Distancing and Hostility as Mediators of Parental Depression and Child Depression

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Introduction

Purpose: To identify parenting behaviors through which parental depression affects children’s depression

Background:
- Parental depression increases the risk for depression in children (Turner, 2008; Goodman & Gotlib, 2002)
- Depressed parents are likely to use coercion (Bor & Sanders, 2004) & have decreased social involvement (Dix & Meunier, 2009)
- When depressed, men are more likely to exhibit irritability and women are more likely to withdraw
- Such parental behaviors increase children’s risk (Elgar et al., 2007)

Hypotheses:
1) Mother’s distancing behavior during an observational task will mediate the relationship between mother’s depression and child’s depression
2) Father’s hostile behavior during an observational task will mediate the relationship between father’s depression and child’s depression

Methods

Sample: 296 two parent families with child average age 13 at Wave 3

Measures: Survey and Taped Observational Task
- 20 item CES-D (Radloff, 1977) for parents-Wave 2
- Child Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1985)-Wave 3
- Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales (Melby, et. al, 1998) for mother distancing and father hostility-Wave 3

Results

• Both parents’ depressive symptoms significantly predicted child’s depressive symptoms
• Mother depression--child depression was partially mediated by mother’s distancing behavior
• Father depression--child depression was partially mediated by father’s hostility
• Child’s gender was not a significant predictor of depression

Implications

• Interventions should include increasing maternal involvement and decreasing paternal hostility
• Depression awareness training for medical personnel should include these findings
• Future research might focus on how a child’s depressive symptoms affects parents’ depressive symptoms