Introduction

- In the study of mental health:
  - High scores of criticism disrupted physiological response in children with a history of suicidal ideation and the reduction of ADHD and ODD symptoms of their children is less likely.
  - High criticism scores emotional dysregulation.
  - High expressed emotions scores higher scores on a measure of eating disorder psychopathology and worse treatment outcomes, and vice versa.

- Present study:
  - Correlates parent’s expressed emotions to an aspect of child’s cognitive function
  - Executive Functions (EFs) which help with planning, switching, inhibition, with working memory and self-regulation
  - predict important life outcomes (e.g., academics, social skills, health, wealth)

A relationship might exist because:
- EE are related to ADHD, ODD and emotional dysregulation, which are related to self-regulation and because EFs help with self-regulation
- EFs are part of everyday language, therefore, parent’s language/EE towards the child might be related to EFs as well.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Negative relations between father’s and/or mother’s critical statements and child’s score on each of the three EFs tasks

Hypothesis 2: Negative relations between father’s and/or mother’s emotional over-involvement statements and child’s score on each of the three EFs tasks

Hypothesis 3: Positive relations between father’s and/or mother’s positive relationship statements and child’s score on each of the three EFs tasks

Design and Methods: Participants, FMSS and EFs Tasks

- Correlational Study:
  - Predictors = Mother’s or father’s expressed emotions (criticism, EOI and relationship comments) assessed at 14 months
  - Outcomes = Child’s scores on three EFs tasks assessed at 14 months

N = 74 families

- Five-minute speech samples (FMSS) of first-time mothers and fathers (i.e., gave thoughts, attitudes and feelings of their 14-month old children) were coded for expressed emotions (EE):
  - Critical comments (e.g., “She is very whiny”)
  - Emotional over-involvement (EOI) (e.g., “I was so worried I couldn’t sleep”)
  - Quality of relationship (e.g., “We get along great”)

- 14-month old infant completed three measures of Executive Functions (EFs)
  - Prohibition Task assessing Delay of Gratification
  - Three Boxes Task assessing Working Memory
  - The Ball Run Task assessing Reversal Learning

Results

- Limited support for hypotheses
- The expressed emotions coding scheme presents a promising research tool for child development.
- The ways in which parents talk about their children is related to child cognitive development.
- Future research will examine stability in EEs over time and will explore longitudinal relations between parents’ EEs and children’s EFs.
References


