Exposure to Trauma in Children Served by Behavioral Health Services

PRESENTERS:
Melissa L. Whitson, Ph.D.
Cindy A. Crusto, Ph.D.
Joy S. Kaufman, Ph.D.
Yale University School of Medicine
DISCUSSANT: Sylvia Fisher

History of Exposure To Trauma

- Prevalence of childhood trauma is an urgent public health problem that is largely a preventable cause of mental illness and health problems later in adulthood (Felitti, 2009; Sharfstein, 2006)
- More than 60% of children and youth in US were victims of or witnessed violence in previous year, with almost 2/3 of these children experiencing more that one type of trauma (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009)
- When experience of trauma goes unaddressed in childhood, epidemiological evidence demonstrates that childhood exposure to trauma has negative consequences that increase the risk for lifelong problems (Felitti et al., 1998)

Exposure to Trauma and SOCs

- Most research focused on the child welfare system (Walrath, Ybarra, Sheehan, Holden, & Burns, 2006)
- Children being served by community-based programs have been overlooked
- One study from CMHS national evaluation (N = 1,157):
  - Over 75% of youth had experienced at least 1 type of trauma or a PTSD diagnosis
  - Among those youth, 83.1% were in clinical range on problem behaviors (CBCL; Macro International Inc, 2007)
- Although SOCs have been highlighted as a promising approach to promote coordination among systems, children’s exposure to trauma is often not identified or addressed

Symposium Overview

- 3 studies on children who have been exposed to trauma and were enrolled in behavioral health services:
  - **Presentation 1** examines relationships between young children’s exposure to family violence, caregiver stress, and the child’s posttraumatic stress symptoms
  - **Presentation 2** looks at how exposure to traumatic events impacts children’s strengths and problem behaviors over time in a school-based SOC
  - **Presentation 3** focuses on young children in an early childhood SOC and provides detailed analyses of trauma exposure for these young children