

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Predicting Emotional and Social Competence During Early Childhood From Toddler Risk and Maternal Behavior

Blandon, A. Y., Calkins, S. D., & Keane, S. P. (2010). Predicting emotional and social competence during early childhood from toddler risk and maternal behavior. *Development and Psychopathology*, 22(1), 119-132.
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SUMMARY: Observational and survey data were used to explore the interactions between maternal parenting behavior and toddler risk (i.e., externalizing behaviors such as aggression and destructive behavior and poor emotion regulation) as predictors of individual differences in children's emotional and social competence during the transition to kindergarten. Results indicate that both child factors and maternal parenting behaviors influenced toddlers risk for emotional and social issues.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Interactions between maternal behaviors and child characteristics were not associated with child social competence, but were associated with child emotional competence suggesting multiple developmental pathways by which toddler characteristics and maternal parenting practices influence later child emotional and social competence.
- Higher levels of toddler risk behaviors (i.e., externalizing behaviors like anger and aggression, poor emotion regulation) were associated with poorer social and emotional competence and lower peer acceptance, greater negativity, and more problem behavior in kindergarten.
- Maternal control was positively associated with greater negativity for high-risk toddlers but lower levels of negativity with low risk toddlers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with organizations connected with military parents to emphasize the importance of maternal behavior and military children's and social well-being
- Facilitate support groups for military parents struggling with parenting issues and provide information regarding age appropriate ways to support a child's social and emotional development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide early intervention for military children identified as at risk
- Disseminate information regarding the resources and services available to military parents

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage pediatricians working with military families and children to routinely screen for psychological/emotional as well as physical issues
- Continue to support parenting programs for military families

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METHODS

- Data were collected as part of a longitudinal study of children identified as at risk for externalizing behavioral issues.
- Participants were recruited through daycare centers; the health department; and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs.
- Children were considered at risk if they had a score of 60 or above on the Child Behavior Checklist for externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression).

PARTICIPANTS

- Two hundred fifty-three children (116 males, 137 female) and their mothers were included in the study.
- Of the participants, 66% were White, 28% were Black, 4% were biracial, and 2% were Latino/Latina.
- Children were on average 31 months old at the 2nd year assessment, 68 months old at the 5th year assessment, and 70 months old at the kindergarten assessment.

LIMITATIONS

- Children were only observed interacting with one caregiver but interactions with other caregivers may also play a role in the development of emotional and social competence, limiting the results.
- Only children who were at risk for externalizing behaviors and maladaptive emotion regulation were included; therefore, results are not generalizable to children not considered at risk.
- Maternal behavior was assessed globally and not in relation to a specific child behavior which could limit the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the impact of sibling relationships on social and emotional development of children
- Examine whether maternal parenting practices mediates the association between children's risk and later social development
- Investigate how paternal parenting practices influence child emotional and social competence

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