Associations between Job Loss and Parental Mental Health and Parenting Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Vivian Nguyen, Dr. Jenna Finch,
Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a significant amount of stress to parents around the United States, which can have a dramatic affect on families.

- **Purpose:** To examine whether parental underemployment is associated with parental mental health and consequently harsh and inconsistent discipline toward young children.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Parents who experience job loss during the pandemic will report higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Parents who experience higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms will report higher levels of harsh and inconsistent discipline.

Materials & Methods

- **Participants:**
  - 250 parents (95.88% Females)
  - Lincoln, NE and surrounding areas

- **Independent Variable:**
  - Employment change (parental report of job loss and underemployment)

- **Dependent Variables:**
  - Parental mental health: Depression (CES-D, Radloff, 1977) and anxiety (PROMIS Emotional Distress-Anxiety Short Form; Polkonis et al., 2011)
  - Parenting Quality: Parent Practices Interview
  - Control Variables: Parent gender and Race

Results & Discussion

| Parenting Quality: Harsh & Inconsistent | B  | (SE)  | P>|t| |
|----------------------------------------|----|-------|-----|
| Anxiety Symptoms                       | .022 | (.016) | 0.189 |
| Depression Symptoms                    | .014 | (.016) | 0.404 |
| Underemployment                        | -.062| (.125) | 0.621 |

- During COVID-19, parents who reported underemployment reported higher rates of depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms (trend-level).
- There is no association between parents with mental health problem (depression and anxiety) and parenting quality.

Background

- Research about the Great Recession showed unemployment was linked to a decline in mental health (Goldsmith & Dieter 2012).

- When parents have a mental health condition, the nature and quality of parenting are often disrupted (Leinonen, Solantaus, & Punamaki, 2002).

- Parents experiencing mental health distress tend to become more punitive, harsh, distant, and less nurturing with their children (Chicco et al., 1996; McCloy, 1989; McCloy et al., 1994).

Descriptive Statistic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underemployment B (SE) B (SE)</td>
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- 2.06 (1.15) 2.86 (1.17)

Conclusion

COVID is not going to go away anytime soon. This study allows us to get a better understanding of how this pandemic is potentially effecting parents experiencing depression and anxiety, along with their families.

Future Work

- Future Research
  - Include similar portions of fathers and mothers
  - Make the study more diverse