How poverty affects social development, behavior, and academics of children: how can school personnel help?

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Abstract
This paper discusses how poverty affects the social development, behavior, and academics of children. It also provides information to professionals who work with children to explain how children in poverty may demonstrate increased behavioral and emotional problems. Additionally, it explores what school personnel can do to help improve outcomes for students in poverty. A case example of a partnership created in Georgia is utilized to help articulate these concepts. The sources cited are all from recent published literature.
How Poverty Affects Social Development, Behavior, and Academics of Children: How can School Personnel Help?

A Research Project

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Master of Arts in Education

By

Jessica Holm-Blackburn

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Entitled: HOW POVERTY AFFECTS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN: HOW CAN SCHOOL PERSONNEL HELP?

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Poverty 1

How Poverty Affects Social Development, Behavior, and Academics of Children: How can School Personnel Help?

Rationale

Poverty is a common concern for children in elementary school. There are 37 million people living at or below the federal poverty line, and of those, 13 million are children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In Iowa, thirty-four percent of children are low income (National Center for children in Poverty, 2006).

Succeeding in school relies on a child’s ability to find their way in social situations, learning how to be autonomous students and follow school rules (Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, and Mcloyd, 2002). Poverty has an impact on children in the education system. Family background and child characteristics also have a great effect on children’s outcomes (Blau, 1999). In addition, small increases in household income have not been shown to positively affect developmental changes in children (Blau, 1999). In fact, families would need to make double the amount of the federal poverty level in order to meet their basic needs (Gershoof, 2003a). Therefore, school professionals need to reconsider additional ways to help their students.

This paper is part of a project, including a PowerPoint presentation for school personnel, regarding the impact of poverty on children in elementary school. The project briefly covers different factors that effect low income families, which cause delays in behavioral, social, and academic development. In addition, signs of behavioral, social, and academic delay will be highlighted amongst a population of
impoverished children. The role of being an individual school personnel, as well as their role as being a part of a team advocating for children, is examined. Lastly, I will introduce the need for a cohesive, comprehensive system for impoverished children. All of the tools a school may already have in place can be enhanced by making sure all school personnel are aware of associated risk factors, implications for school staff, the benefits of such a methodical approach, and how they can intertwine activities with academic lessons.

This paper, in particular, addresses current research regarding the affect of poverty on children in elementary school, in regards to behavior and social development. This paper will also discuss behavioral and social issues faced by children in poverty. The paper will examine two models used to aid in describing the relationship between poverty and social-emotional development. Lastly, this paper will examine what school personnel can do to help children in poverty to become more successful.

Behavioral, Social, and Academic Impact

Children living in poverty have a more difficult time achieving social competence, emotional control, academic success, and self-regulation as compared to their peers (Gershoof, 2003a; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & Mcloyd, 2002). However, studies show that gender and ethnicity are not significant factors in determining outcomes for impoverished children (Mistry et al., 2002; Ackerman, Brown, and Izard, 2004). Some children living in poverty exhibit an increase in both internalizing and
externalizing behaviors (Gershoof, 2003b). Behaviors that some impoverished children may internalize are anxiety, social withdrawal, and depression. External behaviors include aggression, fighting, as well as other forms of acting out (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, 1994). Children who suffer from prolonged poverty show a greater array of internal behaviors than children who live in a temporary situation of poverty. However, children living in temporary poverty exhibit more profound external behaviors (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The following paragraphs will discuss, in further depth, examples of such emotional and behavioral concerns.

Emotional and behavioral concerns appear more often in impoverished children than peers who have a high social economic status (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Income can affect the mental health of children (Conger, Mcloyd, Wallace, Sun, Simons, and Brody, 2002). Therefore, children may appear less self-sufficient and have greater impulsivity (Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & Mcloyd, 2002). Children with mild, negative behaviors have actually now been shown to have none in adolescence (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith 1998). This may serve as a motivation for professionals to, early on, put forth the effort to help children with behavioral concerns. Overall, it is simpler to alter behavior than academics (Blau, 1999).

Two popular models exist defining the relationship between children in poverty and their cognitive and social-emotional development. These two models are the family stress model and the investment model. The family stress model focuses on maternal,
emotional anguish as well as on parenting practices (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). The study by Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, and Mcloyd (2002) supports the family stress model. The emotional suffering of the mother can be in reaction to or confounded by financial worry (Mistry et al., 2002).

The mother may have feelings of depression and ineffectiveness that influence her parenting style (Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & Mcloyd, 2002; Conger et al., 2002). In addition, financial strain may lead to maternal stress, and consequently, poor parenting and having a lower investment in their child (Gershoff, 2007; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). A high income home often has less emotional suffering, as more positive parenting is being used (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). The financial pressure inherent in lower income households may result in the parent being more stressed and angry when disciplining, limiting their ability to parent effectively (Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, Mcloyd, 2002). Positive parenting and investment in children have been shown to increase cognitive and social-emotional competences, and decreased behavior concerns (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, and Lennon, 2007; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002).

Investment is defined by Linver, Brooks-Gunn and Kohen (2002) as an inspiring home environment. The child’s outcome in academics and behavior is directly related to family environment (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002).
Families with more income often have more mentally stimulating environments (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). The poor emotional health of the mother is related to the behavior concerns of the child because it affects the type of learning environment the mother can provide to the child (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002; Conger, Mcloyd, Wallace, Sun, Simmons, & Brody, 2002).

Another area that may be affected by living in poverty is academics. Poverty is more likely to affect academic performance than behavior in children (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). Two of the academic areas affected are math and reading (Blau, 1999; Gershoof, 2003a). Children from low income households who are in preschool and elementary school are less likely to graduate from high school (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks, and Smith, 1998). A child’s environment impacts their overall achievement. The home environment may lessen the opportunities for learning and children may be given less affection from the mother (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

School Personnel

One way to promote development is by utilizing the educational services already offered at a school (Blau, 1999). School personnel can help by engaging with parents and providing quality education (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan; 1997) (Gershoof, 2003 b). Schools tend to abide by middle class rules that are not completely visible (Payne, 2006).
To help students, the educational professionals should make students aware of these rules in order to increase their possibility for success (Payne, 1996). According to Payne (1996) a student might have to sacrifice relationships for achievement.

The following is an example of school professionals working together to improve the quality of schooling offered to children in poverty. Elementary, middle, and high schools in Georgia formed a partnership to help students out of poverty. The principals from all three schools met to discuss ways that they could help improve the success for students in poverty. The school formed a leadership team who decided to work on improving transitions between each school. In addition, they formulated five areas that they wanted school personnel to be knowledgeable about: 1) bridging successful transitions between schools, 2) modifying student culture, 3) increasing student expectations, 4) strategies to promote giftedness, and 5) how to create a culture of excellence. The school welcomed community involvement. The goal was to develop a culture that created a high level of learning for all students. The results of the partnership were positive, demonstrated by higher scores for impoverished students in both math and reading. In addition, the data showed an increase in high school graduate rates (Davenport, Tolbert, Myers-Oliver, Brissett, and Roland, 2007).

Conclusion

Children in poverty may demonstrate internalizing and externalizing behaviors such as depression and aggression. If the child shows only slight behavior concerns in elementary school it is likely that they will not have significant behavior issues in high
school. The two models for family stress and investment introduced in this paper
describe the negative relationship between poverty and social-emotional development.
The two school subjects that children in poverty have greatest difficulty with are
reading and math. Finally, school personnel should work together to provide quality
education to all students, remaining aware of the unwritten rules that they may be
unwittingly reinforcing to unfairly categorize children.
References


How poverty affects children’s academic, social, and behavior development. What can school Personal do?

By
Jessica Holm

Overview

- Cover some statistics of poverty
- Discuss factors related to poverty that contribute to behavior and emotion concerns of children.
- Briefly cover some additional concerns that children in poverty may face
- Ways school personal can work together to assist children in Poverty.
- A cohesive system.
Characteristics of Families in Poverty

- Usually from a mother only family
- Parents have low educational levels
- One or more parent is employed
- More low-income and poor families in rural areas.
- More likely to move
- Parents are first generation immigrants
- Black and Latino’s have a higher percentage of poor than African Americans (Iowa, 2007)
2007, the federal poverty level is $20,650 for a family of four. Poor are children at or below this level. Children living in families with incomes below $41,300 (twice the FPL) for a family of four is referred to as low income.
Parental Employment

- Low-income: 11% Not employed, 31% part-time or part-year, 58% full-time, year-round
- Above Low-income: 95% full-time, year-round

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty

Parental Marital Status

- Poor: 64% Not married, 10% married
- Not Poor: 47% Not married, 12% married

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty
Time to Do a Budget

Possible Characteristics of children in Poverty

- Decreased
  - Social competence
  - Social-emotional development
  - Academic success
  - Self-regulation
  - Autonomy
- External
  - Aggression (impulsive)
  - Fighting
  - Acting out
- Internal
  - Anxiety
  - Social withdrawal
  - Depression
Two Popular Poverty Models

Family Stress Model
- Focus on emotional anguish and parenting practices.

Investment Model
- Is the home environment and time with the child

Family Stress Model
- Financial worry → Stress → Emotional Suffering → Depression and feeling of ineffectiveness
- Poor parenting → Lower investment child (low quality interactions) → Harsh punishment
Family Stress Model

From Conger, Mcloyd, Wallace, Sun, Simmons and Brody (2002)

INCOME

High-Income Parent
- Positive parenting
  - Shown to increase cognitive, social emotional, and lower behavior concerns.
- Less emotional suffering
- Enriching academic environment

Low-Income Parent
- Harsh parenting
  - More anger when disciplining children
  - Unable to control children
- Emotion suffering
  - Stress and depression
  - Lack of an enriching academic environment
Academics and Poverty

- Poverty has a greater effect of academics than behavior or social-emotional effects
- Math and Reading are affected
- Children in low-income preschool are less likely to graduate high school
- The home environment and attachment of mother contribute to academic outcomes.

What school personal can do!

- A small increase in families income has shown not to effect development
  - In fact it is almost double the current income to make a difference
- We must look at other ways!
  - A way shown to improve development is the educational services we offer.
  - Provide quality schooling
  - Parent involvement
  - School personal could be aware of the unwritten social class rules they follow and help students be aware of them.
What school personal can do!

Work together to build a cohesive system:
- Build a Community
  - With in the school
    - Positive school climate cohesive to student learning
  - As a school district
  - As a town or city
  - Parent involvement

What school personal can do!

- All personal effectively using programs that are currently being implanted at your school.
- Everyone: para-educators, custodian, teachers, principle, counselors.
- Many schools may have more than one program (peace for kids, character education, and a bully program)
- The staff should be trained in the programs and have periodic training to “freshen up” on the material.
- Staff should brainstorm how the will use the program in the classroom, possible ways to tie lessons together, and ways to incorporate academic goals.
Example of school working together

- A elementary, middle, and high school meet in Georgia to improve the success of students in poverty.
- The principles of the school got together and formed a Leadership group. They came up with for items they wanted school personal to be knowledgeable about
  - Understanding what a successful transition is
  - Understanding student culture
  - Create a culture of excellence
  - Evaluate current student expectations
  - Understanding strategies to promote giftedness
- **Results**
  - Increased graduates
  - Higher math and reading scores

Questions??

Thank You!!
References


