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Exploring the association between parenting and callous-unemotional traits in a sample of children with atypical development

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Introduction

Research suggests that the parenting is strongly related to conduct problems and the callous-unemotional (CU) traits of the children (e.g. lack of empathy and guilt, shallow and deficient affect, lack of concern about performance). Extant research indicated that children high on CU traits show reduced emotional reactivity and insensitivity to punishment (Blair et al., 2001) and increase risk for subsequent Antisocial Behavior and Conduct Problems (CP); this last appear relatively stable (Frick, 2012). One factor that has been critical for many causal theories of CP in children is the presence of certain parenting practices because they can negatively influence child's socialization (Waller, Gardner, & Hyde, 2013). Children also shape their own environment; particularly, children's impairments may evoke more intense negative reactions from parents attempting to enforce rules and this can lead to the development of CU traits behavior (Waller et al., 2015).

Method

Participants

- 79 Mothers
- M age= 43.45, SD= 5.36,
- 70,6% Italian
- 58.8% secondary school qualification
- Recruited from a specialized center for diagnosis and rehabilitation for their children (M = 10.05 years, SD = 3.07) with neuropsychological, psychological disorders or other certified syndromes.



Measure

- Inventory of Callous-Unemotional traits – Parent Version (ICU parenting; Frick & Ray, 2015)
- Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton et al. 1996)

Conclusions

The interventions targeting parenting tend to be the most effective in reducing conduct problems in young children (Frick, 2012).

These findings were discussed in lights of the needs of children with atypical development and high levels of CU traits, who may constitute a clinically unique group in terms of both developmental trajectories and treatment approaches.

Limitations

- Small sample
- No Classification of the certified syndromes
- Generalizability limited by the small sample

References

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Aim

This exploratory study has the aim of investigating the association between parenting practices and children's level of CU traits in a sample of mothers with children with psychological or neuropsychological disorder.



Results

Prior correlations between the main study variables were tested.

Table: Zero-Order Correlations of the study variables

	ICU	APQ involvement	APQ posit parenting	APQ poor supervision	APQ inconsistent
ICU	1	.02	-.09	.27*	.12
APQ involvement		1	.42***	-.06	-.18
APQ posit parenting			1	-.08	-.39***
APQ poor supervision				1	.12
APQ inconsistent					1

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$, APQ: "Alabama Parenting Questionnaire" ICU: "Inventory of Callous-Unemotional Traits – parent report"

Regression analyses, testing the unique effects of each parenting dimension on CU traits, revealed a positive association between CU traits and the dimension of *Poor Supervision* ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$).

