Title: Socio-Demographic, Maternal and Child Indicators of Reported Child Socioemotional Problems in 2-Year-Old Children

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Introduction: Socioemotional (SE) development is a neurodevelopmental process influenced by interacting biological, social, cultural, neighborhood and other environmental factors, from conception through pregnancy and throughout childhood (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Lu & Halfon, 2003). Early interventions that support children's SE development facilitate positive outcomes in childhood and extending into adulthood (Briggs-Gowan & Carter, 2008; Campbell et al., 2014; Kitzman et al., 2010; Raver et al., 2011; Reynolds et al., 2007). Prenatal and maternal factors such as preterm birth, maternal stress and depression, family poverty, and family violence interfere with children's SE development (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2001; Davies et al., 2009; Hornman et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2016). The prevalence of SE problems in minority children is higher than in majority children (Gilliam, 2005). This study was designed to examine socio-demographic, maternal and child indicators of child SE problems in 2-year-old children living in an urban-suburban in the southern U.S.

Methods: Mother-infant pairs enrolled in a prospective, longitudinal pregnancy cohort study in Shelby County, TN were followed to 2 years of age (N=1,103). Child SE development was measured by the Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment at 2 years of age. Mothers reported their own behavioral and mental health, temperament, parenting stress and potential for child abuse during gestation and/or when their child was 1 year of age. Maternal IQ was measured. Child communication, cognitive development and risk for autism spectrum disorder were assessed at 1 and 2 years of age. Multivariable regression models were developed to predict mother-reported SE problems.

Results: In bivariate analyses, multiple maternal behavioral and mental health indicators and child cognitive skills were associated with reported child SE problems at 2 years of age. Regression analyses, controlling for socio-demographic, maternal and child variables, showed the following were independently associated with maternal-reported child SE problems: ≤ high school maternal education, lower maternal IQ, higher cyclothymic temperament score, greater maternal parenting stress and psychological distress, lower child expressive communication score and risk for autism spectrum disorder as assessed at 2 years of age.

Discussion: Attention to independent indicators of future SE problems in children may identify individual children and families needing intervention and target public prevention/treatment programs in communities. These indicators represent aspects of mothers, their young children, and prenatal and early childhood processes that contribute to SE development. These predictors of SE development point to areas that need the attention of professionals working with expectant and young families. (401 words)

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