



Impact of Parental Symptoms on Behavioral Ratings of Their Children

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Introduction

Parent psychopathology is a known genetic and environmental risk factor for child psychopathology. Less is known, however, about the degree to which a parent's level of psychopathology affects behavioral ratings of their children relative to other informants. Furthermore, different types of parental symptoms may result in different types of reporting bias.

Hypotheses

- Levels of parental psychopathology will be significantly associated with discrepancies between that parents rating of their children and the co-parent's ratings
- Internalizing symptoms in a parent will result in *higher* ratings of child internalizing symptoms (relative to the co-parent)
- Externalizing symptoms in a parent will result in *lower* ratings of child externalizing symptoms (relative to the co-parent)

Methods

We reviewed 268 charts of successive families seen in a general child psychiatry clinic including measures of childhood psychopathology, family histories and measures of parental psychopathology.

Measures of Psychopathology:

- Achenbach System of Empirically-Based Assessment (ASEBA)
 - Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL): independent parent report on child
 - Adult Self-Report (ASR): parent reporting on self
 - Adult Behavior Checklist (ABCL): parent report on co-parent
- Parents were defined as adults living in the same household as the child and assuming primary caregiving roles.

Analysis:

- Pearson Correlations were performed comparing the difference of parent ASR scores to the difference in their respective CBCL scores in categories of Internalizing, Externalizing, Total, and Syndrome Specific categories.
- Similar analyses were performed using levels of parental symptoms as assessed by the co-parent

Results

Demographic Variables:

Mean Child Age:	10.67 (3-17)
Female:	107 (40%)
Male:	161 (60%)
Mean Maternal Age:	40.00 (22-70)
Mean Paternal Age:	43.34 (22-75)
Maternal Figure	
Bio Mother:	225 (84.0%)
Step Mother:	8 (3.0%)
Foster Mother:	4 (1.5%)
Adoptive Mother:	20 (7.5%)
Other Relative:	8 (3.0%)
Paternal Figure	
Bio Father:	165 (61.6%)
Step Father:	16 (6.0%)
Foster Father:	2 (0.7%)
Adoptive Father:	17 (6.3%)
Other Relative:	7 (2.6%)

Child's Primary Diagnosis	
ADHD	125 (46.6%)
Depressive Disorders	47 (17.5%)
Anxiety Disorders	43 (16.0%)
ODD or other Disruptive Behaviors	14 (5.2%)
PTSD	11 (4.1%)
Child's Secondary Diagnosis	
Anxiety Disorders	54 (20.1%)
Depressive Disorders	35 (13.1%)
ODD or other Disruptive Behaviors	25 (9.3%)
ADHD	15 (5.6%)
PTSD	15 (5.6%)
Mother's Primary Diagnosis by History	
Anxiety Disorders	46 (17.3%)
Depressive Disorders	21 (7.9%)
Bipolar Disorder	12 (4.5%)
ADHD	12 (4.5%)
Father's Primary Diagnosis	
Anxiety Disorders	14 (6.4%)
Depressive Disorders	10 (4.6%)
ADHD	7 (3.2%)
Bipolar Disorder	6 (2.8%)

Primary Analyses

- Levels of parental psychopathology were significantly related to perceiving higher levels of child psychopathology, relative to the rating of the co-parent
- The perception of higher levels of child psychopathology was present regardless of the type of parental or child symptoms, with the exception of parental levels of rule-breaking behavior

Correlation of Difference in Parental Scores to Child Scores : Internalizing, Externalizing and Total Problem Scores

		Difference of T-scores of Mother and Father Reports of Child (CBCL)		
		Pearson Correlation r		
		Internalizing	Externalizing	Total
Difference of T-scores of Mother and Father Self Reports (ASR)	Internalizing	0.294**	0.348**	0.368**
	Externalizing	0.308**	0.349**	0.381**
	Total	0.362**	0.391**	0.449**
Difference of T-scores of Mother Self Report (ASR) and How Father Rates Mother (ABCL)	Internalizing	0.280**	0.352**	0.374**
	Externalizing	0.188*	0.288**	0.301**
	Total	0.305**	0.392**	0.430**
Difference of T-scores of How Mother Rates Father (ABCL) and Father Self Report (ASR)	Internalizing	0.315**	0.292**	0.368**
	Externalizing	0.348**	0.359**	0.415**
	Total	0.397**	0.389**	0.472**

* Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.001$ level (2-tailed).

Correlation of Difference in Parental Scores to Child Scores : Syndrome Specific Categories

Difference of T-scores of Mother and Father Self Reports (ASR)	Difference of T-scores of Mother and Father Reports of Child (CBCL)					
	Pearson Correlation r					
	Anxious/Depressed	Withdrawn/Depressed	Thought Problems	Attention Problems	Rule-Breaking Problems	Aggressive Behavior
Anxious/Depressed	0.236**	0.281**	0.255**	0.289**	0.251**	0.411**
Withdrawn	0.169*	0.199**	0.196**	0.298**	0.182*	0.306**
Thought Problems	0.202**	0.267**	0.301**	0.278**	0.270**	0.369**
Attention Problems	0.176*	0.120	0.152*	0.257**	0.259**	0.293**
Rule-Breaking Problems	-0.156*	-0.145*	-0.147*	-0.202**	-0.053	-0.078
Aggressive Behavior	0.240**	0.258**	0.208**	0.266**	0.296**	0.420**
Mean Substance Use	-0.018	0.002	-0.024	0.108	-0.038	0.002

* Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level (2-tailed).

Conclusions

- Parents who struggle with their own emotional-behavioral problems tend to report higher levels of behavioral problems in their children, relative to the reporting of the co-parent
- The association above occurs across different types of parental and child psychopathology with the exception of increased parental rule-breaking behavior where under-reporting of child psychopathology may occur
- Systematic assessment of parental psychopathology is recommended as a part of a standard child psychiatry evaluation

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