The links between family economic and cultural capital and adolescent identity processing styles

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Background and goal

• Studies reveal a number of adverse effects of family economic hardships on child and adolescent developmental outcomes.
  (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Heberle & Carter, 2015; Masarik & Conger, 2017)

• Relatively little is known about the internal psychological processes, such as formation of personal identity, in relation to family economic situation.
  (Dickerson, Milojevich, & Quas, 2019; Heberle & Carter, 2015)
• Recent findings reveal that aspects of self-regulation and cognition can be shaped by experiences related to poverty and low socio-economic status. (Frankenhuis & Nettle, 2020; Sheehy-Skeffington, 2019; Warren & Barnett, 2020)


• Thus, our goal was to explore whether the way adolescents approach identity-related issues may also be related to their family economic situation.

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Theoretical models

Explaining the links between family economic context and individual development (Conger & Donnellan, 2007):

**Family investment model**
Better-off families have better access to financial, social, human, and cultural capital, so they can make multifaceted investments in the development of their children, while disadvantaged families must focus on meeting the immediate family needs.

**Family economic stress model**
Economic hardships exacerbate family stresses and have an adverse effect on parents’ emotions, behaviors, and relationships, which in turn negatively influence their parenting strategies and impede their children’s developmental outcomes.

Respectively, two mediational models were constructed to test the links between family economic context and adolescent identity.

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Variables and instruments

**Predictor:** *Family material conditions* (based on Hobza et al., 2017)
- Number of cars, computers at home, personal bedroom, trips abroad, free meals

**Outcome:** *Identity processing styles* (Berzonsky, 2015)
- Information-oriented, normative, diffuse-avoidant

**Mediators:** Investment model
Family cultural capital (Tramonte & Willms, 2010):
- *Cultural assets* (number of books, musical instruments, art pieces at home)
- *Cultural discussions* (frequency of discussions on art, culture, social and political issues at home)
- *Cultural activities* (frequency of attending exhibitions, concerts, theater, museums)

**Mediators:** Stress model
*Family economic pressures & Family conflict* (both adapted from Wadsworth & Compas, 2002)

**Parenting styles** (Boerchi & Tagliabue, 2018):
- Support, interference, lack of engagement

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Study participants

- **1268** adolescents (51.7% females)
- Age 14 - 16 (M = 14.87 SD = 0.39)
- Diverse family and socio-economic background:
  - 67% live with two parents; 22% parental divorce, 4% parental loss, 4% migration
  - 12.9% receive social support (free nutrition at school) (on a national level – 13.7%)
- Homogenous ethnically (> 98% Lithuanian)
Results: Overall associations

Family material conditions are related:

• Positively with information-oriented identity style
• Negatively with diffuse-avoidant identity style
Mediated links 1: Family investment model

Family material conditions are *indirectly* linked:

- Positively with information-oriented style *through* cultural activities
- Negatively with diffuse-avoidant style *through* limited cultural assets

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Mediated links 2: Family stress model

Family material conditions are **indirectly** linked:

- Positively with information-oriented style **through** supportive parenting

- Negatively with diffuse-avoidant style **through** economic pressures, conflicts and sub-optimal parenting
Conclusions and Limitations

Our findings reveal the **relevance** of family economic situation for adolescent identity formation and provides insights into **potential mechanisms** involved.

- Better material conditions at home are linked to more reliance on deliberate, rational processing of identity-related issues (through higher cultural (co)engagement and better relationships in the family).
- Worse material situation in the family is related to avoidance or situational processing of identity-related information (through higher economic pressures, limited cultural assets, and poorer relationships in the family).

Our cross-sectional findings should be complemented with longitudinal approaches.

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Thank you!

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