The Relationship Between Prenatal Economic Strain and Infant Irritability at 6 Months of Age

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Hypotheses

- Poverty \(\rightarrow\) Negative child outcomes
- Mechanisms help transmit negative effects of economic strain to child outcomes

**Hypotheses:**

**Hypothesis 1:** High prenatal economic strain negatively affects infant’s irritability as young as 6 months.

**Hypothesis 2:** High prenatal economic strain is associated with high household chaos and poor neighborhood safety.

**Hypothesis 3:** High household chaos and poor neighborhood safety are associated with negative infant temperament at 6 months of age.

**Mechanism Model**

- Economic Strain \(\rightarrow\) Child Outcomes (i.e. heightened irritability)
- Mechanisms (i.e. household chaos, neighborhood safety)
- Parenting

**Current Study**

- Data subset of the Brain and Early Experience Study [BEE Study]
- Longitudinal study
- Recruited from the triangle area of North Carolina
- Study Participants: 156 healthy mother-infant dyads

- **Prenatal visit** during mother’s third trimester
  - Self-report economic strain questionnaire [predictor]

- **6 month home visit** when infant is 6-months-old
  - Observer Reports of:
    - Household Chaos [mechanism]
    - Neighborhood Safety [mechanism]
    - Infant Irritability [outcome variable]

**Results**

- No direct significant relationship between economic strain and infant irritability
- Significant associations between economic strain and household chaos and neighborhood safety

- Significant associations between household chaos and infant irritability as hypothesized

**Correlation Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Economic Strain</th>
<th>Irritability</th>
<th>Household Chaos</th>
<th>Neighborhood Safety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Economic Strain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.405**</td>
<td>.533**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Irritability</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.286*</td>
<td>-.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Household Chaos</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.437**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Neighborhood Safety</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

- Heightened prenatal economic strain increases infant temperament through heightened household chaos as a mechanism
- Heightened household chaos has negative impacts to infant irritably
- There may be other moderating variables helping to curtail the negative effects of prenatal economic strain

**Contact Information**

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