

**PARENTAL CRIMINALITY AMONG HEAD START CHILDREN:
ASSOCIATIONS WITH CHILDREN'S PROBLEM BEHAVIORS**

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Background

The life course perspective (Elder, 1985) examines changes in individual lives in the context of social relationships and the way it is influenced by the lives of others. An extension of this body of research argues in favor of inter-generational linkages between parents and children in the transmission of behavior (e.g., Elder, 1985; 1997). However, according to Thornberry et al. (2003), the transmission of anti-social behavior across generations and the causal pathways involved have not been sufficiently examined. Furthermore, any discussion of the development of anti-social behavior is mainly restricted to adolescents with relatively little on the influence on younger children and especially preschool aged children. From a developmental perspective, it is important to examine the transmission of anti-social behavior in this younger age-group because of the expectation that such behaviors could persist beyond these early years with more far-reaching impacts.

A theory on criminality and self-control proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argues that influences on children begin at an early age by way of parental involvement and the nature of child-rearing. In this paper, using data from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey conducted between the years 2000 and 2003 (FACES 2000), we aim to examine the relationship between parent criminality and preschool children's social-emotional development among Head Start children, particularly focusing on problem behaviors such as aggression, hyperactivity, and withdrawn behavior. We also examine the nature of parental involvement and child-rearing in families with an incidence of parental criminality because of the potential mediator roles that these practices might hold on the relationship between parental criminality and the likelihood of aggressive and other problem behaviors among young children. Examining these relationships among children enrolled in Head Start also has relevance to public policy. Research findings establishing the relationship between parental criminal behavior and child's problem behavior argues for a potential intervening role of Head Start to ease the effects of parental criminal activities and children's anti-social behavior.

Research Framework

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) elaborate on the nature of criminality by arguing that criminal behaviors are a result of low self-control among individuals. Furthermore, the occurrence of such delinquent behavior among children can be attributed to family factors including the nature of parental involvement in children's lives. Often, discipline, supervision and affection are missing in the homes of delinquents. Moreover, the parents of delinquents are highly likely to have criminal records themselves. As Rutter and Giller (1984) attest, "of the parental characteristics associated with delinquency, criminality is the most striking and most consistent" (p. 182). For adequate child-rearing to occur, it is important for parents to show appropriate behavior that teaches the child self-control by monitoring the child's behavior, recognizing any deviant behavior when it occurs and punish such behavior (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). They further argue that "research consistently shows that supervision of delinquents in families where parents have criminal records tends to be "lax", "inadequate" or "poor". Punishment in these families also tends to be easy, short-term and insensitive" (p. 101). Parents who are aggressive, with limited human and social capital and engage in deviant behavior are less likely to be responsible

parents (Belsky 1984) and their influence on their children behavior is likely to be negative. Among preschool children, these influences are likely to be evident in the form of aggressive, disruptive or withdrawn behaviors. Typically most people are socialized by familial institutions to avoid involvement in criminal acts or delinquent behavior. However, they argue that those not socialized sufficiently by the family rely on other sanctioning systems or institutions such as the school.

Descriptive statistics using the FACES 2000 data indicate that almost 20 percent of children who entered Head Start in Fall 2000 belonged to families where at least one member of the household had been arrested since the child was born. A very large percentage of the persons who had been arrested were the child's parents. A majority of these individuals (85 percent) had also spent time in jail. These percentages increase further as children move through the Head Start program into Kindergarten. Past research on an earlier FACES sample (FACES 1997) based on children who entered Head Start in Fall 1997 also show similar results (ACF, 2002; D'Elio, O'Brien and Younoszai, 2002; D'Elio et al., 2003) on the incidence of parental criminality among families of Head Start children.

In this research paper, we analyze data on a sample of children enrolled in Head Start, a program enrolling preschool children from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds. Based on preliminary findings on the extent of parental criminality in the Head Start population, we extend these theories to examine how parent criminality is related to preschool children's social-emotional development, particularly focusing on problem behaviors. We examine the nature of parental involvement and child-rearing in families with an incidence of parental criminality with the expectation that these factors could mediate the relationship between parental criminality and the likelihood of problem behavior among young children. Because of the well documented gender differences in children's problem behavior, we observe the differences in these relationships across genders.

Establishing the association of parental criminality on children's aggressive behavior has public policy implications. Young children who display problem behavior are also likely to be branded as "problem" children in later years, which in turn may have consequences for their cognitive development. Particularly among children enrolled in Head Start, where the incidence of parental criminality is as high as 20 percent, it calls for a greater role for the Head Start program to attempt to take on the role of the family in some way to ameliorate the negative effects of the disadvantaged family situation of these children so that fewer repercussions are observed in later years.

Data and Methodology

Description of Sample

Our analysis uses four waves of longitudinal data from FACES 2000, a national probability sample of 2,800 preschool-aged children in 43 Head Start programs across the United States containing data on the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes for children and families in Head Start and after a year of Kindergarten. The FACES 2000 data follow these children from the time they entered Head Start (Fall 2000) through their graduation from Head Start (in 2001 or 2002) and from Kindergarten (in 2002 or 2003). Children who spent one year in the Head Start program were assessed through teacher reported ratings of social-emotional development in fall

2000, spring 2001, and at the end of Kindergarten in spring 2002. Those who spent an additional year in Head Start were also assessed in their second year of Head Start in spring 2002 and at the end of Kindergarten in spring 2003.

Our Head Start sample consists of 1845 children with information from the time they entered Head Start in Fall 2000 and graduated from the program in spring 2001/spring 2002. The Kindergarten sample comprises of children with information from the time they joined Head Start in Fall 2000 and graduated from Kindergarten in spring 2002/spring 2003.

Statistical Analysis Method

We examine the relationships between parent criminality and children's problem behavior at the time the children entered the program, at their graduation from the program and at the time of their graduation from Kindergarten. We use multivariate analysis techniques with the FACES 2000 longitudinal weights (i.e., using only children with at least two data time points) to perform our analyses on the two samples after controlling for other child and family characteristics.

Dependent Variables

The main outcome variables are three measures of social-emotional development of Head Start children obtained from Head Start and kindergarten teachers. Our analysis focuses specifically on the three problem behaviors.

- i) Aggressive behavior (4 item scale ranging from 0-8)
- ii) Hyperactive behavior (3 item scale ranging from 0-6)
- iii) Withdrawn behavior (7 item scale ranging from 0-14)

Key Predictor Variables

We use two indicators of parent criminality in our analyses, each measured at the end of Head Start and Kindergarten respectively.

The first indicator provides information on whether any household member including the child's father or mother had been arrested or charged with any crime by the police since the child was born. This information is available when children entered Head Start in Fall 2000 and when they graduated from Head Start (in spring 2001/spring 2002) and/or Kindergarten in (spring 2002/spring 2003)¹.

The second indicator provides information on whether any of these household members who were arrested also spent time in jail.

Other Variables

Our analyses control for the child's characteristics such as race, gender and age at entry into Head Start in fall 2000. Another child characteristic is an indicator of the child's exposure to crime measured by whether had child witnessed or had been a victim of a crime. Family level controls include background characteristics taken from the baseline year (fall 2000) such as

¹ It is important to note that FACES 2000 data do not provide information on parental criminality in spring 2001. As a result no information is available on parent criminality between Fall 2000 and spring 2001 when those who spent only 1 year in Head Start graduated from the program.

parents' education level, literacy level measured through the K-Fast reading score (Kaufman and Kaufman, 1994). We include other family background characteristics from the most recent time point relevant to the analysis. These include the socio-economic status of the household including poverty and welfare status, family size and family structure expressed in terms of whether both parents were in the household, only one parent or neither.

Measures of parental involvement which are used as mediating factors include time spent by parents with children on various activities weekly or monthly. Parenting style is measured in terms of physical punishment such as the frequency of spanking and other punishments such as time-out as well as whether the child was exposed to an authoritative parenting style.

We also include a measure of children's length of participation in Head Start. Children who graduated from Head Start in spring 2001 and were in Kindergarten in spring 2002 participated in the program for one year while those who were in Kindergarten in spring 2003 graduated from Head Start in spring 2002 after two years in the program.

Preliminary Results

We present preliminary results of these associations in Tables 1-3. Table 1 presents a description of the households who children enrolled in the Head Start program reside based on the reporting of parent criminality in the household. Overall, 20 percent of children were in households with parental criminality. Results from the table also indicate that parent criminality was greater in households of white children in Head Start. 45 percent of white children resided in households where a household member had been arrested since the child was born. In contrast, 32 percent of white children resided in households without any parent criminality. The reverse is true among Hispanic children. A greater percentage of Hispanic children were in households without any criminality (31 percent) as compared to those with criminality (19 percent).

Some differences are also evident in the level of parents' education. A greater percentage of parents of children in households with no parental criminality had a college degree (6 percent). On the other hand, only 2 percent of children in households with parent criminality had parents who had a BA degree or more. Levels of poverty and welfare receipt were also higher among households with parental criminality. A greater proportion of children in these households also had mothers who were not married but were single or divorced, or had only one parent in the household, predominantly the mother.

There is also an association between problem behavior among Head Start children and parent criminality. As Table 2 indicates, problem behaviors including aggressive, hyperactive and withdrawn behavior were consistently higher among children in households with parent criminality as compared to other children in Head Start. This is true for children when they entered the Head Start program in fall 2000 as well as when they graduated from Head Start in spring 2001/spring 2002. Results not presented here also indicate that this relationship holds true in the case of parent reported problem behaviors as well.

Parent criminality is also related to the extent of parental involvement in households of children in Head Start (Table 3). As expected, levels of parent involvement, measured in terms of time spent by parents on various activities with their children are consistently lower in households

with parent criminality. At the same time, the extent of physical punishment, as shown by the frequency of spanking, is greater among these children.

Further analysis will better explain some of these relationships by breaking them down by gender as well as by time spent in Head Start. Furthermore, the proposed multivariate analyses will control for other child and family characteristics to examine these relationships when children move out of Head Start and Kindergarten.

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Table 1: Selected Demographic and Household Characteristics of Children enrolled
in Head Start in Fall 2000 by Parent Criminality : FACES 2000-2003

	In households with no parental criminality	In households with parental criminality
Child's Race		
White	32.1	45.4
Black	32.5	31.1
Hispanic	30.9	18.7
Other	4.6	4.9
Child's age		
3 years or younger	48.3	42.7
4 years	47.0	51.2
5 years or older	4.8	6.1
Child's Gender		
Male	49.1	50.5
Female	50.8	49.5
Parent's education level		
Some high school or lower	23.2	22.8
High school graduate/GED	41.1	44.0
High school plus voc/tech	4.1	5.4
Some college	25.6	26.0
Bachelor's degree or more	6.1	1.9
Household Socio-economic Status		
% Poor	63.1	76.3
% Receiving welfare	19.5	37.6
Mother's Marital Status		
Single	35.0	44.1
Married	48.5	27.6
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	16.5	28.4
Family Structure		
Both parents in household	54.2	26.6
Only one parent in household	42.8	63.6
No parent in household	3.0	9.7
More than one year in Head Start	42.3	40.7
Total percent (parent criminality)	80.1	19.9
N	1448	364

Table 2: Relationship between Parent Criminality in households of Children enrolled in Head Start and their Social-Emotional Development: Fall 2000-End of Head Start: FACES 2000-2003

	Mean teacher-reported behavior scores		
	Aggressive	Hyperactive	Withdrawn
Fall 2000			
No parent criminality	1.66	1.34	2.43
Parent criminality	2.00	1.49	2.61
End of Head Start			
No parent criminality	1.51	1.00	2.08
Parent criminality	1.91	1.27	2.19
Total Sample (Fall 2000)	1.72	1.36	2.46

Table 3: Relationship between Parent Criminality in Households of Children enrolled in Head Start and Selected Indicators of Parental Involvement: Fall 2000-End of Head Start: FACES 2000-2003

	Indicators of Parental Involvement			
	Weekly activities	Monthly activities	Combined activities	Frequency of spanking
Fall 2000				
No parent criminality	6.38	4.53	10.92	0.96
Parent criminality	6.06	4.01	10.08	1.02
End of Head Start				
No parent criminality	6.35	5.26	11.61	0.65
Parent criminality	6.15	5.05	11.20	0.78
Total Sample (Fall 2000)	6.32	4.43	10.75	0.97