Intergenerational Risk: Relationship between Parents’ Adverse Childhood Experiences and Children’s Social-emotional Development in Low-income Families
Sherri Castle, Shannon Guss, Jennifer Hays -Grudo, Julie Miller-Cribbs, and Diane Horm

**Introduction**
Large epidemiological studies have established a predictive relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and subsequent adult health and behavior (Felitti, Anda, et al., 1998). The ACEs model, posits that the stress resulting from exposure during childhood to abuse, neglect and family dysfunction is biologically embedded in the immune, metabolic systems, and neurologic systems (Miller, Chen & Parker, 2011). Neurologic impairments, in turn, prevent the development of emotion regulation, social attachment, focused attention and other aspects of development frequently categorized as executive function skills (Danese & McEwen, 2012).

The current study applies the ACEs model to the study of intergenerational poverty by hypothesizing that childhood toxic stress may also disrupt the neurological and socioemotional development necessary to create positive parent-child relationships and child-rearing environments. Extending this model from health outcomes to parenting and child development outcomes, we propose that ACEs may lead to a pattern of adult behaviors and relationships that result in parents creating adverse childhood experiences for their own children, perpetuating the cycle of adversity.

**Research Questions**
- Do parents’ own adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) relate to their report of current stressful life events?
- Are children’s social-emotional development and behavior in early childhood associated with their parents’ own Adverse Childhood Experiences?
- Is the relationship between parent ACEs and child outcomes mediated by parenting stress?

**Participants**
- Children and families (n = 143) enrolled in an enhanced Early Head Start / Head Start program.
- The study sample was diverse, representing a larger proportion of minorities than the general population.
- Nearly half had a first language other than English (42%).

**Measures**
- **Parent Interviews:**
  - Adverse Childhood Experiences
  - Recent Life Events scale
  - Parenting Stress Index: Parent-Child Dysfunction and Parental Distress subscales

Children’s social emotional development was rated by classroom teachers using the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment, which includes subscales for Total Protective Factors and Behavior Concerns.

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACE score</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Distress raw score</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction raw score</td>
<td>&gt;0.00</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression screening</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful Life Events</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- M 1.9 23.9 18.5 0.21 3.1 55.2 50.6
- SD 2.1 7.1 5.8 0.41 2.4 8.5 9.4
- N 156 145 152 152 149 151 126

*p<.05, **p<.01

**Discussion**
- This study provides initial evidence that the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences may result in negative outcomes of the next generation through ongoing stressful life events and parenting stress.
- These findings highlight possible mechanisms of the intergenerational cycle of poverty. An important implication from this work is that negative effects of stress and trauma are related to stress and development of the next generation, continuing in cyclic manner that requires intervention.

**Note:** Covariates: gender, race, child age; $\chi^2$(N= 86; df = 20) = 17.0, $p = .65$; RMSEA < .01; SRMR = .065