

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

Demographic and Socioeconomic Predictors of Behavioral Trajectories from Age 3 to 15: A Longitudinal Mixed Effects Approach

Marçal, K.E. (2020). Demographic and socioeconomic predictors of behavioral trajectories from age 3 to 15: A longitudinal mixed effects approach. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29, 1818-1832. doi:10.1007/s10826-020-01710-8

SUMMARY: Behavior trajectories of youth are influenced by a range of demographic and socioeconomic factors. This study investigated the influences of demographic factors (e.g., gender) and socioeconomic status (e.g., income) on externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression) and internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety/depression) from early childhood to adolescence. The findings indicate that patterns of behavior problems vary by various socioeconomic and demographic factors like age, gender, race, and home environment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- At 3 years old, male participants showed more externalizing behaviors than female participants. However, these differences were not sustained by 15 years old.
- Internalizing behaviors decreased from 3 to 15 years old. However, the decline in internalizing behaviors was faster for males than females.
- Youth from higher quality interior home environments (e.g., adequate lighting) exhibited fewer behavior problems. The exterior home environment (e.g., broken windows around the block) was not related to youth's behavior problem.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Attend trainings to enhance skills and learn new strategies to work effectively with youth who are at risk for externalizing behavior
- Develop curricula that focus on strengthening peer relationships among youth at risk of behavior problems

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Offer workshops to help families with early identification and management of problem behaviors
- Host classes for parents about the importance of the home environment on youth problem behavior

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Encourage the development of programs aimed to promote resilience in financially disadvantaged families
- Support research that investigates methods to reduce externalizing and internalizing behaviors among youth

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METHODS

- Data were obtained from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, which followed American children born from 1998–2000 from 20 large cities.
- Child and parent demographics and socioeconomic status were taken at baseline and at each follow-up interview. Child internalizing and externalizing behaviors were measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). Home environment was measured from interviewer observation using the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment scale.
- Data were analyzed to compare key demographic characteristics of males and females at different ages. Additional analysis was done to predict if internalizing and externalizing behavior varied by certain demographic factors.

PARTICIPANTS

- This study included 1,090 participants from 3 to 15 years old (546 males and 544 females).
- Of the males, 22.71% were White, 46.71% were Black, 26.37% were Hispanic, and 4.21% did not specify their race. Of the females, 20.22% were White, 48.35% were Black, 27.76% were Latino, and 3.67% did not specify their race.
- The average household income when children were 3 years old was \$35,388.51 (SD=36,631.05). By 15 years old, the average household income was \$60,738.83 (SD=60,423.68).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample only consisted of families from cities; therefore, caution must be taken to generalize the results to families from suburban or rural areas.
- Primary caregivers' reports of child behavior may have been influenced by attempts to minimize problematic behaviors and not accurately reflect their child's behavior.
- Data were only collected at specific time points (3, 5, 9, and 15 years) rather than every year resulting in missing information related to year-to-year behavior changes which may have impacted results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Examine how peer relationships and social media usage may be associated with youth behavioral issues
- Investigate effectiveness of prevention programs for problem behavior among socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in rural and suburban communities
- Explore intervention strategies that can be used in youth programs for youth struggling with externalizing and internalizing behaviors

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design



Excellent
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods



Excellent
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations



Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>