

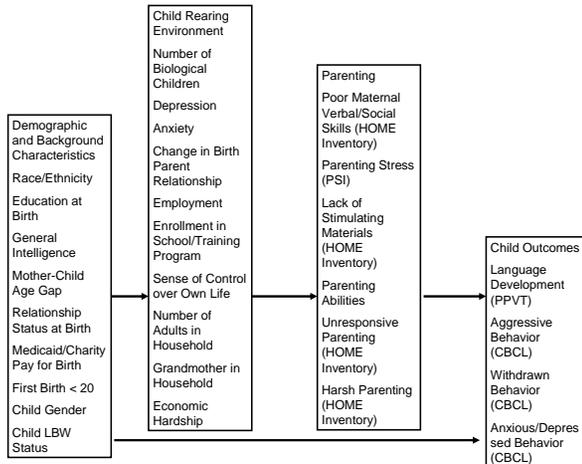
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THE PROBLEM

- ❖ Children of young mothers at particular risk of poor outcomes in all three domains of well-being
 - ❖ Physical: low birth weight, poor nutritional status, fewer visits to medical providers (Seccombe, 2000; Wolfe & Perozek, 1997); increased use of ER (Koniak-Griffin & Tuner-Pluta, 2001); higher risk for child abuse and neglect (Goerge & Lee, 1997), and more abusive family violence (Gelles, 1992)
 - ❖ Social-emotional: elevated risk for behavior problems (Wakschlag et al, 2000); higher odds of special education for emotionally handicapped (Gueorguieva et al., 2001), increased risk for truancy, fighting, drug use, gang membership (Levine, Pollack & Comfort, 2001; Pogarsky, Thornberry & Lizotte, 2006).
 - ❖ Cognitive: lower expressive language and language comprehension (Keown, Woodward & Field, 2001); test scores are lower if mother is younger (Geronimus et al, 1994, Levine et al 2001); more likely to fail a grade (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Morgan, 1987)
- ❖ Demonstrated relationship between maternal age and child outcomes does not appear as strong when control statistically for observed and unobserved differences in mothers
- ❖ Possible pathways and mechanisms
 - Social-demographic and Background Factors
 - Child-rearing Environment
 - Parenting

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ❖ Does the mother-child age gap itself affect child outcomes or is the age gap a proxy for other factors that are important in determining child outcomes?
- ❖ If the age gap is not significantly associated with child outcomes, what characteristics of the mother, child-rearing environment and parenting are?



Conceptual Model Guiding Analysis

DATA

- ❖ Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Public Use Files
- ❖ Three step stratified random sampling (city, hospital, birth)
- ❖ Multiple data collection points
 - Birth: interviews with mother and father
 - 12 months: telephone interviews with mother and father
 - 36 months: telephone interviews with mother and father
 - In home telephone survey and observation
 - 60 months: telephone interviews with mother and father
 - In home telephone survey and observation
- ❖ Study sample all unmarried mothers (n = 3,711)
- ❖ Analysis sample (n = 1594)
 - ❖ Inclusion Criteria
 - Unmarried
 - 18 and older
 - Completed In Home Observation
 - Child spends all/most of their time with the mother
 - ❖ Predominantly minority (63 percent black, 13 percent white)
 - ❖ Under educated (23 percent some college; 39 percent did not complete high school)
 - ❖ Mother-child age gap ranges from 18 to 44; average 24
 - ❖ 49 percent cohabitating at birth
 - ❖ 75 percent of births paid for by Medicaid or charity
 - ❖ 64 percent first child < 20
 - ❖ 53 percent of children were male
 - ❖ 10 percent of children < 2500 grams at birth (low birth weight)
 - ❖ On average had 2 siblings at 36 months
 - ❖ Less than 20 percent mothers demonstrated either depression or anxiety at 24 months
 - ❖ 60 percent of parents experienced no change in their relationship in the first 12 months
 - ❖ Just over 50 percent of mothers reported working at 36 months
 - ❖ Most households had one other adult – 15 percent had a grandmother in the house
 - ❖ 53 percent of households reported economic hardship at 36 months
- ❖ Outcomes
 - ❖ Language Development – Peabody Picture Vocabulary test
 - ❖ Aggressive Behaviors – Child Behavior Checklist
 - ❖ Withdrawn Behavior – Child Behavior Checklist
 - ❖ Anxious/Depressed Behavior – Child Behavior Checklist

METHOD

Ordinary least squares regression after multiple imputation

RESULTS

- ❖ Mother-Child Age Gap only significantly associated with Aggressive Behavior with all three domains of controls (demographic/background, child-rearing environment, parenting).
- ❖ A host of other covariates were significantly associated with outcomes

Summary Table of Covariates with Significant Associations with Outcomes

	Language Development	Aggressive Behavior	Withdrawn Behavior	Anxious/Depressed Behavior
Race/Ethnicity	X		X	
Mother's Education			X	X
Mother's IQ	X	X		
Age Gap		X		
Medicaid/Charity Paid for Birth	X			
Male Child	X	X	X	
Low Birth-Weight Status	X			
Employment	X			
Depression		X		
Lack of Stimulating Materials	X		X	X
Unresponsive Parenting	X			
Parenting Stress		X	X	X
Harsh Parenting	X	S	S	

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Need to consider more than just mother-child age gap
- ❖ Programs and policies could target malleable covariates
 - Education: programs to encourage delaying childbearing; programs and policies to encourage students to remain in school; programs and policies to make it possible for pregnant and parenting students to participate
 - Parenting: education programs at all stages in parent and child lives – both pre-pregnancy and throughout childhood; preventive as well as reactive programs; social support programs.