Early Social-Emotional Development in Children of Mothers with Psychological Risk

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Early Social-Emotional Development in Children of Mothers with Psychological Risk

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Introduction
Healthy child development depends on the ability of parents to put in necessary involvement and attention to respond to children’s emotions and communication cues (Roggman, 2016). Maternal depression (Paulson et al., 2006) and parenting stress (Coyl et al., 2000) can reduce maternal responsiveness and is a risk factor for negative child social-emotional outcomes (El-Sheikh et al., 2009).

Aims
This study examined the effects of Early Head Start (EHS) participation on social-emotional development in children of mothers with either high or low psychological risk.

Methods
Sample: Extent data from 3,001 infants and their families in the U.S. EHS Research and Evaluation Project were used to examine the effect of maternal psychological risk on child development.

Measures and Procedures:
Maternal Psychological Risk:
Scores were calculated as an average of baseline parent-reported depression (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale), parenting stress, and dysfunctional interaction (Parent Stress Index, Abidin, 1991). Scores were standardized and combined into one variable. Scores above the mean were rated as high and scores below the mean were rated as high.

Parenting Responsiveness:
Ten-minute recordings of mother-child interactions at 14, 24, and 36 months were coded for parenting behaviors resembling responsiveness by trained and reliable coders using the Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO; Roggman, et al., 2013).

Results

![Figure 1: Correlation model for responsive parenting behaviors on social-emotional development outcomes in children at 36 months.](image1)

**p < .001, *p < .05

![Figure 2: Correlation model for program versus control. Parent psychological risk on social-emotional development outcomes in children at 36 months.](image2)

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

Conclusions
Families participating in EHS had higher average parenting interaction quality scores than families in the control group. Parent-infant interaction quality, particularly responsiveness, is negatively correlated with maternal depression and parenting distress, and positively correlated with child social-emotional development. Mothers with lower psychological risk had higher parental responsiveness and children with better social-emotional development, especially for families participating in EHS. These results support previous research indicating that better early responsiveness is correlated with better social-emotional development.