Why Does Children’s Temperamental Exuberance Increase their Vulnerability to Externalizing Symptoms?: A Process-Oriented Approach

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Introduction

- Temperamental exuberance or surgency is characterized as a relatively stable disposition to exhibit high levels of approach to novelty, anticipatory pleasure, and activity (Stifter & Dollar, 2016)
- Risk associated with exuberance is modest and inconsistent (Nielsen et al., 2019)
- Children who are high in exuberance during the toddler and preschool years are at greater risk for concurrent and subsequent externalizing problems during middle childhood (Dollar & Stifter, 2012; He et al., 2016; Morales et al., 2016)

Limited work has been done to further investigate specific mechanisms that may account for this association.

Aim

Examine whether children’s negative internal representations of the family, hostile reactivity to family adversity, and exposure to family difficulties mediated the prospective association between their exuberance during preschool and their externalizing symptoms in the early elementary school years.

Participants

| Sample | 243 children and their families |
| 56% girls |
| Mage at W1 = 4.6 years |

Ethnicity/Race

- 48% Black
- 43% White
- 9% Multi-racial or Other
- 16% Latino

Socio-economic Status

- Median income: $36,000
- 69% received public assistance

Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Construct</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Reporter</th>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Measure Description (Manifest Indicators)</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temperamental Exuberance</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gift Delay (Activity/Approach)</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostile Reactivity to Conflict</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>MSSB-R (Antagonistic Relationships)</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Adversity</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Family Interaction Task (Maternal Parenting)</td>
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<td>.70</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Externalizing Symptoms</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>HBQ (ODD, CP, Overt Hostility, Relational Agg.)</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.57</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>HBQ (ODD, CP, Overt Hostility, Relational Agg.)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>HBQ (ODD, CP, Overt Hostility, Relational Agg.)</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A SEM examining children’s exposure to family adversity, hostile reactivity to parental conflict, and negative family representations as mediating mechanisms in the prospective association between temperamental exuberance and externalizing symptoms across three annual waves of data. All path coefficients are standardized. *p < .05.

Conclusions

- Mediational paths examining children’s hostile reactivity and their negative internal representations were significant.
- Informs and refines theoretical models such as top-down and bottom-up regulation processes, mood congruent models, schema-congruent models, social learning, family system theories, and the revised version of emotional security theory.
- No evidence for mediational role of increased family adversity.
- Identification of negative family representations and hostile reactivity to family adversity as risk mechanisms may also offer new clinical opportunities for interrupting the pathogenic cascades.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted at the Mt. Hope Family Center and was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development fellowship RO1 HD065425 awarded to Patrick T. Davies and Melissa L. Sturge-Apple. We are grateful to the children, parents, and staff who participated in this project.