Do Traditional Values Create Stress That Interferes With Positive Parenting?

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Methods

Measures:

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Introduction

Parents’ attitudes and experiences likely influence parents’ interactions with their children. Parents’ attitudes may be based on traditional or progressive parenting ideals, with traditional attitudes emphasizing obedience and control of children while progressive attitudes emphasize a more democratic approach where parents encourage children to express their ideas and develop autonomy (Okagaki & French, 1998). Parents’ experiences of parenting as stressful may also influence the quality of interactions with their children (Farmer & Lee, 2011).

Purpose

To examine whether parental stress at 24 months is a mediating variable for the relationship between parental attitudes at 24 months and parent developmental support at 36 months.

Sample:

Extant data on 2,156 infants and their mothers in the Early Head Start Research Evaluation Project were analyzed for this project.

Results

Parents’ attitudes and experiences likely influence parents’ interactions with their children. Parents’ attitudes may be based on traditional or progressive parenting ideals, with traditional attitudes emphasizing obedience and control of children while progressive attitudes emphasize a more democratic approach where parents encourage children to express their ideas and develop autonomy (Okagaki & French, 1998). Parents’ experiences of parenting as stressful may also influence the quality of interactions with their children (Farmer & Lee, 2011).

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Figure 1. Mediation models showing parental distress or dysfunctional interaction mediating the associations of traditional or progressive parenting attitudes with parent developmental support.

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

Conclusion

• More traditional attitudes predicted lower parent developmental support. This was partially mediated by:
  • Parental distress, as traditional attitudes predicted higher parental distress, which then predicted lower parent developmental support.
  • Dysfunctional interaction, as traditional attitudes predicted higher dysfunctional interaction, which then predicted lower parent developmental support.
• More progressive attitudes predicted higher parent developmental support, in part by predicting lower parental distress, which then predicted higher parent developmental support.

These results, though showing small effect sizes, suggest that programs focusing on increasing developmentally supportive parent-child interactions should include efforts to reduce parental distress and dysfunctional interactions, especially focusing on parents with more traditional attitudes about obedience and control.