Preventive Intervention for Preschoolers at High Risk for Antisocial Behavior: Long-Term Effects on Child Physical Aggression and Parenting Practices


**SUMMARY:** Children whose siblings were adjudicated were at risk for antisocial behaviors. The preventive effect of the modified Incredible Years Series program was examined in the study by randomly assigning high-risk preschoolers and their parents into either an intervention group or a control group. Results revealed significant effects of the intervention in observed child aggression and parental practices.

**KEY FINDINGS:**
- The family intervention had significant effects on observed child physical aggression.
- Parents in the intervention group also showed sustained improvement in parenting practices than parents in the control group.
- Parental rating of child physical aggression showed no intervention effect.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:**
Military professionals could:
- Educate military parents on strategies to prevent child and adolescent problem behaviors
- Participate in professional trainings to learn more about risk factors for youth antisocial behaviors, and how it is relevant in the military context

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:**
Programs could:
- Offer support groups for military adolescents who were adjudicated and also for their parents
- Develop workshops for military parents to foster effective parenting practices such as responsiveness, no harsh parenting, and stimulation for learning

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:**
Policies could:
- Promote additional research on preventing antisocial behaviors in children and adolescents who are at higher risk (e.g., having a sibling that was adjudicated)
- Continue to support preventive intervention programs aimed at promoting optimal parenting practices in military families

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.

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METHODS

- Families with a preschool-age child and another child who had Family Court records and were younger than 16 years old were contacted for the study.
- Families were randomly assigned to an eight-month family intervention group (N = 47) or a control group (N = 45), and were assessed four times over 24 months; 77% of the families completed all the assessments.
- Assessments included observed child physical aggression, parent-rated child physical aggression, and parenting practices (harsh parenting, stimulation for learning, and responsive parenting).
- Statistical analyses examined differences between the outcomes from intervention and control groups.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 92 preschoolers (53 girls) who had familial risk for adolescent antisocial behaviors.
- The average age of the preschoolers was 3.96 years (SD = 0.69).
- Most of the preschoolers were Black (65%), followed by Latino (27%), White (1%), Asian-American (1%), and other (6%).

LIMITATIONS

- There were no baseline measurement of the child physical aggression behaviors, therefore the results may be confounded by children’s original aggression level.
- The last assessment was only eight months after the intervention, so the long-term effect of the intervention was unknown.
- There was no teacher-rated child physical aggression scores, therefore it was unclear how the children behaved outside the home environment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the long-term effect, beyond eight months, of the intervention program
- Have both parent and teacher ratings of aggression so that the results are more comprehensive
- Study whether the intervention would have an effect on older children who are at risk for antisocial behaviors

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

- **Design**: Appropriate
- **Methods**: Appropriate
- **Limitations**: Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit: https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works

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