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Family Income Dynamics and Child Cognitive Outcomes - Exploring Mechanisms of Effect

Edward Sosu

University of Strathclyde

Background and Aim : Studies suggest that income dynamics (poverty, income loss, gain and volatility) have significant impact on child cognitive outcomes. However, we do not fully understand the psychological mechanisms by which these various forms of income dynamics influence cognitive outcomes and whether they operate through the same mechanisms (Miller & Votruba - Drzal, 2016). Drawing on previous research, this ongoing study examined how different forms of income dynamics affect early cognitive outcomes through family stress and investment pathways (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010).

Methods : Data for the study is based on the Growing Up in Scotland longitudinal survey (n=3621). Predictors (income dynamics), mediators (parental investment, mental health, and household chaos) and outcome variable (child cognitive outcomes) were selected in line with the temporal ordering of hypothesised pathways. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling techniques. All analyses took into account longitudinal weights, stratification, and clustering in the data. Analyses were undertaken using Mplus 7.4 software.

Results and conclusion : Preliminary results suggest that income levels influence child cognitive outcomes through parental educational investment, mental health, and household chaos. Specifically, higher family income was associated with high cognitive outcomes through high levels of educational investment, good levels of parental mental health, and low levels of household chaos. Income gain and income loss on the other hand influenced child cognitive outcomes through household chaos. Income gain was associated with low levels of household chaos while income loss resulted in higher levels of chaos. The policy and practice implications will be explored.

References:

Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status, family processes and individual development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 685-704.

Miller, P., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2016). The role of family income dynamics in predicting trajectories of internalizing and externalizing problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 1–14.

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