Parental Marital Status and Child Self-Regulation

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Abstract

Parents play an essential role in their child’s development of the skills needed for self-regulation. The current study examined the relationship between parental marital status and child self-regulation. Analyzing a sample of 328 preschool children, results indicate having married parents is related to higher self-regulation in children. These results suggest that living in a single-parent or married parent household may influence child self-regulation in school.

Introduction

Preschool is a sensitive time in the development of self-control. It is a time when children learn the skills required to regulate their behavior (McClelland & Cameron, 2012). This development, however, can be greatly affected by negative life events such as divorce (Leon, 2003). Some studies have found evidence of oppositional, aggressive, distractible, and demanding behaviors in children following a divorce (Crossman & Adams, 1980). Other research has found that the majority of children who experience parental divorce do not exhibit significantly more problems in their development (Wood, Repetti & Roesch, 2004). A great deal of research has been conducted on the effects of divorce on a childhood adjustment and development. Indeed, this research is useful to parents, teachers, and child development researchers, but there has not been much research conducted examining the relationship between child self-regulation and living with a single, never married parent.

It would be beneficial to determine whether marital status of parents has an effect on child self-regulation. Finding a correlation between these factors could allow early childhood development researchers and educators to design programs for children who may have difficulty managing their behavior.

Study Design/Methods Used

My URAP project was part of Dr. McClelland’s Touch Your Toes! Kindergarten Readiness Study which is examining the reliability and validity of the Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders (HTKS) self-regulation task as a school readiness screening tool.

The sample consists of 328 preschool children. The data examined were collected in Fall of 2011 (Time 1) and Spring of 2012 (Time 2).

Within the sample, 74 children were living with a single, never married parent (22.66%) and 254 children were living with married parents (77.44%). Self-regulation was assessed using the HTKS measure. Correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze the data.

Goals of the Study

The present study examined the following research question:

1. Do children living in single-parent homes have a more difficult time managing their behavior (i.e., lower self-regulation) in school than children living in two-parent homes?

Based on previous research, I predicted children living in a single-parent home will have more difficulty regulating their behavior compared to children living with married parents.

Results

Results of the correlation analysis indicate having married parents is significantly and positively related with HTKS scores at Time 1 (r = .19***, p < .001) and Time 2 (r = .26***, p < .001).

Results of regressions indicate that, when controlling for child age and parent education, having married parents is significantly and positively related to higher self-regulation on the HTKS at Time 1 and Time 2 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Regression Analysis
Relations between living in married or single-parent families and child self-regulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HTKS Task of Self-Regulation</th>
<th>Coefficient at Time 1</th>
<th>Coefficient at Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Education</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.5***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in Married or</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Parent Families</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Coefficients are standardized.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Summary/Conclusion

The results of the analyses support the original hypothesis of child living in single-parent families having lower self-regulation than children living in married parent families. This finding is a good start to future research. It would be very interesting to look further into the factors associated with living in single- and married parent households and how they may affect child self-regulation.

Conducting more research to find predictive factors of self-regulation will be beneficial to children, parents, and child educators.

References


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