

Neglectful and controlling parents linked to mental health problems in children

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Children's perception of how they are parented is a major predictor of whether they will develop mental health problems as teenager, according to research by the University and the Medical Research Council.

Data from almost 1,700 children living in the West of Scotland was analysed by Dr Helen Minnis of the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences and researchers at the MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit (SPHSU).

It revealed that three per cent of 11 year-old children felt both neglected and controlled by their parents. When the children were tested at age 15, this group were much more likely to have developed [psychiatric problems](#).

Children were grouped according to 'parenting style', with the study revealing that the 'neglected and controlled' group were more than twice as likely to develop psychiatric disorders. These included anxiety disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and behavioural disorders.

Conduct disorders such as antisocial and violent behaviour and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) were also much more prominent in this group. Teenage girls were six times more likely to suffer from depressive disorders than those in the 'optimum parenting' group, where [parents](#) are perceived as being caring but not controlling.

Parenting style was assessed using a questionnaire, taking into account the extent to which the children felt loved, allowed to make their own decisions, molly-coddled or supported, amongst other factors. At age 15, psychiatric data was collected by computerised interview.

The paper ‘Children’s perceptions of parental emotional neglect and control and psychopathology’ is published today in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

Co-author, Dr Helen Minnis, of the School of Medicine, said: “It is remarkable that despite the wide range of parenting styles reported in the study, the majority of children’s experience of parenting is ‘good enough’, and less than perfect parenting is not associated with major psychiatric problems during adolescence. That said, it seems that children with better perceived parental relationships have fewer psychiatric problems as teenagers.”

Robert Young, of the SPHSU, added: “It is important that we do not trivialise children’s perceptions of parenting, particularly having seen in this study how early feelings about parenting, map onto children’s future [mental health](#) and psychological wellbeing. We now need to establish whether the effects are caused by the perception of neglect, actual neglect, or some combination of both.”

Professor Chris Kennard, Chairman of the MRC’s Neuroscience and Mental Health Board, said: “Whilst only three per cent of children reported the neglectful and controlling parenting which was associated with increased psychiatric disorders, when the implications are expanded this equates to a large number of [children](#) nationwide. We must also consider the possibility that developing disorders in childhood increases the risk of more serious problems in adulthood, both for the individual and for society in general. A core part of the MRC’s strategy focuses on mental health, and this study gives clear indications of the importance of

the home environment in maintaining mental wellbeing.”

Provided by University of Glasgow

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