Mind over Money: How Do Variations in Receipt of Child-Support Affect Home Environments?

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Abstract

Family structure is often related to financial instability. It is also established that stress caused by instability negatively influences home environments and these environments are integral to positive child outcomes as widely recounted in the “family stress model” (Conger 1992; 2002). Therefore a reduction of home instability is an important policy for mediating the influence of poverty on child outcomes. One policy intended to remediate this problem is formal orders for child support. Though it is logical to assume this support should improve families’ stability, at least financially, I suggest these orders actually may increase stress when they are not followed consistently. I examine the impact that stable child-support may have in the reduction of economic stress thereby allowing for developmentally appropriate home environments as measured by parenting behaviors. Utilizing the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study I explore the variation in child support comparing those with formal orders who receive some of their mandated support and those that receive all the mandated support. The variation in this support is related to parenting behaviors for parents of children at age 9. This analysis provides an important exploration of the influence of stable formal child support orders for urban populations with high levels of single-parent families.

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