Early positive parenting behavior and maternal depression history predicts episodic memory ability in middle childhood

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Introduction

• Age-related differences in episodic memory have been established in early childhood.

• However, individual differences are also important to memory development, yet are relatively under investigated.

• Both parenting and maternal depression have been shown to impact cognitive abilities, including language and executive function.

• Little research has investigated how these factors impact episodic memory, an ability that is critical to learning in early childhood.

• The present study seeks to investigate implications of early parenting and maternal depression on episodic memory ability in young children.

Methods

Participants

• 96 children (47 females) from a longitudinal dataset overselected for a history of maternal depression were included in the study.

Observed Parenting

• Children and their parents completed tasks modified from the Teaching Tasks Battery.

• Tasks were rated on Maternal Intrusiveness, Hostility, Support, Negative Affect, and Positive Affect.

• Negative Parenting Composite: Average of Maternal Intrusiveness, Hostility, and Negative Affect

• Positive Parenting Composite: Average of Maternal Support and Positive Affect

Maternal Depression

• SCID for DSM-IV was administered at T1 and T2 to children’s biological mothers.

• Fifty-seven (59%) mothers had a lifetime history of depressive disorder.

Episodic Memory Assessment

• Scores from the following tasks were standardized and averaged to create a Composite Memory Score.

Remember/Know Task

Feature Binding Task

Results

Parenting & Memory

• T1/T2 Positive and Negative Parenting were entered as predictors in a multiple regression to test associations between parenting and composite memory scores.

• Covariates: T1 general cognitive ability, T2 child age

• T1 Positive Parenting was the only significant predictor of memory performance.

Depression & Memory

An ANCOVA was run to assess memory differences between children of mothers with and without a history of depression.

• Covariates: T1 general cognitive ability, T2 child age

Maternal Depression

No significant mediating or moderating effect between parenting and maternal depression predicting children’s memory.

Discussion

• Results suggest that the timing and type of parenting is important for memory development, where early positive parenting exerts a particularly strong influence on memory.

• Future research would benefit from exploring mechanisms that link parenting and maternal depression to memory in children.

• Once this link has been elucidated, research can focus on deriving interventions to target children who may be at an increased risk of memory impairments.

References


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