



RESEARCH BRIEF

MATERIAL HARDSHIP IN FAMILIES WITH LOW INCOME

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF COPARENTING ON FATHERS' AND MOTHERS' PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS

KEY FINDINGS

- *Supportive coparenting alliance between mothers and fathers from low-income backgrounds was associated with higher levels of both parents' responsive parenting.*
- *Both mothers' and fathers' responsive parenting were then associated with higher levels of preschoolers' prosocial behaviors.*
- *Tests of indirect effects confirmed that mothers' and fathers' responsive parenting mediated the link between coparenting alliance and preschoolers' prosocial behaviors.*
- *When mothers and fathers from low-income backgrounds have a strong coparenting alliance, they are likely to withstand the negative effects of material hardship and thus engage in positive parenting behaviors that benefit their children's prosocial development.*

About this Study

Families with low income experience high levels of economic insecurity, but less is known about how mothers and fathers in such families successfully navigate coparenting and parenting in the context of material hardship. The current study utilized a risk and resilience framework of testing the Family Stress Model to investigate the underlying family processes linking material hardship and children's prosocial behaviors in a sample of socioeconomically disadvantaged mother-father families with preschoolers from the Building Strong Families project ($N = 452$). Coparenting alliance and mothers' and fathers' responsive parenting were examined as mediators. Results of structural equation modeling showed that coparenting alliance was associated with higher levels of both mothers' and fathers' responsive parenting. Subsequently, both parents' responsive parenting were associated with higher levels of children's prosocial behaviors. Material hardship was not associated with coparenting alliance and either parent's responsive parenting. Tests of indirect effects confirmed that the effects of coparenting alliance on children's prosocial behaviors were mediated through both mothers' and fathers' responsive parenting. Overall, these results suggest that when mothers and fathers have a strong coparenting alliance, they are likely to withstand the negative effects of material hardship and thus engage in positive parenting behaviors that benefit their children's prosocial development.

Conclusion

When mothers and fathers from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have a positive and supportive coparenting alliance, they may be able to withstand the negative effects of material hardship and thus engage in sensitive and responsive parenting behaviors that ultimately benefit their preschoolers' prosocial development. Family strengthening initiatives, such as Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRP) programs, could benefit the development of children from low-income backgrounds by placing a strong focus on enhancing positive coparenting alliances between mothers and fathers.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The current study was part of Dr. Lee's doctoral dissertation, which was a three-paper dissertation project that examined the links between poverty and children's development by applying the Family Stress Model (FSM) to data from the Building Strong Families project. The current study was the third and last study of Dr. Lee's dissertation, which focused taking a risk and resilience approach to testing the FSM.

Contact information: lee.10148@osu.edu



Dr. Joyce Y. Lee

CONTACT US

The Ohio State University
College of Social Work
csw.osu.edu/research
Phone: 614-292-9229