

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Teacher-Child Relationships and the Development of Academic and Behavioral Skills During Elementary School: A Within- and Between-Child Analysis

Maldonado-Carreño, C., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2011). Teacher-child relationships and the development of academic and behavioral skills during elementary school: A within- and between-child analysis. *Child Development*, 82(2), 601-616. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8264.2010.01533.x

SUMMARY: The relationships between teacher-child relationships, academic achievement, and behavioral problems were evaluated in a nationally representative sample of elementary school children. The findings indicate that the quality of relationships that teachers report having with children is associated with both academic achievement and behavior.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Teacher-child relationship quality (as assessed by the teacher) was positively associated with teacher reports of academic achievement but not student performance on standardized achievement tests.
- Teacher-child relationship quality was negatively associated with the level of child behavior problems (as reported by both parents and teachers).
- The importance of relationships with teachers for children's academic achievement and behavior is consistent throughout elementary school.
- Between kindergarten and fifth grade, children's academic skills, teacher and mother-reported internalizing behaviors, and teacher-reported externalizing behaviors increased; mother-reported externalizing behaviors decreased over time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with professionals in the field regarding ways to promote positive military child-teacher relationships
- Offer staff training to civilian school systems on military culture; educators who better understand the uniqueness of the military child experience may be able to forge stronger relationships with these children

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer after-school tutoring to support military children who are struggling academically
- Provide support groups to military children struggling with behavioral issues

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage professional development for teachers aimed at enhancing supportive and responsive classroom practices
- Recommend assessment of early and routine academic and behavioral functioning in order to identify youth who might benefit from early intervention

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METHODS

- Longitudinal data were gathered annually from 10 sites across the United States when children were between kindergarten and sixth grade as part of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care.
- Sites included Little Rock, AR; Irvine, CA; Lawrence, KS; Boston, MA; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Charlottesville, VA; Morganton, NC; Seattle, WA; and Madison, WI.
- Academic achievement (standard assessment and teacher report), mother- and teacher-reported behavior problems, and teacher evaluated teacher-child relationship quality were the primary variables.

PARTICIPANTS

- One thousand three hundred sixty-four children participated in the study.
- The majority of youth were male (52%) and White (76%).
- Children were assessed at ages 4-6 years (kindergarten) and ages 9-11 years (fifth grade).

LIMITATIONS

- Rater bias may have influenced findings.
- Other variables that were not included (e.g., classroom instructional characteristics) may contribute to the observed academic and behavioral trajectories.
- Due to attrition over time, much of the data was imputed, which limits the validity of results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore additional variables (e.g., child social competence) that might underlie observed associations between teacher-child relationship quality and teacher-reported academic achievement and behavior
- Evaluate the interaction between instructional characteristics and teacher-quality relationships on academic and behavioral outcomes of military children
- Replicate the study with a sample of military children

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