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Do parenting styles and parental involvement in school actually influence school performance? The role and importance of common genetic and common environmental influences.

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ABSTRACT:

Differences in children's school performance are often associated with differences in parents' parenting styles and school involvement practices, which are often seen as part of the mechanisms by which parents can pass on social disadvantages to children. However, there are doubts about the extent to which the observable relationships are causal or reflect genetic influences. To trace the effective influence of parenting styles and involvement practices on school performance, we examine what underlies the existing associations and to what extent they are driven by common genetic and common environmental influences, while additionally including the possibility of moderation effects. The analysis is based on the first two waves of the German Twin Family Panel (TwinLife), a random sample of twin families from all parts of Germany. We focus on twins ($N = 2,056$) aged 10 to 12 years old at the time point of the first interview and relate the parenting they received to their math grades when they were 10 to 12 and 12 to 14 years old. Our analyses here are based on the full bivariate moderation model proposed by Purcell. Our results demonstrate that the covariance between parental involvement practices and math grades largely relates to common genetic influences, hinting for processes related to gene-environment correlation (rGE). For parenting styles, however, the covariance is mainly due to common, non-shared environmental influences. Our results thus hint for differences in the underlying processes for parenting styles and involvement practices and for possible differences in the causality of relationships.

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