Economic Hardship and Mexican American Adolescents’ Family Relationships

Melissa Y. Delgado, Sarah E. Killoren, and Kimberly A. Updegraff
Why study economic hardship in families with adolescents?
Economic Hardship

- Child poverty
- Low-income
  - 2.8 million Latino youth
- Stagnant incomes
- Economic inequality
- Decline in economic mobility
The Family Stress Model

- Economic problems are related to relationship instability
The Cognitive Developmental Perspective

• Emphasizes adolescents as active agents in their social and cultural environments
Adolescents’ Perceptions of Economic Hardship

- Adolescents recognize family’s financial troubles, e.g., in African American families (e.g., McLoyd et al., 1994)
- Little is known about Mexican American families
Parent-Adolescent Relationship Quality

- Family relationships are a central feature of the family stress model.
- Two dimensions:
  - Warmth/Acceptance
  - Conflict
Parent-Adolescent Warmth and Acceptance

• Warmth and support with parents is associated with positive outcomes.
Parent-Adolescent Conflict

• Conflict is associated with adjustment problems.
Mexican-Origin Youth

- Large and rapidly growing population
- Young
- Increased risk for poverty and economic hardship
Mothers and Fathers

• Mothers and fathers have potentially distinct roles in Mexican American families.
Central Goal

- Parent Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 1)
- Youth Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 2)
- Warmth and Acceptance with Parents (Phase 2)
Conceptual Model and Hypotheses: Goal 1

Parent Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 1) → Youth Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 2) → Warmth and Acceptance with Parents (Phase 2)

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Conceptual Model and Hypotheses: Goal 2

- Parent Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 1)
- Youth Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 2)
- Conflict with Parents (Phase 2)
### Juntos (“Together”):
Families Raising Successful Teens Project
(N = 222 Mexican-origin families)

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<tr>
<td>Median family Income</td>
<td>$41,000 (range $3,000 to over $250,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrant status and language</td>
<td>Mothers and Fathers: 71% born in Mexico 67% interviewed in Spanish</td>
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<td>Adolescents: 39% born in Mexico 83% interviewed in English</td>
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<td>Phase 1 (7\textsuperscript{th} grade)</td>
<td>Phase 2 (9\textsuperscript{th} grade)</td>
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<tr>
<td>246 adolescents</td>
<td>222 adolescents</td>
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<tr>
<td>$M = 12.51$ years of age ($SD = .58$)</td>
<td>$M = 14.63$ years of age ($SD = .58$)</td>
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<td>51% female</td>
<td>52% female</td>
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Individual Home Interviews: 2 to 3 hours
7 Nightly Phone Interviews: 15 to 20 minutes
## Economic Hardship

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<tr>
<th>Perception Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ Perceptions</td>
<td>Barrera, Caples, &amp; Tein (2001)</td>
<td>“My family had enough money to afford the kind of clothing we should have”</td>
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<td>Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the economic hardship latent factor was a good fit to the data (Barrera et al., 2001).</td>
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<td>Adolescents’ Perceptions</td>
<td>Conger, Conger, Matthews, &amp; Elder (1999)</td>
<td>“How much of a problem does your family have because your parents do not have enough money to buy things your family needs or wants?”</td>
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<td>$\alpha = .82$</td>
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## Parent-Adolescent Relationship Quality

|                            | “My mother/father speaks to me in a warm and friendly voice.”  
|                            | $\alpha = .90$ (mothers), .91 (fathers)  
| Conflict                    | Smetana (1988)  
|                            | Frequency of conflict in 12 domains (e.g., chores, homework, bedtime/curfew)  
|                            | $\alpha = .85$ (mothers), .86 (fathers)  |
Analytic Strategy

• Structural equation modeling (SEM) procedures were used
• Separate models for mothers and fathers
• Controls
  • Adolescent gender and family income (Time 1)
Goals 1 and 2: Mothers

Parent Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 1) → Youth Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 2) → Conflict with Parents (Phase 2) → Warmth and Acceptance with Parents (Phase 2)

χ² (2) = .25, ns, χ²/df = .13, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00
Goals 1 and 2: Fathers

Parent Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 1) → Youth Report of Economic Hardship (Phase 2) → Conflict with Parents (Phase 2) → Warmth and Acceptance with Parents (Phase 2)

χ² (2) = .25, ns, χ²/df = .13, CFI = 1.0, RMSEA = .00
Discussion

- Our study addresses the limited attention on adolescents’ perceptions of family-level economic hardship and its links to parent-adolescent relationships among Mexican American families.
Limitations and Future Directions

- Changes across time in perceptions of hardship and parent-adolescent relationship qualities
- Studies with other groups of Mexican-origin adolescents
Implications

• Economic hardship is a significant concern.
• It is important to address the quality of parent-adolescent relationships
  • In culturally sensitive intervention programs and
  • Family therapy sessions
Conclusion

- Examined economic hardship from the perspective of Mexican-origin adolescents, a rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population
- Addressed adolescents’ perceptions of hardship as a salient mechanism in link to parent-adolescent relationship quality (i.e., acceptance and conflict)
- Mother-adolescent and father-adolescent relationships
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md44@txstate.edu