FAMILY ECONOMIC PRESSURE, MARITAL DISCORD, AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES FROM MIDDLE TO LATER ADULTHOOD

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Funding by NIA, NIMH, NICHD, NIDA, Bureau of Maternal & Child Health, MacArthur Foundation, Iowa Agriculture Home Economics Experiment Station
Economic Hardship

• Economic hardship places families at risk for multiple disadvantages.

• Economic adversity has been associated with a range of negative behavioral, mental, and physical health outcomes (Conger et al., 2010).
Family Stress Model

Economic Hardship
1. Low income
2. High debt, low assets
3. Negative financial events

Economic Pressure
1. Unmet material needs
2. Unpaid debts
3. Painful cutbacks

Parent Distress
1. Emotional problems
2. Behavioral problems

Disrupted Family Relations
1. Inter-parental conflict/withdrawal
2. Harsh, inconsistent parenting
3. Low parent involvement

Child & Adolescent Adjustment
1. Emotional, behavioral problems
2. Impaired competence
Family Stress Model

• Empirical support was first demonstrated with generation 1 (G1) and generation 2 (G2) as adolescents from the present rural sample.

• Findings have been replicated with several different types of study populations.
Family Stress Model

- Primary use of cross sectional data
  - Thus, important to test the model using data collected over time.

- Much of the research has involved adolescent outcomes
  - What are the consequences of experiencing economic adversity in middle adulthood on outcomes in later adulthood?
Family Stress Model

- Examined influence of stability and change in economic hardship during the early years (age 44) on health problems of husbands and wives at age 51 (Wickrama et al., 2010)

- Found that economic hardship contributes to onset of health problems of middle-aged husbands and wives
Present Investigation

• Using the Family Stress Model, the present investigation examined G1 economic pressure in middle adulthood on physical health outcomes in later adulthood.

• 3 developmental time points
  • Economic adversity in early middle years (age 39)
  • Family processes in middle years (age 40-42)
  • Physical impairment in later years (age 65)
Method
Middle Adulthood

• Data are from the Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYFP), a longitudinal study of 451 G1 biological parents, G2 adolescents, and a sibling within 4 years of the adolescent.

• Study began in 1989 - 1992
Method
Later Adulthood

• G1s continued in the Later Adulthood Study (LAS)

• Two waves of data collection: 2015, 2017
Method

• IYFP and LAS
  • In-home interviews
  • G1 Wife
  • G1 Husband
• Survey Questionnaires
• Observations (Videotaped Family Interaction Tasks)
  • Partner Discussion Task
The Present Report

- The present report includes 243 G1 husbands and wives who were married to the same person from 1989 - 2015
Time 1 Measures

• **Economic Pressure** ($\alpha = .79$)
  - **Material Needs** – Includes items such as “I have enough money to afford the kind of place to live in that I should, I have enough money to afford the kind of car I need”
    - 6 items ($\alpha = .93$)
  - **Make Ends Meet** – “How much difficulty have you had paying bills, At the end of each month, do you have enough money left over?”
    - 2 items ($\alpha = .84$)
  - **Financial Cutbacks** – Includes items such as “Stopped paying bills, borrowed money, reduced medical insurance”
    - 29 items ($\alpha = .88$)
Time 2 Measures

- Emotional Distress

- SCL-90-R (Derogatis, 1983)

  - Hostility subscale – Includes items experienced in the past week such as “Feeling easily annoyed or irritated, Experiencing temper outbursts you could not control, and Getting into frequent arguments”

  - 6 items ($\alpha = .80$ wife, $\alpha = .74$ husband)
Time 2 Measures

- **Marital Conflict**
  - Observed behavior of one spouse toward the other spouse during a discussion task ($\alpha = .91$ wife, $\alpha = .86$ husband)

  - **Hostility** = Angry, critical, disapproving behavior

  - **Angry Coercion** = The attempt to control or change the behavior of another in a hostile manner

  - **Antisocial** = Resistance, defiance, and insensitivity
Time 3 Measures

• Physical Impairment
  • 11 items – Includes items regarding how much your physical health now limits you in these activities “Vigorous activities, Climbing several flights of stairs, Walking one block, Bathing or dressing yourself, and Driving”
  • ($\alpha = .67$ wife, $\alpha = .71$ husband)
Figure 2. Economic Pressure and Physical Impairment

Economic Pressure

.29***

.38***

Wife Physical Impairment

Husband Physical Impairment
Figure 3. Statistical Model

Economic Hardship

.47***

Economic Pressure

.63***

.26***

.12*

.11

.18**

Wife Marital Conflict

.13*

Wife Physical Impairment

Husband Marital Conflict

.13*

Husband Physical Impairment

Wife Emotional Distress

Early Middle Adulthood
Age 39

Middle Adulthood
Age 40-42

Later Adulthood
Age 65

*p .10, *p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001 Model fit: $\chi^2 (71) = 148.73, \ p < .05, \ CFI = .96, \ RMSEA = .07$
Summary of Findings

• Consistent with the Family Stress Model, economic pressure was associated with emotional distress which, in turn, was associated with marital conflict.

• High levels of marital conflict during middle adulthood was associated with physical impairment in the later years.

• Wife emotional distress was associated with husband marital conflict, which was associated with husband physical impairment.
Future Directions

• Control for physical impairment in the early middle years

• Examine genetic or other biological influences

• Replicate with more diverse sample
Conclusions

- Replicated findings from G1 to G2 as an adolescent to consequences for G1 across adulthood.

- Economic pressure as experienced in the early middle adult years has long-term health consequences into later adulthood, through emotional distress and marital conflict.