

Harsh parenting linked with poor school performance in kids with ADHD

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The way parents interact with their kids may affect how well children

with certain behavioral problems like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—ADHD—perform in school, according to researchers.

The researchers studied the associations between the [parenting practices](#) of mothers and fathers of [children](#) with [behavioral problems](#) like ADHD and how those children performed in school.

They found an association between mothers that parent negatively—using yelling or spanking, for example, as punishment—and a range of problems in the classroom.

"We found that how mom rated her parenting strategies was associated with several different school performance domains," said Dr. Dara Babinski, assistant professor, Penn State College of Medicine. "There were associations between moms using more negative effective control behaviors and children with lower academic achievement, greater behavioral problems in the classroom, and more difficulties in peer and teacher relationships."

Babinski said the results could help improve intervention efforts for families with children with behavioral problems, which in addition to ADHD could include oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder.

The researchers said children with these disorders are prone to problems both at home and in the classroom. They are at a higher risk of having trouble with school achievement, maintaining good grades and dropping out. At home, [parents](#) of these children are more likely to engage in harsh and inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring.

"There's decades of research linking negative parenting with raising a child with behavior problems. In general, the child's difficulties increase the likelihood of [negative parenting](#). The child's aggressive and disruptive behavior is stressful and strains parent resources," Babinski

said. "So we know about parent difficulties, we know about school difficulties, but we don't know much about how they're related."

The researchers recruited 147 mothers, 110 fathers and 148 children, the majority of which had ADHD or another behavioral disorder, for the study. After the children's symptoms were determined, their parents took an assessment designed to measure parenting practices, including how positively involved they were with their child, whether they used negative or ineffective punishment, and if they had habits of inefficient monitoring.

The children's teachers reported on their relationship with the students, how the children got along with their peers, and how disruptive they were in class. Additionally, the researchers collected the students' standardized achievement test scores.

The researchers found that the ways moms and dads interact with their kids affected their children's school performance in a number of ways. Moms who parented negatively were associated with children who had poorer reading and math skills and who had poorer relationships with their teachers. Moms who reported lower monitoring of their kids or who played down their kids' emotions were also associated with children with poorer peer relationships.

Additionally, dads who downplayed or discouraged their kids' emotions were associated with children who had poorer reading and spelling achievement.

Babinski said the results are a good first step to learning more about family systems and how parenting affects children.

"The real theme was the associations between maternal parenting and [school performance](#), where poorer maternal practices related to poorer

outcomes," Babinski said. "It's also striking that associations emerged between how parents described their parenting and their children's standard achievement tests and teachers' ratings of child functioning, which is different from relying solely on parent reports."

Babinski said that in the past, treatments for children with behavioral problems who are struggling in school often take place at school, but little attention is paid to how difficulties at home or with parents are impacting school work. She said that the results highlight how important it is to work with families at home and at school.

"We're seeing that parents do impact how their children perform at [school](#). When we're talking about interventions with these families, there needs to be more integrated efforts in both the home and the classroom, which are both critical to children with behavioral problems," Babinski said. "We need to make sure parents and their children get support in all the areas they need."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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