

Does wealth = sensitivity?: Connections between financial stress and parenting behavior



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Introduction

Socio-demographic risk is the level of risk the family has based on their education level, the stress from their financial situation, how many children in the home, etc. Such factors have been related to many aspects of child development and well-being (Holochoost et al., 2016).

Sensitivity is how well the parent can adapt and respond to their child. High sensitivity is when a parent engages warmly and positively with their child and low sensitivity is when the parent is disengaged or aggressive towards their child. Sensitive parents are less likely to be hostile toward their children, and their children tend to be more responsive (Mäntymaa, 2009).

Non-hostility is the absence of hostile behavior towards their child, such as the absence of negative affect and indifference. Hostility may include the use of coercion, threat, or physical punishment to influence the child's behavior. (Hopkins, Gouze, & Lavigne, 2013).

Empirical connections: A recent survey study found that children who perceived their family as having more affluence were more likely to report better relationships with their parents (Ramdahl, Jensen, Borgund, Samdal, & Torshiem 2018). According to a longitudinal study done by Santiago, Wadsworth and Stump (2009), among individuals with higher socioeconomic risk, older family members showed more withdrawn symptoms, somatic complaints, and thought problems, while younger family members showed more anxiety/depression and social problems.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that the higher the socio-demographic risk the less sensitive and more hostile the parent will be toward the child.

Participants

The research is from a larger longitudinal study that assessed the importance of child-parent relationships with preschooler's emotional functioning. Participants were recruited from preschool programs serving low-income families in rural Appalachia, KY. All the families were given compensation for their participation.

Participants:

- A total of 21 families
 - 20 Mothers and 1 father
 - 21 children between ages of 15 & 18
 - 9 teens were females

Methods

- Participating families took part in an approximately 3-hour visit at the University. Visits were filmed for later coding.
- Parenting was assessed during a task in which the parent and child watched and discussed themselves playing a game when children were young.
- Socio-demographic risk was measured via a parent questionnaire that asked about the number of children in the house, relationship status, income, federal assistance, and financial stress.

Measures

The Ring Toss Reminiscing Task:

Parents and teens were asked to view a 3-minute clip of themselves playing ring toss when children were 4 years old. Specifically, they were asked to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and memories for both the past and the present.

Parental Sensitivity

To assess parental sensitivity toward their child, ratings were made of the ring toss reminiscing task, largely using Biringen, Robinson, & Emde's (2000) Emotional Availability Scale (EAS), 3rd edition. Inter-rater agreement was excellent. The behaviors were rated on a scale that ran from (9) *highly sensitive* to (1) *highly insensitive*. Higher scores represent greater levels of parental sensitivity

Parental Non-Hostility

To assess parental non-hostility behaviors toward their child, ratings were made of the ring toss reminiscing task, again primarily based upon the EAS. The behaviors observed rated on a scale that ran from (5) *non-hostile* to (1) *markedly and overtly hostile*. Higher scores represent greater levels of parental non-hostility.

Inter-rater agreement was excellent for both rating scales.

Socio-Demographic Risk

Each parent completed an in-depth demographic questionnaire. This questionnaire included rating how frequently they were worried by their financial status (1 – never to 5 - always) and how stressed they were by their financial situation (1 – no stress to 5 – extreme stress). The questionnaire also gauged their education level, if they received public assistance, and how many children they had. A total of 8 variables indicative of risk were scored 1 (present) or 0. Higher total scores suggest greater family socio-demographic risk.



Results

Descriptive Data

The mean sensitivity rating was 5.52 (SD=1.72) and the mean non-hostility rating was 4.43 (SD=.98). The mean socio-demographic risk score was 2.52 (SD=1.69).

Primary Results

Given our low statistical power due to a small sample size, we are encouraged to have findings at a trend level. Both sensitivity and non-hostility were correlated with our socio-demographic risk composite, as hypothesized. Both effect sizes would be considered to show moderately strong relationships between our parenting variables and risk.

	Sensitivity	Non-hostility
Demographic risk	-.408+	-.384+

+Correlation is significant at $p < .10$, trend level

Discussion

Our hypothesis has received some support and follows trends in the larger literature, in that it appears that sociodemographic risk has a relationship with parental sensitivity and non-hostility.

Implications

We would expect parents with lower sensitivity, higher hostility, and higher sociodemographic risk to have children with more adjustment issues, consistent with the literature (Holochoost, 2016).

Future Directions

In the future, we would like to code the children's behavior during the ring toss reminiscing task and code adjustment issues from their emotion and attachment interviews.

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