



Children's Problem Behaviors and Self-Efficacy Among Mothers of Toddlers with Autism: The Moderating Role Of Working Alliance

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Introduction

Parenting self-efficacy, defined as a parents' sense of competence in the parenting role, has been associated with both positive parenting behavior and with parental well-being (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). Lower levels of efficacy are reported by parents of children with behavioral disorders and difficult to control temperamental qualities (e.g., Teti & Gelfand, 1991). However, little is known about self-efficacy among parents of children with autism (e.g., Hastings & Brown 2002).

Raising a child with autism presents unique challenges for parents, which may impact their self-efficacy. Parents consistently report high stress levels (e.g., Koegel et al., 1992), and many parents report not knowing how to best help their child with autism. Early intervention providers may positively impact children's behaviors while at the same time they may serve as an important support to parents. Thus the "working alliance," or the relationship between parents and providers, may influence parental perceptions of self-efficacy.

Research Questions

- 1) Is mothers' perceived parenting self-efficacy associated with:
 - Children's problem behaviors and competencies?
 - Mothers' working alliance with early intervention providers?
- 2) Does mothers' working alliance with their children's early intervention provider moderate the associations between children's behaviors and parenting self-efficacy?

Methods

Participants

- 90 toddlers (69 male, 21 female) and their mothers
- Confirmed diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder via ADI-R, ADOS-G, & clinical review

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS			MOTHER CHARACTERISTICS		
	M	SD (Range)		M	SD
Age (months)	27.6	4.1 (18-34)	Age (years)	36.4	4.7 (26-58)
VIQ	54.7	23.6 (14-112)			
NVIQ	75.5	19.1(23-115)			
	n	%		n	%
Minority status			Minority status		
Nonwhite	19	21	Nonwhite	16	18
White	71	79	White	74	82
Position in Family			Maternal Education		
Oldest	15	17	< than college	34	38
Only	30	33	College or >	56	62
Young /Middle	45	50			

Measures

Maternal Efficacy Scale (Teti & Gelfand, 1991): a parent-report measure of perceived efficacy in several aspects of parenting.

- "How good are you at understanding what your child wants or needs?"
- "When your child is upset, how good are you at soothing your child?"

Working Alliance Scale for Interventions with Children (Davis & Carter, 2003): an adaptation of Horvath and Greenberg's Working Alliance Inventory (1989) that assesses parents' connection to and confidence in their child's provider.

- "I am confident in ___'s ability to help my child"
- "___ and I have different ideas on what my child's problems are"
- "___ and I are working towards mutually agreed upon goals."

Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) (Briggs-Gowan & Carter, 2006): a parent-report screening tool that evaluates social-emotional problems and competencies in children ages 12-48 months

Results: Question 1

Is mothers' perceived parenting self-efficacy associated with:

- Children's problem behaviors and competencies?
- Mothers' working alliance with early intervention providers?

YES:

- Mothers who reported lower levels of parenting self-efficacy reported higher child problem behaviors.
- Mothers who reported higher levels of parenting self-efficacy reported a stronger relationship with their child's intervention provider

NO:

- Maternal report of social-emotional competencies was not associated with maternal perception of parenting self-efficacy.

	Self-Efficacy	BITSEA Problems	BITSEA Competencies
BITSEA Problems	-.34**		
BITSEA Competencies	.16	-.27**	
Working Alliance	.35**	-.06	.08

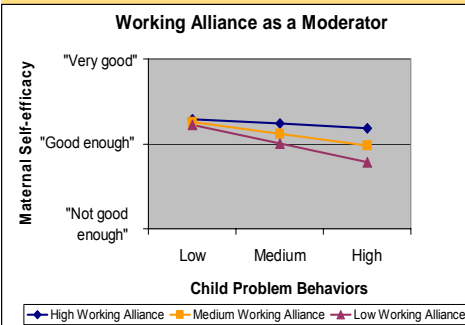
** p<.01

Results: Question 2

Do mothers' relationships with their child's early intervention provider moderate the associations between children's behaviors and parenting self-efficacy?

YES: Working Alliance moderates the association between children's problem behavior and maternal self efficacy

- Among mothers who reported **high child problem behaviors**, mothers with **strong working alliances** felt **more efficacious** than mothers with **weak working alliances**.
- Among mothers who reported **low problem behaviors**, **parenting self-efficacy was high and working alliance was not associated**.



Regression Predicting Self-Efficacy

	β	ΔR^2
1. Problem Behaviors	-.34***	.11
2. Problems Behaviors Working Alliance	-.32***	.33***
3. Problem Behaviors Working Alliance	-2.05**	-.18
Problems X Working Alliance	1.79*	.05
Overall Model F	11.01***	

*** p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Note: Three covariates (maternal education, minority status, and maternal depression) were entered into the regression based on significant bivariate correlations with maternal self-efficacy. These variables did not contribute unique variance to the prediction of self-efficacy and thus were removed from the regression model.

Conclusions & Future Directions

- **Children's problem behaviors were associated with maternal self-efficacy** whereas children's social-emotional competence level was not associated with efficacy in this sample
- **Working alliance moderates the association between problem behaviors and maternal self-efficacy.**
 - Strong working relationships between mothers and intervention providers may enhance maternal parenting self-efficacy, especially when children present with multiple problem behaviors that can negatively influence self-efficacy.
- **Interventions designed to enhance working alliance may promote increased maternal self-efficacy.**
 - Future longitudinal studies will be necessary to clarify the direction of these correlational associations.

Literature Cited

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