

Understanding the Link Between Family Economic Hardship and Children's Bullying Behavior

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Abstract

Past research has revealed a link between family economic hardship and children's bullying involvement, yet research has not examined the kinds of factors that may mediate this relationship. Our study used data from the National Survey of Children's Health and consisted of a sample of 15,797 children from 12 to 17 years of age who lived with their mothers. We found that family economic hardship was directly related to a child's bullying behavior. Indirect associations were also found between child's bullying

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and family economic hardship, violence in the home, and mother's parental frustration. Implications for research are discussed.

Keywords

bullying, health, family economic hardship, mothers, mental health, violence

Bullying is a serious risk for most children, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged (Azeredo et al., 2015; Chaux et al., 2009; Due et al., 2009). Research suggests that the correlation between low socioeconomic status and bullying may be attributed to low parental education, low level of parental occupational status, economic disadvantage, and poverty (D. E. M. C. Jansen et al., 2011; P. W. Jansen et al., 2012; Nordhagen et al., 2005). A meta-analysis similarly concluded that victims and bullies were typically from low socioeconomic households (Tippett & Wolke, 2014). Due to low family income, these children are likely to internalize negative societal attitudes toward their family's perceived failure in achieving economic independence, which places them at an elevated risk of victimization. Another consequence may be low self-concept, a key determinant of these behaviors (Rosenberg et al., 1989), which may result in behavior problems, such as bullying.

Although a significant association between economic disadvantage and children's bullying has been found, articulation of the underlying mechanisms mediating the link between family economic hardship and children's bullying is limited. Conceivably, families living in poverty follow complex pathways, experiencing strains (e.g., psychological and interpersonal problems), which can adversely affect children's behaviors and their relations with others. The aim of the present study is to examine those connections. A better understanding of some of the mediators that explicate the association between family economic hardship and children's bullying is necessary for the development of interventions and services that can effectively disrupt the pathways from living in poverty to becoming bullies. Guided by Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST), we empirically test a conceptual model that assesses the pathways from family economic hardship to a child's bullying.

General Strain Theory

According to GST, individuals might feel strain from three different sources: (a) failure to achieve positive goals, (b) removal or threat to remove positively valued stimuli, or (c) the presentation of adverse stimuli. These sources of strain can lead to adverse psychosocial outcomes including emotions, such

as anxiety, depression, fear, and especially anger. Some individuals might be able to cope with these emotions in productive and prosocial ways, such as support-seeking, while others, such as children in poverty, might not have the same sources of positive coping mechanisms and subsequently turn to maladaptive behaviors (e.g., bullying). As research has shown, youth who report feelings of stress or anger are more likely to engage in negative behaviors (see Mazerolle & Piquero, 1997).

Research has also found support for GST with respect to vicarious strain. Agnew (2002, p. 603) defined vicarious strain as “real life strains experienced by others around the individual.” In cases of vicarious strain, an individual need not be directly experiencing the strain but rather, be witnessing someone close to them experiencing them (e.g., violence between parents). While youth themselves may not be directly experiencing the strain associated with economic hardship, they might vicariously experience strains from their caregiver or any other family members. For the purpose of this study, the strains experienced by the mother due to economic hardship and mental health issues, and the vicarious strain on the child will be examined. Moreover, the strain experienced by children whose caregiver is undergoing economic hardship or experiencing violence in the home might be resulting from both vicarious (e.g., witnessing mother’s economic hardship, being exposed to violence between parents, and seeing mother’s mental distress) and experienced (e.g., experiencing mother’s parental frustration) strains. Children whose mothers live in poverty might experience strains because of a dearth of resources, which may, in turn, increase their odds of displaying behavior problems, such as bullying. Interrelationships among these factors will be analyzed through the lens of the GST.

Potential Pathways From Family Economic Hardship to Child’s Bullying

Family economic hardship has consequences for individuals (Conger et al., 1999), and the burden of hardship often falls heavily on mothers (Leinonen et al., 2002) who, in turn, are at an increased risk of psychological distress. Relative to the general population, the rate of mental health problems among parents who are economically disadvantaged is significantly high. In one study, about 36% of welfare recipients reported having poor mental health conditions (Danziger et al., 1999), and in another study, more than one third of these individuals reported being diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder within the previous 12 months (Chandler & Meisel, 2000). Barusch et al. (1999) found that as many as 57% of welfare recipients were diagnosed with clinical depression. A systematic review of studies on poverty and mental

illness in middle-income countries also reported that more than 70% of 115 studies reviewed reported a positive association between a variety of poverty measures and mental illness (Lund et al., 2010). [AQ: 3][AQ: 4][AQ: 5]

Mental illness and distress can drain the parenting abilities of mothers under economic strain (Chase-Lansdale & Pittman, 2002; London et al., 2004; Moffitt & Garlow, 2018). An earlier review of research concluded that mothers with mental illness have less adequate parenting behaviors and skills than do those without mental illness (Oyserman et al., 2000). Furthermore, mothers with mental illness are characterized as being harsh in their parenting (Oyserman et al., 2005). Mental illness can potentially reduce parental feelings of efficacy as a caregiver as well as parental responsiveness and/or appropriate demandingness (Oyserman et al., 2005). Research suggests that parental mental illness, which can be reinforced by economic hardship (strain), is reflected in the relationship with their children in the form of increased hostility (Leinonen et al., 2002).

Mothers experiencing economic hardship are also more likely to experience stressful life events, such as intimate-partner violence. Research demonstrates the enormous role poverty plays in the occurrence and perpetuation of intimate-partner violence (Benson & Fox, 2004; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005). Goodman et al. (2009) found that because economically disadvantaged women lack the resources that their counterparts of middle or higher family income have, they are more likely to rely on the support of an abusive partner, thereby increasing their risk of violence. Prior to 1996, many women who left an abusive relationship depended on the welfare system for economic support. However, with the advent of welfare reform in 1996, which limited any entitlement to financial assistance on the basis of need, economically disadvantaged women are at increased risk of abuse as they are forced to remain in abusive relationships if unable to find employment (Goodman et al., 2009; Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005; Purvin, 2007).

Family violence can significantly impact the victim's mental health because the violent act is perpetrated by an individual whom the victim knows (Lagdon et al., 2014). Victims of family violence are likely to experience a wide range of psychological problems (Coker et al., 2002; Flach et al., 2011), including depressive symptoms (Bonomi et al., 2006), anxiety (Carlson et al., 2002; Lang et al., 2002), emotional distress (Ellsberg et al., 2008), and posttraumatic stress disorder (Sharhabani-Arzy et al., 2005). In addition, abused women report having elevated levels of anger (Bean & Moeller, 2002), which plausibly influences their parenting behavior.

Violence between parents at home can compromise the quality of parenting (Buchbinder, 2004; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). Even though it may be considered erroneous to suggest that victims of domestic

violence show greater parental deficiencies than their non-victimized counterparts (Holt et al., 2008), the psychological and physical abuse between parents could create stress for the victims, which can negatively impact their parenting behavior and their relationship with their children (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Mullender et al., 2002). Some studies indicated that intimate-partner violence contributes to mothers being less able to exhibit parental warmth and less likely to bond positively to their children (Levendosky et al., 2006; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). Other studies demonstrate that victims of intimate-partner violence are more likely to express hostility when interacting with their children (see Katz & Low, 2004; Margolin et al., 2004). High levels of stress due to intimate-partner violence may contribute to an increased risk of parental hostility by increasing the preoccupation of the victimized parent with issues other than meeting their children's needs (C. E. Cox et al., 2003). Furthermore, victims of intimate-partner violence might show magnified feelings of anger, of being overwhelmed, and of frustration with regard to their parenting (C. E. Cox et al., 2003), which can adversely impact their children's behavior.

Parental Characteristics and Child's Bullying

Parents significantly influence the quality of their children's relationships with their peers. Rigby (2007) argued that inadequate parenting increases children's problems with peers, a proposition first suggested by Bowlby (1969), who highlighted the importance of parenting for children's social and mental functioning and the relationship between inadequate parenting and children's reduced capacity to relate to others. All this suggests that parental mental health, interparental violence, and parent-child interactions are likely to have some influence over their child's behavior, including, for example, bullying.

Research has shown that mother's mental distress has a broad influence on child health and psychosocial well-being and is a strong predictor of her child's behavior problems and later social skills (Holmes, 2013; Najman et al., 2000; Vallotton et al., 2016). In a prospective longitudinal study, Najman et al. (2000) found that anxious and/or depressed mothers tended to report an increased likelihood of their child's externalizing behaviors, such as aggression. In one of the few studies exploring the association between mother's mental distress and children's bullying, Georgiou (2008a) found that a mother's depression significantly predicted her child's bullying perpetration.

In terms of parent-child interactions and child's bullying behavior, the social influence framework postulates that children learn to be aggressive toward those who are less powerful, by observing the daily interactions of their family members (Patterson, 1982, 1986). Parenting practices that are

characterized by the absence of emotional warmth with the child, indifference, or hostility are especially harmful to the child (Georgiou, 2008b), especially as it may lead to poor impulse control (see Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993). This, in turn, is related to bullying perpetration and victimization (Piquero et al., 2016). Related studies also show that children who bully others are likely to come from a home where parents are described as hostile, lacking emotional warmth, and experiencing high levels of conflict (Holmes, 2013; Kokkinos, 2013; Stevens et al., 2002). One study found that a mother's psychological abuse and low level of warmth were related to children's aggressive behavior (Holmes, 2013). [AQ: 6][AQ: 7]

Exposure to violence between parents is an indicator of children's risk of having greater difficulties in peer relations and bullying others. As highlighted by the social influence framework and the social learning perspective, children learn from observing what their primary caregivers do. Research consistently demonstrates a positive link between exposure to violence between parents and bullying in children (Baldry, 2003; Bauer et al., 2006; Haj-Yahia & Abodo-Kaloti, 2008; Holmes, 2013; Katz & Woodin, 2002; Knous-Westfall et al., 2012; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003; Mustanoja et al., 2011). One study revealed that children who were exposed to intimate-partner violence at home had higher odds of exhibiting aggressive behavior (Bauer et al., 2006). Similarly, another study found that children of parents who addressed marital conflicts with hostility displayed more negative affect and non-compliance with their peers than those whose parents handled conflicts in a more positive way (Katz & Woodin, 2002). Knous-Westfall et al. (2012) also reported that exposure to intimate-partner violence predicted higher levels of bullying in male adolescents.

The Present Study

Our study attempts to bring together these two bodies of literature: the effects of mothers' economic hardship on child's bullying and the effects of mothers' mental health problems and engagement in conflictual relationships on bullying. We do so within the context of Agnew's GST, which has been previously used to explore the effect of childhood strainful experiences on bullying (Connell et al., 2016).

We propose that mothers with family economic hardship are at increased risk of having children engaging in bullying indirectly through several pathways. Here, we assess three in particular: (a) mental health problems, violence in the home, and parental frustrations can contribute to their child's bullying; (b) exposure to violence in the home can increase the risk of mothers' mental health problems; and (c) mothers' mental health problems and

violence in the home can exacerbate frustrations in parenting, which may be positively associated with the child's bullying. We hypothesize that (a) mothers with family economic hardship would be more likely to report that their child bullied his or her peers; (b) mothers experiencing economic hardship would be more likely to report higher rates of child exposure to violence in the home, mental distress, and greater experiences with parental frustration; and (c) mother's exposure to violence in the home, mental distress, and parental frustration would mediate the relationship between family economic hardship and children's bullying. **[AQ: 8]**

Method

Data Sample and Procedure

The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) is a national survey that provides data on multiple, intersecting aspects of child physical and mental health and their family context. In 2003, 2007, and 2011–2012, the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a telephone survey under the sponsorship and direction of the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau administered the telephone survey using web- and paper-based instruments and consolidated content from the two surveys.

NSCH aimed to produce national- and state-level data on the physical and emotional health of U.S. children (ages 0–17 years). Data were collected on family interactions, parental health, and school/after-school experiences. Households were contacted by mail based on random selection to identify those with one or more children, 17 years of age or younger, and in each household, one child was randomly selected to be the participant of the survey. A total of 50,212 surveys were completed nationally. The overall weighted response rate was 40.7%. A total of 985 surveys were collected per state, and the results of the survey were weighted to represent the population of non-institutionalized children who live in housing units nationally and each state. The total study sample was 12,490 children, 12 to 17 years of age, who were living with their mothers.

Measures

Family economic hardship was measured with one item, "Since this child was born, how often has it been very hard to get by on your family's income—hard to cover the basics like food or housing?" Response options were 0 = *never*, 1 = *rarely*, 2 = *somewhat often*, and 3 = *very often*.

Children's exposure to violence in the home was measured with one item: "Saw or heard parents or adults slap, hit, kick, punch one another in the home." Response options were 0 = *no* or 1 = *yes*.

Mother's mental distress was measured with one item, which asks about the mother's mental or emotional health: "In general, how is your mental or emotional health?" Response options were 0 = *excellent*, 1 = *very good*, 2 = *good*, 3 = *fair*, and 4 = *poor*. Higher scores on the measure indicate the mother's mental distress.

Mother's parental frustration was measured with three items, "During the past month, how often have you felt (a) that this child is much harder to care for than most children his or her age, (b) that this child does things that really bother you a lot, and (c) angry with this child? Response options were 0 = *never*, 1 = *rarely*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *usually*, and 4 = *always*. A composite score was calculated, with higher scores indicating higher levels of mother's parental frustration ($\alpha = .81$).

Child's bullying was measured with one item reported by the mother, "This child bullies others, picks on them, or excludes them." Response options were 0 = *not at all true*, 1 = *somewhat true*, and 2 = *definitely true*.

Sociodemographic characteristics of mother and child participants were controlled for in the model. Covariates for the study included *mother's age*, *education*, *employment*, and *child's age*, *race/ethnicity*, and *sex*. *Mother's age* and *child's age* were measured as a continuous variable. *Mother's education* ("What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?") was collapsed into three categories: high school, more than high school, and less than high school (reference category). *Mother's employment* ("Were you employed at least 50 out of the past 52 weeks?") was coded dichotomously (1 = *yes* or 0 = *no*). *Race/ethnicity* ("What is this child's race?") was also collapsed into Hispanic, White (reference category), Black, Asian, and Other/Multiracial. *Child's sex* is coded dichotomously (1 = *male* or 0 = *female*).

Analytic Techniques

We first estimated descriptive analyses to calculate variable distributions in multivariate analyses and conducted bivariate correlations between all the potential variables. Next, we employed structural path analyses with Mplus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén 2012) to test the hypothesized path model, after controlling for the covariates.

To assess model fit, we used multiple indices, including Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean

Square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI). Although the chi-square test has been used as one of many other indices of model fit, we should note that the chi-square values are highly sensitive to sample size and other biases (Bentler, 1990). Therefore, a significant chi square is not, by itself, a reason to modify a model, if other indices can provide a good fit (Kline, 1998). This study relied on a standard cutoff recommendation for RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TLI (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For RMSEA and the SRMR, values less than .05 indicated a good fit. For TLI and CFI, values greater than or equal to .90 indicated an acceptable model fit. **【AQ: 9】**

The percentages of missing data at the variable level were less than 2%. The current data also contain non-normally distributed variables such as *bullying* (skewness = 5.02, kurtosis = 26.83) and *children's exposure to violence in the home* (skewness = 3.81, kurtosis = 12.51). Therefore, the robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR) was used because it does not require the assumption of normality and provides mean- and variance-adjusted chi-square test statistics and corrected standard errors (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). Tests of indirect effects based on Mplus estimation assessed the strength of the mediated relationships (Muthén & Muthén, 2012).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The mean age of the mother was 45.66 years old ($SD = 6.58$, range 20–75). The majority of the children (73.4%) were White, followed by 10.2% Hispanic, 6% Black, 3.9% Asian, and 6.4% Other/Multiracial. Approximately 75% reported that they were employed at least 50 out of the past 52 weeks. Regarding educational status, the majority of mothers had more than high school (78.9%). The average age of the child was 14.71 ($SD = 1.69$, range 12–17), and they were evenly divided by sex. Approximately 5.7% of children reported exposure to violence in the home. The mean for the family economic hardship was 0.89 ($SD = 0.88$, range 0–3), mother's mental distress was 0.92 ($SD = 0.88$, range 0–4), mother's parental frustration was 2.24 ($SD = 2.11$, range 0–12), and mother's report of child's bullying was 0.06 ($SD = 0.26$, range 0–2).

Correlation analysis results are displayed in Table 2. Exposure to violence in the home ($r = .087, p < .00$), mother's mental distress ($r = .105, p < .00$), and mother's parental frustration ($r = .234, p < .00$) were all associated with an increase in bullying. Family economic hardship was also positively related

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics ($N = 12,490$).

Variables	N (%)	M (SD)
Child characteristics		
Bullying (range 0–2)		0.06 (0.26)
Age (range 12–17)		14.71 (1.69)
Sex		
Boy	6,321 (50.6)	
Girl	6,169 (49.4)	
Race/ethnicity		
Hispanic	1,280 (10.2)	
White, non-Hispanic	9,172 (73.4)	
Black	749 (6.0)	
Asian	485 (3.9)	
Other/Multiracial	804 (6.4)	
Mother's characteristics		
Age (range 20–75)		45.66 (6.58)
Education		
Less than high school	391 (3.1)	
High school	2,241 (17.9)	
More than high school	9,858 (78.9)	
Employment		
Employed at least 50 out of the past 52 weeks	9,320 (75.0)	
Not employed at least 50 out of the past 52 weeks	3,100 (25.0)	
Family context		
Family economic hardship (range 0–3)		0.89 (0.88)
Exposure to violence in the home		
Yes	704 (5.7)	
No	11,590 (94.3)	
Mother's mental distress (range 0–4)		0.92 (0.88)
Mother's parental frustration (range 0–12)		2.24 (2.11)

to bullying ($r = .075, p < .00$) as well as exposure to violence in the home ($r = .185, p < .00$), mother's mental distress ($r = .355, p < .00$), and mother's parental frustration ($r = .161, p < .00$). We also calculated the tolerance and the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each independent variable in the model. All variables indicated a value of less than 10, implying little possibility of multicollinearity. **[AQ: 10]**

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations of the Study Variables (N = 12,490).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Bullying	—										
2. Child's age	-.029**	—									
3. Child's sex	.028**	-.001	—								
4. Child's race/ethnicity	-.032**	.028**	.009	—							
5. Mother's age	-.027**	.262***	-.008	.081***	—						
6. Mother's education	-.033***	-.004	.001	.166***	.078***	—					
7. Mother's employment	-.020*	.011	-.009	.020*	-.040***	.107***	—				
8. Family economic hardship	.075***	.001	.013	-.053***	-.191***	-.046***	-.059***	—			
9. Exposure to violence	.087***	.010	-.009	-.054***	-.081***	-.032***	-.036***	.185***	—		
10. Mother's mental distress	.105***	-.014	.010	-.024**	-.084***	-.053***	-.107***	.355***	.177***	—	
11. Mother's parental frustration	.234***	-.006	.053***	-.041**	.019*	.002	-.061***	.161***	.132***	.287***	—

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .00.

Path Analysis

Path analysis was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The initial hypothesized model adjusted for the covariates and was tested; the model did not fit the data well: $\chi^2(24) = 310.806$, $p = .000$, CFI = .931, TLI = .884, RMSEA = .031, 90% confidence interval (CI) = [.028, .034], and SRMR = .019. The modification indices indicated the possibility of an improved fit of the model to the data by adding a path from the *mother's employment status* to the *mother's mental distress*. Incorporating this additional path into the model resulted in a much better fit to the data: $\chi^2(23) = 221.804$, $p = .000$, CFI = .952, TLI = .916, RMSEA = .026, 90% CI = [.023, .030], and SRMR = .016. No other modification indices indicated an improved fit of the model. Figure 1 presents the standardized path estimates for this final model.

After adjusting for the covariates, family economic hardship was positively associated with bullying ($\beta = .023$, $p = .027$). Children's exposure to violence in the home ($\beta = .051$, $p = .000$), mother's mental distress ($\beta = .025$, $p = .015$), and mother's parental frustration ($\beta = .216$, $p = .000$) were also positively associated with bullying.

Family economic hardship was positively related to mother's mental distress ($\beta = .330$, $p = .000$), exposure to violence in the home ($\beta = .184$, $p = .000$), and mother's parental frustration ($\beta = .058$, $p = .000$). Exposure to violence in the home was positively related to mother's mental distress ($\beta = .114$, $p = .000$) and mother's parental frustration ($\beta = .075$, $p = .000$). Mother's mental distress was positively related to mother's parental frustration ($\beta = .253$, $p = .000$).

Regarding the covariates, higher levels of education ($\beta = -.021$, $p = .037$), non-White race ($\beta = -.034$, $p = .000$), older participants ($\beta = -.190$, $p = .000$), and participants who reported being employed at least 50 out of the past 52 weeks ($\beta = -.065$, $p = .000$) were all negatively related to family economic hardship. Mothers who reported that they were employed at least 50 out of the past 52 weeks were also less likely to report experiencing mental distress ($\beta = -.084$, $p = .000$). In terms of bullying, older age was negatively associated with bullying ($\beta = -.029$, $p = .001$).

All indirect paths were significant as follows: (a) family economic hardship \rightarrow exposure to violence in the home \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .009$, $p = .000$), (b) family economic hardship \rightarrow mother's mental distress \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .008$, $p = .016$), (c) family economic hardship \rightarrow mother's parental frustration \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .013$, $p = .000$), (d) family economic hardship \rightarrow exposure to violence in the home \rightarrow mother's mental distress \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .001$, $p = .019$), (e) family economic hardship \rightarrow exposure to violence in the home \rightarrow mother's parental frustration \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .003$,

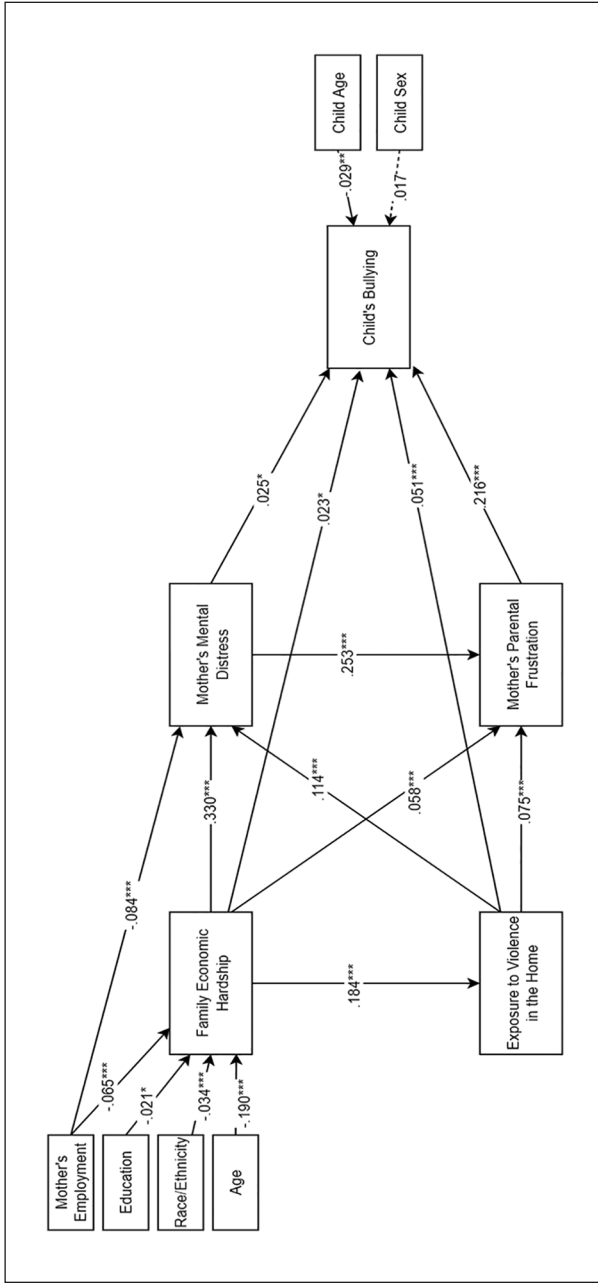


Figure 1. Standardized path estimates for the final path model.
 Note. Nonsignificant paths are denoted by dashed lines.
 $^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

$p = .000$), (f) family economic hardship \rightarrow mother's mental distress \rightarrow mother's parental frustration \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .018, p = .000$), and (g) family economic hardship \rightarrow exposure to violence in the home \rightarrow mother's mental distress \rightarrow mother's parental frustration \rightarrow bullying (indirect $\beta = .001, p = .000$). In turn, exposure to violence in the home, mother's mental distress, and mother's parental frustration significantly mediated the relationship between family economic hardship and child's bullying but consideration of these three mediators did not eliminate the significant relationship between family economic hardship and bullying. Thus, it appears that family economic hardship remains important in increasing a child's bullying. Overall, the model accounts for 6.1% of the variance in bullying.

Discussion

The present study tested a proposed conceptual framework that focused on the interrelationships between family economic hardship and child's bullying through the lens of Agnew's GST, based on the proposition that children may experience vicarious strains through their mothers' economic hardships, which can reinforce bullying. A key feature of this study was its examination of potential mediating mechanisms underlying this overall relationship, with a focus on exposure to violence in the home, mother's mental distress, and mother's parental frustration. Using data from a large community sample, our findings support our hypothesis and show that as expected, and consistent with past studies (D. E. M. C. Jansen et al., 2011; P. W. Jansen et al., 2012; Nordhagen et al., 2005), family economic hardship was associated with the mother's reporting of their child's bullying. This finding is anticipated, as children from low socioeconomic families are likely to experience more adverse family stressors (Tippett & Wolke, 2014).

As expected, our findings revealed that mother's mental distress, violence in the home, and parental frustration were related to their child's bullying. As mentioned above, children whose mothers are economically disadvantaged may be inclined to bully others in response to strains in the home, which can be vicarious (e.g., being exposed to violence between parents, and seeing mother's mental distress) or directly experienced (e.g., experiencing mother's parental frustration). Also, consistent with the social learning perspective, children's observations and experiences in their homes likely influence their socialization outside of the home. Children's observations of the family strains can adversely affect how they relate and socialize with their peers (Bandura, 1978). It is likely that as a result of witnessing violence between parents in the home, for example, children learn to perceive bullying as a legitimate way of interacting with others.

Exposure to violence in the home and mother's mental distress were found to be related to her parental frustration. This result is also expected and is consistent with past findings (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Mullender et al., 2002; Oyserman et al., 2005). Regarding violence in the home, one plausible explanation is the spillover hypothesis, which purports that hostility in one family system (e.g., mother and her intimate partner) increases frustration in another family system (e.g., mother and her child; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Concerning mother's mental distress, the combination of poor mental health conditions and childcare can make a mother with mental distress vulnerable to challenges and frustrations in her parenting (Van Der Ende et al., 2016). These interpretations, of course, await additional empirical scrutiny.

Family economic hardship and exposure to violence in the home were also correlated with mother's mental distress, which supports our hypothesis and past findings (Barusch et al., 1999; Chandler & Meisel, 2000; Coker et al., 2002; Danziger et al., 1999; Flach et al., 2011). For mothers of low income, a strain of family economic hardship can be chronic and severe, and the inability to deal with daily financial hardships can weaken their ability to handle stress (McLoyd, 1990), which likely contributes to mental distress (Broussard et al., 2012). Moreover, the association between mothers' intimate-partner violence and mental distress is not surprising, as research consistently points to the deleterious mental health effects of intimate-partner violence (Fergusson et al., 2005; Holmes, 2013; Vachher & Sharma, 2010). And, finally, mother's mental distress correlated with a child's bullying in our study, which is also consistent with prior studies (Najman et al., 2000; Vallotton et al., 2016). Research on parental mental distress and children's bullying is scarce. However, according to the family systems framework, families are composed of interdependent subsystems, and parents' mental health can have a profound impact on their children's behavior (M. J. Cox & Paley, 1997).

Limitations and Implications for Research

Results from our path analysis suggest that further research is needed to explore the mechanisms by which children experiencing economic hardships are at an elevated risk of bullying. Additional research is needed, given several limitations of this study, most of which are due to data constraints. One limitation is the cross-sectional design, and while we think that the way the questions are framed and timing referenced are justifiable, we cannot make definitive causal inferences. Research using a longitudinal design would yield greater clarity in specifying the proposed set of relationships examined in the present study.

A second limitation is the reliance of a single item to measure several of the variables, including family economic hardship, exposure to violence in the home, mother's mental distress, and child's bullying. Future research should consider additional items to measure these variables, which may yield more robust findings. We also analyzed factors particular to mothers, such as exposure to violence in the home, mental distress, and mother's parental frustration in connection to child bullying. In a two-parent household, questions worthy of research would include what the other spouse or partner's contribution to parenting is, his or her mental health, their level of parental frustration, and the influence of spouse or partner's exposure to violence, mental distress, and parental frustration on children's bullying.

Furthermore, these measures, including the child's bullying, were derived exclusively from maternal reports. Given that children's bullying occurs mostly outside of the home and in the classroom and school settings, the mother's report of her child's bullying may be underestimated. Reports on child bullying should include data from several informants, such as the children who are identified as bullies themselves, teachers, parents, siblings, and peers. These data will facilitate a broader, more robust assessment of bullying. Scholars have also raised questions about the validity of reports of child behavior by individuals with psychological and emotional distress (e.g., mothers experiencing mental distress, parental frustration, and violence in the home). Thus, future studies should consider reports from several informants, including youth and teachers, in addition to the mothers.

The sample size has an impact on any inquiry. In our study, only 5.7% of children were exposed to family violence, and only 6% were reported to be bullies by their mothers. The rare event of bullying of children as reported by the mother may be indicative of an age-range issue, mothers' not knowing what their children's behavior is really like, or something else. Additional measurements over time may help identify additional bullying. As well, while our study was focused on mothers, it could be beneficial to know what contributes to child bullying in families where fathers are the primary caregivers.

Conclusion

Preventing bullying requires drawing connections to some of the underlying mechanisms that are linked to this behavior. The study adds to the growing body of research related to bullying by identifying some of the ways that problems within the home might affect children's behavior and socialization. This study also demonstrates that the problems within the home might also be occurring through vicarious sources of strain, which underscores the

importance of examining factors that might not seem to be directly related to children's behavior. Our findings highlight that children who witness their mother's strains are likely to experience strain themselves and consequently turn to negative coping strategies, such as bullying. Understanding these nuanced relationships is essential for expanding the bullying research more broadly, and in implementing evidence-based anti-bullying programs more specifically (Swearer et al., 2009; Tofsi & Farrington, 2011).

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