

AGGRESSION AND POVERTY

4.2 Introduction

Aspects of the relationship between aggression and social class have been touched on in the previous section. Some points will be repeated here.

What is clear is that although researchers have agreed on the correlation between the development of aggression and lower socio-economic class, they have differed in terms of the emphasis that they place on this correlation. Campbell, Breaux, Ewing, and Szumowski (1986) claimed that greater family stress, which is strongly correlated to poverty, is linked to higher ratings of child aggression. Roff and Wirt (1984) saw the family disturbance associated with a sub-economic lifestyle as the precursor to the development of aggressive conduct disorder in children and teenagers. Poor family-management practices in low-income families have been found to be the most proximal determinants of aggression by Reid and Patterson (1989). However, Faretra (1981) clearly concluded in her longitudinal study on delinquents, "aggressive antisocial children are most often minority group children from socio-economically deprived homes" (p. 188).

Although the researchers explored and stressed on different aspects of the aetiology of aggression, in each case a different segment of society was implicated.

Low socio-economic status has been linked to a below average IQ, language deficits and neurodevelopmental delays (Bates, Bayles, Bennet, Ridge & Brown, 1991; Brennan, Mednick, & Handel, 1991; Hinshaw, 1992). Each of these correlates has a significant relationship with the development of aggression. For example, academic failure and a low IQ are correlated with aggressive behaviour in children (Hawkins & Lischner, 1987).

Tremblay et al. (2005) found that when high family dysfunction coexists with low income, a child is highly likely to become physically aggressive in late childhood.

According to Tremblay et al. (2005), "Poor maternal parent-child attachment, whether exacerbated by poverty or not, often leads to high family dysfunction, and these variables contribute significantly to aggressive conduct disorders in children."

Table 1 shows the nuanced interplay between several early childhood predictors in the home.

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Commented [KD2]: Sounds too much like blaming the parents

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TABLE 1

Parental and Child Characteristics by Trajectory Group

Variable	Trajectory Group			P Value on χ^2 Joint Test of Significance (df=2)	P Value on <i>t</i> Tests of High vs Low and Medium (df= 1)
	Low	Medium	High		
At birth, %					
Male	38.6	50.3	53.6	.012	.032
Young sibling	16.4	40.8	57.1	<.001	<.001
Low income	20.5	20.2	43.9	<.001	<.001
Parents separated	3.7	3.2	11.8	.025	<.001
Early motherhood	22.8	22.2	42.4	.004	<.001
Young mother now	26.2	20.0	31.3	.094	.048
Mother no high school diploma	5.3	9.7	15.4	.071	.36
Mother antisocial (before end of high school)	0.1	4.9	14.0	.016	.003
Mother smoked (during pregnancy)	20.1	22.1	38.2	.014	.003
Mother drank alcohol (during pregnancy)	3.0	5.0	4.4	.93	.479
Maternal postpartum depression	17.9	16.6	29.4	.067	.008
Father antisocial	13.6	11.2	12.9	.768	.418
At 5 months, %					
High family dysfunction	32.8	29.2	53.8	.001	<.001
Difficult temperament	25.4	21.2	40.0	.010	.003

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Note. Adapted from "Physical Aggression during Early Childhood: Trajectories and Predictors", by Tremblay, R.E., Nagin, D.S., Seguin, J.R., Zoccolillo, M., Zelazo, P.D., Boivin, M., Perusse, D., and Japel, C. (2005). Copyright 2005 by Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2538721/>

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