

Low-Income Risks for Early Childhood Development: The Protective Role of African American Fathers' Parenting

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Background

Poverty can have adverse effects on early childhood development:

- Language development (Justice et al., 2019; Gatlin et al., 2016)
- Effortful control (EC; Lengua et al., 2015)

Due to the overrepresentation of African American children in poverty (Creamer, 2020), they may be likely to lag in these skills.

Guided by the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), we expand research on African American father engagement and links between income and children's receptive vocabulary and EC.

Aim and Hypotheses

Study Aim:

- To understand African American family processes that can be protective for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Hypotheses:

- **(H1):** Income will be positively associated with lower receptive vocabulary and effortful control.
- **(H2):** Father's engagement (language activities, physical play) will be positively associated with receptive vocabulary and EC.
- **(H3):** Father's engagement will moderate the relationships between income and receptive vocabulary and EC.

Methods

Sample

- Families (N= 694) from Building Strong Families data
 - Fathers must identify as African American
 - The child must have PPVT and Effortful Control scores
 - Fathers must have seen their child within the past month

Measures

- **Income:** Fathers reported total annual earnings from all jobs.
- **Language activities:** Fathers reported frequency of engagement with their child in four activities ($\alpha = .83$; e.g., tell stories to child).
- **Physical play:** Fathers reported frequency of engagement with their child in five activities ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., played chasing games).
- **Receptive Vocabulary:** Interviewers administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4 (PPVT-4) (Dunn & Dunn, 2007).
- **Effortful Control:** Interviewers rated children's behavior on 4 items ($\alpha = .86$; e.g., task persistence) (Roid and Miller, 1997).

Results

Regression analyses were performed to predict PPVT and EC using identical models. Physical play and language activities were tested in separate models.

- **H1** was supported: Income was associated with receptive vocabulary and effortful control
- **H2, H3** were not supported.

Table 1.

Summary of Regression Results

	Receptive Vocabulary				Effortful Control			
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Intercept	65.29***	5.55	66.31***	5.51	1.80***	0.30	1.53***	0.27
Income (F)	0.04*	1.13	0.15	1.07	-0.34*	0.30	-0.27	0.05
Physical Play (F)	-	-	-0.07	0.82	-	-	-0.05	0.04
Income (M)	0.02	0.34	0.02	0.34	0.08*	0.02	0.08*	0.02
Education (M)	0.04	0.63	0.04	0.63	-0.01	0.03	-0.00	0.03
Education (F)	0.05	0.66	0.05	0.66	-0.02	0.03	-0.02	0.03
Live with Child (F)	0.11*	0.56	0.12**	0.54	-0.04	0.03	-0.04	0.03
Other children (M)	-0.08	0.43	-0.08	0.51	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.02
Other children (F)	-0.08	0.42	-0.08	0.42	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
Child's sex (M)	-0.01	1.04	-0.02	1.05	0.21***	0.05	0.22***	0.05
Language Activities (F)	0.03	0.86	-	-	-0.08	0.04	-	-
Language Activities (M)	0.02	0.64	0.03	0.64	-0.01	0.03	-0.01	0.03
Income X Language Activities(F)	0.02	0.25	-	-	0.06	0.01	-	-
Income X Physical Play (F)	-	-	-0.00	0.24	-	-	0.04	0.01
Effortful Control	0.29***	0.73	0.29	0.72	-	-	-	-
PPVT	-	-	-	-	0.29***	0.00	0.29***	0.00
R^2	0.13		0.13		0.13		0.13	
F	9.24***		9.52***		9.51***		9.39***	

Note: M= Mother, F= Father; Child gender was coded 1= Male, 2= Female; PPVT= Children's Receptive Vocabulary, EC= Children's Effortful Control; Blue = Language Activities; Green = Physical Play; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Conclusions and Implications

Income may impact African American children's language development and effortful control. More research needs to be done to identify African American family processes that can be protective for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Future Research:

- longitudinal
- quantity and quality of father engagement
- role of support networks (i.e., grandparents, fictive kin) that can be protective for African American children and families.

