

Depression, event load and personal vulnerability in parents of young children

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Introduction

Social support has been shown to be:

- A protective factor for parental mental health (Schiller et al., 2020).
- An important resource for parents as they manage daily stressful events (DeLongis et al., 1988; Gable & Bedrov, 2022).
- Positively associated with healthy family relationships and interactions (Schiller et al., 2020).

Parenting stress and mental health can negatively impact child outcomes (Jones et al., 2021).

A greater understanding of the associations among social support and family risk factors could help identify the unique needs of student mothers and inform intervention efforts focused on family and child well-being.

This study examines the role of social support as a protective factor in the mental health, stressful events, and family interactions of mothers who are students at USU.

Sample

- Data were collected as part of the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) project. The focus of CCAMPIS is to support student parents' retention and graduation at USU.
- 38 student parent mothers.
- 26 (68%) were married or cohabiting.
- 68% of mothers were White.
- 34% of mothers' scores fell below the cut-off indicating a lack of Social Support

Measures

All measures were parent report and completed over Qualtrics.

- **Social support** was measured using the Social Support subscale of the Healthy Families Parenting Inventory – short form (LeCroy & Milligan, 2017).
 - Example: "I feel that others care about me."
- **Parent depression** was measured using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale Short form (Andersen et al., 1994).
 - Example: "How often during the past week have you felt lonely?"
- **Personal vulnerability and event load** were measured using the Stress Overload Scale (Amirkhan, 2012).
 - Example: "In the past week have you felt powerless/overcommitted?"



Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Social Support									
2 Respect	.45**								
3 Depression	-.42**	-.21							
4 Personal Vulnerability	-.42**	-.14	.87**						
5 Event Load	-.41*	-.19	.72**	.70**					
6 Negative Interactions	-.43*	-.08	.42*	.37*	.30				
7 Child Demandingness	-.40*	-.27	.33*	.37*	.34*	.48**			
8 Partner Support	-.25	-.13	.37*	.35*	.37*	.05	.22		
9 Marital Status	-.07	.35*	-.09	-.09	-.15	.06	-.03	.00	

Note. N = 38. *p < .05; ** p < .01

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Measures cont.

- **Respectful parenting interactions** was measured using the Respect subscale of the Parenting Alliance Inventory (Abidin & Brunner, 1995).
 - Example: "My child's other parent tells me I am a good parent."
- **Negative parent child interaction** was measured using the Negative Interaction subscale of the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (Strayhorn & Weidman, 1988).
 - Example: "How often do you punish your child for crying?"
- **Parent perceived child demandingness** was measured using the Demandingness subscale of the Parenting Stress Index – 4th edition (Abidin, 2012).
 - Example: "Child makes more demands on me than most children."
- **Perceived lack of partner support** was measured using the Spouse/Parenting Partner Relationship subscale of the Parenting Stress Index – 4th edition (Abidin, 2012).
 - Example: "My parenting partner and I have a lot of conflict over how to raise our child."

Results

Mothers who reported lower levels of general social support also reported:

- Lower levels of respect between parents.
- Higher levels of depression, personal vulnerability, stressful events, and negative child interactions.
- More demanding children.

In addition, mothers who lack emotional and active support related to child management from the other parent:

- Have higher rates of depression, personal vulnerability, and stressful events.

Mothers who perceived their children to be demanding reported more negative interactions with their children.

Parents who are married/cohabiting report more respectful interactions than those who are not married/cohabitating.

Implications

- Starting support groups or monthly activities prenatally would provide mothers with a foundational social network to rely on during the postnatal period.
- Ensuring that student mothers have access to mental health professionals and resources for education to help them gain additional coping skills could prevent the negative impact of stress and depression on their children.



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