Parenting Stress and Positive Parenting Behaviors in At-Risk Mothers: A Parent-Mediated Intervention

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Background

Positive Parenting Behaviors
- Positive parent-child relationships are characterized by maternal sensitivity. Maternal sensitivity is positively associated with children’s early development.
- Sensitivity is also related to other behaviors such as positive affect, scaffolding behaviors and warmth.
- Poverty and related stressors can compromise a mother’s ability to execute sensitive parenting.

Parenting Stress
- Perceptions of the “everyday” hassles of child care as well as satisfaction with the parenting role.
- Positive Parenting Behaviors
- Mexican-American families face disproportionately higher levels of poverty. These families may face additional stressors (language-related, social support). However, little is known about how they experience and report their stress.

Parent-mediated Interventions
- These interventions target the parenting role.
- These interventions include coaching for parenting skills, training parents how to effectively respond to their children’s cues, and seek to alleviate stress and negativity by focusing on positive emotional aspects of the parent-child relationship.

Present Study

A community sample (n = 19) of at-risk mother-toddler dyads participated in a 10-week preventative parent-mediated intervention. Toddlers were between the ages of 11-19 months at the onset of the intervention.

Research Questions
1. Does participation in the Partners in Parenting Education parent-mediated intervention lead to decreases in parenting stress?
2. Does participation in the Partners in Parenting Education parent-mediated intervention lead to increases in the following positive maternal behaviors: sensitivity, responsivity, engagement, affect and scaffolding behaviors?
3. Is there a relationship between parenting stress and positive maternal behaviors?

Methods

Partners in Parenting Education Intervention
- Twenty intervention mothers were followed for 10 weeks, focused on developing sensitive maternal behaviors through guided group discussions and parent-child interactions.
- Trained parent educators provide guidance and feedback to help parents effectively respond to young children’s cues and focus on the positive aspects of their children’s development and behavior.

Parenting Stress
- Parenting Stress Index (PSI; Abidin, 1995)

Parenting Education parent-mediated intervention lead to decreases in parenting stress?
- Parenting Education parent-mediated intervention lead to increases in the following positive parental behaviors?

Hypothesis 1: Changes in Parenting Stress
- Total Stress
- Parental Distress

Hypothesis 2: Changes in Maternal Behaviors
- Scaffolding
- Engagement
- Responsivity
- Affect

Hypothesis 3: Parenting Stress & Maternal Behaviors
- Regression analyses revealed that changes in parenting stress did not predict scaffolding at post-intervention, when child sex and maternal effect were included in the model.

Results

Mothers in the Partners in Parenting Education Intervention:
- Exhibited decreases in parenting stress, including the total and the parental distress subscale.
- Exhibited increases in scaffolding behaviors across the course of the intervention.
- Despite correlations, parenting stress did not predict scaffolding behaviors at post-intervention.

This sample of mothers exhibited average levels of sensitivity prior to intervention, but are at risk for developing negative or harsh parenting strategies. Thus, decreases in parenting stress may help facilitate continued use of sensitive play strategies. Future directions include conducting follow-ups to examine long-term impacts as well as utilizing control groups. Future plans will include examining additional contextual stressors in order to understand the mechanisms by which Mexican-American families experience and cope with a variety of stressors.

Conclusions and Implications

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