



The Social-Emotional Health of Young Children in Michigan 2000-2006

Mental health disorders have relatively the same prevalence in younger children as among older children, according to current studies.

Most young children do not receive any treatment unless their problems are severe. Estimates suggest 6 to 10 percent of children in child care settings are expelled or at risk of expulsion because of anti-social behavior or emotional disturbance.¹ In a limited number of sites, through collaboration between state mental health and child welfare systems, young children in Michigan child care settings may get assistance as part of a Child Care Expulsion Prevention project (C.C.E.P.) when they are exhibiting problematic or “challenging” behaviors.

Roughly 6,400 young children under the age of six were placed in foster care each year between 2002 and 2006 because of abuse or neglect.

This represents a rate of 10 young children per 1,000 placed in foster care. Abused or neglected children experience significantly higher rates of emotional distress. Half to two-thirds of foster children ages 0-6 score in the problem range in their developmental status according to national studies.² Unmet mental health needs make foster care placements difficult to find and sustain for children with emotional problems and can lead to multiple placements causing further distress.

Less than 1 percent of children, ages 0-6, received publicly funded mental health services.

On average 1,500 infants and toddlers under the age of three received such services and 2,700 children, ages 4 to 6. Systems to meet the mental health needs of children in Michigan are plagued by a lack of services and limited resources.³ Although African-American children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, nationwide African-American and Hispanic children are the least likely to receive mental health services. The mental health continuum of care works poorly or extremely poorly, according to over two-thirds of county Family Independence Agency (now Department of Human Services) offices responding to a March 2004 survey.⁴ Service gaps were cited though the entire con-

tinuum. In the long list of service needs, respondents noted the need for more services provided outside normal business hours and offices, more qualified therapists and psychologists willing to treat Medicaid-enrolled children, and services for pre-school children.

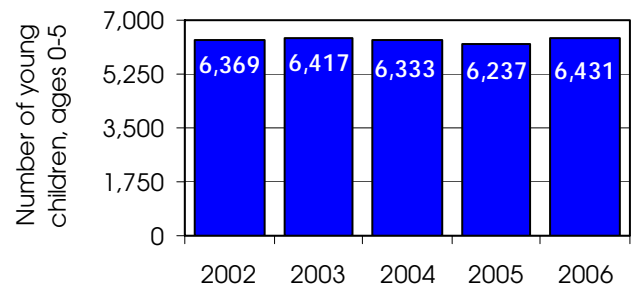
Social and emotional skills and competence are as critical to success in school and life as cognitive ones

While 60 percent of children enter school with the cognitive skills necessary for success, only 40 percent have the age-appropriate social and emotional skills.⁵

Parental and caregiver responsiveness are hampered by family pressures.

Emotionally healthy parents can demonstrate the responsiveness and sensitivity that enables their children to get their needs met, to learn life skills and to feel good about themselves. Two of the major family pressures which interfere with this interactive process include poverty—the daily pressures of meeting basic needs—and domestic abuse, which heighten the parental stress and depression that inevitably affect their interactions with their children. Pediatricians do not usually screen for maternal depression and not surprisingly, young children and their parents are also not likely to receive timely or appropriate treatment.⁶

Each year roughly 6,400 young children spent time in foster care.



Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

¹ Betty Tableman, *Presentation to Elkins Task Force on Early Education and Care*, (Lansing, MI: November 3, 2003).

² John Landsverk, *Child Welfare and Identification of Mental Health Needs* from Report of the Surgeon General’s Conference on Children’s Mental Health (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services).

³ Charles Jones to Marianne Udow, Memo Re: Mental Health Survey (Lansing, MI: Office of Performance Excellence and Disability Determination Service: Family Independence Agency, March 26, 2004).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Michigan Department of Community Health: Division of Mental Health Services to Children and Families. *Social-Emotional Development in Young Children* (Lansing: MI, revised 12/03) 12.

⁶ Neal Halfon, *Preschool and Identification of Mental Health Needs* from Report of the Surgeon General’s Conference on Children’s Mental Health, (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services).