

Controlling mothers add to anxiety risk for young children

9 March 2015, by Evelyn Perez



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Researchers have found a strong link between maternal intrusiveness and child anxiety in young children from low-income families.

A team of psychologists found first graders from low-income families are susceptible to [anxiety](#), and when you add an overly controlling mother to the mix, that risk increases. The findings were published in the [Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology](#).

"Intrusive parenting has been associated with [child anxiety](#), but the majority of studies have focused on middle- and upper-class families. There's an entire population that has been overlooked," said Jonathan Comer, researcher in Florida International University's Center for Children and Families and director of the Mental Health Interventions and Technology (MINT) Program. "This work underscores the urgent need for focused efforts to disseminate parent-focused interventions for younger children from families of lower financial means."

According to the study, as a child ages, the anxiety impact of maternal intrusiveness diminishes, with a family's financial means being the primary predictor by third grade. These findings highlight the importance of parenting behavior and the financial environment in the maintenance of early childhood anxiety, but suggest other environmental factors, including relationships with peers, may play a more important role as children develop.

"Many evidence-based treatments for childhood anxiety focus on parenting and specifically target the reduction of over-controlling parenting as a main objective of treatment," Comer said. "Knowing for whom and when maternal intrusiveness has the greatest link with child anxiety is critical for appropriately disseminating targeted treatment efforts."

Child anxiety disorders are debilitating and negatively affect children's functioning in school and recreational activities, as well as their relationships with family and peers. The presence of an anxiety disorder in childhood places the child at increased risk for anxiety disorders, depression and substance abuse in adulthood.

"Clinical anxiety isn't a stage or phase. It's a misguided notion that it will dissipate with time," Comer said. "When quality, evidence-based treatments are applied by a trained professional, [anxiety disorders](#) are among the most treatable mental health conditions that affect [children](#)."

Provided by Florida International University

APA citation: Controlling mothers add to anxiety risk for young children (2015, March 9) retrieved 24 June 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-mothers-anxiety-young-children.html>

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