

1-21-2015

Impact of Adverse Childhood Events on Child Behaviors, Attachment, and Parenting in Low-Income Families

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IMPACT OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EVENTS ON CHILD BEHAVIORS,
ATTACHMENT, AND PARENTING IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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August 2014

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Title: Impact of Adverse Childhood Events on Child Behaviors, Attachment, and Parenting in Low-Income Families

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The present study was completed to evaluate and expand research on family dynamics and functioning in a low-income sample following Dynamic Systems theory. Previous research has demonstrated that child behaviors are affected by parenting practices and the level of attachment between a child and the caregiver. However, many studies have limited their samples to mixed or middle income, and research has not adequately addressed whether these effects are also true for low-income families. Further, adverse childhood experiences have been linked to a host of negative health and psychological outcomes, but have yet to be linked to family functioning measured with the variables of parenting practices, level of attachment, and a child's adaptive and problem behaviors. Dynamic systems theory would suggest that adverse childhood experiences in a caregiver's childhood would negatively impact their ability to effectively raise their child. Using a convenience sample of Head Start and Early Head Start, the present study found that parenting practices significantly predicted a caregiver's ratings of their child's adaptive behaviors and a teacher's ratings of the child's problem behaviors. Further, the level of attachment significantly predicted a caregiver's ratings of their child's adaptive behaviors and approached significantly predicting a teacher's ratings of the child's problem behaviors. Finally, adverse childhood events reported by the caregiver did not significantly predict their parenting practices, level of attachment

with their child, or their child's adaptive or problem behaviors. However, when caregivers reported more adverse childhood experiences, they also tended to report lower levels of relational frustration, and teachers tended to report more problem behaviors in their child. Limitations including the sample and the method of data collection likely impacted these results. The present study highlights the necessity of social programming to help build parenting skills and support low-income families. Further research is recommended to understand the role of adverse childhood experiences in a family's functioning.