

Researchers at MU tackle family issues,

# For kids' sake

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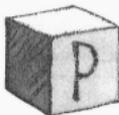


The well-being of one-fourth the population is at stake.

According to the 1994 Kids Count Data Book, Missouri ranks 34th in overall child well-being.

MU has a track record of working on children's issues. Consider:

- Dr. Bernard Ewigman's national model to revamp the way child deaths are investigated;
- The efforts of state Sen. Joe Moseley, AB '71, JD '76, Department of Health director Coleen Kivlahan, MS '83, Lt. Gov. Roger Wilson, M Ed '86, and Kaye Steinmetz, D-Florissant, advisory board member for MU's human development and family studies, to ensure the health and safety of children in church-run child-care centers; and
- The Child Development Laboratory's national Top Ten ranking by *Child* magazine.



### Preventing early births

Dr. Linda Woolery, BSN '71, MS '77, wants to get good information about premature labor into the hands of those

who need it the most, rural health-care providers and their patients.

Some rural Missouri counties, like Mississippi and Barton, have high rates of infant mortality. Gov. Mel Carnahan, JD '59, thinks Woolery's research is so important that in a taped introduction for the project's video, he notes that 11 percent of births are preterm, born before 37 weeks, and cost more than 1 billion health-care dollars in Missouri in 1992. Babies born prematurely are 40 times more likely to die than babies born at term, and premature babies are at increased risk for lifelong mental and physical disabilities.

While premature labor probably cannot be prevented, Woolery says that early identification and treatment can prolong the pregnancy and improve the outcome for the infant.

Woolery, an assistant professor of nursing, is developing a multimedia package that would be used for researching and developing a premature birth prevention program that could be delivered to rural Missouri health-care settings through computers. Dr. Mike Holden of MU's Campus Computing is collaborating with her on the project.

Current methods of predicting premature labor, involving factors like age, race and previous history of premature labor, are at best 17 percent to 38 percent accurate. "You'd do better flipping a coin," Woolery says. The system that she is developing involves 245 variables and uses algorithms to analyze patterns, frequencies and sets within data. She predicts that in the next five years, "We'll have a short list of variables that better predicts preterm labor for doctors and nurses."

Imagine, too, educational materials that permit patients to learn from an interactive compact disk program attached to a television. Within the next year, Woolery will test such a prototype through county health departments.



### Breast-feeding is best

Dr. Kay Libbus, BSN '75, MS '77, can think of a million good reasons to

breast-feed your baby, among them: nutritional, immunological and anti-allergenic benefits for your child; possibly higher IQs; lower cost than formula; and strong mother-baby bonds.

So why was there a decline in breast-feeding from 1984 to 1989, especially among low-income and minority families?

The advantages of breast-feeding have not reached economically disadvantaged women, says Libbus, assistant professor of nursing. In a 1991 quantitative study of Medicaid-eligible women, Libbus discovered mothers who thought breast-feeding was embarrassing and less convenient than bottle feeding.

"In our society, the breast is seen as a sex object, rather than a mammary gland," Libbus reports. "Society could provide places for women to breast-feed." Health-care providers could encourage pregnant women to breast-feed and provide support during the postpartum period.

The women in Libbus' study indicated their male partner or the baby's maternal grandmother influenced them to bottle-feed their babies. Only 23 percent of minority women choose to breast-feed when discharged from the hospital after giving birth; the percentage drops to 6.5 six months after birth. Those whose family or friends didn't support breast-feeding felt "out on a limb," Libbus says.

In her next study, a qualitative look at 40 women enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children program, she wants to learn what they see as advantages and barriers to breast-feeding. Her long-range goal is to look for interventions that would encourage women to breast-feed.

Through her work, she hopes to show how breast-feeding is easy, convenient, good for the baby and not embarrassing. Breast-feeding for low-income minority women can be empowering, says Libbus, who holds her doctorate in public health. "You really feel good when you're successful at something."



## I nfants in child care

A team of MU researchers looked at long-term effects of infant day care, and found nothing to worry about regarding full-time care.

The researchers were Drs. Johnetta Wade Morrison, assistant professor; Jean M. Ispa, associate professor; and Kathy R. Thornburg, MS '68, PhD '73, professor, all of the human development and family studies department in the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

The child-care issue is a pressing one, since the number of employed mothers with children under 18 has risen from 39 percent in 1970 to 62 percent in 1990.

Students from seven Missouri colleges, including MU, described the type of care they received in infancy: care by stay-at-home parent, part-time child care and full-time child care. In 1990, white college students were studied; in 1993, black students were studied.

The questionnaire measured the college students' attitudes about their friendships, self-confidence and identity. "Children in full-time care had higher scores than those who had received part-time care. There was no difference in scores between children who had been in full-time care compared with children who had been cared for by their parent," Ispa says.

However, something about part-time care appears to be problematic, Ispa reports. Perhaps part-time care for the children corresponded with part-time jobs for parents, meaning stress from lower salaries and no benefits. Or perhaps it reflected maternal frustration, feeling torn between the roles of worker and parent.

Because the study was based on past events, "We have no measurement of the quality of care the children received, and quality does make a difference," says Ispa. She finds recent studies highlighting the low quality of much of the available child care disturbing. "It's important for parents to find day care where their children will feel secure and where their emotional and intellectual needs will be met."

For Ispa, a mother who works full time outside the home, the bottom line is this: "You don't have to stay home full time to be a good parent for your child, but you do need to find a good setting for your child."

For helpful guidelines on selecting a day-care setting, call (314) 882-2792 and request Publication No. GH6234.



## Day care for TIKES

Mothers of children with disabilities seek high-quality day care, too. When Dr. Robert F.

Busch learned of a Census Bureau projection that, by 1995, two-thirds of children under 6 and three-fourths of school-age children will have mothers in the work force, he went to work. If this is true for normally developing children, the director of the Child Study Clinic in the College of Education was concerned about what happens to parents of children with disabilities. The supply of child-care settings with staff trained to work with children with disabilities has not kept pace with demand.

By taking a survey of Boone County child-care providers in 1988, Busch learned that providers were interested, but reluctant to accept children with disabilities.

Busch, Shirley Patterson and Ron Gillam obtained a six-year \$723,455 grant through the U.S. Department of Education. M-TIKES, as the project is called with Busch as director, stands for Missouri Training Individuals to Care for Exceptional Students. Its purpose is to train child-care providers so they can successfully mainstream children with disabilities into child-care settings.

During the first three years, 1989 to 1992, providers within Missouri were trained. During the remaining three years, through 1995, trainers with Head Start, child-care agencies and preschool program directors throughout the country are learning to train child-care providers. Child development information is given with an emphasis on adapting and modifying environments and activities.

About 10 percent of children nationally have disabilities. Of those, only 1 percent or 2 percent have severe disabilities like cerebral palsy or spina bifida. The remainder have speech and language delays or social-emotional problems. "They're slow, quiet, not talkative," Busch says. At preschool age, children with disabilities may not realize they're different. But they do like "belonging," or being part of a group. "They all like to talk and laugh and play with their friends, and to be loved.

"We need to accentuate their similarities rather than point out their differences."



## Divorce in black families

You don't read too much about how black fathers fare after divorce, do you? That's because there's hardly any

research available about them. Dr. Aaron Thompson is going to change that.

Thompson, assistant professor in human development and family studies in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, is conducting research with African-American fathers. African-American families constitute only 11 percent of American families. The probability of divorce for first marriages of blacks is higher than the 50 percent probability for all first marriages.

"African-American men in almost all cases had close ties with their biological children and stepchildren," Thompson says of the divorced men he has interviewed. Of the 12 divorced and four married African-American fathers in his group, the mean age was 44 years with an average of 14 years' of education and mean annual income of \$32,000.

"When the male married into a stepfamily, the wife brought the child into the fold. When divorce happened, the loss of a stepchild is as great as the loss of a biological child," Thompson reports. In general, the men were unhappy with custodial and visiting arrangements. Part-time parenting brought intense feelings of loss and distress to the fathers.

Divorced black men feel underappreciated by the institutions of work and of marriage, Thompson says. They put in many hours on the job, sometimes working two jobs to make a living, and consequently have less time to spend with their children than they would like. "On the job, they were overlooked for promotions that would've made making a living easier and, at home, they felt underappreciated by wives who didn't understand or appreciate the process," Thompson says. Eighty percent of the men interviewed said economic instability and lack of upward career mobility contributed to the end of their marriages.

Thompson hopes his research sheds new light on cultural differences about divorces in black families. "Given good options, I think black men would choose to be good fathers and husbands."