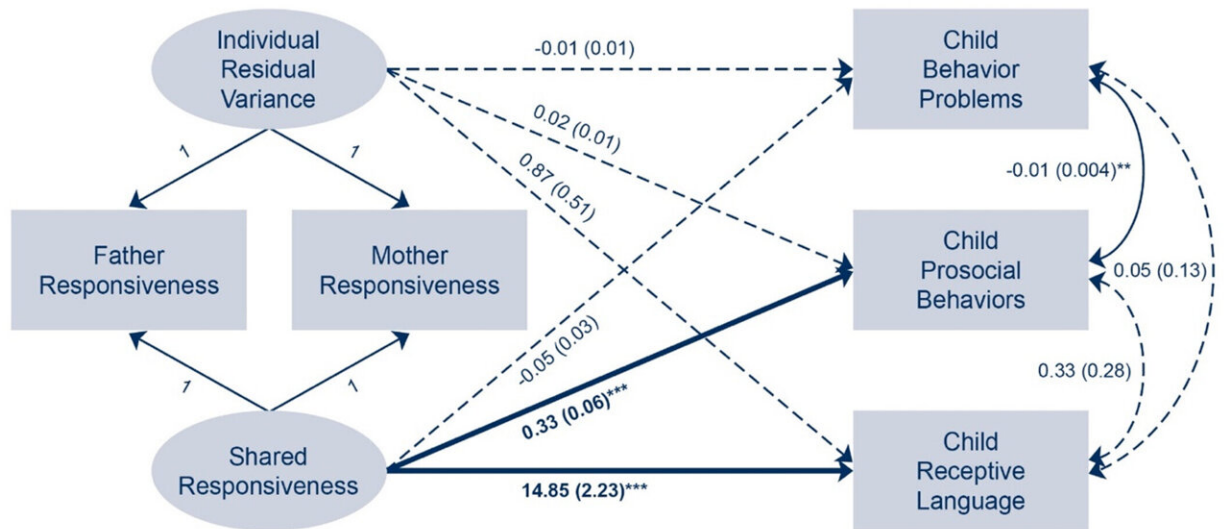


# Study shows that parents' shared warmth benefits preschoolers living in poverty

July 7 2023, by Jared Wadley



Associations between mothers' and fathers' shared responsiveness and individual residual variance predicting child prosocial behaviors, child behavior problems, and child receptive language. Credit: *Family Relations* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/fare.12913

Fathers and mothers in low-income homes can ensure that their preschoolers thrive with social behaviors and language skills by engaging in shared expressions of parental love or warmth, according to a new study.

Mothers and fathers who demonstrated similar or mutually agreed-on

ways of being sensitive and warm in their parenting stimulated the child's development, the findings showed.

Most poverty-related studies about child development focus on the adverse effects, ranging from [poor health](#) to higher emotional and [behavioral problems](#). The current study, published in *Family Relations*, focused on the factors contributing to the resilience of children growing up in poverty, as well as how fathers and mothers work as a team.

Researchers from the University of Michigan, Ohio State University, University of California-Berkeley and University of Nevada-Las Vegas examined parental responsiveness—which is the prompt and appropriate reaction to their children in everyday exchanges—among [low-income families](#).

The study's nearly 1,200 participants came from the Building Strong Families project, a racially diverse group of families from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Parental responsiveness was observed during short father-child and mother-child interactions with a book and a set of toys in separate bags.

Researchers gathered data on the preschoolers' child [behavior](#) problems, prosocial behaviors (such as demonstrating empathy) and [language skills](#).

Children had higher levels of [prosocial behaviors](#) and language skills when fathers and mothers engaged in shared parental responsiveness, said Shawna Lee, University of Michigan professor of social work.

Lee and colleagues noted that the study sample only involved fathers who completed the parent-child observations. Thus, compared with those who are unavailable, fathers in this research may be highly involved in their children's lives, irrespective of their resident status.

"As long as both parents engaged in shared parental responsiveness, their children benefited from it," said Joyce Lee, Ohio State University assistant professor of social work and the study's lead author.

These findings would not be drastically different for other families, as well, she said. "The literature shows that parental responsiveness is beneficial to children across different income levels," she said. "Hence, we might expect similar patterns for middle-income families, for instance."

**More information:** Joyce Y. Lee et al, Shared parental responsiveness among fathers and mothers with low income and early child outcomes, *Family Relations* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/fare.12913](https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12913)

Provided by University of Michigan

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