



# Parental Education: Impact on Adolescent Social and Emotional Outcomes

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## Introduction

- Parents' level of education, an index of social context, has both physical and psychological aspects that may exert both direct and indirect influences on child outcomes (Hortacsu, 1995).
- While most of the previous research has studied children in primary and secondary schools, few have included young adults past high school. When youth transition to college, they may experience additional stresses since many might be living away from their parents/caregivers for the first time (Fengliang, Longlong, & Dongmao, 2015).
- Social emotional learning (SEL) encompasses various techniques that are related to the social and emotional development of individuals. SEL aims to address outcomes such as emotional awareness, empathy, community building, communication school and prosocial problem solving, all of which have been linked to positive academic outcomes (Kress & Elias, 2013).
- This cross-sectional study is designed to understand the relationship between parental levels of education and their effects on social-emotional skills after young people transition from high school to college. We predicted that young adults whose parent's attained higher levels of education would report higher coping scores and would display lower levels of anxiety and depression.

## Method

### Procedures

- This study is part of a larger, ongoing international study with youth and young adults ages 13-25 year-old.
- Data collection for this study took place between June and December 2014 using the Qualtrics online platform.

### Participants

- Responses were collected from 2,737 participants ranging from 19-25 years old. Participants had a mean age of 21.35 ( $SD = 2.01$ ), and were primarily Caucasian (73.7%). 59.5% identified as female, 36.4% male, 1.6% transgender, 2.0% genderqueer, and .5% preferred not to disclose. The top five countries participants endorsed living in included United States (52.2%), United Kingdom (12.2%), Canada (7.0%), Australia (3.4%) and Mexico (2.3%).

Table 1. Parental Level of Education

Highest level of education	Mother	Father
Less than high school	n = 345 (12.6%)	n = 539 (19.7%)
High school graduate	n = 817 (29.9%)	n = 844 (30.8%)
Some college	n = 586 (21.4%)	n = 449 (16.4%)
Graduated College	n = 989 (36.1%)	n = 905 (33.1%)

### Measures

- Brief Resilient Coping Scale (BRCS; Sinclair & Wallston, 2004)** – 4-item, unidimensional outcome measure designed to capture how individuals cope with stress. Cronbach's alpha for the BRCS was .71, suggesting acceptable internal consistency.
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck & Steer, 1993)**– 21-item self-report measure of anxiety symptoms. Cronbach's alpha for the BAI was .92, suggesting high internal consistency.
- Beck Depression Inventory – Second Edition (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996)**– 21-item self-report measure of depression symptoms and their severity. Cronbach's alpha for the BDI was .94, suggesting high internal consistency.

## Results

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of coping, depression, and anxiety scores by parental level of education

Level of Education	Coping <i>M (SD)</i>	Depression <i>M (SD)</i>	Anxiety <i>M (SD)</i>
Less than high school			
Mother	15.29 (3.53)	21.82 (14.05)	20.81 (13.05)
Father	15.23 (3.42)	21.42 (14.19)	20.09 (12.70)
High school graduate			
Mother	15.41 (3.22)	20.27 (14.66)	19.65 (13.12)
Father	15.61 (3.14)	20.33 (13.92)	20.00 (13.04)
Some college			
Mother	15.97 (2.94)	17.95 (12.70)	18.71 (13.03)
Father	16.02 (2.99)	17.05 (13.00)	18.14 (12.54)
Graduated from college			
Mother	15.58 (3.04)	16.97 (12.84)	17.43 (11.76)
Father	15.51 (3.03)	16.60 (12.89)	17.18 (12.13)
Total			
Mother	15.58 (3.14)	18.75 (13.63)	18.77 (12.65)
Father	15.58 (3.14)	18.75 (13.63)	18.77 (12.65)

- Coping** The analysis of variance revealed that the effect of mother's level of education was significant ( $F = 3.99, p < .001$ ). Father's level of education was also significant ( $F = 3.18, p < .05$ ).
- Anxiety** The analysis of variance revealed that the effect of mother's level of education was significant ( $F = 6.53, p < .0001$ ). Father's level of education was significant ( $F = 3.83, p < .001$ ). Parents (Mother + Father) combined level of education was also significant ( $F = 1.99, p < .05$ ).
- Depression** The analysis of variance revealed that the effect of mother's level of education was significant ( $F = 12.552, p < .0001$ ). Father's level of education was significant ( $F = 8.383, p < .0001$ ).
- Young adults, whose mothers graduated college, endorsed an increased ability to cope with stress, endorsed lower levels of anxiety, and endorsed lower levels of depression when compared to young adults whose mothers graduated from high school or whose mothers did not graduate from high school.
- Similarly, young adults, whose fathers graduated college, endorsed an increased ability to cope with stress, endorsed lower levels of anxiety, and endorsed lower levels of depression when compared to young adults whose fathers did not graduate from high school.
- Young adults whose parents did not graduate from college scored 9 points higher on the *BAI* when compared to young adults whose parents graduated from college, suggesting significantly higher levels of anxiety.

Poster presented at the National Association of School Psychologists Annual Convention, February 21 -24, 2017, San Antonio, TX.

## Discussion

- As hypothesized, results showed that parent's achieved level of education was a significant predictor of young adults' ability to cope with stress and mitigate their feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Young adults from households with limited achieved education may need increased social and emotional support post high school.
- Increasing college enrollment and graduation rates may foster positive social emotional and mental health outcomes for future generation of youth.
- Mental health professionals should consider increasing social-emotional awareness in community settings to support youth and young adults.
- Parents with no level of college education may need increased support in recognizing the importance of their child's mental health.

### Resources for School Psychologists

#### Websites

- Emotion Coaching** – A 5-step method that builds emotional intelligence and creates positive, long lasting effects for children. ([www.emotioncoaching.gottman.com](http://www.emotioncoaching.gottman.com))
- The Incredible Years** – An evidence-based program for parents, children, and teachers aimed to prevent and treat young children's behavior problems and promote their social, emotional, and academic competence. ([www.incredibleyears.com](http://www.incredibleyears.com))

#### Books

- Parent Management Training: Treatment for Oppositional, Aggressive, and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents* – Alan E. Kazdin, PhD
- Helping the Noncompliant Child: Family-Based Treatment for Oppositional Behavior, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* – Robert J. McMahon, PhD & Rex Forehand, PhD

## Limitations

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- Participant's from this study were recruited through Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation, and may display unique demographic features when compared to the general population.
- All participants included in this analysis endorsed having both a mother and father. These data do not take into consideration participants who have a diverse upbringing (i.e. single-family household, raised by guardian who is neither mother or father)
- No questions regarding participants socio-economic status (SES) were examined. It is possible participants' SES may also be a contributing factor when considering the results of this study.
- While levels of anxiety, depression, and coping were measured, participant's participation in SEL programs were not assessed.