

Public Abstract

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Title:THE EFFECT OF PARENTING STRESS ON CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT:  
EXAMINING THE VARIABLES OF SEX AND RACE/ETHNIC ORIGIN

Little is known regarding the impact that parenting stress has on young children's developmental outcomes. There is also no known research that has examined the variables of children's race/ethnicity and children's sex as possible moderators in this relation. Using mothers and their children who participated in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, this study examined the longitudinal effects of parenting stress on child cognitive development scores. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) bioecological systems theory was used as a foundation in the current study to predict the effect of parenting stress when children were 14 months old on children's cognitive scores on five measures when children were 24 and 36 months old. This framework suggests that children develop in a socio-cultural context, marked by differences in socialization processes and access to family and community support, which directly impacts their developmental outcomes.

Analyses on all five measures indicated that there was a significant negative association between 14 month parenting stress and 24 and 36 month child cognitive scores in all three race/ethnicity groups. Analyses on four of the five measures indicated that the relation between parenting stress and child cognitive scores was not moderated by child sex. However, child race/ethnic origin was found to moderate the relationship between parenting stress and child cognitive scores on two of the five measures. Children's scores on these measures revealed that European American and African American children showed stronger negative relations between maternal parenting stress and children's cognitive outcomes than Mexican American children. Child cognitive scores on the remaining two measures suggest that relation between 14 month parenting stress and child outcomes was not moderated by child race/ethnic origin.

The information resulting from longitudinal study designs is pertinent in that it can help us predict the future outcomes of at-risk children in comparison to their counterparts. This information also provides the possibility of positive child cognitive outcomes by developing and implementing preventative and intervention approaches to counteract the effects of parenting stress. These approaches and testing can be tailored to target at-risk adults and children so that parenting stress can be reduced and children's overall well-being can be improved in the short term, as well as throughout their lifespan.