

MATERNAL AND PATERNAL PARENTING STRESS AS PREDICTORS OF CHILD EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

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Introduction

Parenthood = lots of adaptation and challenges¹

Perception of having too few resources to meet the demands of the parental role → parenting stress²

Parenting stress → child socioemotional difficulties³

Literature mostly concerned with maternal parenting stress. Both parents experience similar levels of parenting stress and contribute to child development⁴

Objectives

1. Examine if each parent's parenting stress uniquely predicts, over and above the other parent's stress, child externalizing and internalizing behavior problems
2. Examine the interaction between maternal and paternal parenting stress in their associations with child externalizing and internalizing problems

Method

Sample

157 children (75 girls, 82 boys) & both parents
93% of mothers and 89% of fathers: White
Age: mothers 31.3 yrs (SD=4.0); fathers 33.7 yrs (SD=5.1)
Maternal education: 16.1 yrs (SD=2.1)
Paternal education: 15.7 yrs (SD=2.4)
81%: familial income above \$60,000 CAN

Measures

Parental Stress Index – Short Form (Abidin, 1995) completed by fathers and mothers when children were aged 18 months old

Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach et al., 1999) completed by fathers and mothers when children were aged 4 years

Results

Table 1

Parental parenting stress predicting externalizing and internalizing behavior problems

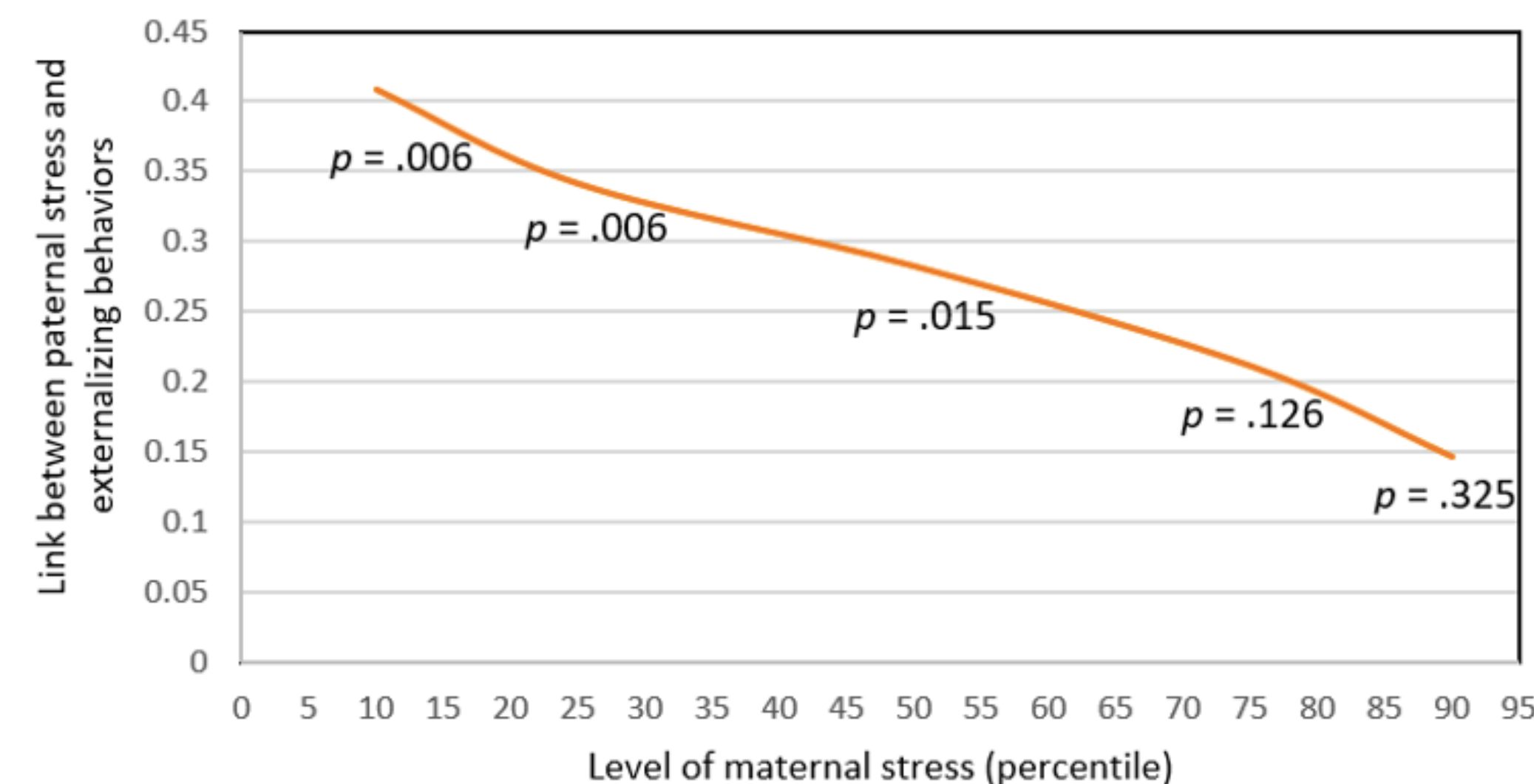
	R ²	ΔR ²	F	β
Externalizing behaviors				
1. Family SES	.13		7.89	-.24*
Child sex				.0001
Child difficultness				.07
2. Maternal stress T1	.24	.11	9.94	.19
Paternal stress T1				.29*
3. Interaction term	.27	.03	9.51	-.17 [†]
Internalizing behaviors				
1. Family SES	.18		11.60	-.29*
Child sex				.10
Child difficultness				.10
2. Maternal stress T1	.26	.08	10.93	.19
Paternal stress T1				.16
3. Interaction term	.26	.00	9.11	.005

Note. Interaction term = Paternal parenting stress x maternal parenting stress. SES = socioeconomic status.

* $p < .05$ † $p < .10$.

Figure 1

Degree of association between paternal parenting stress and child externalizing behaviors at different levels of maternal parenting stress



Note. Covariates: family socioeconomic status, child sex and temperament.

Higher paternal parenting stress predicted more child externalizing behaviors at most levels of maternal stress, but the strength of this association decreased as maternal stress increased

Discussion

Parenting stress → parental suboptimal behaviors

More externalizing and internalizing behaviors in child⁵

Fathers' physical play is instrumental in learning how to regulate behavior⁶

Fathers' involvement quality in childcare decreases as their parenting stress increases⁷

More maternal psychological distress decreases fathers' involvement in childcare⁷

Mother distress = more hostility and less warmth toward partner = more ineffective paternal parenting⁸

Strengths:

- Longitudinal design
- Consideration of fathers and mothers

Limits:

- Mostly well-educated French-Canadian White families
- Correlational design
- Parental questionnaires

Future studies:

- Mediation of the association
- Role of the quality of parent-child interactions
- Cross-lagged design

References

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