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PRESS RELEASE

Child Development (January/February issue)

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON February 7, 2007 (12:01 AM)

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**Study Questions “One Size Fits All” Approach
When Measuring Income’s Effect on School Readiness**

A lot of research has examined the effect of a family’s income on children’s readiness to start school. A new study suggests that adopting a “one size fits all” approach—that is, measuring material hardship, parenting, and school readiness in the same way for white, black, and Hispanic children—may obscure the toll that lower income takes on ethnic minority children as well as the strengths that some families show in coping with poverty-related disadvantages.

These findings come from researchers at the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, and New York University, and are published in the January/February 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*. The research was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

The study looked at children enrolled in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, a nationally representative study of more than 21,000 kindergarteners. The researchers found that a common yardstick of school readiness has been used in measuring pre-academic and socio-emotional skills among ethnic minority and white children. But they found that the same yardstick in measuring parenting and stressors related to poverty yields different answers, depending on families’ race and ethnic identity. This suggests that researchers think twice before assuming that “one size fits all” in such studies.

Despite these findings, however, when the researchers looked at models of how low income might affect parenting and children’s readiness for school, they found similarities across racial and ethnic groups. Regardless of race and ethnicity, lower family income was associated with increased hardship, higher levels of stress, less positive parenting behavior, and more problematic behavior in kindergartners.

“We can conclude, on the one hand, that low income affects all families similarly, regardless of the sociocultural contexts in which families live,” says C. Cybele Raver, associate professor in the Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies at the University of Chicago. “On the other hand, the differences we found in how certain aspects of hardship and parenting are measured suggest that the sociocultural context of minority families alters the meanings of these constructs among families.”

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 1, *Testing Equivalence of Mediating Models of Income, Parenting, and School Readiness for White, Black, and Hispanic Children in a National Sample*, by Raver, CC (University of Chicago), Gershoff, ET (University of Michigan), and Aber, JL (New York University). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.

