Title: The Effect of Mindful Parenting on Behavior Problems and Social Skills among Children with Developmental Delays: The Mediating Role of Parenting Behaviors

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Introduction: Children with developmental delays (DD) are at a greater risk for behavioral and social difficulties compared to typically developing children (Merrell & Holland, 1997). Recently, researchers have begun to investigate the impact of mindfulness-based parenting interventions on child outcomes. In particular, studies have shown that increased mindful parenting was associated with improved child outcomes, including less behavior problems, greater attention, and more positive social interactions (Singh et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2007). Despite the growing literature on mindfulness-based interventions, the number of studies examining the effects of mindful parenting on child outcomes remains sparse, especially among children with DD. Further, the mechanisms through which mindful parenting influences child behavior problems and social skills remain unclear. In the current study, we examined the following among families affected with DD: (1) the efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in improving mindful parenting; (2) whether changes in mindful parenting through MBSR predicted child behavior problems and social skills; and (3) parenting behaviors (positive parenting, inconsistent parenting, and punitive parenting) as potential mediators in the relationship between mindful parenting and child behavior problems and social skills.

Method: The current study used data from the Mindful Awareness for Parenting Stress (MAPS) Project, which included 56 parents of children, ages 2.5 to 5 years old, with DD. These parents participated in a randomized controlled trial examining the efficacy of MBSR in reducing parenting stress and subsequent child behavior problems. Parents were assigned to an immediate treatment or a waitlist control group. Mindful parenting was measured using the Mindful Parenting Scale (Jones, Hastings, Totsika, Keane, & Rhule, 2014), the data for which were collected at three time points over the course of the intervention: at the beginning, middle, and end. Parents completed the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) as a measure of child behavior problems, the Social Skills Improvement System (Gresham & Elliot, 2008) as a measure of child social skills, and the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Clerkin, Marks, Policaro, & Halperin, 2007) as a measure of parenting behaviors. The APQ has the following subscales: Positive Parenting, Inconsistent Parenting, and Punitive Parenting.

Results: Hierarchical linear modeling was used to examine changes in mindful parenting across the course of the intervention. Results from the unconditional growth model indicated that there was a significant increase in mindful parenting over MBSR sessions ($b = 1.73, p < .001$). Additionally, results from hierarchical linear regression analyses showed that changes in mindful parenting predicted significant reductions in child behavior problems ($\beta = -.281, p = .014$) but no changes in child social skills ($p > .05$). Multiple mediation analyses using bootstrapping revealed that only inconsistent parenting significantly mediated the relationship between mindful parenting and child behavior problems ($ab = -.98, 95\% CI [-1.93, -.32])$, and only positive parenting significantly mediated the relationship between mindful parenting and child social skills ($ab = .45, 95\% CI [.01, 1.12])$.

Discussion: Results showed improvements in mindful parenting among parents of children with DD after receiving MBSR. Our findings suggest that improvements in mindful parenting through MBSR directly improved child behavior problems but not social skills in children with DD. Further, results suggest a promising mechanism by which mindful parenting influences both child behavior problems and social skills indirectly through parenting behaviors. Specifically, parents who exhibit more mindful parenting engage in less inconsistent parenting, which reduces child behavior problems. Also, parents who exhibit more mindful parenting engage in more positive parenting, which improves child social skills. These findings support the usage of mindfulness-based interventions in increasing mindful parenting and improving child outcomes among families affected with DD.
References/Citations:

