

Correlational method



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Harvey Correlational Method Analysis [ID The question of single motherhood and other changing parental and family unit structures is obviously a difficult, new and controversial one. It is bundled up with conservative-liberal battles as to the shape and fabric of the American culture in the 21st century. Elizabeth Harvey's analysis of correlation between early-childhood parental employment and health indices finds complex results, but the difficulty is that there are many confounding variables that may explain her correlations. Harvey finds that, in general, the benefit of income tends to exceed the cost of parents being out of the home, and that in most categories children are not affected by early employment, with the exception of academic and cognitive development scores before ages 7 and 9. Harvey tries to control for education, but the only meaningful control she makes is that of years of education. Perhaps mothers who saw reduced results from going to work were educated at worse schools or had lower academic performance. Certainly, the academic performance of the child can't be separated from the academic performance of the mother. Another factor could be genetics. Mothers in the early-employment group may have different genetic backgrounds, anomalies or diseases that could explain lower cognitive or academic functioning. Harvey can't control for these factors either. She does control for mother's IQ, but the NLSY doesn't account for father's IQs. Harvey appropriately controls for race, but only controls for African-American or Hispanic status. Yet Asian-Americans also face notable difficulties (Wise, 2005) . Other groups that might face discrimination or social stigma that could vary the results are Native Americans and Middle Easterners. It is possible that the children who faced difficulties were Asian-American or Middle Eastern in background. Harvey

uses the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, so it is difficult to say that geographic variation may explain the data, as the study includes data from across the nation. The NLSY controls for marital status but not for the quality of marriage. It is certainly possible that the mothers Harvey studied began work for more reasons than income. Certainly, it would make sense that a family struggling to provide for children would have domestic strife and stress. It is then possible that the childrens' low academic and cognitive results would be explained by poor relationship between the mother and a spouse, ex-spouse or boyfriend. The NLSY also does not control for sexual orientation, which could obviously contribute to stress on the part of the mother and therefore on the part of the child. A true confounding variable could be other economic assets. It may be that women who go to work are compensating for lower economic assets aside from income such as net wealth, less access to networks of privilege or assistance, home equity, insurance protection, etc. This same factor would then explain early-childhood variations in academic and cognitive skills, irrespective of the mothers' employment status. It is also possible that her specific claim that additional income is better than the slight losses to academic and cognitive indices ignores that children past the age of 7 to 9 receive more support if they are in trouble since the grades in those years matter more and children are supposed to be more independent. Children could still be suffering but be receiving countervailing assistance not available in the early childhood years. It is impossible to control for every variable, and Harvey's study on its face seems to shed new light on a controversial topic. But a brief review indicates that there are likely dozens of potential confounding variables that make her claims spurious. Bonus Question It is possible that increased

spending in preventative health care causes higher income: Mothers need to pay for preventative health care at a particular juncture so they anticipate the need and get better employment.