanger children?

Are we missing the needs of the Drug Endangered Child?

- Children in the Child Welfare System are four times more likely to have a disability or delay than a child living with a parent.
- Two federal laws *require* developmental screening for infants and toddlers: CAPTA and IDEA.
- Tragically and despite this, many if not most of these infants and toddlers with special needs (often drug endangered) still fall between the developmental cracks.

DEC & Ecology

- It is important to explore the symptomatology of DEC within an ecologically based and contextual model
 - interactions between the characteristics of DEC and the impact of the home environment and their trajectories.
- More information is becoming available regarding the synergy of drugs and the child's environment as it relates to the experiences and effects on the child;
 - reflecting that the 'sum is greater than the parts'.

DEC & Ecology

- The poor parenting of a caregiver under the influence of substances and the possibility of multiple caregiving placements put these children at significant risk for attachment difficulties

– *(In utero drug exposure and maternal-infant interaction: The complexities of the dyad and their environment. Infant Mental Health Journal, Freier, 1994).*

- Exploration of number and characteristics of caregivers is essential to understanding and appropriately intervening with the DEC.

DEC & Ecology

- Limited investigation of DEC and kinship care
- Most of the children living with grandparents and other relatives are there because of something to do with drugs or alcohol.
- Relatives have many and varied understandings and reactions to caring for the DEC

DEC: Ecology & Development

- Growing up in a DEC environment can affect all areas of development.
 - daily chaos
 - lack of safety
 - poor communication
 - Violence
 - disorganization
- Can impact the child's cognition & most often their neuropsychological function (attention, learning, memory, language, physical development, motor skills, sensory integration etc.)

DEC: Ecology & Development

- Children growing up in these environments often do not have the fundamental developmental experiences required to
 - Self-regulate
 - Relate
 - Communicate
 - Think

DEC: Ecology & Development

- There are growing concerns related to factors such as
 - respiratory distress (allergies, asthma)
 - sleep disturbances
 - eating concerns (over/under eating and other food & trauma presentations)
 - auditory and visual disturbances
 - Seizures
 - require further investigation

DEC: Psychological Profiles

- The child's psychological profiles must be considered
- There are some trends
 - Language
 - Sensory
 - Visual spatial
- Of import is the variability in the neuropsychological profiles of the DEC

DEC: Psychological Profiles

- Variability
 - Between domains
 - Within domains
 - resembling an irregular 'saw tooth pattern'
 - Within subtests
- 'Swiss cheese' profiles
 - very difficult to interpret
- Utilizing parametric aggregate scores (averages etc.) may conceal this variability and demonstrate misleading results.

DEC: Psychological Profiles

- Variability may contribute to contradictory findings
- Pilot study
 - Physical and developmental data revealed scores within normal limits
 - Functional status concerns reflected significant neurodevelopmental and psychosocial difficulties.

DEC: Psychological Profiles

- Another concern as it relates to neurodevelopmental outcomes for DEC is the 'sleeping effect'
- DEC studies which report child outcomes are misinterpreted to suggest that these findings are predictive into the indefinite future
- Child outcomes are very affected by development over time
- A 'sleeping', in the negative sense, suggests belated difficulties or something that is not immediate but later can become a problem
 - For example, if a child is given a language evaluation at two years of age it is not predictive of language at 10 or even 5 years of age due to the nature of language development and how brain development and ecology interact."

• (*Drug Endangered Children: Risk Factors & Neuropsychological and Psychosocial Development*, Freier Randall, 2009).

DEC: Long-term Outcome

- Current information regarding adverse childhood events and long-term outcomes for mental and physical health insist on timely intervention
- The greater number of childhood traumatic exposures, the greater risk of early adult disease and death, from any cause.
- Many chronic diseases of adults are determined in childhood, not by disease but by the events of childhood.

JAMA 2001 286 Vincent J.Felitti, MD,

DEC: Long-term Outcome

- This is crucial in light of recent research findings demonstrating high numbers of adverse events experienced by DEC
– Randall, Powell, Tucker (submitted 2010)
- Most importantly is the need for interventions to make a change in these potentially negative trajectories

DEC: Long-term Trajectory

- Scientific evidence that even neuronal regeneration is possible given the right 'environment'. The 'Hard Wired to Connect' report, 2003
- Research demonstrates that an improved social environment can change a heritable vulnerability into a positive behavioral asset.
- This emphasizes a reason for optimism!
- Our interventions, should they provide an improved social environment can make a difference!

DEC: Long-term Trajectory

- The drug endangered child is at HIGH RISK
- However, those of us who work with or on behalf of the drug endangered child can tilt their 'balance' from risk to resiliency and help to ameliorate their functional status and change their trajectories.
