

SYMPOSIUM TITLE: Mothers aren't the only ones: Associations between the quality of relationships with important adults and children's adjustment

*Resident father-child involvement: Associations with young children's peer-based behavior in the NICHD-SECC and ECLS-B studies*

The quality of play between fathers and young children differs from that between mothers and young children. Because interaction with fathers is often more emotionally arousing, interaction with fathers may provide children opportunities to practice and develop self-regulation skills. Through secondary analysis of NICHD Study of Early Child Care (NICHD-SECC) and Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) data, the current study examines the hypothesis that father-child interaction is linked with impulsivity and peer behavior.

The NICHD-SECC included 1,364 families recruited in 10 US locations shortly after the child's birth. Data used in the current investigation, collected at the 54-month follow-up, were available for 721 children who were observed interacting with their fathers during a structured laboratory session (350 girls; 90.0% European-American, 4.7% African-American; 3.5% Hispanic). The *positive caregiving* composite included ratings of father behavior ( $\alpha = .88$ , interrater  $r = .81$ ) during a videotaped laboratory session. Father *Harsh Control* was assessed through self-reports on the Raising Children Checklist (six items,  $\alpha = .69$ ). *Impulsivity* was the proportion of incorrect responses obtained through a children's Stroop Test. *Inhibitory control* was assessed through maternal ratings on 10-items from the inhibitory control scale of the Children's Behavior Questionnaire. Caregivers reported *Aggression* was via Achenbach's Teacher Report

Form 2-5y and *Peer competence* via the California Preschool Social Competency Scale (6 items,  $\alpha = .54$ ).

For boys, positive care was linked with lower impulsivity scores and higher inhibitory control scores. There was an unexpected positive significant association between father positive care and aggression ratings for boys. Harsh control was significantly associated with boys' impulsivity, but not inhibitory control or aggression (see Table 1). For girls, higher ratings of positive care were linked with lower impulsivity scores, higher ratings of inhibitory control, and lower ratings of aggression. Harsh control was negatively associated with inhibitory control, but was not significantly associated with impulsivity or aggression (see Table 1).

The ECLS-B followed a nationally representative sample of children from birth to kindergarten entry. At the 4-year follow-up, data were collected from residential fathers of 7,070 children (3,456 girls; 48.3% white, non-Hispanic). Fathers' reports were used to compute father *caregiving* (e.g., read books, plays games, play chase; 5 items,  $\alpha = .67$ ), and four items (# of times spanked child, endorsement of spanking, yelling, hitting back) indexed *Harsh control*. Mothers rated *Impulsivity* during home interviews (5 items,  $\alpha = .71$ ). Preschool teachers provided measures of children's *Peer competence* (e.g., accepted by other children, makes friends easily; 6 items,  $\alpha = .81$ ) and a single-item rating of *Aggression*.

For boys, positive care was linked with lower levels of impulsivity, and higher levels of peer competence. Harsh control was associated with higher levels of impulsivity and aggression. For girls, positive care was negatively associated with impulsivity, and harsh control was associated with higher levels of both impulsivity and aggression (see

Table 2). The presentation also will discuss results from follow-up regression analysis examining interactions between father-child involvement and impulsivity in predicting social outcomes.

Table 1

*Associations among father-child interaction and impulsivity and peer behavior variables, NICHD-SECC sample.*

	Father Positive Care	Father Harsh Control	Impulsivity	Inhibitory Control
<b>Boys</b>				
Impulsivity	-.19**	.10*	1.0	-.04
Inhibitory Control	.16**	-.06	-.04	1.0
Aggression	.13*	-.08	.15*	-.24**
Peer	.10	.02	.04	.10
Competence				
<b>Girls</b>				
Impulsivity	-.14**	-.05	1.0	-.01
Inhibitory Control	.14**	-.11*	-.01	1.0
Aggression	-.18**	-.01	.07	-.24**
Peer	.11	.01	.03	-.11
Competence				

Note: \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

Table 2

*Associations among father-child interaction and impulsivity and peer behavior variables, ECLS-B sample.*

	Father Positive Care	Father Harsh Control	Impulsivity
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Boys			
Impulsivity	-.08**	.07**	1.0
Aggression	.03	.07**	.22**
Peer	.07**	-.02	-.16**
Competence			
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Girls			
Impulsivity	-.05**	.07**	1.0
Aggression	.03	.05*	.19**
Peer	.04	-.03	-.16**
Competence			
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Note: \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$