



The *Chosen-One* Status in African American Families: Implications for Physical & Mental Health, and Family Relationship Quality

Cortnie Baity, M.S. | Joseph G. Grzywacz, PhD

Florida State University College of Human Sciences, Dept. of Family & Child Sciences

BACKGROUND

Introduction

- In some African American families, older members identify and make investments in younger members that have strong potential for success and can generate family upward mobility.
- Although identifying as the *Chosen One* is a title of honor, it also may have emotional and interpersonal costs, particularly for those coming from family's with a history of financial need.

Empirical and Theoretical Background

- Research shows a link between family economic strain and poor health outcomes is well documented in the literature.
- Research shows economic strain may contribute to poor relationship quality in African American families.
- Increasing numbers of African Americans are breaking the barriers of institutional racism to arrive at indicators of "success" (e.g., business ownership, college education). This might suggest that the prevalence of *Chosen Ones* across A.A. families is on the rise. Thus, giving attention to the *Chosen One* is becoming increasingly important.
- Intergenerational Solidarity Theory suggests that family members partake in intergenerational exchanges of resources and engage in diverse levels of commitment to carry out familial roles and meet family obligations. This means that family well-being is likely benefitted when these "investments" made by the family into the *Chosen One's* success are reciprocated once that individual becomes established.
- Family Stress Theory that suggests family economic hardship created by broader socio-structural forces (e.g., recession, job loss) poses threats to family relationships, and that the strain associated with economic hardship undermines the physical and mental health of all family members including the dominant earner. In alignment with these theories this study hypothesized:

- Chosen Ones* will report more family financial need than non-*Chosen Ones*.
- Mental health differs between *Chosen Ones* and non-*Chosen Ones*.
- Physical health differs between *Chosen Ones* and non-*Chosen Ones*.
- Family relationship quality differs between *Chosen Ones* and non-*Chosen Ones*.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Goal: to consider the potential implications of *Chosen One* status for African Americans physical and emotional health and the quality of family relationships.

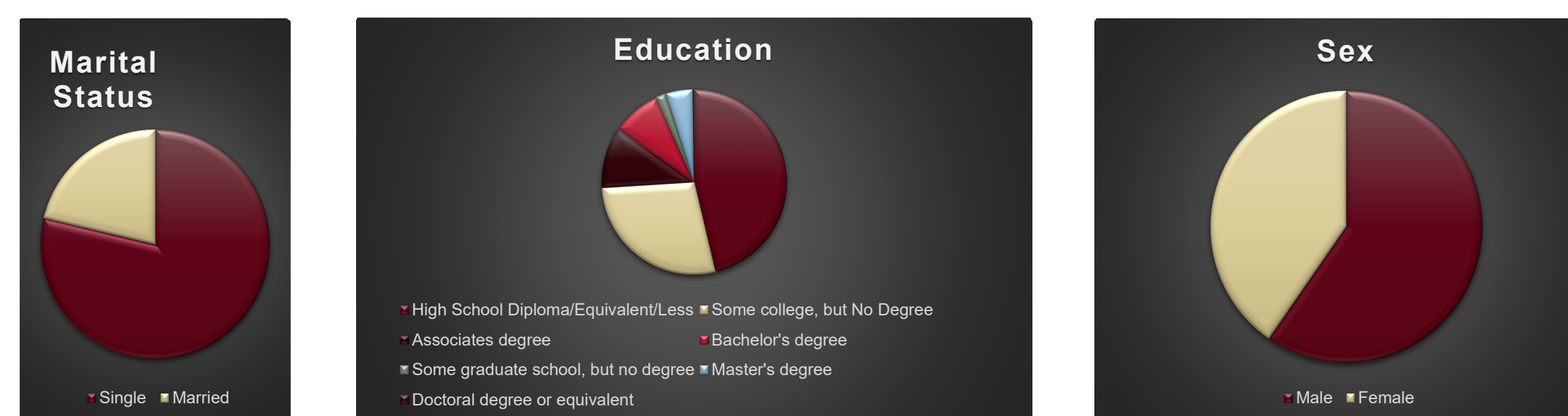
DATA

Data for this study are from African Americans derived from the Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) Refresher study, which recruited an oversample of African Americans from Milwaukee, WI.

METHODS & FINDINGS

Participant Characteristics

(N= 508) age 25 to 64 yrs. (M=43.02, S.D.=11.1)



- **Two exclusive Groups: Chosen One & non-Chosen One.** Chosen One classification criterion met by earning at least a 4 year college degree and/or by owning a business.
- **Measures:** Family Financial Need, Relationship Quality, & Negative Affect

Results

1 in 5 African Americans (n=93, 19.9%) met *Chosen One* criterion, mostly via educational attainment criterion (15.2%)

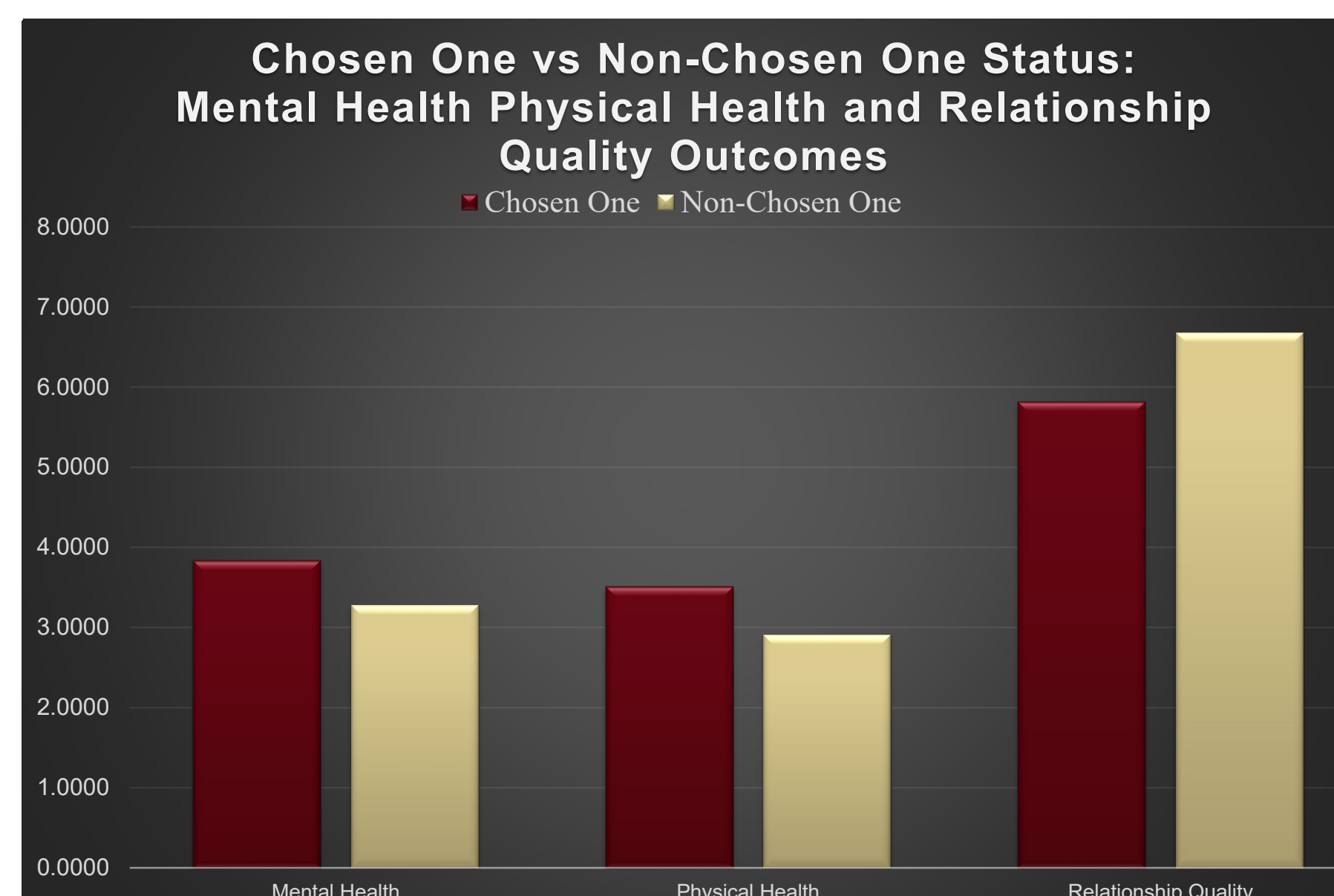


Table 1
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Condition Groups by Measures of Mental Health, Physical Health, and Relationship Quality

Group	Mental Health			Physical Health			Relationship Quality		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Constant (Non-Chosen One)	3.935	0.28	---	3.495	0.29	---	7.944	0.72	---
Chosen One	0.427	0.15	0.148**	0.419	0.15	0.143**	-0.844	0.39	-0.15*
Sex	-0.148	0.11	-0.07	-0.09	0.11	-0.04	-0.929	0.27	-0.21
Age	-0.012	0.01	-0.12	-0.013	0.01	-0.13	0.004	0.01	0.02
Income	5.55E-06	0	0.131	6.69E-06	0	0.155	-1.08E-06	0	-0.01
Family Financial Need	-.110	.068	-.080	-.190	.068	-.136	.026	.171	.010

Note *p<.05;**p<.01

CONCLUSIONS

- Hypothesis A: **Supported** – *Chosen Ones* reported more family financial needs than non-*Chosen Ones*
- Hypothesis B: **Supported** - Mental health differs between *Chosen Ones* and non-*Chosen Ones*, such that Chosen one's had better mental health than non-*Chosen Ones*
- Hypothesis C: **Supported** – Physical health differs between *Chosen Ones* and non-*Chosen Ones*, such that Chosen one's had better physical health than non-*Chosen Ones*
- Hypothesis D: **Supported** - Relationship quality differs between *Chosen Ones* and non-*Chosen Ones*, such that Chosen one's had poorer relationship quality than non-*Chosen Ones*

IMPLICATIONS

- *Chosen One's* have better mental and physical health, suggesting that there are additional protective factors accompanying the *Chosen-One* status.
- *Chosen Ones* reported more frequent family financial needs which may explain relationship quality outcomes for these individuals.
- Results suggest family stress theory may be more useful than Intergenerational Solidarity Theory in considering how intra-family financial matters may affect family processes. We interpret *Chosen One* poorer relationship quality as reflecting requests of family members.
- The results of this study and subsequent replications can inform strength-based interventions delivered by clinicians and practitioners working with African American families to support the increasing number of African American young adults who may be among the first in the their family to achieve the American dream.