AN EXPLORATION OF THE FAMILIAL RISK PROFILES OF KINDERGARTEN

STUDENTS AND LATER ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Elise N. Hendricker

Dr. Cheryl A. Offutt, Dissertation Supervisor

Dr. Wendy M. Reinke, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

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, early intervention and prevention should incorporate a family-systems, life-course theoretical orientation. Although schools are an optimal place to provide such programming, an understanding of how to effectively identify the characteristics of at-risk families is needed. The purpose of this study was to understand how risk manifests within profiles of low-income, entering kindergarten students and is associated with later academic and behavioral outcomes. Participants included a sub-sample of kindergarten students within the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). Latent profile analysis was conducted using five observed family risk factors and 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 risk factor within the African-American sample. Few differences were found among third grade outcomes; however, significant differences that were found support the concept of cumulative risk. Implications of these findings are discussed from the perspective of school-based professional practice.