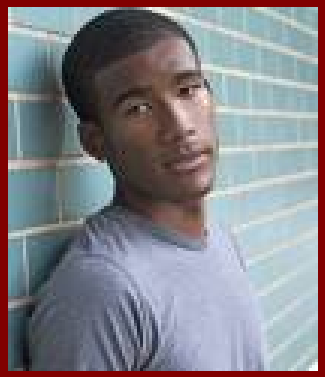
Multi-Problem Youth: Policy, Public Health and Politics of a Vulnerable Population



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Presentation Objectives

- Identify subgroups classified as multi-problem youth
- Identify factors that place multi-problem youth at high risk
- Identify strategies for working with multi-problem youth

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Multi-problem Youth: Who Are These Children?

John is 16 and currently lives in a therapeutic foster home. He has a history of running away and is currently on the run. His father is incarcerated and his mother resides in a therapeutic community.

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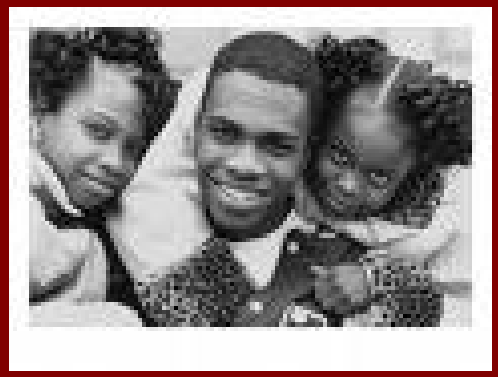
Multi-Problem Youth

- Homeless
- In out-of-home care
- Children of parents with substance use disorders
- Children of parents with histories of incarceration



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What We Know About High Risk Behavior

Individuals engage in high risk activities not because they lack relevant information but because they lack behavioral and cognitive skills to use available information.

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8 Key Components of Prevention Services for Youth at High Risk

1. Adolescent Specific Services
2. Focus on Basic Needs
3. Interagency Case-management & Collaboration
4. Outreach
5. Peer Education & Training
6. Wide Referral Network
7. Youth Involvement (Staff & Volunteers)

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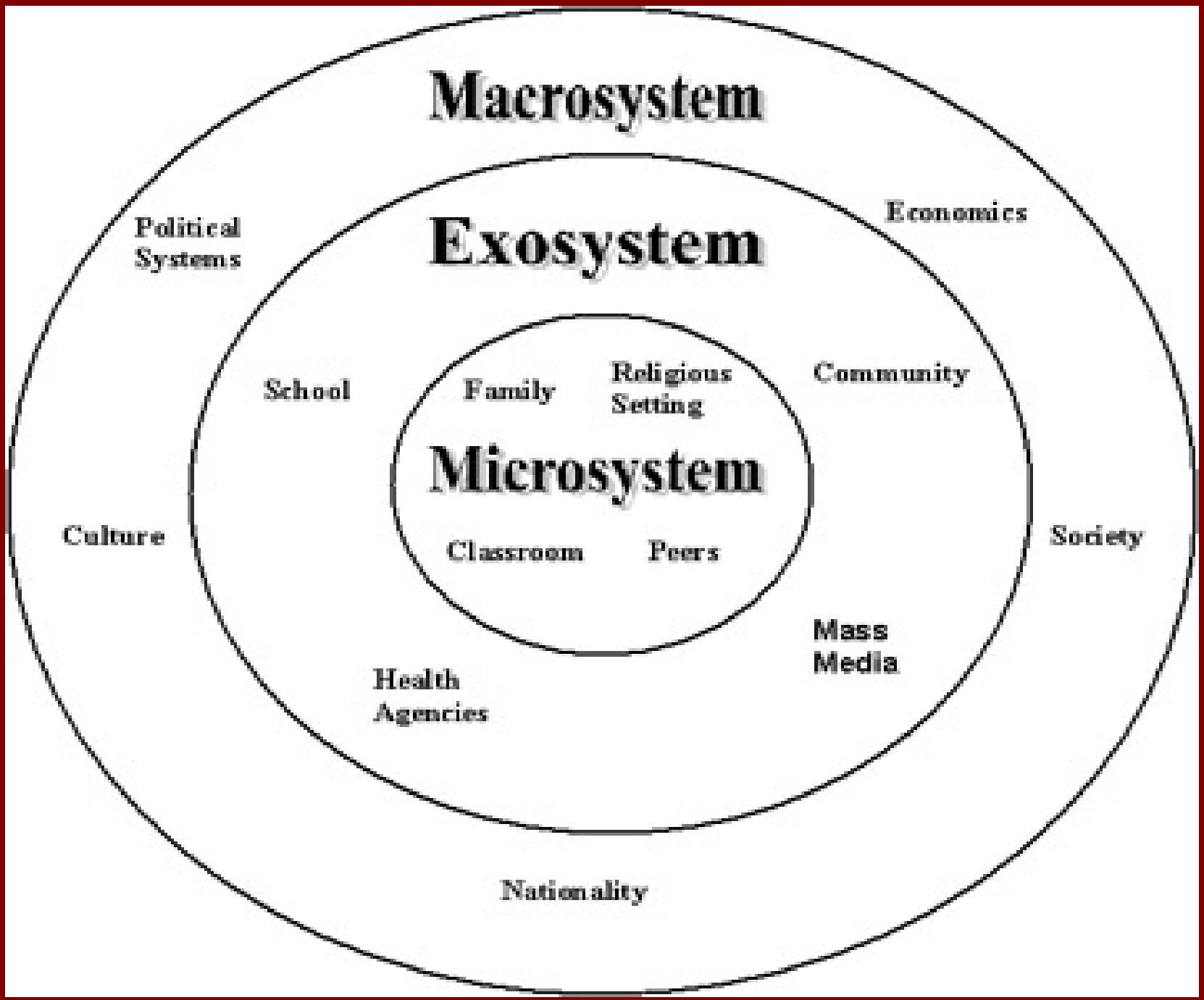

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Factors that influence Risk

- Macro:
  - Poverty (limited or lack of resources)
    - Extra-curricular activities
    - Quality of education
    - Homelessness
- Exosystem
  - Level and type of community criminal activity
  - Difficulty of access to substances within the comm
- Microsystem
  - Family Instability & Disruption
    - Lack of parental supervision
    - Parental involvement with Justice System (Prob e, or Incarceration)
    - Parental Substance Abuse

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Factors that influence Risk

- Individual
  - History of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
  - Behavioral or emotional difficulties
  - Do the youth have the information?
    - » Information on protective practices and substances
  - Do they posses the behavioral and cognitive skills?
    - » Refusal skills
    - » Planning & problem-solving skills
    - » Decision making & assertive communication skills
  - Do they have the support?
    - » Positive relationships with adults

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Lessons Learned from Programs Serving High Risk Youth

- Networking & Working Agreements Are Paramount
  - Juvenile Justice System
  - Foster Care System
  - Mental Health System
  - Social Services
  - Group Homes
  - Shelters

- Case-Management Takes Time
- System Changes May Be Necessary
  - Healthcare Policy
- Community Norms Can Be Obstacles

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