Welcome. You are listening to poverty in focus. This Center for Poverty Research podcast series brings together experts in their fields to discuss new poverty research and public policy. I'm Mary Ann Page., a professor of economics at UC Davis and the center for covertly research deputy director. Today is my pleasure to speak with Erie Colo a professor of public policy at university of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy.

She is also the director of the Center for Human Potential and Public Policy. Kalil is the Developmental Psychologists, her recent work examines how economic conditions including impacts of the great recession affect child development. Her research is funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and by the MacArthur and Russell Sage Foundations.

So can we start by having you just give us a, a short summary of what you've looked at with respect to the Great Recession in children?
>> Yeah, so I have, as you know, been interested in for a long time in parental job loss. And how it affects children, and how it affects parenting, and parents mental health.

And been interested in particular in the differences in how job loss for mothers versus fathers might differently affect child development. In part, that relates to my interest in time use. And of course there's a trade off between time that parents spend at work, and time that parents can spend at home with their kids.

And a lot of the research I've done shows that mothers and fathers spent their time with their kids differently. which, and, and so the Great Recession provides an interesting kind of natural experiment to think about those questions. Because as you, and others, have shown, you know, the, the job losses were primarily concentrated among men.

And, and, and women's employment didn't seem to have been as adversely effected. So theres a, a neat opportunity there to take that phenomenon, to, to look separately at, at moms and dads and child development in the context that. In the context of an economic recession.
>> And recessions also tend to affect low skilled adults more than high skills adults, right?

So we might expect, I know that some of your work shows that different economic groups also spend their time with their children differently. But I am thinking that we might also expect, not only did the Great Recession affect fathers more than mothers. I think that we will find it also affected advanced families more than disadvantaged families.

Families, and that might also affect the overall impact on how parents are spending their time.
>> Right, so there's two different underlying phenomena there. In terms of the time that economically advantaged, verses economically disadvantaged parents spend with their kids. And at the same time there are big differences in the ways that mothers and fathers spend time with their kids.

So first, it is the case that in looking at data that come from, for example, large time diary surveys. In general economically advantaged parents, not only spend more time with their children than do economically disadvantaged parents. They also seem to spend more of what developmental psychologists like me call, developmentally effective or developmentally stimulating time.

So highly educated parents. And by that, I mean parents with a college degree spend more time reading, helping their kids with homework, et cetera. They also tend, as some of my work has shown, to focus their time in a way that matches children's developmental stage. So, we know as Developmental Psychologists, that kids need different kinds of time investments at different ages.

That's pretty obvious to any parent or any lay person. And it seems that more highly educated parents kind of tailor the time that they spend with their kids. According to what development stage the child is in. So that's one big difference in, in time input. Now, another body of work, and I've worked a little on this area, shows that mothers and fathers spend their time very differently with their kid.

Again, on average, mothers, it turns out, tends to do more of the. Educationally relevent, managing time, the things that we think as developmentalists promote children's cognitive development. Maybe their academic achievement. Again, on average, fathers seem to spend more time in play. For young kids in gross motor activities, these are also very important developmentally for the child.

They're correlated with children's emotional behavior. But it, it doesn't seem like there's a lot of overlap in the ways in which mothers and fathers spend their time with kids. Many studies have shown this general kind of, distinction. So, when it comes to thinking about the Great Recession, and, you might ask yourself who's at home more than they would be otherwise?

Given that they may be less likely to be working. You want to ask yourself both is this a highly skilled parent who's now at home, on the one hand. Or is this a mother versus a father who's now at home on the other hand. And then you can begin to think about what might that mean for children's' development.

And as you said we know that in the Great Recession, fathers are more likely to be to be at home. I should have said before, it's also the case that fathers spend their time differently. Fathers also spend much less time than do mothers with kids, on average, again.

There's big gaps in the amount of time spent in child rearing activities. That gap is smaller, the more educated the couple is.But nevertheless, even among college educated couples, there's still a pretty big gap.
>> And that gap is also there, even if the parents are at work with the same number of hours a day.

>> Exactly, that's what's really interesting about both of these gaps that I mentioned in the time diary data. Both the mother, father gap, and the education gap or gradient as others have called it. These gaps hold up even when we control for parental employment, both hours worked and schedules worked.

So, when we've known for a long time that especially for mothers, there's not a one-for-one trade-off between time spent in work and time spent at home. We've long known from Suzanne Biancy's work that working mothers or mothers who working outside the home. Preserve much of the time they would otherwise spend with their kids by cutting back on their own leisure and sleep.

But nevertheless, these differences in education the education gradient we see in time use. Does not seem to arise from differences in the ways in which parents with different skills are employed either. Again, as I said, the intensity with which they're employed or the, the schedules which they work.

So, as I said, I think when you wanna imagine what is the impact of the Great Recession on child development? Those are the kinds of questions that you need to ask. So, if we were to say, for example, that. It's more likely that less skilled men are at home.

And this is the, the big difference that we see in the recession. I would say that given what we know about time use, we don't think that children we'll necessarily benefit a whole lot from that kind of, quote unquote, extra time with the parent. Because we know that, on average, those fathers are not gonna spend a lot of time with their kids-

>> Mm-hm.
>> In the first place, and they are not going to be doing a lot of the kind of cognitively stimulating. Time activities that mothers might do. If we also observe in the great recession that even within couples, as fathers lost jobs, mothers worked more. Which I, I think is something we know about the recession even, you know, at the individual couple level.

You can imagine those kids are losing valuable time with their mothers. And what they're getting from fathers might not be, the same kind of substitute. That's just on the time dimension of course there's the whole element of, of economic hardship and income instability. If all that arises from job loss as we expect it to, there's lot of research that suggests that that is going to be bad for kids.

Especially for kids who have little to begin with.
>> Right. I also, in my own work, I find myself thinking a lot about. The differences between job less and a recession, two very highly correlated things. But a kid could be affected by a recession not only because their own parent losses a job, but because other parents around them.

Or even, or I guess a better way of putting it is even if the child's own parents don't lose their job. And are able to maintain the same earnings level that they had before. That there are other consequences of recessions that could have negative effects on children. Because, local revenues go down, school funding goes down.

There are, there's evidence that during a recession, even people who do not lose their jobs, experience higher levels of stress. So, you could imagine two sort of pathways by which children might be affected, right. One is the direct effect of the own. A child's, families experience, but there's also sort of a community or environmental set of things that accompany recessions.

Which might have an effect.
>> Yeah, no no, in fact I just finished a paper, which looks like it's about to be accepted that focuses on exactly that question. I was involved in a study, with Sheldon Danziger and others that followed a sample of families in the Detroit area.

From about 2007 forward for three or four years. So these are families who are basically at ground zero for the impact of the recession. And it was a group of, of, of varying socioeconomic status. Both poor families, but also middle class and upper middle class families and we looked at the data We were interested in how children's behavior problems increased over the period.

And whether any increase in kids' behavior problems was more strongly correlated with a set of characteristics we called, kind of, objective markers. Of, of things you think are increasing during the recession, which included. Housing loss an income loss of 30% or more, a job loss that occurred to either one of the parents a big wealth decline that might have come from a housing value loss, etc.

Relative to a set of subjective perceptions among the parents, of how worried they were about making ends meet. How confident were they that a year from now they would be in a secure financial position. How concerned they were that they were that they might lose their job. It turns out these two sets of factors are correlated, but not at all entirely overlapping.

And so, as you say, many families in a period of, of an economic downturn, you know, surrounded by other families who are experiencing job loss. Even if they themselves are not experiencing those events, are extremely worried and anxious about, about their economic security. And, we know that those subjective perceptions of anxiety and stress are independently correlated with.

Family interactions and with child development. And that, in fact, is exactly what we found. That it wasn't even, you know, that among families who hadn't experienced any of these objective markers. Those subjective perceptions were highly predictive of children's behavior problems. You know, this was in a, a longitudinal analysis, sort of controlling for a lot of other stuff and looking at increases over time.

So we were as sure as we could get with these data. That this wasn't some sort of spurious correlation arising, from the fact, that some people are just more anxious, in general, than other people-
>> Right.
>> For example. So part of this is, is driven by changes in the economic environment that they're in?

>> I, yeah, absolutely. I, I absolutely think that's the case. And it, you know, if you can imagine why that is so, when you're, you think you're the next one to lose a job. Or, maybe you have family members, where it is now clear, or someone may be asking you for financial support.

Even though you didnâ€™t lose your job, all of sudden, some share of your earnings is being allocated to some relative or something like that.
>> Or even that relative could be living in the home with you.
>> Or someone moves in, or similar phenomena. So I think this idea that, the expectation of something bad happening to you, is just as powerful for some of these child development outcomes.

Is very real phenomenon, because I think it affects parents in much the same way, in terms of conflict in the house. In terms of parents, not being able to focus on their kids and, and their own kind of mental health worries. We think these things are very important for children's development.

Generally it's not something that economists, study.
>> Right.
>> but, you know, they, we find really huge substantively important correlation between those factors and kids' outcomes.
>> These relationships that we see between parental stress, or parental economic experiences and children's development. Then can also translate into the longterm into how successful those children are as adults.

Right, so this is, this could have, real meaningful impacts beyond the well being of children themselves-
>> Mm-hm.
>> Currently. But, also, long, it could have a big impact on how these kids are doing 20 years from now. I don't know how much we know about that yet, but we have lots of reasons to believe that.

These processes or the, the, the healthy child development translates into a different type of adult for sure, right?
>> Yeah. I mean, that's exactly right. And I've always said that we should think of job loss, you know, parental job loss or, you know, economic downturns as, you know, two generation.

Processes because there's absolutely every reason to think that if kids are demonstrating high levels of behavior problems in school. That critical period, that there are turning points in child development. If kids repeat a grade or get suspended from school or somehow get involved in. Some delinquent activity that puts them in contact with the justice system.

These are critically important events that clearly have long-run implications for their well being in adulthood. And I don't think we know that, obviously, from the current great recession, but your work and others has shown. Direct links between early childhood, economic diversity, and adult earnings and well being. And I think there's every reason to imagine it.

And given the severity and the extent of the most recent economic downturn, you know, the great recession. This is something that people will want to be studying 15 years from now.
>> Right. Well, and I think an important thing to keep in mind is that with this particular recession.

Something that's really marked this recession, is the length of time that people who've lost their jobs have been unemployed. And that length of time may be short, relative to an adult's life span. But quite a large component of the 18 years a child is living at home. So, that's something that I have been thinking about a lot as something that's really marked this recession.

But we all know it's mark this recession is different from many previous recessions. Most, certainly the one of the eight, the big one of the 80s, but that that has its own set of consequences for children. It's not just the number of people who have lost their jobs, it's how long they've been unemployed and, and that, that level of stress or-

>> Mm-hm.
>> Deprivation of economic resources-
>> Mm-hm.

>> May have been a, a significant chunk of that kid's life.
>> Right, and as you know, the fact that the job losses were accompanied by housing instability. In a way that you know prior recessions hadn't been marked by, so there was a lot of down turn and contraction happening.

In several different arenas.
>> Right.
>> In for high-income families, wealth losses, which are largely recovered at this point. But, again, if they happened at a critical period when parents are say, trying to figure out how to finance kids' education. And all the sudden all their retirement savings is gone.

>> Right.
>> Those families at that moment in time, may have made very different decisions, about investing in their kids-
>> Right.
>> Than a similar family, two years later.
>> Right. Not to mention the fact that volatility, income volatility itself, has it's-
>> Mm-hm.
>> Own set of impacts on family functioning and how well kids are doing.

>> I'm Anne Stevens, the director of Poverty Research at UC Davis, and I want to thank you for listening. The Center is one of three federally designated poverty research centers in the United States. Our mission is to facility non-partisan academic research on domestic poverty, to disseminate this research.

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