Introduction

• The critical influences of parental discipline on adolescent socioemotional development is well established; however, limited work examined the mechanisms for such associations.

• Social information processing framework (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011; Crick & Dodge, 1994): environmental adversities may confer risk for individual adjustment by altering how they process interpersonal stimuli threatening cues

• Empirical evidence:
  - Experiences of adversities (e.g., maltreatment, neglect, negative parenting) biased emotion processing (e.g., greater attention for angry and fearful expressions; Pollak & Sinha, 2002; Masten et al., 2008)
  - Biased emotion processing compromised adolescent development (e.g., greater anxiety, Gulley, Oppenheimer, & Hankin, 2014).

The current study

• Whether adolescent emotion processing biases for facial displays of threatening cues (i.e., angry, fearful emotion) may operate as indirect pathways through which harsh and lax discipline may be linked to adolescent socioemotional development.

Methods

• Participants:
  - 192 families followed for two annual waves
  - Target adolescent: Mean (age) = 12.4 @ Wave 1

• Measures:
  - Parent Harshness/Overreactivity & Laxness (Wave 1): 21-item Parenting Scale completed by both parents
  - Adolescent functioning (Wave 2, adolescent self-report):
    - Aggressive behavior: Youth Self Report
    - Depressive symptoms: Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale
  - Peer problems: Multidimensional Peer Victimization Questionnaire
  - Covariates (Wave 1):
    - Interparental conflict: Parent-reported on Conflict and Problem-Solving scale
    - Parent-adolescent relationship hostility: Adolescent-report on Conflict Behavior Questionnaire
    - Maternal education

Results

Indirect Effects:

• Greater parent harshness/overreactivity greater difficulty inhibiting responses to fearful distractors more peer problems one year later
  - Estimate = 0.03, bootstrapped 95% CI: [0.001, 0.08]

• Greater harshness/overreactivity greater difficulty inhibiting responses to fearful distractors more depressive symptoms
  - Estimate = 0.61, bootstrapped 95% CI: [0.05, 1.40]

Discussion & Conclusion

• Adolescent emotion processing was involved in the indirect pathway linking harsh/overactive discipline and adolescent depressive symptoms and peer problems one year later
  - Fear processing bias in the form of greater difficulty in disengaging attention away from negative emotional stimuli
    - May reflect the adaptive capacity to be hypervigilant to negative emotional cues in order to better anticipate and protect themselves against harsh and punitive caregivers

• Null finding for anger processing
  - Extreme adverse experiences (e.g., abuse) in clinical samples vs. harsh/overactive discipline in non-at-risk sample
  - Harsh/overreactive parenting might not impose at much adaptive pressure to prioritize and to rapidly attend to angry faces
  - Environmental adversity (e.g., maltreatment, negative parenting)
    - Enhanced amygdala reactivity (Herrings et al., 2016)
    - Abnormal connectivity between amygdala & vmPFC when processing fearful stimuli (Herrings et al., 2013, 2016)

References


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