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The Joint Impact of Achievement Goals and Familial Relationships on Conduct Problems in Youth

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The Joint Impact of Achievement Goals and Familial Relationships on Conduct Problems in Youth

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ABSTRACT The current literature examines the influence of family relationship (i.e., cohesion, organization, and support) and achievement goals (i.e., mastery, approach, & avoid) on conduct problems in children and adolescents. Further research is needed to examine these relationships to understand how to strengthen achievement goals and family relationships. Accordingly, the current study examines effects of family relationships and achievement goals on conduct problems, and whether either of the variables can moderate these effects. The researchers examined these relations in a sample of 397 youth ages 12-16 (47% female, 11% male, and 36% who did not specify their gender). Participants and their parents completed two surveys, nine months apart. The survey included a self-report measure of conduct problems, and a child behavior measure for the parents to report on their child. Results indicated that family cohesion is associated with conduct problems. Additionally, mastery achievement goals appeared to moderate the association between family cohesion and conduct problems, such that at low levels of mastery achievement goals, family cohesion was associated more with conduct problems. Family cohesion was uniquely associated with conduct problems and no other family relationship or achievement goal variables. Additionally, results of the current study contribute to the literature by suggesting conduct problems are associated with family cohesion when mastery achievement goals are low.

INTRODUCTION

Studies have found heightened response initiation impulsivity in adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders (Dougherty et al., 2003a, 2003b). Individuals displaying an onset of Conduct Disorder symptoms at an early age, continue to have poor outcomes in adulthood, as well as participate

in criminal activity (Mathias et al., 2008). A specific poor outcome that can arise from early onset is the increased level of impulsivity; the deficit in the ability to inhibit an inappropriate response once the response has been initiated (Mathias et

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al., 2008). For decades, researchers have identified numerous factors related to the onset of Conduct Disorders. Academic performance, parent-child conflict, and family organization (Poquiz et al., 2018; Klahr et al., 2011; Barocas et al., 1991) have all been found to be significant predictors of conduct problems. The present study fits with previous literature, by proposing a mediation model to examine the influence of family relationship (i.e., cohesion and organization) and achievement goals (i.e., mastery goals) on conduct problems.

Achievement Goals and Conduct Problems

Achievement Goal Theory explains how cognitive activity, emotions, and behaviors in learning circumstances are guided by student's motivations when they engage in academic assignments (Elliot, 2005). Achievement goals are made up of three facets: mastery goals, performance-approach goals, and performance-avoidance goals (Elliot & Church, 1997; Kaplan & Midgley, 1998; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Urdan et al., 2002). The present study will focus specifically on mastery goals- student's main objective when engaging in a task is to develop academic skills (Duchesne et al., 2010). Previous research has found mastery goals to be associated with positive outcomes: feelings of self-efficacy, use of meta-cognitive strategies, intrinsic motivation, and academic achievement (Elliot & Church, 1997; Kaplan & Maher., 1999; Ryan, Patrick, & Shim., 2005; Shim et al., 2008; Wolters, 2004). A study examined the relationship between community violence exposure (CVE), and conduct problems, while looking at academic performance as a moderator (Poquiz et al., 2018). The study found CVE to be significantly associated with conduct problems, but also found academic performance to moderate the effects of CVE on conduct problems. In other words; with low levels of academic performance, CVE was correlated with more conduct problems (Poquiz et al., 2018).

Another study also found that youth with externalizing disorders are often disruptive which interferes with their own learning, as well as the educational success of their peers (McConaughy et al., 1993). Many externalizing school behaviors have been identified: ignoring teachers, non-compliance, intimidation, bullying, disruptiveness,

truancy, lying, stealing, destroying school property, and use of weapons at school (Clarizio, 1992). With the abundant amount of disruptive behaviors at school that are associated with Conduct Disorder, it is likely that achievement goals are low in individuals with Conduct Disorder.

Familial Relationship and Conduct Disorder

Klahr et al. (2011) identified two different types of environmental influence: shared and non-shared. Shared environment is an environment that is common to both members making them similar to each other (Klahr et al., 2011). For most children and adolescents, home environments are shared with a parent and/or guardian. Research with twins has found parenting to be associated with adolescent delinquency to a certain degree via shared environmental mechanisms (Burt, McGue et al., 2007; Burt et al., 2003; McGue et al., 1996; Pike et al., 1996). Through a sample of 700 11-year old twins and their mothers, parent-child conflict accounted for 12% of variance in child externalizing disorders (Burt et al., 2003). In a recent study the relationship between parent-child conflict and conduct problems was examined amongst 672 adolescents (Klahr et al., 2011). The results indicated that parent-child conflict predicts the development of Conduct problems (Klahr et al., 2011).

Further studies have examined not only the effects of parent-child conflict, but family cohesion and conflict. Family cohesion has been defined as the emotional connect that family members share for one another (Olson et al., 1982). Haddad and colleagues (1991), hypothesized that families with conduct disordered children would be high in conflict and low in cohesion. The 1991 study found support for their hypothesis; the conduct disordered participant group was lower in family cohesion and higher in conflict, than the participants of the two other groups (Haddad et al., 1991).

Familial Relationship and Academic Achievement

In 2003 researchers published a study which served two purposes: (a) run a conceptual model linking contextual risks with parenting processes

and youth outcomes and (b) indicate if the conceptual longitudinal pathways cause change across three years in youth's academic achievement and conduct problems (Brody et al., 2003). The study found a number of parent and youth variables that increase academic achievement and decrease conduct problems. The parent variables consist of: parental involvement, support, and vigilance. (Brody et al., 2004). Similarly, Turner and Johnson (2003), predicted that parental beliefs and parent-child relationships would be predicting factors in the child's mastery goals. The analyses showed that parent-child relationships are significant predictors in the child's mastery goals, and the child's mastery goals predicted the child's academic achievement (Turner, & Johnson., 2003). Duchesne and Ratelle (2010), examined predictive relationships between parental behaviors and adolescents achievement goals. Through a structural equation model analysis, the researchers found that parental involvement predicts mastery goals and parental control predicts performance goals (Duchesne et al., 2010).

Hypotheses

The current study combines achievement goals and family relationship variables to examine predictive factors on conduct problems. The present study will aim to answer the following questions: does mastery goals predict conduct problems in children/adolescents? Which type of family relationship is most predictive of conduct problems in children/adolescents? Does achievement goals buffer the impact of family factors on conduct problems?

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

Data for this study came from a sample from a previous study, which focused on stressors in adolescents and children's lives on learning outcomes. The sample consisted of 397 youth ages 12-16 (189 females, 46 males, and 144 who did not specify their gender). Of the participants who responded, 39.8% of participants were born in the U.S., 22% born outside of the U.S, and 39.8% did not respond to this question. The study's sample is ethnically diverse: White/Caucasian (36.4%), African American/ Black (35.6%), Asian or

Asian American (10.3%), bi-racial or multi-racial (16.1%), other (1.6%). Lastly, the sample consisted of primarily middle class (29.8%) and working class (21.4%). Participation in this study required parental consent. Participants completed 2 surveys, time 1 was completed by the child and parent at the beginning of the school year, and time 2 was completed by the child and parent at the end of the school year.

Measures

The Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale (PALS) (Midgley et al., 2000) was created by a group of researchers using goal orientation theory as a foundation to investigate the relationship between the student's learning environment and student's motivation, affect, and behavior (Midgley et al., 2000). The present study focused on achievement goal orientations, which consist of: performance-approach, performance-avoid, and mastery. Items from the PALS mastery scale include: At my school, really understanding the material is the main goal. An item from the PALS approach scale is: At my school, it is very important to not do worse than other students. Lastly, an example from the PALS avoid scale is: At my school, it is very important not to look dumb.

PALS are rated on a 5 point Likert Scale with (1) not at all true and (5) very true. In previous studies, Chronbach's alpha has ranged from .83 to .85 (Duchesne et al., 2010). The 2010 study found Chronbach's alpha to be .85 for mastery goals, .85 for performance-approach goals, and .83 for performance-avoid goals. The original study using PALS found Chronbach's alpha between .89 (performance-approach) and .74 (performance-avoid) (Midgley et al., 2000). In this study, the Family Relationship Scale (FRS) was adapted from the Family Environment Sale (Moos et al., 1994).

The FES measures an individual's perception of family relationship quality (Allen & Fok, 2014). Specifically, FES examines family relationship, personal growth, and system maintenance and change (Moos, & Moos, 1994). Through the FES measure the following FRS constructs were drafted: family cohesion, family communication,

family organization, and family support. The present study focuses on FRS cohesion items, for example: Family members feel very close to each other. An item from the FRS communication is: I am able able to let others in the family know how I really feel. An example of an FRS organization item is: Family members ask each other for help. Lastly, an FRS support item is: My family doesn't let me be myself. Each item on the FRS scale was rated using a 4 point Likert Scale, (1) not at all true, and (4) almost always or always true.

The Family Environment Scale (FES) has strong psychometric characteristics (Zucker et al., 1999)., The family communication synchrony score of .83. (Sanford et al., 1999). Sanford's (1999) study also ran a confirmatory factor analysis which resulted in a score of .62 (Sanford et al., 1999).

The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) is an instrument, reported by the parent(s) of the individual, used to determine emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents (Rider et al, 2019). Within the CBCL is the Psychopath Checklist: Youth Version (PCL: YV; Neumann et al., 2006), which was designed to identify a personality disorder by looking at deficits such as: affective, interpersonal, and behavioral functioning (Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1998). The current study used items from the PCL: YV to screen for conduct problems. An item example for them CBCL survey is: Cruelty, bullying, or meanness to others. The concurrent validity of the PCL: YV and conduct disorder ranged from .38 to .69 (Achenbach et al, 2006). However, another study in 2014 found the Chronbach's alpha of DSM IV-oriented conduct disorder in the CBCL to be .82 (Sistere et al, 2014). The present study CBCL survey was rated on a three point Likert scale ranging from

(0) not true to (2) very true/often true.

The Youth-Self Report (Achenbach, 2001) is the youth report version of the CBCL described above. The YSR-Conduct Disorder scale was used in the current study as a way to measure self-reported conduct problems. An item example from the YSR-conduct survey is: I get in other

peoples' faces. The Chronbach's alpha for all YSR DSM IV-oriented scale was found to be between .58 (DSM IV- Anxiety) and .86 (DSM IV-Affective problems) (Sistere et al., 2014). The 2014 study also ran Pearson correlations between DSM-IV disorders and CBCL/YSR. The correlations for DSM-IV Conduct Disorder was .58 for CBCL and .46 for YSR. In the present study, the YSR scale was rated on a three point Likert scale ranging from (0) never to (2) often.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

We performed bivariate correlational analyses on all variables of the study as a preliminary analysis (See Table 1). The following correlations found are significant at both times one and two: YSR-Conduct Disorder and PALS Mastery ($r=-.35$), CBCL-Conduct Disorder and PALS Mastery ($r=-.14$), YSR- Conduct Disorder and FRS Cohesion ($r=-.29$), YSR-Conduct Disorder and FRS Communication ($r=-.26$). All correlations are significant at the .01 level

(2-tailed).

Significant Pearson Correlations	YSR-Conduct	CBCL-Conduct
	PALS Mastery	-.35**
FRS Cohesion	-.29**	-.04
FRS Communication	-.26**	-.03

Note. **indicates $p < .01$

Table 1.

Analyses

The analyses of these data began with running regression models using all significant variables, while controlling for time 1 and time 2. Next a two-way interaction slopes test was run, using the significant regressions. The analyses showed a significant interaction between FRS Cohesion

and PALS Approach on conduct problems ($z = -.73$, $p < .05$). From the interaction results a main effect was found between PALS Mastery ($B = .016$, $p < .03$) and FRS Cohesion ($B = -.007$, $p < .03$). See Table 2.

Main Effects	FRS Cohesion	PALS Mastery
Conduct Problems	$B = .007$, $p < .03$	$B = .016$, $p < .03$

Table 2.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the present study was to examine the relationship between achievement goals and family relationship (i.e., cohesion, organization, support) on conduct problems in children/adolescents, using a Stress and Learning Survey completed at time 1 and time 2 by children and their parent. The analyses revealed two significant findings: one family variable (i.e., family cohesion) is linked to conduct problems, and one achievement goal (i.e., mastery goals) are a moderator to conduct problems.

The FRS variable, family cohesion, was found to be a significant interaction with conduct problems. The higher family cohesion is, the fewer conduct problems. This is consistent with the literature which states; families with conduct disordered children are lower in cohesion than families with non-conduct disordered children (Borocas et al., 1991). The present study proposes that strengthening family cohesion in families with conduct disordered children is a secure way to decrease conduct problems in the child. Previous literature has suggested many family constructs to be significant predictor variables in conduct disorder such as: family support, and family conflict (Brody et al., 2004; Borocas et al., 1991). The current study ran interactions with 4 family variables (i.e., communication, organization, cohesion, and support) in which the analyses suggested cohesion to be the only significant predictor in conduct problems.

When looking for significant interactions of achievement goals (i.e., approach, avoid, and mastery) on conduct problems, none were found to be significant predictors of conduct problems. However, the mastery achievement goal was found to be a moderator in the interaction effect of family cohesion and conduct problems. A moderation effect shows that if mastery achievement in the child is high, but cohesion is low, conduct problems will be lower than if both mastery goals and family cohesion were low. Previous research has found parent-child relationship and parental involvement (Turner et al., 2003; Duchesne et al., 2010) to be significant predictors in the improvement of children's mastery goals. The present study proposes a further look at family cohesion as a predictor in children's mastery goals.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current findings need to be evaluated further in context of the limitations to this study. One limitation of the current study: demographic information such as gender, SES, and age, were not controlled for with the significant interactions. This study only ran a preliminary correlation with demographic information and achievement goal and family relationship variables. It would be beneficial for future research to control for demographic variables.

Another limitation is that overall academic achievement and family/parental involvement were not run in the interaction analyses or correlation tables. Examining overall academic achievement is an important variable to control for because achievement goals predict academic achievement (Turner et al., 2003). Parental involvement is another variable that future research should further evaluate. As found in past research, parental involvement has been found to increase academic achievement and decrease conduct problems (Brody et al., 2003).

One last limitation to the study is the validity scores of the CBCL and YSR-Conduct measures. As reported about the Chronbach's alpha for CBCL- Conduct is .58 and the alpha for YSR-Conduct is .46. The commonly accepted Chronbach's alpha value is .60. It is recommended for

future studies to use a measure with a better validity score to evaluate conduct problems in children and adolescents.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations, the present study highlights family cohesion as a significant predictor

on the appearance of conduct problems. The study also emphasizes the potential of mastery goals to buffer the effects of family cohesion on conduct problems. It is important to understand the distinct risk and protective factors in order to develop effective interventions.

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