

Disadvantaged youth more likely to be high-school dropouts, young parents and poor adults

November 16 2010

Disadvantaged kids are more likely to drop out of high school, become premature parents and raise their own children in poverty, according to an exhaustive new study from researchers at Concordia University and the University of Ottawa.

Published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, the investigation was the first to follow boys and girls over three decades to examine whether childhood aggression, [social withdrawal](#) and low socioeconomic status could impact adult [wellbeing](#).

"Low socioeconomic status appears to have long-term detrimental effects – even when childhood behavior, education and other variables are factored in," says lead author Lisa A. Serbin, a psychology professor at Concordia University.

"Our study confirms that individual and environmental factors have a direct and enduring impact from childhood into parenthood. Addressing behavioral and academic problems in childhood might reduce, but would not eliminate the risk of economically disadvantaged children from parenting in poverty as adults," continues Dr. Serbin, who is also a scientist at the Centre for Research in Human Development.

This ongoing study was launched in 1976 and assessed participants at three-year intervals as part of the larger Concordia Longitudinal Risk

Project. Subjects from low socio-economic urban backgrounds were recruited from Grade 1, Grade 4 and Grade 7 at French-speaking public schools in urban Quebec.

In the most recent phase of the study, participants were in their mid-30s. Of the 328 women and 222 men who had become parents:

- 22.6 percent of mothers and 22.5 percent of fathers had not completed their secondary education (Grade 11) by age 25.
- 40 percent of female participants – married, single, cohabiting – were poor.
- 28 percent of male participants – married, single, cohabiting – were poor.
- On average, 35 percent of households were considered poor.

Affects of childhood aggression and withdrawal

The study found that childhood aggression and withdrawal resulted in lower school achievement. Girls who experienced academic difficulties were at increased risk to drop out of [high school](#). Girls who failed to complete high school were at greater risk for entering motherhood at a young age and to parent in poverty.

"Not only were aggressive girls at greater risk for becoming mothers early, but having children at a young age increased the likelihood that children would be raised with at least one biological parent absent," says Professor Serbin. "The absence of a parent, in turn, increased the likelihood of living in poverty."

Boys who were aggressive and those who experienced academic difficulties were at increased risk to drop out of high school. Aggressive boys were found to be at increased risk to be young parents of children who would be raised in the absence of one biological parent. Early parenthood predicted future family poverty among men regardless of family structure.

For disadvantaged kids to rise above challenges, Professor Serbin stresses, social intervention strategies must specifically target school drop-out, early parenthood, parental absence and family poverty. "To do this effectively, problematic behavior and learning difficulties during childhood and adolescence need to be addressed for conditions of parenthood to be substantially improved for socially disadvantaged youth," she says.

More information: *International Journal of Behavioral Development* study: [jbd.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... /24/0165025410372008](http://jbd.sagepub.com/content/early/.../24/0165025410372008)

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: Disadvantaged youth more likely to be high-school dropouts, young parents and poor adults (2010, November 16) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-disadvantaged-youth-high-school-dropouts-young.html>

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