**McLeigh, Jill (PS1-B)**

**The Role of Social Cohesion in Child Maltreatment Prevention**

The proposed session focuses on the role of social cohesion in the prevention of child maltreatment. The first presentation prevents a research study demonstrating the potential preventive influence of social cohesion on child maltreatment, and the second presentation describes an initiative aimed at promoting social cohesion piloted in Tel Aviv, Israel.

**Neighborhood distress and child maltreatment: The mediating role of social cohesion**

*Jill D. McLeigh, PhD, Children’s Health, Dallas, TX*

Neighborhood distress has been associated with a number of negative outcomes for children, including child maltreatment. Although the relationship between maltreatment rates and neighborhoods characterized by impoverishment, high child care burden, and instability has been well-established, understanding the mechanisms through which these factors affect maltreatment rates is underdeveloped. This presentation explores the relationship between neighborhood distress and child maltreatment rates in a diverse set of neighborhoods in South Carolina using data collected from a survey administered to a random sample of caregivers with children under the age of 10 (n = 483), substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect, and Census block group data. The study investigates the possibility that neighborhood social cohesion (i.e., mutual trust and shared expectations among neighbors), mediates the relationship between neighborhood distress and child maltreatment. Significant direct effects of distress on rates of substantiated cases of child maltreatment were found. Multiple regression analyses were then conducted to assess the proposed mediation model. Social cohesion was found to mediate the relationship between neighborhood-level distress and maltreatment rates. The findings suggest that efforts to increase neighborhood social cohesion may be effective in reducing rates of child abuse, particularly in neighborhoods categorized by high levels of distress.

**A Strategy for Promoting Social Cohesion: Strong Communities for Children**

*Carmit Katz, PhD, Tel Aviv University, Israel*

Strong Communities for Children is a unique primary prevention effort focused on changing attitudes and expectations regarding communities’ collective responsibilities for the safety of children. The Strong Communities initiative was first implemented in South Carolina in the United States and then replicated in Tel Aviv, Israel. After briefly describing key elements of the initiative and characteristics of the community in Tel Aviv where the initiative was carried out, this presentation details the strategies that were developed with residents to promote social cohesion and feedback from residents and child welfare workers regarding the effects of the initiative. This session concludes with lessons learned and recommendations for community-based child maltreatment prevention.

Keywords: child maltreatment; prevention; social cohesion; neighborhood

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