The Parent-Child Relationship: Its Importance in the Development of Conduct Problems in Children with ADHD

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Abstract

Recent literature suggests that 60% of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) will develop comorbid Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD; Barkley, 2006). Another 33% of these children will later develop comorbid Conduct Disorder (CD; Greene, 2005). The current study takes a strengths based perspective in that it examines the children who do not develop these comorbid conduct problems. Specifically, the current study explores the effect that parent-child relationships have on the development of these problems. Research has shown that parents of children with ADHD and comorbid conduct problems report less effective parenting practices than children without ADHD (Pfiffner et al., 2005). The current study examines what specific factors within the parent-child relationship are important in predicting better outcomes in terms of conduct for children with ADHD. The study examines the perceived attachment from both the parents’ view, measured by the Parenting Relationship Questionnaire, and the child’s view, measured by the Attachment Scale for Children. Comparisons and contrasts are made between these ratings of attachment with ratings of behaviour as rated by the parents on the Conners-3. Results will be discussed in relation to positive parenting practices for children with ADHD.

Background Information

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Prevalence in school-aged children is estimated to be between 3% and 7% (APA, 2000)
- ADHD-C is characterized by symptoms of both hyperactivity/impulsivity and inattention (APA, 2000)
- Children with ADHD-C are the most impaired and may be at the most risk for comorbid mental disorders (Spencer et al., 2007)

ADHD & Behavior Problems
- Approximately 60% of children with ADHD will go on to have comorbid ODD (Barkley, 2006) and approximately 33% of these children will progress to having comorbid CD (Greene, 2005)
- Children with comorbid ADHD/Behavior Problems have a greater risk of becoming delinquent in later life, experiencing academic underachievement, and being rejected by peers (Hinshaw, 1992)

Parent-Child Relationships
- Parent-child relationships marked by conflict put a child at ADHD at risk for developing behavior problems in adolescence (Fisher et al., 1993)
- Children with ADHD and behavior problems tend to display insecure attachments to their parents (Crittenden & Kulbotten, 2007)

Research Questions
1. Do children with ADHD and their parents rate their relationship the same?
2. Is there a connection between children’s and parents’ ratings of their relationship and parents’ ratings of their child’s behaviour?

Methods

Participants
- 68 children (92.4% male) aged 8-11 years (M = 9.8, SD = 1.15) and their families
- All children had a previous diagnosis of ADHD-combined type (diagnosis confirmed by Conners-3 Rating Scale)
- Recruited through local media, schools, community newsletters and events, and local psychology clinics

Measures
- Conners Rating Scale - 3rd Edition (Conners-3)
- Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ)
- Consecrated by the child’s behavior as rated by the child’s parents
- Attachment Scale for Children (ASC)

Results

N=47

Child’s Rating of Attachment - Mother
Mother’s Rating of Attachment - Father
.146
.216

Child’s Rating of Attachment - Father
Mother’s Rating of Attachment - Father
.231
.294

Mother’s Rating of Communication
.084
.167

Mother’s Rating of Discipline Practices
.244
.325

Mother’s Rating of Involvement
.042
.165

Mother’s Rating of Parenting Confidence
.188
.071

Mother’s Rating of Relational Frustration
.004
.216

Note. * = p < .10

Child’s rating of their attachment to their mother trends in the positive direction with their mother’s ratings of involvement
Child’s rating of their attachment to their father trends in the positive direction with their father’s ratings of involvement

Discussion

- Children with ADHD and their parents do not agree on the level of attachment that exists between them which is congruent with other research that showed that boys with ADHD rated their relationship with their parents higher than their parents rated the relationship (Gerdes, Hozz, & Pelham, 2003)
- Children with ADHD often perceive themselves more positively than others (this is known as the positive illusory bias; Sarno Owens & Hozz, 2003) and this may contribute to the lack of agreement in terms of attachment between parents and children
- The amount that both parents are involved in their children’s lives appears to be related to their children’s ratings of attachment to them
- Children with ADHD tend to rate their attachment to their parents as lower than their parents rate the negative behaviours of their children higher which is agreeable with research that found that children with ADHD who display more behaviour problems have a less secure attachment to their parents (Crittenden & Kulbotten, 2007)

Implications/Future Directions

- Parents can be encouraged to stay actively involved in their children’s lives in order to nurture the attachment their children feel to them
- Nurturing a strong attachment will be important for parents in order to possibly prevent defiant and aggressive behaviour in their children with ADHD
- In the future, it will be important to examine observable behaviour outcomes in relation to both the children’s and the parents’ views of the relationship to determine if positive views from either party serve as a protective factor

References


This research was supported by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family, & Community Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and government support from the Carson Family Fund.

Special Thanks to our community partners, including CHASO Calgary, LOMA, Canalsario Center, and all the children and families who participated in this research. As well, thanks to the members of the Strengths in ADHD research team!