Family economic vulnerability in the great recession: Dynamics & links to child socio-emotional development

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Family Adversity: Children, Young People and the Next Generation
Edinburgh
November 19th 2015
Importance of Child Poverty

- Child poverty is not just an immediate issue of the well-being of children,
  - It has long term effects, so implications for...
    - future of the economy
    - future demand on public services
    - important in breaking the cycle of disadvantage.
- How has child poverty been affected by the Great Recession and what were its consequences?
Outline

1. Data and Measures
2. Economic Vulnerability dynamics
3. Consequences for children’s socio-emotional development
4. Conclusions and Implications
1a. Data and Measures

- **Growing Up in Ireland Survey (GUI)** – survey of families with children. Two waves and Two cohorts –
  - One born in 1998 (child aged 9 at first wave in 2007-8; 7,423 families responded in both waves)
  - One born in 2008 (child aged 9 mo. at first wave in 2008-9; 9,793 families responded in both waves)

- **Economic Vulnerability (GUI)**: people living in a HH with a disadvantaged risk profile in terms low income, household joblessness and economic stress.
  - Identify the vulnerable group using latent class analysis.
1b. GUI – Timing of Fieldwork & Recession

- '98 cohort: 9 years wave 1
- '08 cohort: 9 months wave 1, 3 years wave 2
- '98 cohort: 13 years wave 2
2a. Economic Vulnerability (EV) in Irish families

- Difference between the cohorts mainly due to timing of 1st wave (before vs. at start of recession).
2b. Economic Vulnerability Dynamics – Did the same families remain EV in both waves?

- There was persistence and also movement
  - into EV (‘Recession EV’)
  - out of EV (‘Transient EV’)

- Change in the profile of the EV group – economic stress more central in recession
2c. Risk factors for Economic Vulnerability

- Parental Education: Primary care-giver (PCG) lower education
- Family type: higher rate of EV for
  - Lone parent families
  - Larger families
  - Cohabitating couples vs. married couples
- Age of PCG: PCG younger at child’s birth
- Differences by whether EV Persistent or ‘Recession’
  - Associations are strongest with Persistent EV
  - Associations somewhat weaker for ‘Recession EV’
  - Those becoming EV in recession were a broader group
3a. Consequences for Children

- **Child socio-emotional development**: Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman et al. 1997)
  - Designed to assess emotional health & problem behaviours among children and young people.
  - Included measures of emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems
  - Questionnaire completed by Primary Care Giver (PCG, usually the child’s mother)

- Used to identify group at risk of socio-emotional problems (top 10 per cent of cases)
3b. EV & Socio-emotional Difficulties

Adjusted risk = from model, with other characteristics controlled:
- child gender, cohort, family type, PCG education, PCG age at child’s birth, change in family composition (e.g. separation, additional children)

- EV has similar association with socio-emotional problems for
  - the two cohorts and
  - for boys and girls.
3c. Protective Factors

- There are ‘protective’ factors for both EV and non-EV children

- Children less likely to have socio-emotional problems where...
  - **PCG in 30s** at child’s birth
  - **PCG not emotionally distressed** (at wave 1)
  - **Good relationship between parents** in couple families (vs. couple with problems)

- Some protective factors differ by presence/absence of EV:
  - **PCG education** - even more important in EV families (Lower PCG education has more negative impact in EV families.)
  - **Lone parent families**: SDQ high whether or not family is EV
4a. Summary

- Economic Vulnerability (EV) increased for families during recession (reaching 25%)
- Risk factors for EV include low levels of education, lone parenthood, younger parents at child’s birth
  - Risk factors more strongly related to persistent EV
  - Those becoming EV in recession had less disadvantaged profile
- EV associated with higher risk of child socio-emotional problems
  - Except in lone parent families where risk was high with/without EV
- Protective factors: parental emotional wellbeing, parental higher level of education, mother in 30s at birth of child, good relationship between parents in couple family
4b. Policy Implications

- Attention to economic vulnerability of children warranted, especially persistent vulnerability
  - But even non-persistent EV linked to negative outcomes
  - Child-specific poverty targets established in Ireland in 2014

- High risk groups identified (family type, education, parental age)

- A broader group became vulnerable in recession
  - Need for policies to address wider issues
  - Not just income support but childcare, housing
Thank You.