TEACHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS FOR HIGHLY MOBILE CHILDREN LIVING IN NON-PARENTAL CARE

Sara A. Schmitt, a Megan Pratt, b & Shannon T. Lipscomb c

a Purdue University
b Arizona State University
 c Oregon State University - Cascades
CHILDREN LIVING IN NON-PARENTAL CARE

• “Non-parental care” = child’s primary caregiver is not a biological, adoptive, or step parent

• Developmental challenges
  • Poorer cognitive and psychosocial functioning
  • Lower levels of achievement and school engagement
  • More special education needs
  • More externalizing behavior problems

• Elevated risks
  • Maltreatment
  • Prenatal exposure to alcohol
  • Poverty and other household risks
  • Instability in home environments

(Ehrle & Geen, 2002; Lipscomb et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 2007)
CHILDREN LIVING IN NON-PARENTAL CARE

• “Non-parental care” = child’s primary caregiver is not a biological, adoptive, or step parent

• Developmental challenges
  • Lower levels of achievement and school engagement
  • More special education needs
  • More externalizing behavior problems

• Elevated risks
  • Maltreatment
  • Prenatal exposure to alcohol
  • Poverty and other household risks
  • Instability in home environments

(Ehrle & Geen, 2002; Lipscomb et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 2007)
CHILDREN LIVING IN NON-PARENTAL CARE

- Elevated risks
  - Placement instability $\rightarrow$ increased risk for poor behavioral outcomes (Rubin et al., 2007)
  - Little research has focused on a related, yet distinct source of instability: housing/residential instability or mobility
RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY

• Frequent residential moves is associated with a number of poor outcomes:
  • Physical and oral health (Busacker & Kasehagen, 2012)
  • Academic achievement (Cutuli et al., 2013; Schmitt & Lipscomb, 2016)
  • Self-regulation (Roy et al., 2014; Schmitt et al., 2015)
  • Externalizing behaviors (Ziol-Guest & McKenna, 2014)
MOBILITY DURING THE TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

• Emerging evidence for investigating mobility during more narrow time frames
  • Preschool may be a sensitive period for the experiencing the negative effects of mobility (Schmitt & Lipscomb, 2016; Fowler et al., 2015)
  • Critical stage when children are developing behavioral and academic readiness for school (La Paro & Pianta, 2000)
TEACHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

• Documented links between positive teacher-child relationships and child outcomes (Cadima et al., 2015; Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Ponitz, 2009; Sabol & Pianta, 2012)

• Evidence that positive teacher-child relationships may serve as a protective factor for children with low levels of school readiness and those experiencing family adversity (Elledge et al., 2016; Liew et al., 2010; Peisner-Feinberg et al. 2001)
The primary aim was to examine whether teacher-child relationships moderate association between residential mobility and externalizing behaviors for children living in non-parental care.
SAMPLE

• Head Start Impact Study (HSIS)
  • Nationally representative sample (N=4442)
  • 2 cohorts (3-year-old and 4-year-old)
• Subsample of 268 children living in non-parental care
  • 53% male; 16% Hispanic, 44% African American, 40% White
  • Maternal education: 44% less than high school, 34% high school, 19% beyond high school
• Higher risk than the full Head Start sample:
  • Household risks
  • Special needs
  • Lower school readiness at baseline
MEASURES

- **Residential mobility** (prekindergarten)
  - Primary caregivers responded to: *How many times has your child moved in the last 12 months?*
    - Dichotomous variable to: 0=did not move \((n = 164)\) 1=moved \((n = 104)\)

- **Teacher-child relationships** (prekindergarten)
  - Student-Teacher Relationship Scale: Closeness subscale *(Pianta, 2001)*

- **Externalizing behaviors** (prekindergarten and kindergarten)
  - Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention *(ASPI; Lutz et al., 2002)*
ANALYSIS

• Regression analysis with interaction term (residential mobility*teacher-child closeness)
  • Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML)

• Covariates
  • Externalizing behaviors in prekindergarten, sex, age, special needs status, household income, maternal education, parent-child reading, and HSIS condition
RESULTS: MAIN EFFECTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K externalizing behaviors</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K residential mobility</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-K Teacher-child closeness</strong></td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.13t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child book reading</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.13t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start participation</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS: INTERACTION EFFECT

![Graph showing the interaction effect between teacher-child closeness and externalizing behaviors in kindergarten. The graph indicates a negative correlation, with behavior decreasing as closeness increases. Two lines are shown: one for children who did not move and another for those who moved.](image)
CONCLUSIONS

• Prekindergarten teacher-child closeness moderated the association between mobility in prekindergarten and externalizing behaviors in kindergarten

• In line with previous research showing buffering effects of teacher-child relationships

• Implications for developing supports for children living in non-parental care
LIMITATIONS

• Limitations
  • Small sample
  • Measure of residential mobility was limited
  • Correlational
QUESTIONS?

Contact information:

Sara Schmitt
saraschmitt@purdue.edu
Assistant Professor
HDFS, Purdue University