

POOR PARENTS, POOR PARENTING? THE INFLUENCE OF POVERTY

Population Association of America Submission
2004

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SPECIFIC AIMS

The negative consequences of growing up poor are well documented in social science research (Hao, 1996; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Wagner, Spiker, and Linn, 2002). It is apparent children raised in or exposed to poverty stricken conditions have more negative cognitive and social developmental outcomes. While previous literature focusing on quality of schools and neighborhood context contributes to our understanding of the broader social environment of poor children (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, and Duncan, 1994; Children's Defense Fund, 1994), there has been less attention to their family environment (Crosnoe, Mistry, and Elder, 2002). Specifically, research has not explicitly examined parenting among poor families, despite the fact that it is a primary component of children's home environment (Miller and Davis, 1997).

Yet, to assess the impact of economic strain on family processes like parenting, research needs to account for the varied characteristics of poor families (Mistry et al., 2002). Specifically, it is necessary to assess parenting within specific family structures. The circumstances of parenting vary drastically according to family structure, simply in terms of the number of parental sources available to children. Since the conditions of parenting vary by family structure, we must also account for the possibility that the influence of being poor on parenting is different for one and two parent families. Research needs to acknowledge that the conditions in which parenting takes place are not homogeneous.

Using nationally representative data (NLSY-97), I will focus on three aims that will serve to better illustrate the influences and conditions of parenting, particularly among poor families. The first aim is to construct a sociodemographic profile of

parenting defined in terms of poverty status and family structure. To date, research has not yielded a comprehensive picture of which family forms exhibit positive parenting practices and relations. Little research has considered the diversity that exists within family structures. Consequently, the parenting practices of poor and non-poor two parent families are not well established. It has been suggested that little is to be gained from further examinations of family structure differences without adequately accounting for variations within these configurations, especially with regard to family processes (Demo and Cox, 2000). This study seeks to identify the parental control, support, and style of two biological parent families.

The second aim of this study is to determine how economic status influences the parenting of two parent families. Parents identify financial issues to be a primary stressor in the parenting process (Sidebotham, 2001). Yet few studies focus on the economic well-being of two parent families, creating a deficit in what we know about the influence of poverty on parenting in this family type, particularly for fathers (Harris and Marmer, 1996). It is unknown whether being poor influences the parenting of married mothers or fathers differently, if at all. This work seeks to identify how parenting may differ for poor and non-poor married mothers, as well as poor and non-poor married fathers.

The third aim is to assess how the interaction of poverty status and parenting strategies influences child well-being in terms of behavioral outcomes. This assessment serves to illustrate a specific mechanism by which poverty may influence child outcomes: parenting. Prior research has demonstrated an association between poverty and negative child behavior, such as delinquency. However, this study addresses a particular family

structure and how poverty may influence its dynamics, thereby influencing child outcomes.

The results from this study will make several important contributions. Chase-Landale, Brooks-Gunn, and Zamsky (1994) assert the need for research to identify the conditions in which poor families demonstrate positive parenting behaviors. Here, I address this need by assessing the influence of poverty on parenting within a specific structural condition: married biological parent families. Second, research has demonstrated the importance of parenting on outcomes of children (Luster and Okagaki, 1993). In this regard, determining the nature of influence of poverty on parenting is of great value to family scholars. Also, the results of this study may be used to supplement evaluations of policies designed to improve the economic well-being of families (McGroder, 2000). I attempt to identify a “process by which and for whom such programs have impacts.”

Plan of analyses

The analyses reflect how poverty status influences the parenting of mothers and fathers. These analyses are divided into four sections and test hypotheses 1A-4A (poor parents exhibit more support and control than non-poor parents) and 1B-4B (poor parents exhibit less support and control than non-poor parents). First, I assess how being poor affects parental control, a measure that does not distinguish between mothers and fathers. Using ordinary least squares regression, I assess the odds parents set all of the limits for their adolescent by 1) poor status, in terms of poor, near-poor, and non-poor; 2) a set of control variables, including number of siblings, mother’s education, and child’s race, age, and race; 3) poor status plus the set of controls.

The second section of the analyses illustrates how poverty status influences maternal monitoring, support, and style. I used ordinary least squares regression to assess the monitoring and support measures on: 1) poor status, in terms of poor, near-poor, and non-poor; 2) a set of control variables, including number of siblings, mother's education, and child's race, age, and race; 3) poor status plus the set of controls. Next, I used multinomial logistic regression to determine the odds of authoritative and uninvolved maternal parenting styles. The sequence of these models mirror those used in the OLS analyses.

The third section of the analyses assesses how poverty status influences paternal monitoring, support, and style. I used ordinary least squares regression to assess the monitoring and support measures on: 1) poor status, in terms of poor, near-poor, and non-poor; 2) a set of control variables, including number of siblings, mother's education, and child's race, age, and race; 3) poor status plus the set of controls. Next, I used multinomial logistic regression to determine the odds of authoritative and uninvolved paternal parenting styles. The sequence of these models mirror those used in the OLS analyses.

In the fourth section, I will test hypotheses 5-7 and measure the difference in poverty effects between mothers and fathers on each of the following parenting dimensions: monitoring, support, and style. It is expected that the influence of poverty will be greater for maternal parenting, relative to paternal parenting. Statistical analyses will assess whether the effects of poverty for mothers are significantly different from the effects of poverty for fathers on these dimensions. Finally, the analyses will test the interactions of poverty and parenting on subsequent adolescent delinquency.