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50 Years After the War on Poverty

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It is entirely appropriate that the Journal of Applied Research on Children (JARC) publish this issue of articles on research regarding improving the lives of children living in poverty 50 years after President Lyndon B. Johnson initiated the war on poverty. In the intervening half-century significant strides have been made to reduce poverty in senior citizens thanks to Medicare and improved Social Security benefits. However, childhood poverty has stubbornly remained in the 21 to 23% range despite Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and other measures to reduce childhood poverty. Most unfortunately, the recession of 2008 affected poor families to a greater extent than middle and upper income families and economic recovery for poor families has lagged behind that of other families. The articles in this issue of JARC demonstrate that there are effective evidence based measures that reduce the negative effects of childhood poverty by improving their health, development, well-being, and learning abilities. Thus, we know what to do to improve childhood poverty, we just need to implement these measures on a large scale to reach all impoverished children.

Golden indicates that Head Start, Early Head Start, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, or Food Stamps), Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), Child Tax Credits (CTC) and child care assistance have scored important successes in improving the health and economic outcomes of children living in poverty. Indeed, other studies have shown that these measures reduce childhood poverty by about half. Another paper by Joshi discusses the effectiveness of Head Start in favorably impacting the educational outcomes of impoverished children.

Waldfoegel demonstrates that the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) which takes into account the effects of measures to improve childhood poverty by race and ethnicity is more accurate than the Official Poverty Measure (OPM).

Presser, Raver, and Masucci show that increasing low-income mothers' educational attainment leads to increased income, decreased unemployment, and decreased poverty in those families, thereby improving their children's chances for success. Similarly, Smith points out that supporting parental engagement in linguistically diverse families can positively influence children's development, early learning, school readiness, and long term educational success.

In the educational arena Tarasawa, Ralson and Waggoner indicate that leveraging university-school district research partnerships allows school districts to rigorously evaluate programs to increase learning in early kindergarten transition summer programs. This demonstrates that such partnerships can develop evidence-based educational programs to

improve the learning abilities of children living in poverty. Similarly, Whipple, Genero, and Evans point out that task persistence improves the educational attainment and reduction of childhood poverty over time.

Finally, Branham and Holland show that homelessness negatively affects parental relationship with their children thereby negatively affecting their development, behavior, and learning abilities strongly suggesting that efforts to reduce homelessness in families will positively affect children's outcomes.

Fortunately, many organizations and government officials are beginning to realize that "Children are Our Most Important Resource" and that "Children are 25% of Our Population and 100% of Our Future" and calling for an increase in measures to reduce childhood poverty. About fifteen years ago Great Britain realized that their childhood poverty rate was an unacceptably high 20% and passed several relatively inexpensive measures to reduce this. After ten years they had successfully reduced this rate to 10% demonstrating that it is possible to address this pressing issue thru enlightened policies and determination. Therefore, it is now time that the United States take similar actions to significantly reduce childhood poverty. Robert Heckman Ph.D., a Noble Prize winning economist, has demonstrated that for every dollar invested in improving the health and development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers there is a societal economic return of eight dollars over their lifetimes.

Many organizations such as the Children's Defense Fund, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have been advocating for years for the need to reduce childhood poverty to improve our country's economic viability as well as being "the right thing to do" for our children. The AAP has recently published its "Blueprint for Children" outlining specific steps to be taken to reduce childhood poverty such as affordable health care for children, paid maternal leave (available in all of the developed countries in Europe), affordable high quality child care, and safe communities for raising children, among many other measures. Hopefully, this issue of the JARC will stimulate an acceleration of programs to finally and permanently eliminate childhood poverty.

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