Examining Maternal Age and Aggressive Behavior in Children

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Examining Associations Between Maternal Age and Aggressive Behaviors in Children

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ABSTRACT
Data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development were analyzed to examine associations between maternal age and aggressive behaviors in children. Regression results indicated that younger maternal age does have an association to higher aggressive behaviors in children as reported by the parents.

HYPOTHESIS
The hypothesis being tested was maternal age, at the time of birth of their child, is negatively related to aggressive behaviors in the child.

BACKGROUND
- Prior research on maternal age and cognitive and behavioral outcomes found that maternal socioeconomic status and education were far better predictors than maternal age alone (Turley, 2003).
- Schlomer’s research has shown that maternal age can have an effect on the child’s behaviors through their own relationship and interactions (2015).
- Pasiak noted that a child’s behavior can also be influenced by parental modeling and affirmations, and as explained earlier, younger mothers may have different drives and therefore be more likely to model aggressive behavior, show poor attachment, and reinforce negative behaviors (2015).

METHODS
Participants
In 1991, 1,364 families were recruited from hospitals located in 10 sites across the United States. Families included 24% ethnic minority children, 79% of whom were non-Hispanic European American. The study included 10% mothers without a high school education and 14% single mothers. The average family household income was 3.6 times above the poverty threshold. The sample consists of 659 females and 705 males. Assessments were conducted during the grade levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The data collected includes an array of individual standardized tests, observations of family and school settings, as well as parent and teacher reports on behavior.

Measures
- Family Demographics—Variables relating to the parents were mother’s age, total income-to-needs ratio, and if husband/partner lives with the mother. Variables relating to the child were the child’s gender and birth order.
- Child Behavior—The mothers and fathers of the children participating in this study completed a Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) at 54 months old, kindergarten, and first grade. The average of these assessments was used.
- Child Behavior—Teacher Report—The teachers of the children in this study completed a Teacher’s Report Form (TRF) in kindergarten.

RESULTS
The average of the mother’s reports of aggression in the child at 54 months, kindergarten, and first grade were negatively associated with maternal age, after controlling for demographic characteristics. The father’s average report of aggression in the child at 54 months and in first grade were compared to maternal age and were also significantly negatively associated with maternal age. Teacher’s report of child’s aggression in kindergarten was not significantly associated with mother’s age.

Descriptive Statistics--Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Mom’s Aggression Score</td>
<td>1045</td>
<td>54.02(5.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Dad’s Aggression Score</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>53.90(5.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Aggression Score</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>53.47(6.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Age</td>
<td>1045</td>
<td>28.63(5.49)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion and Discussion
- Links between Maternal Age and Aggression in Children: This research expands on previous knowledge of influential factors on children’s behavior. The results from the mothers’ and father’s reports provide additional support to previous claims. Further research would be necessary to confirm or deny causation.