

# Parenting in Context

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# Historical Precedents

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- Eugenic-era marriage prohibitions
  - Involuntary sterilization of (mostly) women with mental disabilities in the U.S.: By 1937, 31 states allowed for coercive sterilization
  - At least 50,000 people sterilized by 1949
  - Sterilizations continued well into the 1970s, possibly later
  - True extent of sterilization is unknown
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# Current Lines of Inquiry

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- # Parental skill/knowledge assessments
  - # Intervention evaluations
  - # Child outcome evaluations
  - # Qualitative investigations of parents' perspectives
  - # Investigations of mother's individual or interpersonal traits
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# Limitations of Existing Research

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- # Samples generally recruited from Child Protective Services - confirmed abuse and/or neglect cases
  - # Exceptionally small samples
  - # Focus on easily-measured child outcomes
  - # Limited life-course perspective
  - # Minimal data on fathers
  - # Few comparisons to other parents with similar socioeconomic status
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# Construct of Competence

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- # No legal agreement as to the minimum standards for adequate parenting
  - # No clinical agreement on adequate parenting
  - # How do we measure parenting or its consequences?
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# Parenting by Mothers with DD: Research Overview

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- # No differences in decision-making or maternal knowledge, when compared with mothers of similar socioeconomic status
  - # Greater likelihood of children's removal from the home
  - # Mothers often lack the ability to generalize their learning to actual situations
  - # Respectful and supportive interventions can be fruitful - tailored for learners with cognitive limitations & limited literacy
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# Well-being of Mothers with DD

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- # Life circumstances best characterized by overwhelming problems
  - # Girls with cognitive disabilities significantly more likely to be abused, particularly sexually
  - # High rates of comorbid psychiatric disorders
  - # Mothers have low self-esteem & fewer social supports than other women
  - # Low education levels, little chance for economic prosperity/independence
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# Well-being of Children whose Mothers have DD

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- # Greater levels of delinquency & school failure
  - # Sustain higher rates of neglect
  - # Sustain lower rates of abuse
  - # Some adults report great satisfaction with care received as children
  - # Some adults have good educational & employment outcomes
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# Poverty

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- # Receipt of SSI leaves adults with DD below the federal poverty level (\$512/month in 2000)
  - # At least 50% of the population with DD doesn't receive SSI or DI
  - # Women with DD have among the lowest rates of employment (24%)
  - # 1/3 of people with DD live below the poverty level, v. 13% of others
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# Heightened Vulnerability to Abuse

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- # Cognitive limitations
  - # Reliance on caregivers
  - # Desires to be compliant & “pass” as normal
  - # Limited access to sex education & abuse prevention
  - # Sexual abuse often longstanding & often perpetrator is well-known and/or family
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# Comorbidity of Psychiatric Disorders

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- # 1/3 of people with DD have psychiatric or mental disorders, rates which far exceed that of the general population
  - # Depression, among other mental disorders, has strong association with parenting difficulties - lack of nurturing
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# Availability of Supports

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- # Traditional family support programs benefit families of children with DD, not parents with DD
  - # Limited support programs in scattered sites across country
  - # Few combined residential/social support programs
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# US Supreme Court Rulings

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- # Parenting is a fundamental right
  - # Termination of parental rights can only be done with “clear and convincing” evidence of harm to the child, inability to parent, or probability that inadequate care will persist
  - # Parents have the right to due process protections
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# Characteristics of Child Welfare Cases involving Mothers with DD

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- # Extensive deference to expert testimony
- # Establishment of mental retardation shifts burden of proof from state to parent
- # Courts “resourcefully” legitimate termination decisions with formal findings regardless of the process

(from Hayman, 1990)

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# Discriminatory Realities

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- # Presumptions of incompetence without evidence, when parent has DD
  - # Higher standard of minimal care held for parents with DD
  - # Mitigating circumstances (domestic abuse, poverty, inadequate social supports, successful completion of rehabilitation) are ignored
  - # ADA is voluntary compliance - burden of securing justice falls on injured party
  - # Unknown extent of removal of infants at birth
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# Research Recommendations

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- # Longitudinal research on parents & children's well-being over the life course
  - # Use of parenting measures that capture the nuances of competence and caring
  - # Studies of parents who are not recruited through Child Protective Services
  - # Intervention studies
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# Policy Recommendations

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- # Global school curricula addressing sex education, parenting skills, violence/abuse prevention
  - # Aggressive measures to reduce the causes of poverty
  - # Enforcement of due process protections in termination proceedings
  - # Educational campaigns to reduce stigma
  - # Family-level supports and services
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