Selections highlight research, evaluation reports, and other publications that inform the field about key issues in, and effective practices for, fostering economic self-sufficiency.


https://opressrc.org/content/using-brain-science-design-new-pathways-out-poverty-0

This 2014 report from the Crittenton Women’s Union discussed how executive functioning skills are important to escaping poverty and achieving self-sufficiency. The author explained that executive functioning includes skills such as impulse control, working memory, and mental flexibility and suggested that persistent poverty can influence brain development in children that later manifests as executive functioning deficits impacting education and creating employment challenges in adulthood. The author reviewed how improving executive functioning can help promote positive outcomes and discussed how policy and programs can be developed to target those impacted by social bias, persistent poverty, and trauma. Recommended remediation of executive function deficits focused on the use of coaching case management frameworks to help improve client executive functioning skill capacities.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/poverty-predictor-4-year-olds-executive-function-new-perspectives-models-differential

In this article, the authors looked at a predominantly low-income, population-based longitudinal sample of 1,259 children and followed them from birth. Their results suggested that chronic exposure to poverty and the strains of financial hardship were each uniquely predictive of young children’s performance on executive functioning measures. They concluded that temperament-based vulnerability serves as a moderator of the link between poverty-related risk and children’s executive functioning. They also discussed the implications of their findings for models of ecology and biology in shaping the development of children’s self-regulation.

https://opressrc.org/content/poverty-impedes-cognitive-function

This article hypothesized that poverty directly impedes cognitive function and shared findings from two studies, one on finances and the other tracking farmers over a planting cycle. In the first study, the authors experimentally induced thoughts about finances among poor and well-off participants. They found that poverty reduced cognitive performance only among poor participants. Similarly, they found that only poor farmers showed diminished cognitive performance before and after harvest, while rich farmers did not, despite both having elevated stress levels before the harvest. The authors suggested that because poverty-related concerns consume mental resources, individuals focus less on other tasks. The authors discussed social and policy implications relating to their findings such as the ‘cognitive tax’ experienced by low-income individuals in filling out lengthy forms, preparing for long interviews, and deciphering new rules.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/stressing-out-poor-chronic-physiological-stress-and-income-achievement-gap

In this article, the authors suggested that poverty is harmful, in part, because it exposes children to chronically stressful environments that have accumulated impacts on their psychological, economic, and physical development. The authors noted that an array of environmental conditions, such as environmental toxins, hazardous waste, ambient air and water pollution, poor housing, and crime, elevate the levels of chronic (or toxic) stress in the body. Similarly, psychosocial challenges, such as higher levels of family turmoil, family separation, and violence, can also impact healthy development. Children growing up in poverty, they suggested, demonstrate lower academic achievement because of their exposure to these varied and cumulative risk factors. The authors concluded that these risks build upon one another to the point of being toxic—directly hindering children’s academic performance by compromising their ability to develop many executive skills necessary to perform well in school.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/building-brain%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cair-traffic-control%E2%80%9D-system-how-early-experiences-shape-development

This joint Working Paper from the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and the National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs explained how executive skills develop, what can disrupt their development, and how supporting them pays off in school and in life. The authors suggested that being able to focus, hold, and work with information in mind; filter distractions; and switch gears is like having an air traffic control system at a busy airport to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of
planes on multiple runways. In the brain, this air traffic control mechanism or executive function is a group of skills that help individuals focus on multiple streams of information at the same time, and revise plans as necessary. The authors concluded that acquiring the early building blocks of these skills is a critical developmental piece of early childhood that is built upon through middle childhood, adolescence, and into early adult life.


https://opressrc.org/content/childhood-poverty-chronic-stress-and-adult-working-memory

In this article for the National Academy of Sciences, the authors brought together two separate research fields: (a) neuro-cognition and physiological stress and (b) the income–achievement gap. The authors noted that numerous previous investigators, using a wide array of study designs, uncovered consistent evidence of an income–achievement gap. Missing in this literature, they said, is evidence of underlying neurocognitive and biological mechanisms. Reviewing longitudinal data of 195 young adults who participated in a study on rural poverty, cumulative risk, and children's development, they found that the greater the duration of childhood poverty from birth to age 13 years, the worse one's working memory is as a young adult. First, they found that the duration of childhood poverty is related prospectively to working memory performance later in life among young adults. Second, they showed that the longer the period of childhood poverty, the higher the levels of stress during childhood, and the greater the reductions in young adults’ subsequent working memory.