

Public Abstract

First Name:Alexandra

Middle Name:N.

Last Name:Davis

Adviser's First Name:Gustavo

Adviser's Last Name:Carlo

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SP 2016

Department:Human Environmental Sciences

Degree:PhD

Title:Family and Life Stressors Predict Adolescents Social Behaviors via Parenting and Moral Identity

The goal of the current studies was to examine the associations between family-level stressors and low-income adolescents' social behaviors. Previous theory and research has suggested that stress can be emotionally and cognitively debilitating and lead to lower levels of positive social behaviors, such as helping behaviors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Alternatively, theorists have suggested that traumatic stressors may foster emotional sensitivity and ultimately contribute to higher levels of moral behaviors (Staub, 2007). In order to better understand the associations between stressors and adolescents' moral behaviors, two studies were conducted. Study 1 consisted of adolescents from Camden, NJ and St. Joseph, MO (Camden: n = 19, M age = 15.38, 72.2% girls; St. Joseph: n = 15, M age = 16.27, 65.5 % girls). Adolescents completed self-reports of their economic stress and major life events as well as a moral identity structured interview. The results demonstrated that moral identity was marginally, positively associated with economic stressors for the St. Joseph sample such that adolescents with higher moral identity reported higher economic stressors. Moral identity was negatively associated with life events for the Camden sample such that adolescents with higher moral identity reported lower levels of life events. There was no association between moral identity and stressors for the St. Joseph sample, however. Study 2 extended study 1 by examining the associations between economic stressors and life events and adolescents' prosocial and aggressive behaviors via parenting practices (use of social and material rewards) and adolescents' moral identity. The sample consisted of 198 adolescents from St. Joseph, MO (M age = 16.22, 34.8 % girls, 84.1 % White). The results demonstrated that economic stress was negatively associated with parents' use of social rewards, whereas life events were marginally, positively associated with material rewards. Social rewards were positively associated with moral identity. Moral identity, in turn, was associated with moral behaviors. Discussion focuses on the importance of understanding how stressors are associated with parenting behaviors and adolescents' moral outcomes.

?