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Title

Connecting Families: A qualitative study examining the experiences of parenting young children under financial strain

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Social determinants and vulnerable populations

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: Financial strain is the subjective psychological experience of stress arising from economic difficulties. It is associated with negative impacts on adult mental health, parental satisfaction, and parental self-efficacy. Financial strain and poverty can lead to profound detrimental impacts on children, contributing to significant disparities in health, development, and well-being. While impacts on children are well established, few studies have explored the subjective experiences of parenting young children under financial strain using qualitative methodologies.

Objective: To explore the experiences of individuals parenting young children while experiencing financial strain.

Study Design and Analysis: We used a qualitative, phenomenological approach conducting semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded then transcribed. Inductive thematic analysis using open coding in NVivo 12 was independently completed by 3 researchers, with all transcripts double-coded.

Setting: A family medicine clinic, specialty children's clinic, several early years centres, as well as a social assistance office in Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Population Studied: Eligible individuals were parenting a child 2-5 years of age, lived in Kingston, Ontario, and answered yes to: "Do you ever have difficulty making ends meet at the end of the month?"

Outcome Measures: Experience of parents raising young children while experiencing financial strain, perception of parents regarding the impacts of financial strain on their lives.

Results: Sixteen interviews were conducted. Numerous deleterious physical, mental, and material impacts on the family unit and parent were identified; however parent-perceived impacts of financial strain on their children were minimal. Parents described striking levels of resourcefulness and resiliency in providing necessities for their families, taking on the most significant impacts of financial strain through the phenomenon of self-sacrifice.

Conclusion: The impacts of financial strain on caregivers with young children are far-reaching. Further research into the impacts of self-sacrifice on parents experiencing financial strain are needed to better understand this issue, and to inform social programming and resources that could help alleviate the deleterious impacts of financial strain and poverty on parent mental, social, and physical health.