Parental Control During Homework Help Tasks of Children: Moderation by Learning Difficulties

Amyia C. Harris, Dr. Jenna Finch
Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Parental Control
- **Learning Difficulties (LD):** is a fundamental deficit in working memory (Swanson, H. L., & Siegel, L., 2001)
  - E.g., spatially disorganized handwriting, reading slowly, or making careless errors in math
- Parents may be more likely to “take over” and micromanage when helping children with LDs during homework (Lipton, D., 2004)
- Parental involvement during homework is positively associated with children’s academic development (Kochanska, M., & Shinn, A. D., 2011)
  - **Parental autonomy-support:** encourage children’s self-direction by adopting children’s perspective and allowing children to make decisions
- **Parental control:** their attempts to intrude on children’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Cheung, C. S., et al. 2016)
- Parental involvement differs by **family socioeconomic status (SES)** (OECD, 1997)
  - Families with better economic circumstances have the advantage to easily shift their focus off finances
- Children from lower-income families performed worse in mathematics than counterparts that come from high-income families (Jordan, N. C., & Levine, S. C., 2009)
  - Poor children are 1.5 times more likely to have a learning disability and two times more likely to repeat a grade than non-poor counterparts (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001)

Research Questions & Hypotheses
- **RQ1:** Are parents of children with learning difficulties symptoms more controlling during a homework help task?
  - H1: Children’s learning difficulties will be **positively associated** with controlling parenting
- **RQ2:** Are parents of children with learning difficulties symptoms less autonomy-supportive during a homework help task?
  - H2: Children’s learning difficulties will be **negatively associated** with autonomy-supportive parenting during the homework help task
- **RQ3:** Does the link between child learning difficulties symptoms and parenting differ by family socioeconomic status?
  - H3: Families’ SES would **moderate the association** between learning difficulties and parenting.
    - Lower-SES families will be less likely to demonstrate controlling parenting than higher-SES families when children have learning difficulties.

Method
- **Participants:**
  - 170 families with second graders from the midwestern United States
  - Schools where the majority of students received free or reduced-price lunches were targeted to attain a socioeconomically-diverse sample. Also, the families that are self-identified as racial and ethnic minorities were oversampled.
- **Procedures:**
  - Families were invited to schedule a laboratory visit to campus to complete a session of challenging puzzle assessments, interaction tasks, and surveys.
- **Measures:**
  - Parent-Child Interaction Coding System to observe parent’s autonomy-supportive and control during video recorded homework help interaction (Grolnick, Gurland, DeCouture, and Jacob, 2002; Grolnick, Price, Brimberger, and Smock, 2007)
  - Colorado Learning Difficulties Questionnaire (CLDQ) (Willett et al., 2011)
  - Socioeconomic Status was reported by using Qualtrics surveys for parents’ income and education.

Parent-Child Interaction Coding (PCI)
- 30-second epochs
- I = present 0 = absent
- Parents and children completed homework help tasks in a 10-minute time-frame.
- Tasks:
  - **Reading comprehension** assignment with multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions.
  - **Math** assignment with problems such as, addition, subtraction, and problem-solving.
- Coding Scheme:
  - **Parental autonomy-support**
    - Waits to be needed
    - Treats child as Expert
    - Provides general feedback
    - Provides information or asks question
    - Explains the task at child’s level
    - Checks answer at request
  - **Parental control**
    - Leads the child
    - Tells the answer
    - Takes over
    - Checks answer when not requested

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Autonomy-support</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.67*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Control</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
- Due to COVID-19 research came to a halt, thus the current study is reported based on 19 parent-child dyads who came into the lab.
- Even with our small sample, we did find that there is a moderate positive association between SES and parental autonomy-support
  - The M of income was $57,941, but over 52% of families reported their household income is under the National Poverty level, $48,678 (National Center of Children in Poverty, 2018)
- There was large range difference between parental autonomy-support and control.
  - **Parental Autonomy-support:** 5-45
  - **Parental Control:** 8-25
- Parents showed to perform more autonomy-supportive behaviors than controlling behaviors

Discussion
- **Next Steps:**
  - Continue research in the fall of 2020 to get the projected sample size
  - Continue PCI coding and calculating reliability
- **Limitations:**
  - COVID-19
  - Low representation of racial and ethnic minorities; Minority children (e.g., African American) are disproportionately represented in lower-income populations (Jordan & Levine, 2009)
- **Implications:**
  - Knowledge on how to create better resources for lower-income families with children with learning difficulties

Acknowledgements
- Dr. Jenna Finch, UNL faculty mentor
- UNL McNair Scholars Program
- Kimia Akhavan, UNL Graduate Student
- NaKeysha Olson & Mackenzie Starlin, Undergraduate RAs