

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

The Effects of Affluence on Young Adults

Madison Jennings

Angelo State University

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

The Effects of Affluence on Young Adults

Research over the past 20 years has shown children growing up in affluent communities tend to have higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and eating disorders (Luthan & Becker, 2002; Lund & Dearing, 2013; Anderson & Leventhal, 2014). Starting as young as 13 years old, males and females both begin to feel the pressure to “achieve” and begin experimenting with what could potentially be dangerous habits (Luthan & Becker, 2002). Whether it is the Kardashian family or British Royalty, there are repercussions from being publicly exploited in the face of growing up in the spotlight, pressures from themselves and others, and what lifestyle is so accessible when money is excessively available.

To understand affluence, it is important to understand the scale of wealth that will be referred to in this study. Families that are considered affluent make over \$100,000 USD per year, median income families make \$40,000- \$75,000 USD per year, and lower income families make \$15,000 USD per year or less (Luthan & Becker, 2002). There has been a steady increase in household income since the 1970s, which was around \$50,000 USD in 1970 to \$74,600 in 2018 (Horowitz, Igielnik, & Kochhar, 2020). This average combined with the household that make over \$75,000 -\$100,00+ USD would make about 25 percent of American households considered affluent (Cashmand & Twaite, 2009). That being said, there is a generation of kids being raised in households that are on their way to the middle- and upper-class income. While this is great news for the parents that worked hard to be able to live comfortably, it means kids are being left to be raised by alternate caretakers or themselves while parents are at work or busy. It is important to understand the affluence of kids as they grow into adulthood to better understand where disorders or mental illness may arise from and what the best form of treatment would be, should they seek professional help. This is not to say that those who grow up poor or

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

in the middle class do not go onto also develop these disorders as well, it is, however, more prevalent in those in the upper class (Sareen, 2011)

Studies from Becker, Lund and Dearing in 2002, and Anderson and Leventhal in 2014 found that young American adults that grew up in affluence were later diagnosed with a mental disorder like depression, anxiety, substance abuse or an eating disorder all stem from sociocultural factors. Specifically, in a 2009 study by Sutsko, the three areas hypothesized and researched were the effects of community, cultural, and parental factors as well as childhood experiences. Sutsko's study found that while American's incomes have nearly doubled since the 1950s, divorce rates have doubled, teen suicide completions have tripled, and violent crime has quadrupled (Sutsko, 2009). As a result of her research, she developed preventive workshops to be implemented in schools of affluent communities.

With all of this in mind, there is no doubt that sociocultural factors are a major element when discussing and evaluating the effects of affluence on children and how it impacts them as adults, especially in the face of mental health and other disorders.

From previous research, I expect to find that those with higher income will be the most significant factor that lead to problems later on in life. This can be expected because having more money could lead to having more access to substances that could in turn cause depression or anxiety.

Method

Participants

In this study, approximately 75 participants ranging from age 17-23 years old will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that will be provided to them once they agree and sign consent forms. To recruit potential participants, My assistants and I will post about the study on social

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

media like Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok. I, along with my assistants will describe what the study is, the effects of affluence on young adults, and will provide the link to the consent form via their homepage or through direct message with the participant. The answers submitted by the participants will be sent directly to a secure email address and account owned by the head researcher on a password protected computer equipped with data safety protocol. Personal information submitted will remain confidential and be kept for at least three years after the study is completed.

Design

This study is a correlational design. In this research, the goal is to analyze and understand the relationship between affluent children and the effects it has on their mental health. Correlational design allows me to conclude if there is a positive, negative, or no relationship between the individuals who grew up affluent and if there is a development of any mental health issues or disorders.

This study is a within-subjects design. In this research, each participant will be provided the same questionnaire. Within-subjects design allows me to gain insight to the participants' background, history, and understand the context surrounding factors that might lead to mental health issues or disorders.

Measures

The participants will be asked to fill out a four- part questionnaire. In section one, they will be asked about their demographics: age, race, gender (assigned at birth), participant's occupation, current income of their parents/ guardians, and their parents/ guardians' occupation. It will be scored by having the participants provide a fill in the blank response or prefer not to answer. This section is designed to understand, on paper, who the participant is. Section two of

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

the questionnaire will ask the questions directed to the participants mental health and social background. For example: *Have you ever been clinically diagnosed with: depression, anxiety, and/ or an eating disorder?* These questions will be scored by having them check all that apply after the colon. *How you rate your relationship with: your mom, dad, guardian, sibling(s), and friends.* This set of questions will be scored on a Likert scale from one to five, one indicating no relationship to five indicating a strong, healthy, and feel emotionally close to them. *How accessible was alcohol?* This section of the questionnaire is designed to understand more of who the participant is as a person and the sociocultural factors in their life. The third section of the questionnaire will be directed towards money/ income within the household: *Did income/ money ever add or contribute to any strained relationships or mental health issues?* These answers will be scored by selecting yes, no, or prefer not to answer. These set of questions will be for better understanding how money or income was used in the household. The fourth and final section of the questionnaire will be an area for participants to further explain any answers to the questions asked.

Procedure

Participants who reach out myself or the assistants through social media or in person will be briefed on the study and have the opportunity to ask any clarification questions. The participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form before being provided the link to the survey. They will begin the questionnaire and will be asked to answer to the best of their ability. Once completed, I will debrief the participants and they are free to go about their day. If participants wishes to receive results from the study once completed, they may provide me with their contact information. Should there be any grievances, the participants may contact the IRB, whose contact information will be on both the consent and debriefing forms.

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

Expected Results

. As previously mentioned, I would like to test if more income leads to the development of mental health issues or disorders.

I plan to use a Pearson correlation. I predict that there will be a positive correlation for those that report having poor childhood experiences will have higher rates of anxiety and depression. I am using Pearson correlation to determine this because it is most useful when analyzing a linear relationship between two variables, which in this study, would be income and if the individual has anxiety or depression.

Discussion

As previously mentioned, I predict the higher the income, the more likely it is the individual will develop mental health issue and/ or a disorder.

In 2013, Frank Ocean released his first studio album, Channel Orange. On this album is a song called "Super Rich Kids." At first glance at the title and listen to the track, it sounds like a song that is about affluent kids living a relaxed and easy lifestyle. Upon further listen and examination of the lyrics, the listener can begin to see more into this person's lifestyle. The song includes references to substance abuse, neglectful parents, and eventual suicide. With Ocean's song in mind, previous research, and this study in mind, it is crucial that those who grow up in affluence are not overlooked or ignored when it comes to mental health and disorders. As humans, regardless of income, have a hierarchy of needs as best explained by Maslow. The bare minimum of what it takes to be the best version of ourselves is having physiological and safety needs met that money may or may not provide. The remaining three needs of love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization all come from sociocultural factors- community, family, and childhood experiences (Mcleoud, 2020).

References

- Anderson, S., Leventhal, T., & Dupéré, V. (2014). Exposure to neighborhood affluence and poverty in childhood and adolescence and academic achievement and behavior. *Applied Developmental Science, 18*(3), 123–138. <https://doi-org.easydb.angelo.edu/10.1080/10888691.2014.924355>
- Cashman, O., & Twaite, J. A. (2009). *Toxic wealth: How the culture of affluence can harm us and our children*. Praeger/ABC-CLIO.
- Cherry, K. (2019). “How Attachment Theory Works.” *Verywell Mind*, www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337.
- Horowitz, J. et al. (2020). “Trends in U.S. Income and Wealth Inequality.” *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center, www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/.
- Lund, T. J., & Dearing, E. (2013). Is growing up affluent risky for adolescents or is the problem growing up in an affluent neighborhood? *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 23*(2), 274–282. <https://doi-org.easydb.angelo.edu/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00829.x>
- Luthar, S. S., & Becker, B. E. (2002). Privileged but pressured?: A study of affluent youth. *Child Development, 73*(5), 1593–1610. <https://doi-org.easydb.angelo.edu/10.1111/1467-8624.00492>
- Mcleod, S. (2020), “Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.” *Simply Psychology*, Simply Psychology, www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html.
- Middleton, N., Sterne, J. A. C., & Gunnell, D. (2006). The geography of despair among 15-44-year-old men in England and Wales: Putting suicide on the map. *Journal of Epidemiology and*

THE EFFECTS OF AFFLUENCE

Community Health, 60(12), 1040–1047. <https://doi-org.easydb.angelo.edu/10.1136/jech.2005.045302>

Ocean, F. (2013), Super Rich Kids [Recorded by F. Ocean and E. Sweatshirt], on *Channel Orange* [CD]. New York, New York: Def Jam Recordings (2012)

Sareen, J. MD. “Relationship Between Household Income and Mental Disorders: Findings From a Population-Based Longitudinal Study.” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, JAMA Network, 4 Apr. 2011, jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/211213.

Sutsko, M. D. (2009). The unseen struggle of the affluent child: Etiology and prevention [ProQuest Information & Learning]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering* (Vol. 69, Issue 10–B, p. 6439).

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), “Women in the Labor Force: a Databook: BLS Reports.” www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2019/home.htm