An Ecological Analysis of Maltreatment of Children with Disabilities

In a recent article (2011), Algood, Hong, Gourdine and Williams examined the literature on maltreatment of children with disabilities using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework. It is not clear how many studies were examined (the reference list contains 75 resources) or how many studies related to each dimension. Bronfenbrenner (1976; 1977) includes four dimensions of factors that can raise or lower risk for child maltreatment.

Microsystem (socio-demographic characteristics)

- **Age** – Children in preschool are at greatest risk.
- **Gender** – Boys with disabilities are more likely to be mistreated than girls with disabilities.

Microsystem (characteristics of the parent or child that increase risk)

- Children with disabilities require additional effort and attention which can increase parental stress. Parents of children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to emotional, physical, and economic stress.
- Children with disabilities can have behavioral problems that negatively affect their bonding with their parents and increase the risk of maltreatment.

Exosystem (community resources)

- Parents with limited social support may be at high risk of abuse due to feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with increased supervision and care of their child with disabilities.
- The authors found a link between economic disadvantage and maltreatment of children with disabilities.

Macrosystem (societal and cultural attitudes and beliefs)
The authors were unable to find any empirical studies related to the macrosystem.

The citation for the study is: Maltreatment of children with developmental disabilities: An ecological systems analysis, 2011, Carl L. Algood, Jun Sung Hong, Ruby M. Gourdine, and Abigail B. Williams, Children and Youth Services Review, 33, 1142-1148.