

An Exploration of Factors Mediating Disruptions in Young Children's Relationships with Primary Caregivers



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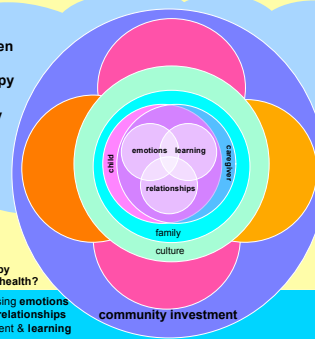
Sarasota Early Childhood Mental Health Partnership

VISION

All young children & their families are healthy, happy & thriving in Sarasota County communities

MISSION

To strengthen Sarasota's system of care that supports early childhood mental health & well-being



...so what do we mean by early childhood mental health?

- Experiencing & expressing emotions
- Forming close, secure relationships
- Exploring the environment & learning
 - With primary caregivers
 - In a family
 - In a cultural context
 - In a community

Population of Focus

- Children birth through age 8 & family members at risk of **disrupted relationships** due to:
 - ◆ foster care placement or risk of placement
 - ◆ prenatal exposure to alcohol / other substances
 - ◆ risk of expulsion or exclusion from an early learning and care setting &/or
 - ◆ presence of other environmental stressors (i.e., domestic violence, poverty, caregiver mental illness)
- with DC: 0 – 3R or DSM-IV-TR diagnosis & prognosis that MH challenges will last at least one year
- in need of multi-agency interventions from at least 2 community services



Outcomes: Children, Caregivers, Families

- Children will function optimally in home, childcare, school and community (social-emotional skills & healthy relationships).
- Parents and other caregivers will have skills & support needed to promote social emotional skills of children.
- Families will be actively involved in classrooms, programs, and the SOC.
- Reduced disruptions will occur in children's relationships with primary caregivers & family.



Purpose of Study

- This study analyzed data on the reciprocal interaction between stress in the parent-child relationship and disruptions in young children's primary caregiving placements in order to identify indicators associated with positive change in children's problem behavior.



Methodology

- Data for the current study were drawn from 65 families enrolled into the national evaluation from October 2006 to December 2007.
- Questions regarding the stability of the child's living situation, continuity of early education and care placements, family relationships, and parental distress during the past six months were looked at from instruments used as part of the national and local evaluation efforts. These instruments included the Caregiver Information Questionnaire, Education Questionnaire, Caregiver Strain Questionnaire, Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, Living Situation Questionnaire, and Parent Stress Index.
- Univariate analyses consisted of descriptive statistics to gain an understanding of the distribution of the data. Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used to test the reciprocal interaction between stress in the parent-child relationship and disruptions in young children's primary caregiving placements.



Demographic Characteristics of Children Served

Demographics	
Gender	
Male	75.4%
Female	24.6%
Average Age at Intake	
Average Age	5.1 years
Race/Ethnicity	
Black or African-American	20.0%
White	72.3%
Hispanic/Latino	15.6%
Income Level	
Below Poverty	20.0%
At/Near Poverty	72.3%
Above Poverty	15.6%



Predictor Variables

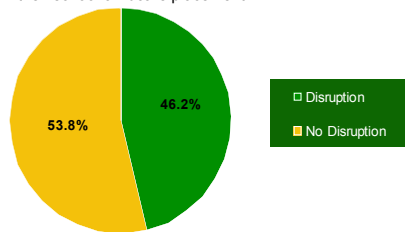
Living Situation	
Dual Caregiver	57.1%
Single Caregiver	42.9%
Parental Stress Index	
Normal Range	46.2%
Clinical Range	53.8%
Child demonstrates sense of belonging to family	
Like child	83.8%
Not like child	16.2%
Child trusts a significant person in his/her life	
Like child	83.8%
Not like child	16.2%
Child maintains positive family relationships	
Like child	75.7%
Not like child	24.3%
Child interacts positively with parents	
Like child	75.7%
Not like child	24.3%



Criterion Variables

School Disruption

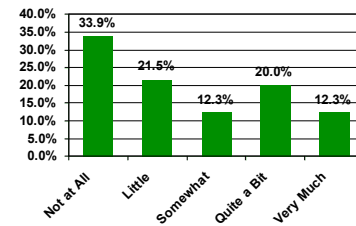
In the past 6 months, did the child experience a disruption in their school/childcare placement?



Criterion Variables

Family Disruption

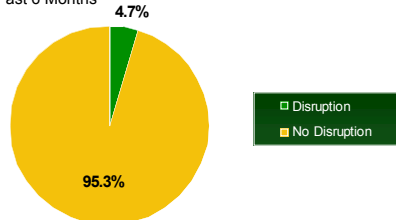
In past 6 months how much of a problem was the disruption or upset of relationships within the family due to child's emotional or behavioral problems?



Criterion Variables

Home Disruption

Continuity of the Child's Home Living Placement Over the Past 6 Months



Significant Results of Chi-square and Fisher's Exact Tests

Family Disruption	
	p Value
Parental Stress	0.0021
Belonging	0.0243
Positive Family Relationships	0.0158
Positive Interaction with Parents	0.0270

- Findings indicate that there are no significant differences in the demographic characteristics of children and families who experience disruptions in family interactions, home placement, or school placement.
- Increased parental distress is associated with disruptions in the child's relationships with caregivers in the home ($p= .0021$; chi-square test), but it is not related to disruptions in early learning and care settings.



Implications

- The results suggest that interventions that mediate parenting stress associated with difficult child interactions may help enhance continuity in the child's relationships within the family, but specific interventions focused on classroom conditions and teacher training may be needed within early childhood education settings to mediate expulsions or exclusions resulting from the child's emotional or behavioral problems.
- As young children require higher levels of care, all caregivers, including parents and teachers, will need focused support to create caring and nurturing environments in which the child can be successful. Early childhood classroom teachers who are highly stressed may continue to struggle with challenges in the classroom even when families are not experiencing high degrees of distress.
- Future studies should explore teacher and school variables, including data on teacher training, experience, work environment (i.e., work hours, number of children served), and support available.



Contact Information

For additional information on this study, please contact:

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