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Understanding children's outcomes through the lenses of family structures and income levels, in conjunction with parenting styles

Children who live with their married, biological parents have consistently superior physical, emotional, and academic well-being, according to nearly three decades of studies examining the impact of family structure on children's health and well-being (Hannan & Halpin, 2014). Considerable evidence also suggests that children from low-income families perform worse than their classmates in a variety of areas, including health and education (Berger, 2007). In this paper, we delve into a child's developmental and behavioral outcomes, through the lenses of income of a household and its family structure, in tandem with parenting styles, in the western context.

For a variety of reasons, household income may be negatively associated with poor outcomes for the child. To begin with, a family's financial resources may have a direct impact on parenting habits; low-income parents may simply lack the financial means to meet all of their children's material demands (e.g., in terms of the physical conditions of the home or access to materials for learning and cognition). Regardless of the parents' or caregivers' intentions, if a family's income is low enough to preclude the purchase of an appropriate bundle of goods and services to meet a kid's needs, the child will be subjected to substandard parenting (Berger, 2007).

Poverty or a lack of finances can also have an indirect impact on parenting. One possibility is that low money leads to increased parental stress and, as a result, stricter parenting (McLoyd & Wilson, 1991; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993). As a result, inadequate care in terms of emotional support or physical discipline may result. Another hypothesis is that low-income parents have fewer available disciplinary alternatives than their higher-income counterparts. Low-income parents may be more inclined to employ physical discipline (such as spanking) as a method of behavioral control because they lack the financial resources to offer their children monetary incentives (e.g., allowance) to change their habits (Weinberg, 2001).

Dooley and Stewart in their 2006 paper look at the effects of income of the family on parenting styles and inherently on a child's behavioural-emotional outcomes in the United States by interviewing both the parents and the teachers of the students. They found that higher income is related to better behavioural–emotional scores and the impact of parenting style as reported by the parent, is substantially more strongly related to parental reports of child behavioural–emotional well-being than teacher reports (Dooley & Stewart, 2006).

Doubling the income-led to a one-tenth change in the standard deviation of the behavioral-emotional score. A 'lone mother effect' was discovered, which essentially means that a child in a lone mother family has a behavioural–emotional score, which is about one-third of standard deviations higher than an observationally equivalent child in a two-parent family for the teacher and parent scores, and around one-tenth of standard deviations higher for the self-reported scores (Dooley & Stewart, 2006). In addition,

parenting styles have no significant effect on most other variables included, such as parent age, or even income. It only seemed to matter in the case of the parent being a problematic drinker.

Moreover, using a fixed-effects model, it was discovered that levels of income don't have much of an impact on a child's emotional development, but provide a significant effect on parenting styles also known as 'hostile parenting'. As for their answers regarding the income effect, they are relatively similar to previous surveys conducted in the United States and Canada. After learning about the income effect on parenting styles and a child's future outcomes, the effect of family structures on the same is explored.

Family structure is typically defined by whether children live with both biological parents, one biological and one non-biological parent, a single parent (usually the mother), or neither biological parent. It can also include whether the adults in two-parent homes are married or cohabiting. Through three methods, family structure can have both direct and indirect effects on parenting behaviors. These are, financial resources, the amount of time caregivers can dedicate to parenting, and caregivers' motivation to invest in children (Berger, 2006).

According to current theory and research, mother-father families are the least likely to engage in poor parenting of the three family types studied (mother-father, single-mother, and mother-partner). This reflects the fact that they typically have the most time and money available to them, as well as the greatest inclination to spend on their children. Given their higher stress levels and lower resources to invest in caregiving, single-mother households should be more prone than mother-father families to engage in poor parenting. There is less confidence about the relationship between mother-partner family structure and

poor parenting. Mother-partner families, as opposed to single-mother households, may have more opportunities to invest in parenting because they have more resources (Berger, 2007).

A comparative study between Sweden and the United States also tries to take into account the parents' education levels. They do so to accentuate the differences in schooling outcomes between children from intact families and those from non-intact families, which are reduced when childhood sibling structure and parents' education are considered (Björklund & Sundstrom, 2006). However, the context in this scenario had a negligible effect as the educational outcomes were quite similar, though not many results came out to be statistically significant. The authors suggest that the true effect of family structure is more complex than the biological relationship of parents to children in both Sweden and the United States (Björklund & Sundstrom, 2006).

Another interesting study was conducted by Hannan and Halpin, where they assess the significance of effect size disparities in child outcomes among Irish families. When compared to other European countries, the Irish case is particularly interesting in a number of ways, including its relatively low divorce rates, low but increasing rates of cohabitation, high rates of unmarried motherhood among women under the age of 25, and a tradition of marriage at a later age (Hannan, 2008). Second, because the non-traditional family group consists of three main treatment groups, the analysis improves the literature on propensity scores matching by using multiple treatment groups. The first is unmarried single-parent families (lone mothers), the second is previously married single-parent families (often separated mothers in Ireland), and finally cohabiting families (excluding a small number of step-families which were dropped from the analysis). Now, the results imply that there is limited agreement on why children develop differently depending on their family type. Resource depletion, stress proliferation, and

interpersonal skills inadequacies are the key theoretical arguments. This means that children whose parents divorce/separate or never marry have fewer resources, more stressors, and fewer interpersonal skills, resulting in lower adolescent and young adult outcomes. However, it's possible that marital dissolution or childbearing status is unimportant. In reality, selection bias may account for a considerable part, if not all, of the empirical evidence on disparities in child and early adult outcomes across family types (Hannan & Halpin, 2007).

Furthermore, a paper by Lopoo and DeLeire emphasises what the Dooley paper found out about children in single-parent households, suggesting that children whose mothers were not continuously married (single mothers) have incomes that are about $25,000 less than the children of mothers who were continuously married. Given that always-married families earned about $77,200 annually, single mothers have total family incomes that are about two-thirds the size of always-married couples' incomes (Lopoo & DeLeire, 2013). Hence, being in a single-parent household reduces the resources available to a child. The paper also tries to explore the existence of a step-parent in a child's life, and how that can affect one's socioeconomic outcomes since step-parents can regard children from previous partners differently. The authors indicated that being a part of a married household, whether one marries once or goes through a divorce just to marry again will always make them financially better off. This degree of being better-off obviously changes according to when and whom they choose to marry. Effects of this are also seen in the long term. This means that, in terms of adult income, the findings for children of single mothers show that these children earn around a quarter less annually than children of continuously married parents (Lopoo & DeLeire, 2013).

In conclusion, the findings of most of the studies point to the fact that having both parents in the home and having a higher income level is always better for a child. That is, when the parents are married and

have higher income levels, the child's educational, financial, and social outcomes are significantly better than when the parents are single and have lower income levels. The comparative study between Sweden and the US, on the other hand, gave different results. This could be due to the fact that sibling relationships were also considered in the study, making the results statistically insignificant, as more siblings could impact the level of educational attainment of the children in the family.

In addition, the results of all the studies were also consistent with other research discussed in class, in which parental support was determined to be a critical component in a child's future outcomes. Furthermore, a parent's income has a substantial association with the parenting styles he or she employs, which ultimately determines the child's emotional-behavioral development. Finally, as a criticism, most studies do not consider ‘same-sex married households', and more attention should be paid to this area because it is critical to examine how the economic dynamics and authorities in a home alter when both parents identify as the same gender.

Works Cited

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