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## Paternal Parenting Stress during Middle Childhood: The Impact of COVID-19

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# Paternal Parenting Stress during Middle Childhood: The Impact of COVID-19

Vanessa M. Newell, Kathryn E. Cherry, Emily D. Gerstein

## INTRO

- Most research has examined mothers, father parenting stress is also critical to children's development, predicting increased problem behaviors and poorer cognitive skills (Cabrera & Mitchell, 2009, Harwood, 2017)
- The COVID-19 pandemic may increase parental stress in multiple ways, due to job loss, school closures, and needing to simultaneously fulfill occupational and family responsibilities (van Tilburg et al, 2020)
- COVID-19 stressors are associated with higher parental stress in mothers (Brown et al., 2020)

## AIMS

1. Examine how perceived parenting stress in fathers relates to sociodemographics
2. Examine how COVID-19 may impact perceived parenting stress, relative to sociodemographics

## METHODS

### Participants

- N = 172 Fathers of children ages 6-10 living in the US with at least regular visitation
- Surveyed once via Amazon's Mechanical Turk between November 2020 - February 2021

Demographics	Percentage
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Asian American/Pacific Islander	7.6%
Black	18.6%
Hispanic/Latino	7.6%
White	58%
All other races & ethnicities	8.1%
<b>Employed full-time</b>	97.1%
<b>Married</b>	82%
<b>Urban Living</b>	78%
<b>Age (Mean/SD)</b>	37 (7.19)
<b>Income (Median)</b>	\$30,000-\$59,000
<b>Perceived Social Class</b>	
Lower or Working Class	23.2%
Middle Class	75.6%
Upper or Upper Middle Class	1.2%

### Measures

- **Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction subscale of the Parenting Stress Index**, 4th Edition Short Form (Abidin, 2012)
- **COVID-19 Impact Scale** (Kaufman & Stoddard, 2020)
- **Demographic factors** (father age, household income, perceived social class, marital status, education, and urban/rural environment).

# Greater COVID-19 stressors are associated with more perceived stress in fathers of children during middle childhood, over and above sociodemographic factors.

### Blocked Regression Model Predicting Parent Stress

Block		$\beta$	p
1	<b>Perceived Social Class</b>	<b>.17</b>	<b>.042</b>
	Urban or Rural Living	.14	.060
	Marital Status	.15	.058
	<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>.18</b>	<b>.032</b>
2	<b>Perceived Social Class</b>	<b>.16</b>	<b>.033</b>
	Urban or Rural Living	.09	.183
	Marital Status	.09	.189
	Level of Education	.12	.106
	<b>COVID-19 Impact</b>	<b>.45</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>

## RESULTS

- COVID-19 impact was positively associated with parenting stress ( $r=.50, p<.001$ )
- Greater parenting stress was associated with higher perceived social class ( $r=.24, p<.001$ ) more education ( $r=.24, p<.001$ ), and being married ( $t(155)=-2.81, p=.006$ )
- Fathers in urban environments endorsed more parenting stress than those in rural environments ( $t(170)=2.57, p=.011$ )
- There were no significant associations between father age or household income and parenting stress
- Blocked regression indicated that COVID-19 impact was associated with parenting stress over and above sociodemographic factors
  - Block 1 explained 12% of variance in parenting stress, while adding COVID-19 impact to Block 2 explained 31% of the variance in parenting stress

## DISCUSSION

- COVID-19 and parenting stress were strongly associated with one another
- Contrary to hypotheses, fathers who were married, more educated, identified with higher social classes, or lived in urban environments reported more parenting stress
  - This may be due the impact of COVID-19
  - Married fathers may have more time with their children, fathers with higher education or perceived social class may be working from home more, and urban areas may have seen more dramatic changes to daily life
- Fathers more impacted by COVID-19 may benefit from additional supports or services to reduce demands and parenting stress
  - Although a single timepoint and single-reporter measurement, findings suggest that interventions designed to reduce COVID-19 related stressors may in turn benefit other aspects of family well-being