

## Risks of Early Childhood Adversity for Academic Skill Development and Learning

*Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LINK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful dialogue about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.*

*In this issue we were interested in understanding how measures of early childhood screening can illuminate the processes in which early risk exposure may influence later school achievement among children living in Minnesota. We aimed to identify how developmental readiness skills assessed during screening may explain or buffer the relation between early childhood adversity (i.e., child protective services involvement and homelessness) and later academic achievement. Results indicated that early CPS involvement, substantiated maltreatment, and homelessness pose risks for later math and reading achievement outcomes.*

*Overall, there is a need for cross-system collaborations between child protection, homelessness services, and public schools to facilitate early childhood screening for those who are most at risk for later academic challenges, including children experiencing CPS involvement and homelessness.*

### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. Both studies found that early childhood adversities (maltreatment, homelessness) had enduring effects on school success. Why do you think these experiences in early childhood continue to have an impact on child functioning years later?
2. Our first study found that MPSI-R screening scores did not explain the association of early CPS involvement, childhood maltreatment, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading and math achievement outcomes. Why do you think it is important to understand the role of developmental readiness assessment tools, such as MPSI-R on the relationship between early adversity and third grade achievement outcomes? What factors do you believe led to early CPS involvement and confirmed maltreatment not predicting to developmental readiness scores at the time of screening? Do you see this phenomenon happening in your service system?
3. Although our second study did not find that executive function skills were a protective factor for academic achievement in the context of homelessness, there might be other factors that are particularly important for children experiencing high socioeconomic risk compared to those with low socioeconomic risk. Can you think of any other factors (e.g., in the family, schools, or community) that might serve as a protective rather than promotive factor for young children?

### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. The policies around child protection and housing assistance may need improvement to increase school engagement among those at risk for academic challenges. What does your state and local policy look like in terms of supporting those involved with CPS and homelessness services? How can we advocate for improvement in services for children and families in these systems?
2. Building strong relationships across systems that work with families (e.g., child protection, homelessness services, and public schools) could help to ensure that those most at risk for academic difficulties participate in childhood screening and receive early intervention. What barriers might exist in creating this type of cross-system collaboration and what are some strategies for overcoming these barriers?
3. What prevention and early intervention services are available to families experiencing CPS involvement and homelessness in your state and in your service system to mitigate the risks of long-term poor educational achievement? What services may be needed, but are not available? What kinds of resources are needed to develop and implement these services?