

Social Development Of African American Children In Poverty

Posted on October 2, 2018

Social Development and Childhood Poverty

In recent years, concerns have been raised over the social development of African American children who are living in poverty (Denby, 2013). Most of these concerns aim at understanding their academic, emotional functioning, and behavioral development. Efforts to understand these concerns give rise to social and emotional development (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

Meaning and Dimensions of Social Development

Social development can be defined as a situation where individuals develop dispositions and abilities that help them to have the competence and emotional adjustment for them to meet the demands of a social environment. Social development involves having acceptable personal, ethnic, and gender identities. It also means having the capacity for intimate relations, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior (Denby, 2013). Cultural and social factors play significant roles in the development of African American children, and hence, they can't be underestimated (Kristin Anderson Moore, 2009). Our research will also be less illuminating if we don't consider the ability of schools, families, and neighborhoods to provide protective and sound environments for the proper development of these children. Various research gives disturbing findings on the social, academic, and emotional functioning of African Americans who come from poor backgrounds. Multiple issues are associated with being poor and African American (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). These issues include early pregnancies, substance abuse, low self-esteem, poor academic performance, aggression, racial discrimination, impulsivity, externalizing disorder, and attention deficits. These children have a lot of behavioral issues (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). However, among them, there are very few severe emotional disturbances being reported. Most of the researchers have shifted their attention to social and emotional factors and specific psychological processes. Most social development emphasizes family and community socialization, in which these children grow up and adopt the goals, values, habits, and knowledge that are needed for them to function effectively. The unique culture of African Americans affects the behavior of their children as well as how they develop socially and emotionally (Kristin Anderson Moore, 2009).

Ethnic Identity Self-Esteem and Mental Health

When dealing with emotional factors amongst African American children, one cannot fail to recognize the role of ethnic identity and self-esteem. In the past few years, researchers have suggested that there is a relationship between ethnic identity and self-esteem. Although this topic cannot be easily related to culture, it can help to understand the external valuation and social context of African American children. Self-esteem is substantially associated with mental health. It is positively related to motivation, assertiveness, self-confidence, and enthusiasm and also negatively related to depression. Therefore, self-esteem is an essential indicator of social and emotional functioning (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). African American Children are thought to have low self-esteem, which leads to other social problems. The needs and socialization of African Americans are unique to any other racial group in the United States of America. First of all, is that African American children must struggle to mature and become grown-up adults in an environment in which they are considered a minority racial group. Therefore, specific behaviors shape their character differently from other races in the United States of America (Kristin Anderson Moore, 2009).

Historical and Economic Context of African American Childhood

African Americans are people of African descent who were brought to America to work as slaves in the early 1600s. Their children include those who are currently under eighteen years of age. In 1997, statistics showed that there were 68.7 million children in the United States, and 14 percent of them were African American. However, children who are considered to be very poor back are those of European ancestry, followed by children of African American descent. In 1997, statistics showed that 35 percent of children of African Americans came from needy families. Compared to children of other ancestry, African American children are more likely to experience poverty because of racial disparities (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Racial differences are the reasons behind the woes of African American children. When children suffer a lot of poverty during their childhood, it has a lot of effect on their school achievement and even cognitive development. Further research has shown that African American families are more likely to settle in impoverished urban slums than children of European Americans who are of equal economic status (Alexander Rudolph, 2011). Moreover, most African Americans have no educational, occupational, and social resources to support their children, which include providing them with the best education and health facilities (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Therefore, these children turn to violence. This involves the formation of gangs, crime, and substance abuse activities (Alexander Rudolph, 2011). Even when African American children escape poverty, there is a very high probability that they will experience it in their neighborhoods. Neighborhood conditions can significantly affect children's development. For example, those children who are brought up in a well-up society are thought to have a higher cognitive functioning than children from well-up families who were brought up in poor neighborhoods.

Family Structure and Economic Stability

Another factor that usually affects the social development of African-American children is the structure of a family. In 1998, 54 percent of African American children were being brought up by their mothers only. What leads to female-headed households is marital dissolution, and when unmarried women give birth, both factors are common in African American societies. This can be associated with the poor economic status of African American men. African American men who are stable financially experience high marriage rates, and few divorce cases are reported among them as compared to African American men who are not stable financially (Alexander Rudolph, 2011). Employment factors are only one among very many other factors that cause family issues among African Americans; when parents divorce or separate, African American children are more likely to be affected by poverty. Moreover, differences in family structure are not the only reasons that cause a lot of poverty in African American children. The poverty levels of African American children living with both of their parents are the same as the poverty levels of European American children who spend all their lives with single parents. These differences can be associated with racial discrimination in mortgage lending, housing, education, and employment. African American children are also said to receive very low scores on IQ tests, reading tests, and writing tests. Factors that can contribute to this include poor home learning environment, teacher expectancy, cultural bias in IQ tests, economic resources, and differences in the quality of schools (Alexander Rudolph, 2011). African American children are also said to have health issues due to a lack of proper health services, which is associated with poverty. Iron deficiency usually affects brain development, which, in turn, affects motor and cognitive functioning. Children with elevated blood lead levels have high performance in academics, increased impulsiveness, and shorter attention spans.

Culture Parenting and Child Development

However, despite a lot of critiques being laid on the social development of African American children, Research on parenting has proved that a relationship exists between culture and parenting values (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Cultural influence on parents has evidently been seen in the African American community. Therefore, an African American parent is likely to utilize physical and emotional punishment other than any other ethnic group in the United States since they place more value on obedience. Moreover, in African Americans, the community works together with society in raising a child (Kristin Anderson Moore, 2009) (Francesco Acciai, 2016). African American parents teach their children unique skills on how to adapt to American society. They also teach a lot of coping skills to their children. They usually encourage them to face the pain of life instead of being protected. Therefore, it can be assumed that children of African Americans are always ready to fit well in society. Given that most of them come from poor backgrounds, they are still likely to show symptoms of violence and post-traumatic disorder. They are also expected to have depression and some unpredictable behavior. This is because of the physiological and emotional effects of living in unpredictable, dangerous, and stressful conditions. These might be some of the very many reasons

why these children do not attend classes. Most of these children are forced to join specialized schools at the end of the first grade (Alexander Rudolph, 2011). However, the government has come up with school programs that promote social and emotional development among children (Hutchison, 2008).

Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage

Factors like limited access to supportive services, economic hardship, and the psychological burden of oppression have posed challenges to the social development of African American children (Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, 1997). The effects of these factors can be observed in their lives (Hutchison, 2008). This includes academic underachievement, Substance abuse, premature sex, childbearing aggression, mood disturbances, divorce cases, and instability in families. It is, therefore, clear that these conditions significantly affect the emotional and social development of children (Hutchison, 2008). Therefore, African Americans are academically marginalized and disengaged from school and destined for destruction in the 21st century (Shaffer, 2009). When these children grow up, they will not be able to be good citizens or providers. However, parents, community, and churches also have a role to play in these children's lives. But if they are not willing to take up their responsibility, then a whole generation is destined for destruction. Research has shown that investing in social development and academics for youngsters is of more importance.

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