

Economic pressure and stress caused by poverty directly impacts children as well as parents

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A study led by a sociologist at Trinity College Dublin has found that stress caused by poverty directly impacts children. The findings

contradict mainstream theoretical models of poverty which hold that economic pressure only indirectly impacts children's lives via their parents' experience of poverty.

The study found that economic pressure and psychological distress caused by [economic hardship](#) leads to arguments about money between parents and [children](#) and between mothers and fathers in two-parent families. This was experienced in both higher and lower income households and in one-parent as well as [two-parent families](#).

The findings challenge the mainstream theoretical models of [poverty](#) and psycho-social processes within families that focus on parents and ignore children's own experiences and actions. These models posit that poverty creates economic pressure, resulting in parental stress, which in turn disrupts parenting.

By incorporating children into the model at all stages, this research contributes to a more nuanced and child-centered understanding of poverty and calls for collecting data from both parents and children, where possible.

"Our results indicate that adolescents are affected by economic hardship more immediately than previously understood. Poverty directly affects the lives of children, as well as parents; it leads to both children and parents experiencing economic pressures, which in turn impact children's and parents' well-being and intra-[family](#) conflict, including conflict about money," explains lead author Yekaterina Chzhen, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology.

The study, published this month in a leading sociology journal, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, was conducted in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Manchester and the University of Leeds. It used data from a nationally representative survey carried out in England in

2018 that investigated children's and parents' decisions about sharing family resources. The survey of 1,005 parent-child pairs included questions about deprivation, coping strategies and mental health, and was answered independently by children (aged 10-17) and their parents.

In their study the authors examined the experiences of economic hardship, economic pressure and [psychological distress](#) separately for [parents](#) and children and how this led to intra-family conflict about money.

"Children's experiences of deprivation and the strategies they adopt to cope with it are key to understanding the effects of poverty on families. Our results call into question anti-poverty policies and interventions that focus on parental behaviors and mental health rather than poverty itself. Instead, our findings suggest that policies that address economic hardship and economic pressures due to, for example, high living costs, could be more successful in helping families," Dr. Chzhen added.

The paper, entitled "Deprivation and intra-[family conflict](#): Children as agents in the Family Stress Model," was published in the February edition of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

More information: Yekaterina Chzhen et al, Deprivation and intra-family conflict: Children as agents in the Family Stress Model, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12791](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12791)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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