MINDFULNESS IN PARENTING, INFANT TEMPERAMENT AND PARENTING STRESS

Sydney Iverson, M.S.
Maria A. Gartstein, Ph.D.
Mindfulness Research Conference
Seattle, WA, April 28-29, 2017
**TEMPERAMENT**

- **Temperament:** “Constitutionally based individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation” (Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981)
  - Negative Emotionality
  - Surgency/Extraversion
  - Effortful Control/Regulatory Capacity
- Temperament directly predicts children’s adjustment problems above other factors (Nigg, 2006; Rothbart & Bates, 2006)
- “goodness-of-fit”: compatibility between child’s temperament and their environment (Thomas & Chess, 1986)
**Parenting Stress**

- Parenting stress consistently shown to impact quality of parent-child interactions.
- Can interfere with parent’s ability to respond appropriately to child in difficult situations (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Roberts, 1989)
- Under stress, parents at risk of becoming (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Crnic et al., 2005):
  - More rejecting
  - More controlling
  - More reactive
  - Less warm
- Leads to a poorer quality parent-child exchanges and relational fit.
Mindfulness in a Parenting Context

- Parenting behaviors characterized by **intentionality** in parent-child interactions (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greensberg, 2009; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1998)
  - Careful listening and attention
  - Low reactivity
  - Non-judgmental toward parenting choices
  - Non-judgmental of child
  - Emotional awareness
  - Compassion for the self and child

- Mindful parenting is linked with more adaptive parenting practices (Parent et al., 2015)
  - Indirectly related to lower internalizing and externalizing problems in children
Interplay between parents and children is complex.

Temperament influences parenting (e.g., Lipscomb et al., 2011), and vice versa (Bridgett, Laake, Gartstein, & Dorn, 2013; Gartstein, Crawford, & Robertson, 2008).

Mindfulness can lower parenting stress (e.g., Singh et al., 2007).

Mindfulness can impact temperament development (van den Heuvel, Johannes, Henrichs, & Van den Bergh, 2014).

- Higher mindfulness during pregnancy associated with less infant self-regulation problems and less infant Negative Emotionality.
- Maternal anxiety mediated this association.
GOALS OF THE PROJECT

- Parent-child interactions are complex, and influenced by all of the factors described previously.

- Interested in examining relationship between parenting mindfulness, temperament, and parenting stress in infancy.
  - Parenting in infancy critical for the development of attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978), regulation/executive functioning skills (Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010), and other cognitive and social outcomes (Smith, Landry, & Swank, 2010).

- Create a scale that evaluates mindfulness in the context parenting infants.
Mindful parenting scales for older children include multiple items that do not apply in infancy

- “I listen carefully to my child’s ideas, even when I disagree with them” (The Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting Scale; Duncan, 2007)
- “Did you ask your child’s opinion?” (Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire; McCaffrey, Reitman, & Black, 2015)

Some studies utilize dispositional or general mindfulness (Duncan & Bardacke, 2010; Parent et al., 2016)
- Not considering mindfulness directly in parenting contexts
THE SCALE

- Parenting Mindfulness Scale (PMS)
- Developed to evaluate mindfulness specifically in context of parenting in infancy
- Utilized the Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting Scale (Duncan, 2007) for parenting older children as a guide
  1. Present-centered attention and emotional awareness during parenting interactions
  2. Openness and non-judgmental receptivity to child
  3. Regulation of reactivity to child’s behavior
- Obtained feedback concerning items from:
  - Individuals who do infancy work
  - Individuals who study mindfulness
PARENTING MINDFULNESS SCALE (PMS)

7 point Likert Scale (Never to Always)

1. I find myself not being as attentive as I could be to my child, because my mind is preoccupied with other things.
2. When I’m upset with my child, I notice how I am feeling before I take action.
3. I notice how changes in my child’s mood affect my mood.
4. I always do what is best for my child, even if it inconveniences me.
5. I often react too quickly to what my child does.
6. I am aware of how my moods affect the way I treat my child.
7. Even though it sometimes makes me uncomfortable, I allow my child to express him/herself.
8. When I become upset with my child, I am able to calm down and not have it affect my mood or the way in which I care for my child.
9. I rush through activities with my child without being really attentive to him/her.
10. I have difficulty accepting my child’s growing independence.
Very early on in data collection (N = 34)
So far, good internal consistency!
  Cronbach’s Alpha: .80

**Mindfulness and Parenting Stress**
  Overall parenting stress (PSI; Abidin, 1995)
  Significant correlation: (r= -.588; p<.05)
PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- **Mindfulness and Temperament**
  - Broad temperament scales (IBQ-R; Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003)
    - Surgency/Positive Affectivity, Negative Affectivity, Regulatory Capacity/Orienting

- Significant correlations:
  - Mindfulness and Surgency/Positive Affectivity ($r = .429; p < .05$)
  - Mindfulness and Regulatory Capacity/Orienting ($r = .497; p < .01$)
Hierarchical regression to evaluate mindfulness and temperament as predictors of parenting stress

- Step 1: Three temperament factors (Surgency/Positive Affectivity, Negative Affectivity, Regulatory Capacity/Orienting)
- Step 2: Mindfulness

Results:
- \( F = 3.82; \ p < .05 \)
- Mindfulness accounted for additional 16.1\% of the variance in parenting stress above the contribution of temperament
CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Results support importance of considering mindfulness as protective with respect to parenting stress
  - Interventions promoting mindful parenting targeting mothers of infants
- Temperament based intervention for mothers of infants
  - Improving parenting mindfulness and parenting stress by teaching about temperament
  - Improving understanding of infant and their characteristics

Continue to evaluate validity of scale.
QUESTIONS?
References


