April 2020 Webinar

Family environment instability: How early childhood shapes social maladjustments over time

Presenter:

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Webinar Information

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Family stability and children’s social outcomes

Elizabeth Karberg, Ph.D.
April 8, 2020
Webinar objectives

You will learn...

1. How families in America are changing
2. The link to children’s social outcomes
3. Why we see this link
4. What this means for those working with children and families
1. Background
Family stability project

- NIH grant R03HD090277
- Why child aggression and social competence?
- Why family contexts?
- What are the mechanisms and for whom?
Children’s social development

- Social competence (positive social skills) is an essential life skill.
- As children develop, some degree of social incompetence is expected.
- It shouldn’t persist into the school years.
Family instability

- Increasingly common
  (Ruggles, 2016)
Children’s family contexts

Fig. 9 Living arrangements of infants residing without married parents: USA, 1880–2010. (Source: Fitch et al., 2005; King et al., 2010; Ruggles et al., 2010; The category “parent and coresiding partner” was estimated using cohabitation variables in the 2010 Current Population Survey to adjust results from the census in 2000 and 1990 based on the “unmarried partner” category. Pre-1990 cohabitation was estimated from Fitch et al., 2005)
Family instability and social development

- Linked with social maladjustment

- Children do not experience family instability equally
  - In particular, marriage shapes likelihood

- Family (in)stability shapes children’s household income, time with each parent, and possibly the quality of interaction with each parent changes
2. Methodology
Data

▪ Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study
▪ 1,498 mothers/children
Measures

- Family instability: no vs. 1
- Social competence
- Aggression
- Household income
- Mothers’ relationship status at birth
Approach

- Family instability between birth and age 9
- Social competence and Aggression at age 15
- NOT changes over time in social outcomes
  - Rather, differences by group
3. Results
Family instability and social development

Family instability is linked with aggression, not social competence

*Significant at p<.01 level
Marriage at birth is linked with less aggression and greater social competence

*Married significantly different from other groups at p<.01 level
Adolescents living in low-income households are rated as more aggressive and less socially competent.*

*Significant at p<.001 level
Instability is associated with greater social competence when mothers gain a partner.

Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and social competence
Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and income and social competence

This effect is driven by households with low income
Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and aggression

Instability is associated with more aggression when mothers divorce

![Graph showing the relationship between instability and aggression scores]
Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and income and aggression

This effect is driven by households with higher income

![Graph showing moderation effects](image-url)
4. Summary and Implications
Summary

Early family instability is linked with adolescent aggression

This is driven by families experiencing a divorce

And with higher income

Early family instability is not linked with social competence

It is *positively* linked with social competence when a *partner* moves into the house

And *only when* the family has *low income*
Implications

- Support for heterogeneity effect

- Children in low-income households and households where mothers stably live without a partner generally have lower levels of social competence and higher levels of aggression
  - Cumulatively speaks to the need for policies and programs that alleviate parenting stress and financial insecurity
  - This may be improved when a partner moved into the house, but more research is needed on this to understand when and why this is the case
Implications

- COVID-19:
  - Inability to leave a bad relationship – may be as or more stressful than instability
  - Policies and programs to alleviate parenting stress and financial insecurity important now more than ever
Questions?
Thank you!

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Thank You for Joining Us Today!

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Second Wednesday Webinar

May 13, 2020

Scaling Up a Large Program in Rural Areas

Presenter:
Jill Gwilt, Director of the Mission West Virginia THINK Program