



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Fathers' Challenging Parenting Behavior Prevents Social Anxiety Development in Their 4-year-old Children: A Longitudinal Observational Study

Majdandžić, M., Möller, M., de Vente, W., Bögels, S.M. & van den Boom, D.C. (2014). Fathers' challenging parenting behavior prevents social anxiety development in their 4-year-old children: A longitudinal observational study. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 42, 301-310.



94 Dutch families participated in an observational, longitudinal study to test whether the effect of challenging behaviors on children's social anxiety differed between fathers and mothers. Fathers' challenging parenting behavior predicted less subsequent observed social anxiety in the 4 year old child, but mothers' challenging behavior predicted greater child anxiety.

Key Findings:

- Paternal challenging behavior (extent to which the parent challenges the child in a playful manner to push his/her limits) decreased social behavioral inhibition in first born (4 year old) children half a year later.
- Maternal challenging behavior increased social behavioral inhibition in 4 year old children half a year later.
- Social anxiety, as measured using parental report, was not predicted by challenging parental behavior for either child.
- Overinvolvement (extent to which the parent is needlessly helping the child or interfering in his/her behavior) of both parents did not affect later observed or parent-rated social anxiety in either child.
- In the second born children, parenting of neither parent influenced the development of social behavioral inhibition. However, early social behavioral inhibition explained much of the variance six months later.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could include components in their parenting classes about the potential benefits of appropriate paternal challenging behavior as a means of preventing child social anxiety.
- Programs may include information about how different children benefit from distinct parenting strategies, and how children may respond differently from similar behaviors from mothers and fathers.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies may recommend continued support for parenting interventions for Service members and their families.
- Policies which allow Service members greater flexibility in their work schedules, thereby permitting more involvement in child rearing, could be considered.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Additional research could assess the consequences of maternal challenging parenting on their children's social development.
- Future studies could use observational measures of parenting behavior assessed in natural settings (rather than a clinical setting).



Background Information

Methodology:

- Families with at least two biological children (the first child 4 years old and the second at least 2 years old) were recruited through the birth records of the Municipal Health Service of Amsterdam.
- Data were collected at two time points, 6 months apart.
- Observational data on parenting was obtained at Time 1 (children and a parent completing a puzzle together and playing 2 games) and was coded by 4 students.
- Child social anxiety was assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 via coding of the Stranger Approach.
- Child shyness was assessed by a parental self-report questionnaire.

Participants:

- 94 Dutch families participated.
- Time 1 characteristics: Mean age of first child=4.31 (SD=0.28) years, Mean age of second child = 2.57 (SD=0.36) years, Mean mother age =36.90 (SD=3.82), Mean father age =39.70 (SD=5.19). 96% of mothers and 95% of fathers were Caucasian.
- Time 2 characteristics: Mean age of first child = 4.94 (SD=0.31) years, Mean age of second child = 3.20 (SD=0.35) years.

Limitations:

- Parenting behavior was measured in a structured lab setting which may not generalize to behavior as it exists in the “real world.”
- Only three tasks were used to measure parenting behavior; this may not be representative of all domains of parenting behavior.
- Parenting was observed with both children at once; the other child may have influenced each other’s behavior.
- Parents were highly educated, and the population was Dutch; it is unknown how these findings apply to other populations.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★ ☆
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★☆☆)	Limited (★★★☆☆)	Questionable (★★★☆☆)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★☆☆)	Limited (★★★☆☆)	Questionable (★★★☆☆)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★ ☆
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★☆☆)	Limited Several Limitations (★★★☆☆)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★★★☆☆)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★ ☆
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★☆☆)	Limited (★★★☆☆)	Questionable (★★★☆☆)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications	
Overall Quality Rating					★ ★ ★ ★