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Conclusions and Directions for Future Research Concerning Racial Socialization

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The overall findings incorporated in these exploratory studies suggest that parental racial socialization processes are an important factor in:

1. determining favorable outcomes related to youth and parental mental health, and
2. influencing important decisions; such as youth avoiding violent confrontations.

A strong sense of ethnicity appears to be a strong protective factor for the mental health and behavioral outcomes of these inner city youth and their families. These multiple effects of parental racial socialization processes suggest that this variable is an important feature in the day to day lives of African American families residing in low income inner-city environments; therefore, the examination of parental racial socialization processes could be included in future studies on resilience in minority populations.

Data also revealed that several parental racial socialization processes constructs explained family use of child mental health services. Those providing services to urban adolescents need to be knowledgeable about the effects that culturally and contextually specific variables have on youth residing in urban environments. Therefore, it is important that future research studies on child mental health service use for urban families of color includes culturally specific factors such as parental racial socialization processes. Furthermore, although this study focused specifically on low-income urban youth and families, future studies must investigate the influence of parental racial socialization processes on youth and family mental health outcomes across urban, suburban, and rural, as well as economic strata. This type of research could

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provide invaluable information on the process of how parental racial socialization processes influence youth and family outcomes across a broad spectrum.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

These exploratory studies carry several implications for social work practice. For example, the identification of the protective qualities of racial socialization parenting practices may facilitate the development of appropriate services and intervention strategies targeting mental health and behavioral problems among youth and their families. First, these studies may inform social work administrators, researchers, and practitioners of how to better engage African American families in mental health services and intervention programs through considering a culturally-based family process (i.e., racial socialization) that evidenced influence on mental health service use. Second, these studies direct social workers conducting services and interventions to focus on a culturally-based family process that has protective effects for the mental health for both parents and youth. The current set of studies may have special implications for services and interventions targeting youth violence and behavioral difficulties. Due to the fact that current findings indicate that the presence of racial socialization may be associated with reduced youth externalizing behavior and avoidance of violent confrontations, these data may help guide the selection of culturally specific variables for services and interventions targeting the behavioral difficulties of urban youth of color.

Additionally, the current set of studies informs existing evidence-based models for parenting programs for African American families. Given the saliency of the racial socialization process in African American families, it is important that parenting programs consider the role of this construct in the development and implementation of parenting programs. Furthermore, because the field of social work is concerned with providing support to vulnerable children and those ethnic minority adolescents living in poverty, schools of social work may consider developing courses that specifically focus on culturally-specific protective factors that naturally exist among this group, which could be developed as a means of enhancing outcomes. It is *essential* for social workers, who are devoted to the welfare of vulnerable populations, to be educated on the strengths and strategies used by ethnic minority youth and families that help them positively adapt to pervasive environmental stressors they face.