Title: Predicting Externalizing Problem Behavior from Adaptive Behavior and Parental Intrusion for Young Children with Developmental Delays

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Introduction: Current research findings on associations between adaptive behavior and problem behavior in children with developmental delays (DD) are mixed, indicating a need for further research in this area (Hahn, Fidler, & Hepburn, 2014). Observed intrusive parenting behaviors are associated with externalizing problem behavior for children with DD, but little is known about any relationships that may exist between adaptive behavior and parenting behavior (Niccols & Feldman, 2006). One possibility is that low adaptive behavior in specific domains may serve as a risk factor, such that children with adaptive behavior deficits are differentially susceptible to the effects of intrusive or insensitive parenting (Crnic & Greenberg, 1987). Following this hypothesis, the purpose of this study was to examine whether adaptive behavior moderated the relationship between intrusion and externalizing problem behavior for children with DD.

Method: This study was part of a larger NICHD-funded investigation of family-based early intervention for families with preschool-aged children with DD. Families with children with DD (N = 76) were recruited from early intervention and early childhood special education programs in Oregon. Data were collected through extensive in-home interviews and assessments of family demographics, child adaptive behavior (Vineland-II), child externalizing problem behavior (CBCL), and observed parent-child interactions (Phaneuf & McIntyre, 2007). Specifically, the percentage of 30-second intervals containing intrusive parenting behavior was analyzed during a 10-min parent-child interaction free play task.

Results: Five separate hierarchical linear regressions were conducted to predict externalizing problem behavior. Adaptive behavior in a specific domain (communication, daily living skills, socialization, motor skills, or overall adaptive behavior) and intrusion were entered at step 1, and the interaction between the adaptive behavior domain and intrusion was entered at step 2. In the equations including communication, daily living skills, motor skills, and overall adaptive behavior, both intrusion and adaptive behavior were significant predictors of externalizing problem behavior. In addition, the interaction between daily living skills and intrusion significantly contributed to the prediction of externalizing problem behavior, ΔR² = .07, ΔF = 5.44, p < .05. Interaction probing found that the effect of intrusion was stronger when children had greater deficits in daily living skills. The final R² for this equation was .23. In the equation including socialization, only socialization contributed significantly to the prediction of externalizing problem behavior.

Discussion: Results suggest that deficits across domains of adaptive behavior predict externalizing behavior for young children with DD. In addition, early deficits in daily living skills may serve as a risk factor for children with DD, as these children might be more susceptible to the effects of intrusive or insensitive parenting. Future research could examine how these relationships develop over time and could explore why specific domains of adaptive behavior may be associated with greater risk.

References/Citations:

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