

The Effect of Reported Household Chaos on Parenting Behaviors Among Latine Mothers

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Introduction

Current literature attributes high environmental ambience, disorganization, and unpredictability as the source of household chaos. However, there is a lack of literature that examines household chaos in different cultural contexts – particularly in non-English speaking households or those outside of western cultures (Marsh et al., 2020). Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that the experience of chaos is subjective and that its associated characteristics may not be detrimental to child development in every culture or context (Weisner, 2009).

A culturally sensitive framework places a greater emphasis on well-being and contrasts it to chaos (Weisner, 2009). Well-being is nurtured through meaningful and culturally salient daily activities and routines. Chaos arises when engagement in these activities is barred and can act as a stressor that compromises the quality of parent-child relationships and interactions (Corapci & Wachs, 2002). For example, parents who reside in a chaotic environment may experience greater levels of stress, which can lead to less responsive, less sensitive, and less stimulating parenting (Marsh et al., 2020). The current study examines the relationship between household chaos and parenting characteristics such as warmth & involvement, directiveness, and verbal hostility.

Research Question

What is the relationship between perceived household chaos and characteristics of parent-child interactions among Latine mothers?

Methods

Participants

19 Latine families with a 3- to 5-year-old child (average age was 58 months) from a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States.

Mothers were primarily from Mexico (80%) and all families spoke primarily Spanish in the home. Families reported an average income of \$65,000 (\$20,000 - \$180,000).

Procedure

Mothers completed a series of surveys reporting their household chaos and measures of parent-child interactions. A Language ENvironment Analysis (LENA) device was worn by the child throughout the day to measure language and noise in the home.

Measures

Mother-Reported Household Chaos (Confusion, Hubbub, and Order Scale; Matheny et al., 1995)

- 15 items, e.g., “There is often a fuss going on at our home”, $\alpha=.84$

Environment Noise, Objective Household Chaos (LENA)

- Noise, percentage of overlapping noise, signal-to-noise ratio, percentage of time noise was greater than 70 decibels

Parenting Behaviors (abbreviated version of the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire; Robinson et al., 1995)

- 4 items for each of the three subscales: verbal hostility, $\alpha=.89$, warmth/involvement, $\alpha=.83$, directiveness, $\alpha=.62$.

Results

Parents tended to be warmer with older children and more directive when there were fewer children residing in the home. Greater family income was related to greater perceived chaos. Thus, linear regression analyses controlled for family income, number of children in the home, and child age.

Regression results showed greater mother-reported chaos related to more verbal hostility and marginally less warmth and involvement.

Table 1. Linear Regression with Maternal Perception of Home Chaos Predicting Parenting Verbal Hostility

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Income to needs ratio	-.208	.096	-.496	.054
Number of children	-.031	.135	-.046	.824
Child age	-.594	.245	-.481	.034
Home chaos	1.088	.377	.662	.015

Table 2. Linear Regression with Maternal Perception of Home Chaos Predicting Parenting Warmth/Involvement

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Income to needs ratio	.171	.104	.378	.129
Number of children	-.183	.145	-.252	.235
Child age	.807	.265	.606	.011
Home chaos	-.885	.407	-.499	.052

Table 3. Linear Regression with Maternal Perception of Home Chaos Predicting Parenting Directiveness

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Income to needs ratio	-.019	.107	-.052	.863
Number of children	-.237	.149	-.412	.139
Child age	-.261	.271	-.247	.356
Home chaos	-.167	.416	-.119	.696

Partial correlations were run to explore whether objective measures of home chaos (LENA) were related to parenting behaviors. Mothers were more directive in home with more noise and lower signal-to-noise ratios.

Table 4. Partial Correlations Between Parenting Behaviors and Objective Measures of Household Chaos

Control Variables			Parenting	Parenting	Parenting	Percentage	Noise	Signal-to-Noise Ratio
			Verbal Hostility	Warmth/Involvement	Directiveness	Noise Overlap		
Income-to-needs ratio, number of children, child age	Parenting Warmth/Involvement	<i>r</i>	-.561					
		<i>p</i>	.058					
Parenting Directiveness		<i>r</i>	.403	.327				
		<i>p</i>	.193	.299				
Percentage Noise Overlap		<i>r</i>	-.116	.383	.508			
		<i>p</i>	.720	.220	.092			
Noise		<i>r</i>	-.024	.333	.614	.870		
		<i>p</i>	.940	.290	.034	.000		
Signal-to-Noise Ratio		<i>r</i>	-.317	-.092	-.639	-.658	-.892	
		<i>p</i>	.315	.776	.025	.020	.000	
Percent Noise >70db		<i>r</i>	-.428	.471	.192	.628	.773	-.651
		<i>p</i>	.165	.123	.550	.029	.003	.022

Discussion

Prior studies have defined household chaos as being high in environmental noise, finding an adverse effect on parenting behaviors (Wachs & Evans, 2010; Corapci & Wachs, 2002). In our study of Spanish-speaking Latine mothers, this was only partially supported. Background noise and lower signal-to-noise ratios were related to more maternal directives, but they did not relate to mothers' verbal hostility or warmth and involvement with their children. Rather, when parents reported feeling overwhelmed by their environment, generating feelings of stress and lowering their well-being, they tended to show greater verbal hostility and less warmth. The fact that more objective measures of home chaos were only somewhat related to parenting behaviors may reflect the cultural context.

A primary limitation of this study is the small sample size, which limits the generalizability of these findings. However, this study has offered a snapshot into the complex relationship between home chaos and family life among Latine mothers that warrants further investigation. Additionally, parenting behaviors are self-reported by parents and do not offer an objective measure of the quality of parent-child interaction.

Future studies should direct attention to where parents source and attribute their feelings of stress as well as highlight protective factors against household chaos. Analyzing parents' recounts of what makes them feel stressed and overwhelmed at home could reveal central themes and expand our understanding of household chaos and its impact on family life. These findings may direct researchers to re-examine how household chaos is measured and analyzed – especially in diverse homes.

References

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