HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

DISSERTATION DEFENSE FOR

BO-RAM KIM

TITLE: THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MATERNAL CHARACTERISTICS, MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY DURING INFANT BEDTIMES, INFANT TEMPERAMENT, AND INFANT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES

Dissertation Committee:

Douglas M. Teti
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Michael J. Rovine
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

Bethany C. Bray
Research Associate of Human Development and Family Studies

Cynthia A. Stifter
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

Alysia Y. Blandon
Assistant Professor of Psychology

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PLACE: 1 Henderson Building

Areas of Specialization: Infant Development and Intervention

ABSTRACT

A primary purpose of parenting is to socialize the child as a productive member of society. Competent parents promote a balance of social connectedness (including parent-child attachment) and self-regulation (including emotion regulation) as developmentally appropriate in their children (Baumrind, 1996; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Understanding parenting quality and how it relates to child social and emotional outcomes is essential in light of the important implications that these outcomes have for children's adjustment in larger society.

The first aim of the present dissertation was to better understand the factors that influence parenting quality, the relations between parenting quality and child social-emotional outcomes, and the role of child characteristics in both parenting and child outcomes during the first two years of life. The second aim was to extend the parenting literature in several ways: to examine parenting quality through the lens of emotional availability (EA), to assess mothers' EA from video recordings of mother-infant interactions during the less-studied context of infant bedtimes, and to consider contributions of infant temperament (including surgency, negative affectivity, and orienting/regulation) to EA and its links to infant social-emotional outcomes. Data for the three studies was drawn from a larger NIH-funded study of 167 children and their families.

Study 1 examined mothers' depressive symptoms, coparenting quality, maternal and infant sleep, and infant temperament during infants' first 6 months as predictors of mothers' EA at bedtime with their infants at 9 months. Whereas mother-reported coparenting quality was both directly and indirectly predictive of EA, changes in depressive symptoms during the first 6 months only predicted lower EA when infants were temperamentally highly surgent.

In Study 2, trajectories of mothers' bedtime EA across five time points (1, 3, 6, 9, and 12 months) during the infant's first year were examined as predictors of infant attachment security at 12 months. Infant temperamental reactivity was also included as a potential moderator. Two maternal EA trajectory types, one that was consistently high and another that was consistently low, were identified and found to predict infant attachment security. In addition, infant temperamental surgency/extraversion moderated the relation between EA trajectories and infant attachment security such that highly surgent infants of mothers showing a low EA trajectory had the lowest attachment security at the end of the first year.

Study 3 examined the influences of mothers' EA towards their infants during bedtime, infant attachment security, and interactions between bedtime parenting and attachment with infant temperamental reactivity, on infants' emotion regulation strategy use at 12 and 18 months. Whereas EA was not directly related to infants' emotion regulation strategies, infant attachment security had direct relations with infants' orienting towards the environment and tension reduction behaviors. Both maternal EA and infant attachment security were particularly important in the use of less-adaptive strategies for infants high on negative affectivity.

In conclusion, the results of the studies indicate the significant relations between mothers' psychosocial resources and mothers' parenting quality, parenting quality across the first year and infant attachment security, secure attachment and infants' more adaptive emotion regulation, as well as the significant role of infant reactive temperament in all of these relations. These findings contribute to the parenting literature by demonstrating the importance of examining the emotional availability of parenting during the less-studied context of infant bedtimes, and contributions of infant temperamental characteristics in understanding child social-emotional development.