Presentation Proposal for Utah Early Childhood Conference 2014

(Edited for Github)

**Variations in Home Learning and Home Social Environments and Children’s School Readiness among Married, Cohabiting, and Single Families**

**Descriptions**

Using national data of NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, we examined how maternal marital status at 36 months of children’s age affects the children’s pre-academic and social skills when they were 54 months old by investigating potential mediating roles of home environments and family resources. Specifically, we examined families’ monetary (i.e., income) and psychological (i.e., depressive symptoms, social support, and parenting stress) resources as they lead to variations in cognitive and social aspects of the home environment in families with different marital status. Implications for practice are discussed.

**Summary**

Previous studies have shown that children from cohabiting or single households are likely to have lower pre-academic and social skills. These variations among children may arise due to differential levels of social and emotional risk at their home depending on their parents’ marital status ascohabiting or single parents have vulnerable demographic characteristics, such as lower levels of income, educational attainment, and psychological adjustment.

The current study focused on two aspects of home environment to explain the association between marital status and young children’s school readiness: cognitive stimulation and parental supportiveness. In addition, since married families tend to be more resourceful in family income and psychological well-being than cohabiting and single families, monetary (i.e. income) and psychological (maternal depressive symptoms, social support, and parenting stress) resources were included to the current study. These monetary and psychological resources may explain the availability or restrictions in home environment of families with different marital status. Therefore, we examined how maternal marital status affects preschool children’s pre-academic and social skills by investigating potential mediating roles of home environments and family resources. Specifically, we examined families’ monetary and psychological resources as they lead to variations in cognitive and social aspects of the home environment in families with different marital status. The current study utilized a sample of 897 families, whose data were obtained thorough the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD-SECCYD).

Results showed that marital status influenced language and cognitive(vocabulary) skills, but not social skills. The results also showed that marital status influenced both cognitive and social aspects of home environment. The cognitive aspect of home environment had a significant influence on children’s language, cognitive (early literacy and vocabulary), and social (behavioral problems) skills, but the home social aspect did not.

When the effects of resource variables were examined, social support and parenting stress had significant influences on children’s social and behavioral outcomes, but not on cognitive or language skills. Income only influenced their behavioral outcomes. Parenting stress influenced bothcognitive and social aspects of home environment.

The results indicate that marital status may lead to variations in home environmental factors, which influence children’s school readiness. Specifically, our results indicate that cognitive aspect may influence both pre-academic and social skills, whereas social aspect may have little influence. Among the resource variables, parenting stress influenced both cognitive and social aspects of home environment, which may suggest the importance of better psychological services to relieve parenting stress. Current results suggest that early intervention for young children from non-traditional families may target home cognitive environments, rather than social environments. Along with providing psychological services with a specific emphasis on parenting stress, focus on home cognitive environments may lead to a substantial impact on impact on children’s pre-academic and social skills from non-married families. The results could be used as a starting point to promote community’s involvement and provide insights of effective programs that may improve home environment, which then improve children’s school readiness.