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

- Neighborhood Dysfunction
- Family Structure Transition
- Maternal Stress
- Paternal Engagement
Data and Sample

• Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study year3 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

Mother: 27
Father: 29

Education

<Highsch: 36 36
Highsch: 37 40
~College: 23 22
College+: 3 2

Income

<50% FPL: 25% 14%
50-99%: 24% 16%
100-199%: 26% 26%
200-299%: 19% 13%
300%+: 24% 12%

Employment

Mother: 59%
Father: 77%
Sample Characteristics-Cont.

Race Combination

- Both Black: 54%
- Both White: 10%
- Both Hisp: 21%
- Interracial: 15%

Family Structure

- Cohabitation: 53%
- Rom/Friend: 40%
- No Rel: 7%

Family Structure Change

- -2: 4%
- -1: 18%
- 0: 58%
- 1: 18%
- 2: 3%
SEM Model Results

- Neighborhood Dysfunction
- Family Structure Transition
- Maternal Stress
- Paternal Engagement

**Path Coefficients**

- Neighborhood Dysfunction → Family Structure Transition: -.10*
- Family Structure Transition → Paternal Engagement: .54***
- Maternal Stress → Neighborhood Dysfunction: .26***
- Paternal Engagement → Maternal Stress: -.15***
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