

A First Look at Young Parents and Potential Risk Indicators of Negative Parenting and Child Neglect

Chair: Judith Carta

Presenters: Robin G. Lanzi, James Selig, Kere Hughes, Kimberly S. Howard

This symposium presents results from a 4-site prospective study investigating earliest indicators of child neglect, as well as early protective factors that may mitigate risk of eventual child neglect. As the first major project of the Centers for the Study of Child Neglect, the goal of this longitudinal study is to clarify the meaning of child neglect through the use of direct observation, interviews, self-report, and developmental assessment. Our specific focus is on adolescent mothers.

- **Examining Child Neglect: Methodological Issues, Research Findings, and Implications for Service Providers and Clinicians**

Robin G. Lanzi, Sharon L. Ramey, Bette Keltner, Shannon Carothers, Tammy Haendel, Lorraine Klerman

The proposed study is a 4-site prospective study of the early predictors and precursors of neglect in the first 3 years of life (in considering results from cell phone interviews (based on Ramey & Ramey, 1999) with mothers when their babies were four months old). We found great variability in the number of hours mothers spend with their children, when their children wake up for the day, the number of hours babies spend watching television, and the number of times the babies are fed and their diapers are changed. Adult “high resource” mothers were significantly more likely than adult “low resource” and teen mothers to report providing language stimulation, celebrating developmental advances, and protecting their babies from harm over a period of 24 hours.

Reported neglectful behaviors often occur during the prenatal period ($p < .05$), with teen mothers who receive low ratings on observer ratings of parenting during their baby’s second year of life waiting longer to have their first prenatal visit ($p < .05$), receiving more negative scores on the Child Abuse Potential Inventory ($p < .001$), being less likely to report that they were accepting new responsibilities now that they were pregnant, ($p < .05$), and a trend for being more depressed ($p < .08$) than those who have more positive ratings of parenting during their baby’s second year of life.

When the babies were six months old, teens who were scored as having lower scores on their parenting were more likely to report: not working, their babies’ fathers were not working, not having any other men to help care for the baby or act as a role model, being pregnant again, not using birth control, not having a car seat, and hitting or physically hurting someone in the past 6 months.

Reference

Ramey, C. T., & Ramey, S. L. (1999). *Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation for Life*. New York: Goddard Press.

- **Becoming a Parent for the First Time: A Structural Model of Adolescent and Adult Mothers' Cognitive Readiness to Parent During Pregnancy and Their Observed Parenting at 4 Months**

Jane Atwater, Jennifer Burke Lefever, Kristi Guest, James Selig, Leslie Keener, Chelsea Weaver

This paper examines the concept of cognitive readiness to parent and its relation to subsequent parenting practices. Cognitive readiness is a construct comprised of maternal knowledge of child development and parenting techniques as well as attitudes towards parenting. Four parenting constructs were derived: 1. negative parenting, 2. warmth, 3. support for language and learning, and 4. support for developmental advance.

In comparison to adults, teen mothers were significantly lower in cognitive readiness, lower in positive aspects of observed parenting, and higher in negative parenting. In the final structural model, only three parameters differed significantly across groups; and, in each case, the correlation between parenting constructs was stronger for adults than for teens. For both teens and adults, cognitive readiness predicted higher levels of positive parenting and lower levels of negative parenting.

- **Relationships Between Prenatal Cumulative Risk and Mothers' Parenting Outcomes with Their Infants at Four Months**

Kere Hughes, John Borkowski, Judith Carta, Kim Howard, Julie Schatz

This study examines how cumulative risk assessed during pregnancy relates to parenting outcomes assessed when children are 4 months of age. A group of teen mothers and two comparison groups (adult low resource and adult high resource) were recruited to help understand the role of maternal age versus other contextual/cultural variables on the emergence of child neglect. Categories of risks included: education and intelligence, maternal cognitive readiness to parent, maternal socioemotional functioning, health and stress, maltreatment risk, and demographic factors. Overall, the socioemotional category represented the highest number of endorsed risks for child neglect across the three groups, contributing the most variance to the cumulative risk index (52.5%). Maternal cognitive readiness contributed the next highest percentage (31.4%). The remaining categories contributed anywhere from 12.5% to 27% of the variance.

Analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between the cumulative risk index and both observed and reported parenting practices at 4 months postnatal. Results showed statistically significant correlations between the cumulative risk index and all parenting outcomes. In addition, an examination of the prediction of parenting from the number of risks indicated that even a moderate number of risk factors may predict less

optimal parenting at four months and that additional risks may not further differentiate parenting outcomes.

- **The Impact of Father Presence on Maternal Parenting Practices and the Quality of Home Environments**

Kimberly S. Howard, John G. Borkowski

This study examines the indirect influence of fathers on their children's development by identifying ways in which father presence in the home and in the family system impacts maternal parenting practices and the quality of the children's home environment. Father presence was classified into five levels: married fathers (18.6%), cohabiting fathers (18.4%), non-resident fathers who were engaged in romantic partner relationships with mothers (23.7%), non-resident fathers who were not romantically involved but maintained contact with mothers and their children (25.8%), and those who had no contact with their families (13.5%).

Prenatal classifications of father presence significantly predicted both maternal parenting practices and the quality of children's home environment at four months, even after controlling for maternal age and educational attainment. Planned comparisons revealed that resident fathers (both married and cohabiting) were associated with more responsive maternal parenting than nonresident fathers. In addition, married fathers had HOME scores [an observational rating scale of the household environment] that were significantly higher than all other groups, including those who were cohabiting. Maternal age and educational attainment did not interact with father presence, suggesting that the effect of father presence was not different for adolescent and adult mothers. Additionally, father presence predicted the level of involvement that fathers had with their children, which in turn predicted maternal parenting and HOME scores.