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Family Well-Being and Social Environments: Correlations within Childhood

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Not too long ago, the big debate among child development advocates was whether “nature” or “nurture” was more important in determining the developmental pathway for any given child. However, the verdict has been reached . . . and it turns out that both are important! Reams of research now form a solid intellectual foundation that supports the correlation between a child’s social environment to their childhood, adolescence, and even their later adulthood. These early experiences, shaped by the people and circumstances in the child’s environment, play a very significant role in the lives, success, and ultimate sense of well-being among our community’s children. The child’s social environment is populated with adults and other children. What we are learning is that these interactions can have a tremendous impact on children and their development. Positive, constructive interactions make for a nurturing environment built on a strong sense of well-being; whereas negative, destructive interactions, especially over an extended period of time are toxic, disempowering, and damage the child’s sense of safety and predictability - often with devastating consequences. Every interaction our children have, whether with a parent, teacher, caregiver, or even a peer could have a noticeable impact.

We converse with parents and parenting groups a great deal in our community-based advocacy work. Many of these parents have an idea

that there are maybe one or two things that could have an adverse effect on our children. Technology is discussed, alongside the school bus ride where most parents are pretty sure all bad words are learned (to date, we do not disagree with them). But also discussed are teachers, Sunday school leaders, Little League coaches, child friendships, spanking and discipline, candy and fast food, together with scores of other ideas. All of these circumstances, exposures, interactions, and relationships can play a part in the life of a child, although we don't always immediately know the results.

However, we *want* the results. Within every issue of JARC, we aim to tackle topics that are not only interesting, but topics that also allow us to better understand families and childhood. In turn, these topics can help us learn more how to best promote health and well-being. This new issue, with the help of Susan Landry of the Children's Learning Institute, gives us a window from which to look inside family well-being and social environments. Oftentimes, it is easy to forget that there is more to the whole child than just one certain socioeconomic or demographic detail.

For those of us focused on data and research around our children, nothing has an impact on childhood like poverty. Interestingly enough, after decades of near silence on childhood poverty, the topic is now a key area of discussion. Whether it is income inequality or poverty's impact on

healthcare and childhood education, poverty *is* discussed as a major factor towards children's outcomes. However, there are so many different factors placed within poverty for us to select. Within this issue, we decided the approach of family well-being within the context of poverty was pertinent, particularly with changing modern society.

In a country with some of the highest levels of teenage pregnancy, research finds some unique family environments and potentially negative social environments with young parents. We have also added research focused on families in other countries to give this issue an added angle necessary for an increasingly accessible world.

We have articles that range from childhood obesity to the need for physical activity – popular items in the world press and important items for a *literally* growing group of youngsters. Some of the articles specifically examine direct-access care to families, with a focus on the prevention of child abuse or the implementation of Texas programs. We have a number of reports from the field where professionals step up to the plate and take a swing at a tough issue confronting our children in a bold and effective manner.

However, this expansive issue has one overarching theme – how does family well-being and social environments affect the children of today? And how will it affect the children of tomorrow? You as the reader

have the opportunity to learn from this new publication and hopefully, will find opportunities to apply whatever you learn towards improving the environments of the children around you. We hope you find the articles and reports in this issue as informative as we did – our community's children deserve positive and nurturing environments, so let's get busy building them!