Parenting Stress, Child Characteristics, and Developmental Delay from Birth to Age Five in Teen Mother-Child Dyads

Prepared by: Katie Gallamore, B.S. 
Oklahoma State University 
MS Student in Human Development & Family Science 
katie.lynn.cole@okstate.edu

Carolyn S. Henry, Ph. D. 
Oklahoma State University 
Professor in Human Dev. & Family Science 
carolyn.henry@okstate.edu


Overview:

Children of young mothers are at increased risk for developmental delays during the critical development period for of birth to five years old. In general, parenting stress such as the demands of caregiving and basic needs is associated child developmental delays. Thus, the goals of the study were to examine the associations between parenting stress and developmental delay and assess disparities developmentally between the first five years and older children.

The authors hypothesized perceived parenting stress among young mothers to increase the risk for child developmental delays. This study also examined the potential of parenting interventions designed to decrease the risk of developmental delays by addressing parental stress.

Method:

*Design and Participants.* The final study sample consisted of 133 teen mothers and their child in New York City attending a free teen parenting program. The respondents were young primarily (93%) Latino or Black/African American mothers between the ages of 14 and 22 years old who attended a well child visit during a specific time frame, spoke English, and completed the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3). Data collection took place through in person questionnaires administered in a private room.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COOPERATIVE EXTENSION:**

With children born to low-income families presenting with higher risks for developmental delays in several areas of development, this study provided insights into the way parental stress in teen mothers effects a child’s risk for developmental delays in early childhood.

The current study results show that when parenting stress symptoms are present, a child is likely to show an increased risk in developmental delays across several areas. The results offer valuable information to provide further support to adolescent mothers, especially those reporting highly stressful parenting, to infants, toddlers, and/or preschoolers. *Specific recommendations include the following.*

- **Comprehensive screening of young children for developmental milestones** followed by intervention if developmental delays are present.
- **Screening mothers of young children** for overall parenting stress and concerns about child qualities or behaviors.
- **Parenting interventions** for mothers of young children with high stress levels designed to assist mothers in reappraising parenting, realistic expectations for child qualities and behavior, and coping skills.
**Measures.** Child age and gender, reported parental problems/concerns, and developmental delay were identified in the ASQ-3. Maternal age was provided by the parenting program and consisted of teenage mothers less than 19 years old at the birth of the child. Parenting stress was measured through a questionnaire with ratings from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Results:**
Results from the study were consistent with children being at increased odds for developmental delays in certain areas at certain ages (i.e. communication and personal-social at the 2nd through 4th year). Mothers’ age was not related to parenting stress or an increased risk for developmental delays in children. Overall, an increased risk for delays developmentally among multiple areas of development was explained, in part, through the symptoms of parenting stress. This association was particularly notable in the overall functioning of children at the age of 3.

**Discussion:**
The current results indicated children birth to five years old born to adolescent mothers who report highly stressful parenting are at an increased risk for developmental delays. Identifying adolescent mothers at risk for highly stressful parenting holds potential to offer support through efforts to increase coping skills as well as strengthening, reappraising parenthood, and visible acceptance the child’s characteristics and behaviors. This research adds evidence that adolescent mothers and their children will benefit from a supportive caregiving environment and access to community supports.