Introduction
Over the past two decades, the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has funded scholarly research aimed at advancing the science of human development while also developing evidence for programs designed to serve low-income children and their families. In the following poster, we illustrate the ways that Buffering Toxic Stress Consortium-funded data regarding parents’ appraisals of the challenges of caregiving can be interpreted in two ways.

On one hand, our data can help us to understand the ways that parents’ thoughts and feelings about parenting are related to their mental health and the ecological and family stressors that they face. Our hypotheses were that 1) the low-income Latina parents in our sample would report a wide range of parenting hassles, and that 2) parenting hassles would be significantly and positively related to parents’ experiences of anxiety, intimate partner violence, and financial hardship.

On the other hand, our project data can help us evaluate whether a video-coaching-based model of parent support (PALS, Landry, et al., 2008) delivered by family visitors/educators yields significant benefits for families facing these multiple stresses.

We refer to these two different perspectives afforded by our data as “two sides of the coin” of parenting research in the context of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) delivered in 4 neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage in New York City.

Data

SAMPLE: 190 families were recruited from 7 social service programs providing Early Head Start home visiting services to families with children 0–3 years of age. Additional families (n=77) were recruited from hospitals in the same neighborhoods as those social service agencies in order to increase the range of family incomes represented in the sample. Of the 267 respondents, 92.4% were mothers, 6.8% were fathers, and .8% were grandparents. The average age was 31 years (SD = 7 years). 65% of the parents’ primary language was Spanish and 35% was English. The majority of the sample was low-income—69% reported an annual total household income of less than $21,000.

PROCEDURES: All data were collected during a 2-hour home visit conducted by Spanish- or native speaker assessors. All procedures were approved by the NYU institutional review board.

MEASURES: Mothers reported on highest level of education, difficulty paying bills, and whether or not they are currently (or have ever) received welfare or lived in public housing. Mothers also reported on anxiety symptoms (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lavee, 2006) and experiences of inter-parental conflict with spouse or partner (on 5 items adapted from Straus, et al., 1996). The Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) scale (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) was completed to assess mothers’ appraisals of everyday hassles and inconveniences associated with parenting.

Hypothesis 1: Latino parents reported relatively low levels of daily hassles, overall. There was considerable variability in parents’ reports, however, with a small proportion of parents reporting negative thoughts and feelings about daily hassles “a lot” or “constantly.”

1) Parents are managing these feelings under high levels of stress. Fully 50% of families enrolled in Early Head Start reported experiencing one or more types of financial hardship.

The Implications for Policy and Practice

Materials and Methods

Materials and Data

Consortium-funded data regarding parents’ appraisals of the challenges of caregiving can be interpreted in two ways.

Hypothesis 2: The psychological and ecological contexts of parenting matter—Parents reporting higher number of symptoms of anxiety also reported significantly more hassles. Parents who reported greater financial hardship and higher levels of exposure to IPV also reported higher levels of parenting hassles.

Families are likely to benefit from parenting interventions when CBOs also provide support for mental health, safety, and economic security. Supporting improvement in parents’ appraisals and behaviors may be an “uphill battle” if those additional factors remain unaddressed.

Means of Parenting Daily Hassles

Rates of IPV were high among the Latina moms in our sample—These descriptive findings are of grave concern, given implications of household violence for both maternal and child mental health and well-being.

Subscores for exposure to any physical violence or any verbal conflict (i.e., reported “rarely” through “all the time” on at least one item in each category)

Table 1: Zero order correlations among the analysis variables

For the PALS curriculum (post-test) are currently underway.

Random assignment of 130 families to receive PALS home visits versus “standard care” home visits will allow us to test the impact of PALS on parents’ appraisals of daily hassles, as well as their provision of warm and responsive care.

We will test the impact of PALS on these outcomes using 2-level statistical models that predict parents’ post-test hassles scores from a) their pre-test scores, b) their random assignment to treatment vs. control group, c) key family-level covariates, and d) site-level covariates, including nesting within home visitor/educator caseloads.

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References