

Public Abstract

First Name:Elise

Middle Name:Nicole

Last Name:Hendricker

Adviser's First Name:Cheryl

Adviser's Last Name:Offutt

Co-Adviser's First Name:Wendy

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Reinke

Graduation Term:SS 2011

Department:Educational & Counseling Psychology

Degree:PhD

Title:An exploration of the familial risk profiles of kindergarten students and later academic and behavior problems

Children who exhibit early behavioral and academic difficulties are at increased risk of later negative outcomes (see Patterson et al., 1989). Given the importance of families in the lives of young children, approaches to early intervention and prevention should incorporate a family-systems approach, emphasizing how families change throughout a child's life course. Although schools are an optimal place to provide intervention programming for at-risk children and families, an understanding of how to effectively identify the characteristics of these populations in need of intervention is needed and is currently lacking in the empirical literature. The purpose of this study was to understand how risk manifests within profiles of low-income, entering kindergarten students and how family risk in kindergarten is associated with a student's later academic and behavioral outcomes in elementary school. Participants included a sub-sample of kindergarten students within the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). Latent profile analysis was conducted separately on Caucasian, African-American and Latino samples, using five observed family risk factors. Once family profiles within each racial group were determined, differences among third grade outcomes were compared using the Mplus Auxiliary function (Muthen & Muthen, 2007). Results indicated similar family profiles across racial groups involving mental health concerns, low educational involvement and high educational involvement, with negative discipline practices also being a distinguishable risk factor within the African-American sample. Few differences were found in third grade outcomes when comparing profiles, although significant differences that were found support the concept of cumulative risk, as those children with increased risk factors, both in number and severity, were more likely to have negative outcomes. These findings indicate that schools must analyze specific risk factors within particular racial and ethnic groups to determine which students are at-risk. By analyzing specific risk factors within specific populations, school professionals can gain further information regarding which families would be candidates for intervention programming and provide adequate services to those in need to prevent later problems.