



For ADHD Children, Mother's Depression, Early Parenting Predict Conduct Problems

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Contact Information

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Description

A mother's depression predicts whether children with ADHD will develop conduct problems, according to a new study that also found early positive parenting to predict fewer conduct problems. The strength of the findings led the researchers to conclude that maternal depression may be a risk factor, whereas positive parenting may be a protective factor.

Newswise — A mother's depression predicts whether children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) will develop conduct problems such as lying, fighting, bullying and stealing, according to a new study from a University of Maryland researcher. The study, published in the January 2007 issue of the American Psychological Association's journal, *Developmental Psychology*, also found that early positive parenting during the preschool years predicted fewer conduct problems as the children grew to early adolescence. The strength of the findings led the researchers to conclude that maternal depression may be a risk factor, whereas positive parenting may be a protective factor.

"This research gives us clear targets for early intervention to prevent conduct problems in children with ADHD,"

says Andrea Chronis, director of the University of Maryland ADHD Program and professor of psychology who served as lead author on the paper. "In the real world, this could have important implications, because research has suggested that children with both ADHD and conduct problems are at the greatest risk of becoming chronic criminal offenders."

The researchers say their study is the first to focus directly on the role of parent mental health and early parenting in the development of conduct problems among children with ADHD. Moreover, they point to previous research that shows the development of conduct problems to be quite common in children with ADHD. By one estimate, approximately 20 to 50 percent of children and 44 to 50 percent of adolescents with ADHD experience severe conduct problems.

"Parenting an ADHD child is very difficult for many families," Chronis says. "Often there's a growing cycle of negativity as parents' nerves fray and their children's behavior escalates in response to increasingly harsh or withdrawn parenting. Maternal depression

Image Gallery



Andrea Chronis, Director, University of Maryland ADHD Program

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makes parenting a child with ADHD even more challenging. Now we have new evidence that praise, a warm tone of voice and use of other positive parenting techniques may help break this dangerous cycle.”

Findings and Method

Specifically, the researchers found that children with mothers who displayed the highest levels of positive parenting during preschool had significantly lower levels of conduct problems over time, when other possible contributing factors were controlled. Also, children of previously depressed mothers had significantly higher levels of conduct problems over time compared to children whose mothers had never been depressed.

This research is part of an ongoing longitudinal study funded by the National Institutes of Health that follows ADHD children through their 18th birthday. Conducted by members of the research team at the Universities of Chicago and Pittsburgh, it consisted of a series of annual assessments of 108 children’s behavior and development. Children ranged in age from four to seven at the start of the research. The parenting techniques were assessed using observational methodology during the first year of the study. Information on the mother’s mental health was also collected annually.

The study focused on the mothers’ health and parenting since they are most often the primary caretakers and are more likely to be depressed than men. Also, an earlier study by Chronis and the research team found that mothers of ADHD children are at double the risk of experiencing depression than moms of non-ADHD kids.

With a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, Chronis and her research team at the University of Maryland are now developing and evaluating a 14-week behavioral intervention for depressed mothers of children with ADHD that targets effective parenting and reducing maternal depression.

The Maryland ADHD Program is a clinical research program with a strong commitment to conducting clinical research that advances knowledge of the assessment and treatment of ADHD, provides comprehensive, empirically-based assessment and treatment of ADHD and associated behavior problems, trains the next generation of child clinical psychologists in these practices and educates parents and schools in this form of assessment and treatment. More information is available online:

<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/psyc/clinicalpsyc/training/adhd.htm>