

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 20, 2016 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

POSTER SESSION 1

Commons East, Easel 58

11:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Attachment Moderates the Effect of Childhood Maltreatment Exposure on Emotion Regulation: Attachment as a Protective Factor

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Mentor: Katie McLaughlin, Psychology

Mentor: Matthew Peverill, Psychology

Childhood maltreatment is one of the most common adverse events in children and has been associated with a variety of negative effects on children's social adjustment and mental well-being later in life. One explanation is that maltreated children may develop maladaptive emotion regulation skills, which mediate the pathway between maltreatment and psychopathology. Accumulating literature suggests that attachment security may be a protective factor against maladaptive emotion regulation skills in maltreated children. Prior research has investigated attachment as a mediator between childhood maltreatment and poor behavior outcomes. However, little research has examined attachment as a protective factor associated with better emotion regulation skills in maltreated children, which in turn results in better behavioral and emotional adjustment. The current study hypothesizes that, childhood maltreatment will have a less negative effect on children who are securely attached to one of their care givers, compare to those who have insecure attachment. In other words, secure attachment will serve as a protective factor for children exposed to adverse experiences, leading to better emotional and behavioral outcomes. Data from two separately collected samples of maltreated and control children ($n= 221$ and $n= 124$) are analyzed based on multiple linear regression models. We expect to find a significant difference between the effect of maltreatment on emotion regulation in high and low attachment individuals, such that children with more secure attachment are less affected by maltreatment. These findings would suggest that secure attachment may protect maltreated children from developing maladaptive emotion regulation skills which contribute to better general behavior outcomes in children.

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How Does Stress Influence Development?

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CoMotion Mary Gates Innovation Scholar, McNair
Scholar

Mentor: Katie McLaughlin, Psychology

In recent years there has been much speculation about how events that occur during childhood can have a lasting impact on a child's development. There have been many studies that attempt to look at how the impact of child stress affects different parts of development: physical development, psychological development, and social-emotional development. The purpose of this research was to observe and learn how stress affects emotional and social development and consequently impacts the child's risk for mental health issues. Although stress is a multidimensional concept and can be measured by biological responses, the presence of challenging environmental factors, and self-reports, for the purpose of this research stress was defined as the presence of adverse environmental factors. For development, I specifically observed attachment and emotional regulation. My focus on mental health was internalizing psychopathology, especially anxiety and depression. To gain a better understanding of the emotional social development of a child suffering from toxic stress, I looked at multiple studies already done that observed the effects of stress on a child's social-emotional development. I also used conclusions drawn from experience gained while working at the Stress and Development Lab directed by Dr. Katie McLaughlin. For this approach I reviewed papers that demonstrated a connection between stress and mental health, between stress and development, and between development and mental health. I also looked for and identified factors that showed evidence of mitigating the effects of stress on mental health and development. These factors are referred to as protective factors. Identifying the aspects of development influenced by toxic stress and the mitigating factors is crucial to creating and implementing intervention techniques to promote healthy development and to decreasing the risk of internalizing psychopathology.