Destined for Trouble? : A Prospective Analysis of the Effects of Temperament and Parenting on Externalizing Problems

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Destined for Trouble? : Examining the Effects of Temperament and Parenting on Conduct Problems

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Temperament

- **Temperament**: Constitutionally based differences in emotionality and self-regulation (Rothbart & Bates, 1998)
- Temperamental irritability is one aspect of negative emotionality (Rothbart & Bates, 2006)
- Temperamental irritability is linked to conduct problems (i.e., aggression and rule-breaking) (Thomas et al., 1968; Frick & Morris, 2004)

Role of Parenting

- Robust association between parenting and child adjustment (e.g., Larsson et al., 2008)
- Negative parenting behaviors include inconsistent discipline and hostile reactions (Lengua & Kovacs, 2005; Morris et al., 2002)
- Underlying assumption: parents are driving the effect (Petitt & Arsiwalla, 2008)

Transactional Models

- Learning theory: holds that actions are learned through contingencies
- Theoretical and experimental evidence that infant behavior shapes parental response (e.g., Bovin et al., 2005; Patterson, 2002)
- Parental negative reactions associated with conduct problems (e.g., Lengua & Kovacs, 2005)

Sibling Comparisons

- Comparing differences among siblings within the same family
- Controls for the effects of shared genes between parents and children and environmental confounds (Lahey & D’Onofrio, 2010)

Current Study

The goal is to better understand the development of conduct problems in children, considering both the genetic and environmental influences.

Hypotheses

1. Infant irritable temperament will predict future conduct problems
2. Infant irritable temperament will predict future negative parenting behaviors
3. Negative parenting behaviors will predict future conduct problems
4. Negative parenting behaviors will partially mediate the relationship between infant irritable temperament and conduct problems

Results

Maternal Responsiveness:
- Between families
  - Temperament predicted CP, $\beta = 0.23$
  - Temperament predicted MR, $\beta = -0.09$
  - MR predicted CP, $\beta = -0.15$
  - Significant partial mediation, $b = 0.002$
- Within families
  - Temperament predicted CP, $\beta = 0.05$
  - Temperament predicted MR, $\beta = -0.06$

Learning Stimulation:
- Between families
  - Temperament predicted CP, $\beta = 0.21$
  - Temperament predicted LS, $\beta = -0.10$
  - LS predicted CP, $\beta = -0.33$
  - Significant partial mediation, $b = 0.01$
- Within families
  - Temperament predicted CP, $\beta = 0.05$

Harsh Parenting:
- Between families
  - Temperament predicted CP, $\beta = 0.23$
  - Temperament predicted HP, $\beta = 0.10$
  - HP predicted CP, $\beta = 0.09$
- Within families
  - Temperament predicted CP, $\beta = 0.05$
  - HP predicted CP, $\beta = 0.05$

Discussion

- Strengths
  - Design and data set
  - Assessment of temperament
- Limitations
  - Measures and parenting variables
  - Importance of genetic and environmental controls
  - Implications for interventions

Participants: 11,508 children comprising the CNLSY

**Variables:**

- **Infant Irritable Temperament**: Rothbart, 1981; Assessed ages 0-23 months
- **Parenting**: Caldwell & Bradley, 1984; assessed ages 3-4 years
- **Conduct Problems**: Peterson & Zill, 1986; Assessed ages 5-6 years

Data Analysis: A CFA was used to confirm the parenting variables. Hypotheses were tested using multilevel path modeling in Mplus. Data were analyzed between and within families.

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