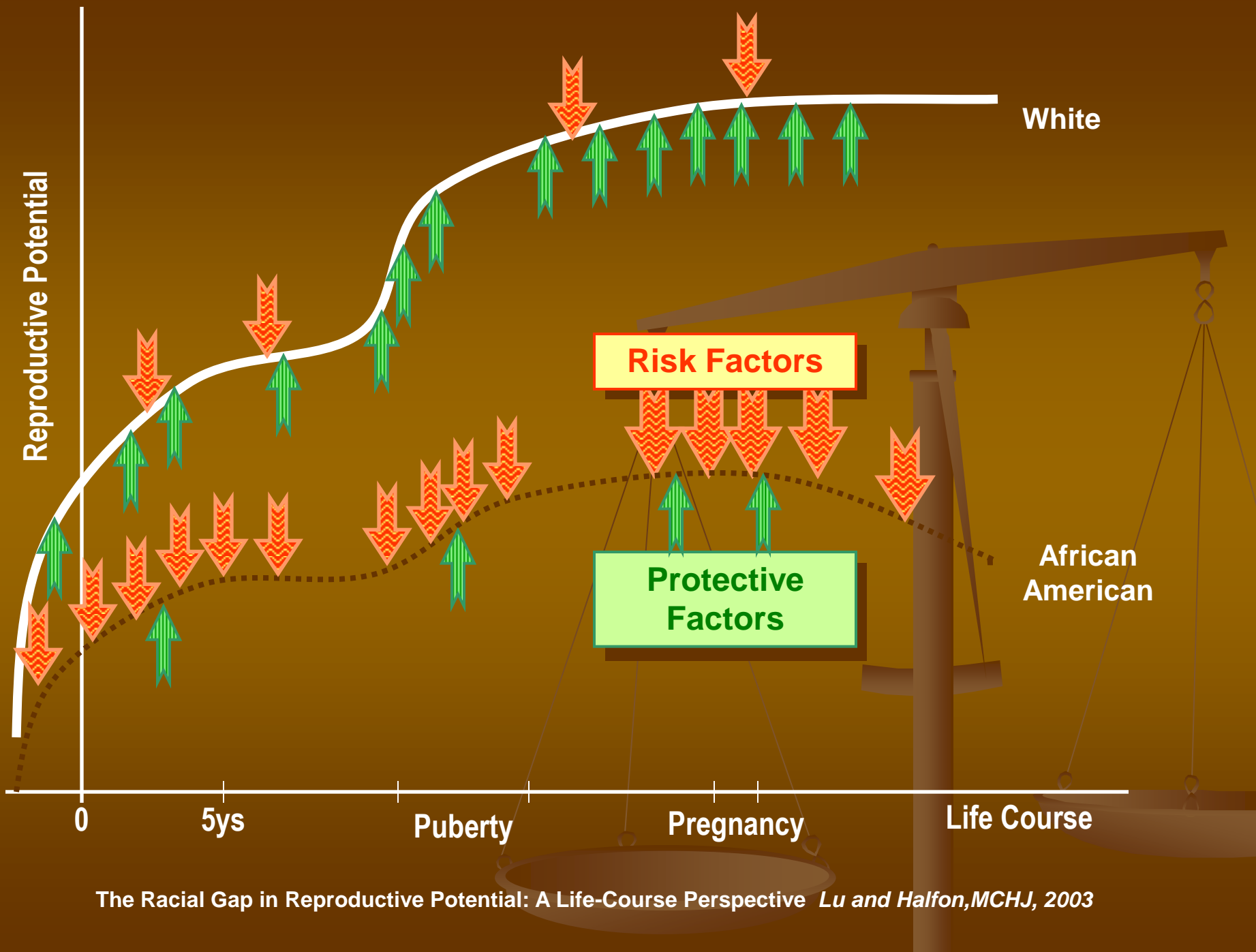


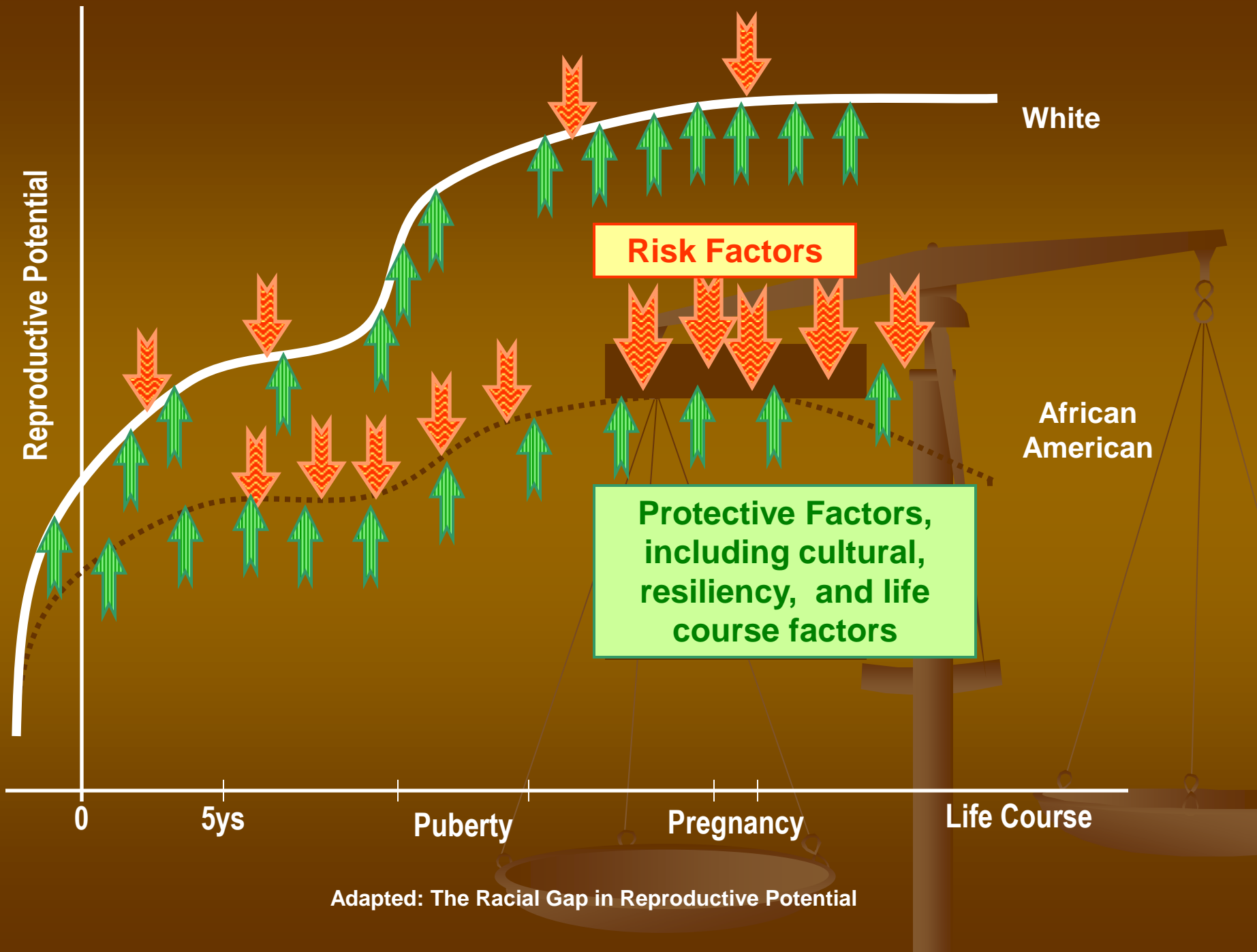
Resiliency in African American Families

Patricia McManus, PhD, RN, GCNPM





The Racial Gap in Reproductive Potential: A Life-Course Perspective *Lu and Halfon, MCHJ, 2003*



Definition of Culture

- Culture, as a body of learned behaviors common to a given human society, acts like a template (i.e., it has predictable form and content), shaping behavior and in some shaping template or consciousness prior to behavior as well (that is, a cultural template” can be in place prior to the birth of an individual person).
- A culture is a way of life of a group of people—the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.



Definition of Culture

■ Important Principles:

1. If the process of learning is an essential characteristic of culture, then teaching also is a critical characteristic. The way culture is taught and reproduced is itself an important component of culture.
2. Because the relationship between what is taught and what is learned is not absolute (some of what is taught is lost, while new discoveries are constantly being made), culture exists in a constant state of change.



Definition of Culture

- 3. Meaning systems consist of negotiated agreements – members of a human society must agree to relationships between a word, behavior, or other symbol and its corresponding significance or meaning. To the extent that culture consists of systems of meaning, it also consists of negotiated agreements and processes of negotiation.



Definition of Culture

- 4. Because meaning systems involve relationships which are not essential and universal (the word "door" has no essential connection to the physical object – we simply agree that it shall be that meaning when we speak or write in English), different human societies will inevitably agree upon different relationships and meanings; this a relativistic way of describing culture.



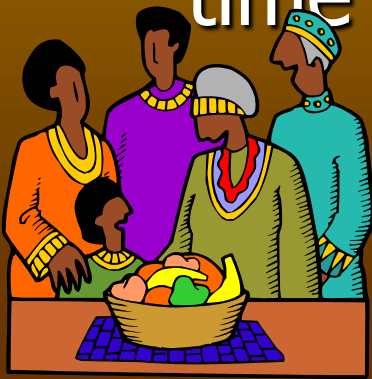
Elements of African American Culture (Noble, 1986)

- Strong kinship bonds and sense of family and community.
- Strong religious belief system
- Strong history of self help
- Present time focus
- Action valued over words
- Importance of children



Elements of African American Culture

- Tend to respond to things in terms of the whole picture instead of its parts;
- Tend to prefer inferential reasoning (intuition) to deductive or inductive reasoning;
- Tend to approximate space, numbers, and time rather than stick to accuracy;



Elements of African American Culture

- Tend to prefer to focus on people and their activities rather than on things;
- Tend to lean toward altruism, a concern for one's fellow man;
- Tend to prefer novelty, freedom and personal distinctiveness;
- Tend not to be "word" dependent. They tend to be very proficient in nonverbal communications



Concept of “The Shifting Principle” in African American Women

- **Definition:** A sort of subterfuge perfected by African Americans that has long been practiced to ensure their survival in this society.
- **Described for African American women** – shifting to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves to placate White colleagues, Black men, and other segments of their community. They shift to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity.
- Shifting has become such an integral part of the Black women’s behavior that some adopt an alternative pose or voice as easily as they blink their eyes or draw a breath----without thinking. The ways black women have shifted has changed over time, but it still occurs.
- Shifting can be adaptive or self destructive.

American Myths about Black Women

- Black women regularly receive the message that they are inferior to other people;
- Black women are unshakable, that somehow they are physically and emotionally imperious to life's most challenging events and circumstances;
- Black women are deemed strong, invulnerable, and unshakable and are stereotyped as unfeminine. They are viewed as domineering, demanding, emasculating and course;
- Black women are especially prone to criminal behavior;
- Black women continue to be perceived as sexually promiscuous.

Research Findings from the African American Women's Voices Project

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- Racial discrimination against Black women still persists.
- Gender discrimination against Black women still persists.
- Most Black Women shift their behavior to accommodate others. They change their behavior to fit in.
- Discrimination is experienced most frequently at work.
- Black women frequently submerge their talents and strengths to support their Black men.
-

Research from the African American Women's Voices Project

- Sexual abuse and harassment of Black women is all too frequent. Many times Black women will not report domestic or sexual abuse to the people because they do not want to be accused of “putting another Black man in the system.”
- There is increasing pressure on Black women to meet conventional beauty standards.
- Black mothers are acutely aware of having to train their children to cope with discrimination.
- Black women have a disproportionately high risk for depression.
- Black women often feel discriminated against within their churches.

RESILIENCY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

It must be understood that the health of a
people begins with the family
(Semmes, 1991)



Resiliency

- ▣ An asset-based approach which explore factors associated with positive outcomes Does not ignore risk factors.
- ▣ Includes values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
- ▣ Results in health maintenance, well-being, and thriving despite life's difficulties and stresses.
- ▣ Analysis of the context and relationships among individuals, families, communities, and the healthcare system (intergenerational, perinatal)



Research Study

Identifying Resiliency Characteristics in African American Families designed to Prevent Youth Violence

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And

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President/CEO

Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin, Inc.

April, 1995



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Research Design

- The study used a cross sectional exploratory descriptive approach to allow participants to describe from their perspective. The inductive approach was used to uncover factors that are associated with resilience in the African American families was used.



Research Design

- In terms of the logic of scientific investigation, the study falls in the context of discovery rather than hypothesis testing. This allowed for better designing of interventions to prevent youth violence.
- The unit of analysis was African American families



Traditional Assumptions

- There has been a great deal of time, energy and resources utilized in looking at “distressed families and neighborhoods”, usually from a deficit perspective.



Traditional Assumptions

- Recommendations for improvement has hinged on the belief that these families had nothing to offer internally, and required external intervention in order to mitigate the impact of negative factors in their neighborhoods or households.



Resiliency Assumptions

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- Includes values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
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African American Resiliency Assumptions

- The African American community has problems. The community is not the problem.
- There are African American families living in distressed communities that are not only able to “survive”, but to “thrive” and provide “Nurturing environments” for their families.



Description of population

- Number interviewed 37
- African American families
- Average annual income was under \$8,000
- City of Milwaukee Residents
- Referred by agencies, churches, self referral

RESILIENCY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

Definitions of resiliency:

1. The ability to resist the pressures of negative forces.

(Primary Prevention)

2. The ability to cope positively with adversity

(Secondary Prevention)



Findings

- Male spouses/partners seem to add a positive dimension to the family's ability to cope with adversity. However, lack of a male in the home did not automatically produce a negative dimension



Findings

- Education, employment and income are factors that add to the family's resiliency



Findings

- The social support network of both resilient and nonresilient families consisted mostly of their relatives.



Findings

- In terms of locus of control, the nonresilient families were more likely to feel powerless, helpless, inept, and interact less with persons outside of their kin
- Some families who were identified as being more resilient seemed to move more often than the nonresilient.



Findings

- All families self identified as being spiritual.
- However, the resilient families tended to attend church with a greater frequency than the nonresilient families



Findings

- In terms of residential mobility, the resilient families had much greater frequencies of mobility than the nonresilient families



Findings

- An overwhelming number of the resilient families owned a automobile, and this would seem to have enhanced the well-being of their family members



Findings

- Both groups of families associated being a good parent with being firm with children
- Less resilient families were not able to see children as resource.



Discussion

- A continuum of Resiliency - If family resiliency is defined in terms of the ability to cope positively with adversity or to resist the pressures of negative forces. It is evident that it is not an “all-or-none” attribute.



Discussion

- Rather, resiliency should be viewed as a continuum along which families can be ordered, depending on the extent to which they needed help.



Application of Research Findings

Used findings from research to develop culturally selected principles for services to the community.

1. Recognize that most assessment tools are biased based on race and class.
2. Families bonds are protective factors for African Americans. If client is working with Bureau of Child Welfare, will incorporate support and advocacy in case management of family.



Application of Research Findings

3. African American families are spiritual even if they do not attend church. Often recommend pastoral counseling.
4. Children are seen as resources and a source of pride. Work with children to understand the stress of their parents and how they can help.
5. Recognition that professional boundaries must be redefined for better communication and relationships. (message/messenger)



Application of Research Findings

6. Advocated and received approval to set aside funding in budget targeted to reduce stress related to crisis events (housing, legal, food, DV, heating bills, etc.).
7. Promoted opportunities for consumer leadership:
 - a. MHBP Consortium is always Co-chaired by a consumer.
 - b. Consumers attend other local, state, and national meetings.
 - c. Consumers must attend a certain number of meetings per year.

Outcome Evaluation

- Looking at data from our federally funded Milwaukee Healthy Beginnings Project (MHBP) 2004-2011. Targeted to increase good birth outcomes
- 1. MHBP data was compared to Project area data (12 zip codes).
- 2. Found statistical significance in the areas of preterm births and very low birth weight between MHBP infants and the project infants.



Where can we foster resilience?

- In individuals
- In families
- In neighborhoods
- In health care systems
- In social service systems
- Throughout our communities



Opportunities to Foster Resilience

- Redefine health to include the social determinates of health, not as a byproduct but central to the meaning.
- Recognize the role that racism/classism plays in health status in this country.
- Community ownership of health problems *and* the solutions



Opportunities to Foster Resilience

- Community capacity-building and sustainability
- Reinforcement of inherent strengths within communities to address priority health concerns
- Collaboration with equitable power and resource sharing



Opportunities to Foster Resilience

- Utilization of trusted community venues for health education and healthcare
- Document and monitor risk AND assets factors in client records and link to health outcomes.
- Promote and demonstrate resilience through health care system practices and policies



Opportunities to Foster Resilience

- Acknowledge traditional or cultural practices as strengths, despite scientific knowledge
- Understand the context of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to tailor health education campaigns.



Final Thoughts

- Resilience cannot be just another politically correct word of the day.
- Public Health/Health Care has not made progress in decreasing racial and ethnic disparities.
- Incorporation of the principle of inclusion must demonstrate a respectful partnership between communities of concern and others.



Final Thoughts

■ Thank You!!!!

