

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

Making Meaning From Money: Subjective Social Status and Young Children's Behavior Problems

Roy, A.L., Isaia, A., & Li-Grining, C.P. (2019). Making meaning from money: Subjective social status and young children's behavior problems. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 33(2), 240-245. doi:10.1037/fam0000487

SUMMARY: Understanding the impact of the family's socioeconomic status on child behavior has important implications for minimizing problem behavior. This study investigated how parents' reports of subjective social status (how parents rated their own social status) and objective indicators of socioeconomic status (e.g., employment) affected parental mental health and children's behavioral problems. The findings indicated that parental stress was related to their employment status and education levels. In addition, higher stress in parents was associated with more behavior problems in children.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents who reported lower social status tended to experience higher depression, which in turn, was related to more externalizing problems (e.g., hyperactivity) in children.
- Parents who experienced higher parenting stress tended to have lower education levels and were not currently employed, which was related to more externalizing, internalizing (e.g., anxiety), and dysregulation problems (e.g., sensory sensitivity) in children.
- Subjective social status was associated with children's externalizing problems, but not with dysregulation or internalizing problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Facilitate support groups for parents that focus on managing financial stress
- Attend trainings about the effects of parental depression on youth behaviors to enhance their ability to provide support to at-risk families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Provide education to parents on the effects of parental stress on youth behavior
- Offer educational programming to youth that focus on strategies for peer conflict resolution

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Promote the development of programs that help youth with problem behavior management
- Support research that investigates effective strategies to manage parental depression and stress

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METHODS

- Families were recruited from seven different social service programs. Some of the families were recruited from three different public hospitals that were located in the same vicinity as the social services programs.
- Subjective social status of families was measured using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status. Objective indicators of socioeconomic status were measured using parent education level, current employment status, and an income-to-needs ratio.
- Parental depression was measured using the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D). The Dysfunctional Interaction subscale of the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) was used to measure parenting stress. The Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) was used to measure child behavior problems.

PARTICIPANTS

- This study included 173 parents who had children between zero to three years old (M=24 months, SD=10 months). The average age of parents was 31 years old (SD=7 years).
- Mothers made up 93% of participants, fathers made up 6% and grandparents made up 1%. Fifty-six percent of the sample was female.
- Latino families comprised 79% of the participants, while 13% were Black, 6% were multiracial, and 2% were Asian American.

LIMITATIONS

- This study did not include parenting behaviors other than stress and depression, so the results may have excluded important parental factors that influence problematic child behavior.
- The study was cross-sectional which limited the ability to examine the causal relationship between parental social status and child behavior.
- The sample only included families with children ages zero to three years which restricts generalizability of findings to families with children above the age of three years old.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Investigate how subjective social status affects child behavior in families with diverse socioeconomic statuses
- Examine the timeframes for when children understand the meaning of their own socioeconomic status and how it affects their actions and behaviors
- Explore how parental depression and stress can affect the behaviors of youth throughout adolescence

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

Appropriate
Research Plan
and Sample

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Methods

Appropriate
Measurement
and Analysis

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Limitations

Few

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For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
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