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Contribution of negative parenting behaviors evoked in childhood and adolescence to the persistence of externalizing behaviors

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KEYWORDS: externalizing behaviors, inconsistent discipline, latent change score, adoption design, child development.

ABSTRACT: The developmental course of child externalizing behaviors is unlikely to be independent as reciprocal effects have been shown with negative parenting. We apply a bivariate latent change score model to test reciprocal effects between the preceding year level of child's externalizing behavior and parent's inconsistent discipline on intraindividual change of both child and parent behaviors. Using a parent-offspring adoption design, we also test for the presence of evocative *rGE* on parent's inconsistent discipline practices. This study uses data from 561 children from the Early Growth and Development Study. Parents reported on their use of inconsistent discipline practices and on their children's externalizing behaviors during childhood and early adolescence (4.5, 6, 7 and 11 years of age). Preliminary results from the best fitting bivariate model indicated that only inconsistent discipline was associated with future change in externalizing behaviors. This model showed that children's externalizing behaviors follow a mean decline (growth rate $b = -11.720$) that got steeper as they displayed more externalizing behaviors (proportional change related to past externalizing $b = -.476$), but that mean decline was dampened by their parents' inconsistent discipline practices (proportional change related to past inconsistent discipline $b = 7.035$). Birth mother's externalizing behaviors was examined as a predictor of adoptive parents' inconsistent discipline. No evidence of evocative *rGE* was found. In summary, our findings control for both passive and evocative *rGE* and thus, indicate that parents' inconsistent discipline may have a mostly environmental effect and prevent a decline in children's externalizing behaviors during childhood and early adolescence.

GRANT SUPPORT: Fond de Recherche du Québec – Santé; R01HD042608; R01DA020585; R01MH092118; R01DK090264; R01DA035062; UH3OD023389; R01DA045108.