



CHILDREN AND FAMILY
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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Neighborhood Dysfunction and Paternal Engagement: A Pathway Analysis

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Research Background Outline

- Community environment concern
- Family structure transition concern
- Fathers' engagement in unwed families concern
- Mediating mechanisms between community environment and the wellbeing of children and families



Community Environment Concern

- Ecological perspective of human behavior
- Neighborhood dysfunction as a research concern
 - Indicated by poor neighborhood social control and social cohesion, and prevalence of disorder
 - It impairs individuals' physical and mental health, economic well-being, social support, and family processes
- Community environment's impact on paternal engagement



Paternal Engagement Concern

- One third children do not live with bio-fathers
 - Largely driven by the increase of unwed births
 - Most of the unwed birth parents break up within a few years
 - 48% and 63% breakup at year one and five respectively
 - Breakup fathers' paternal engagement declines overtime(Carlson et al, 2008)
 - Saw child in last month: 63% and 43% at year 1 and 5 of child birth



Paternal Engagement Concern – cont.

- The importance of paternal engagement in unwed birth families
 - Engagement includes fathers' interactions with children, mother, and other support
 - Its absence negatively affects child social, emotional, and cognitive development
- Factors affecting paternal engagement
 - Various individual and family factors
 - Community environment
 - Family structure transition



Family Structure Transition Concern

- Family structure transition definition
- Its effect on mother, father, and child wellbeing, including paternal engagement
- Several limitations in family structure transition studies
 - Most are concerned about downward trend
 - Most look at two levels, e.g., marriage/cohabitation vs. divorce/non-cohabitation

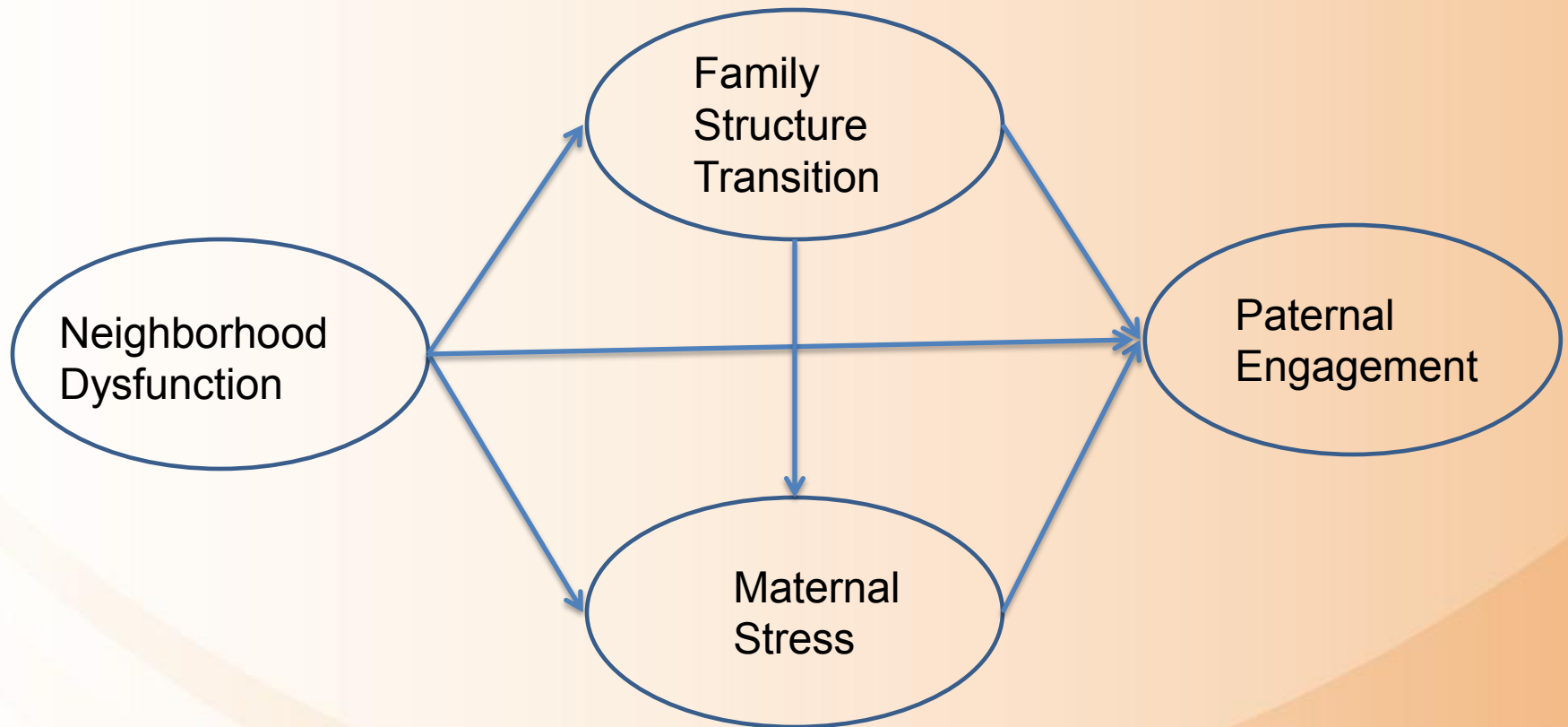


Mediating Mechanisms?

- There is evidence about
 - Community environment on paternal engagement
 - Community environment on (Cultrona et. al, 2003; Lyngstad et. al, 2011)
 - Family structure transition
 - parental stress
 - Family structure transition and parental stress on paternal engagement
- Family structure transition and maternal stress mediate between community environment and paternal engagement?



Research Conceptual Model





Data and Sample

- Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study year 3 and 5 surveys
- Sample of 801 unmarried families
 - Mother and father not married at year 3, and not married or cohabiting with others at year 3 and 5
 - Father not in jail and child not deceased
 - Father had some contact with child



Measures

- Dependent variable
 - Mother and father co-parenting behavior (8 items)
 - Mean of 23 between 7-28; example items include mother' perception that father:
 - Acted like the father expected
 - Can be trusted to take good care of children
 - Would talk about problems in child raising



Measures-Cont.

- Independent variable
 - Neighborhood dysfunction consists of 3 aspects of mothers' perception of neighborhood
 - Cohesion (5 items) – mean of 12 between 0-20
 - e.g., trust level toward neighbors
 - Control (5 items) - mean of 12 between 5-25
 - e.g., neighbors likelihood of intervention if children have bad behaviors (skipping school, etc.)
 - Disorder (8 items)- mean of 15 between 8-32
 - e.g., drug dealing, loitering on the street



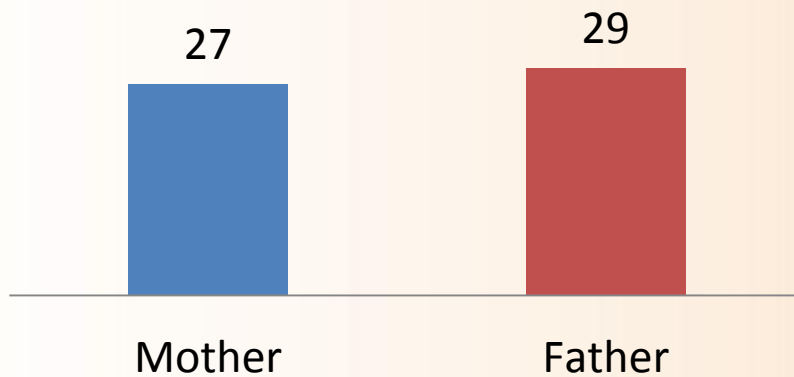
Measures- Cont.

- Mediating variables
 - Family structure transition
 - Four levels of relationship indicated by 4 – 1 (married, cohabitating, romantic/friends/divorce, and no relationship) measured at two waves
 - Changes among these levels during two waves
 - Maternal stress (12 items)
 - Mean of 13 between 0-28
 - Mothers' stressful feeling related to childcare

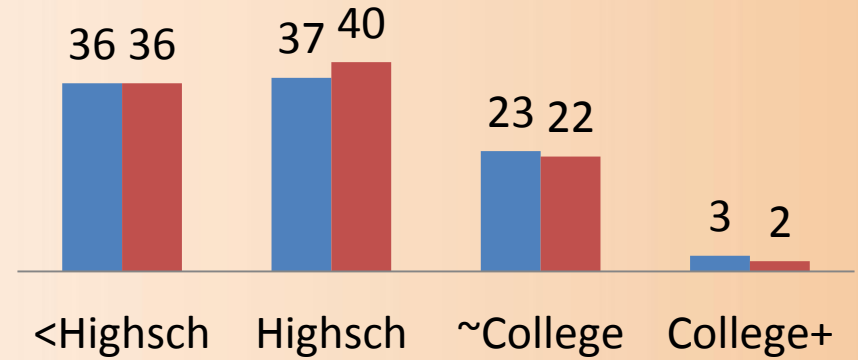


Sample Characteristics

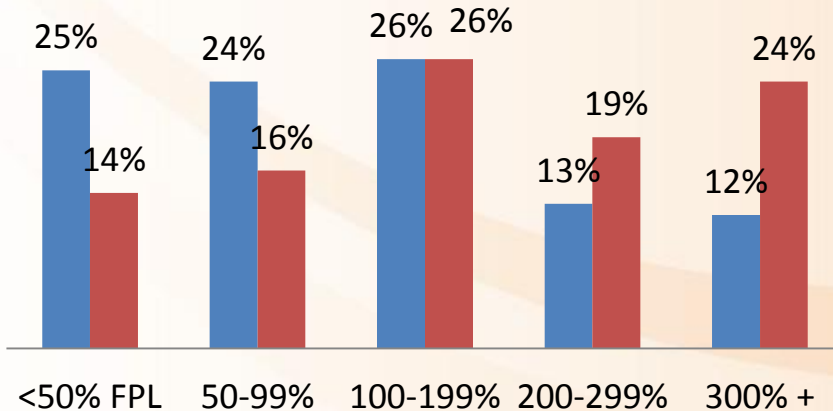
Age



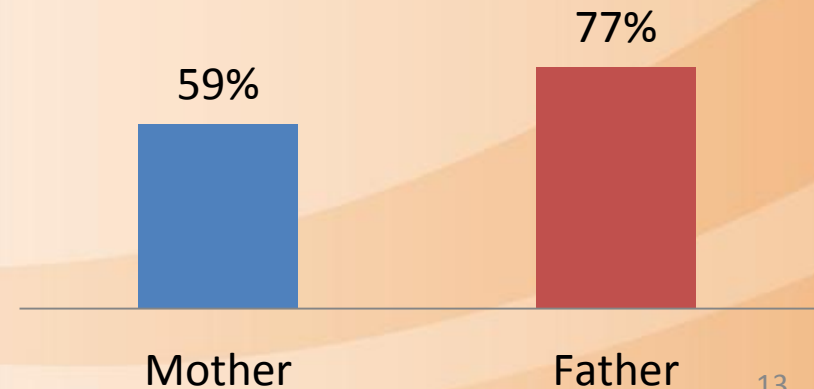
Education



Income



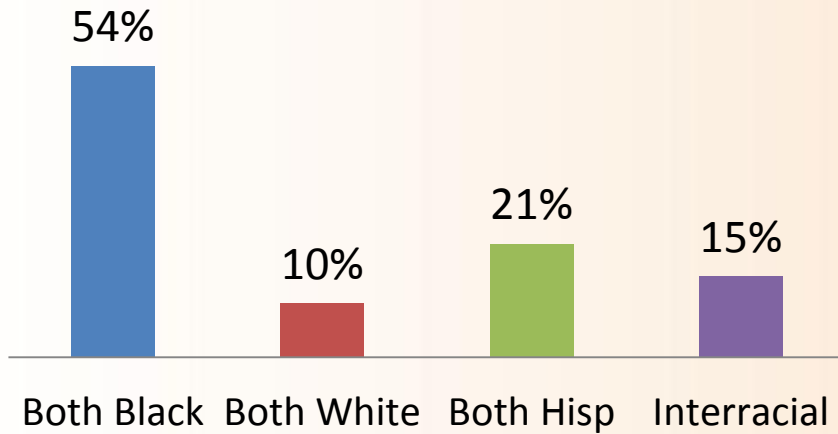
Employment



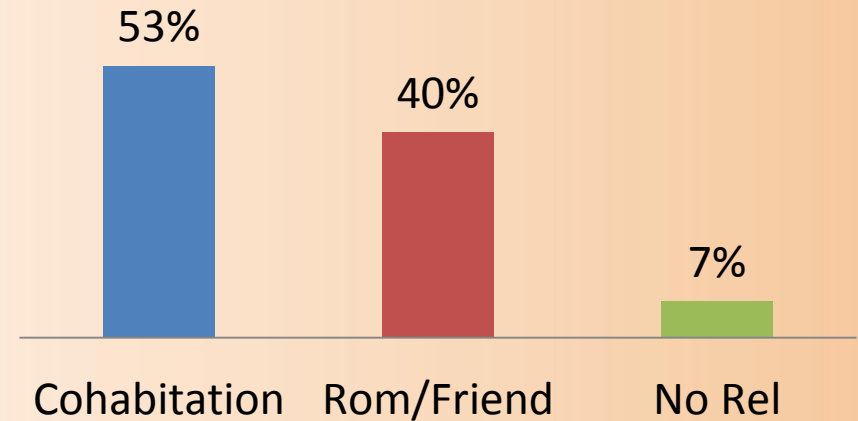


Sample Characteristics-Cont.

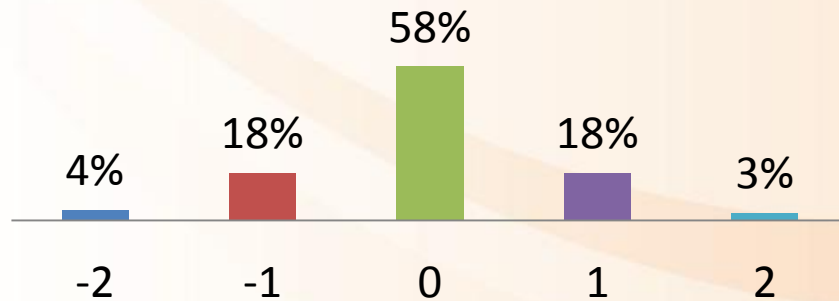
Race Combination



Family Structure

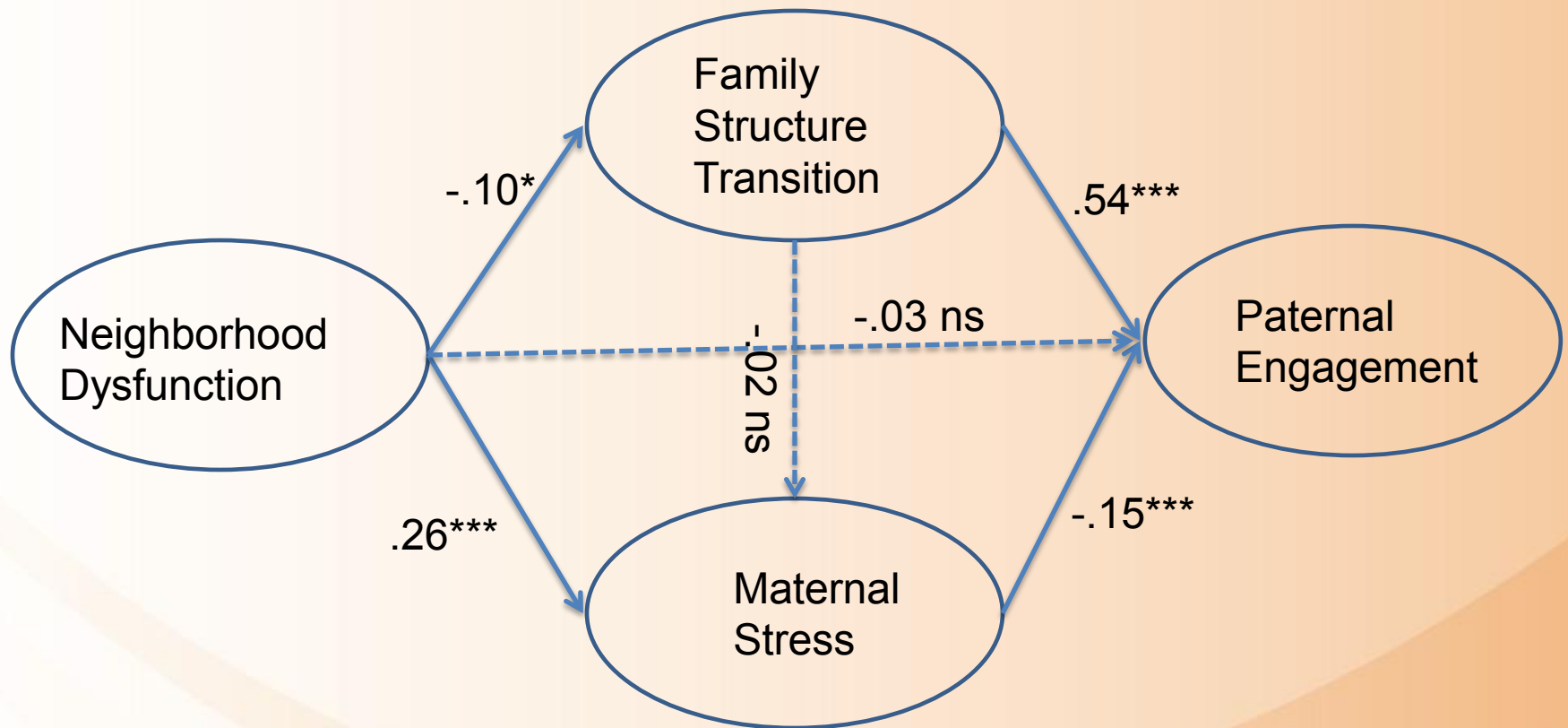


Family Structure Change





SEM Model Results





Model Statistics

- Chi-square = 322, df = 249, $p < .01$
- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .02
- CFI = .99
- Covariates
 - Mother and father age, race, edu, income, employment, child gender, etc.



Conclusions

- There are both upward and downward family structure transitions
- There are pathways of neighborhood dysfunction affecting unmarried fathers' paternal engagement mediated by family structure transition and maternal stress



Conclusions-Cont.

- Two pathways
 - Neighborhood dysfunction is negatively associated with family's upward transition, which is positively associated with paternal engagement
 - Neighborhood dysfunction is positively associated with maternal stress, which is negatively associated with paternal engagement



Implications

- Consider neighborhood dysfunction in programs aimed at promoting paternal engagement
- Consider neighborhood dysfunction when serving cases with problems of family relationship deterioration and maternal stress
- Consider a more holistic perspective when serving unmarried families