



# Examining Child Temperament as a Predictor of Parent Stress

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## Background

- Parenting stress can lead to negative outcomes for parents and children, including less effective parenting and increased child behavior problems (Lewallen & Neece, 2015).
- Minor stressors, like daily hassles surrounding child behavior and parenting tasks, can impact the mother-child relationship and parent psychological well-being (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990).
- Child temperament contributes to the complexity of parent-child interactions (Thomas & Chess, 1977), and may be an overlooked source of parenting stress.
- Temperament is defined as biologically based differences in reactivity and self-regulation (Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981; Rothbart & Bates, 2006).
- The potential contributions of child temperament to parenting stress has not been widely investigated and findings may be useful in understanding the bidirectional aspects of the relationship of parents and children.

## Purpose of Current Study

- To investigate whether child temperament is predictive of the frequency and intensity of parenting stress experienced by their mothers.

## Method

### Sample

N = 71 toddlers (30 females) and their mothers. Data were collected when the toddlers were 42 months of age.

### Measures

*Children's Behavior Questionnaire* (CBQ; Rothbart et al., 2001)

• Mothers rated children's temperament on 15 dimensions of the CBQ which is comprised of 3 factors: **Negative Affectivity** (sadness, discomfort, fear, anger, and soothability), **Effortful Control** (smiling/laughter, attentional focusing, inhibitory control, perceptual sensitivity, and low intensity pleasure), and **Surgency/Extraversion** (high activity level, high-intensity pleasure, impulsivity, and shyness, which was reverse-scored)

*Parenting Daily Hassles Questionnaire* (PDH; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990)

• Mothers rated the frequency and intensity of 20 experiences that may be considered a "hassle" to parents on 2 dimensions: **Challenging Behavior** (i.e. The kids don't listen—won't do what they are asked without being nagged) and **Parenting Tasks** (i.e. Continually cleaning up messes of toys or food).  
• *Frequency* is scored as: never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, a lot = 4, and constantly = 5.  
• *Intensity* is scored by adding the parents rating of 1–5 for each item. If a 0 has been scored for frequency on an item then it is scored 0 for intensity as well.

## Analyses

### Correlations

• Pearson correlations between children's temperament and parenting stressors. See Table 1.

### Regression

• Multiple regressions were calculated to predict the two PDH factors (Challenging Behaviors and Parenting Tasks) from CBQ factors of child temperament.

## Tables & Figures

Table 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CBQ-Surgency							
2. CBQ-Negative Affect	.140						
3. CBQ-Effortful Control	-.086	.029					
4. PDH-Challenging Behavior Frequency	.280*	.410**	-.134				
5. PDH-Challenging Behavior Intensity	.244*	.389**	-.188	.680**			
6. PDH-Parenting Tasks Frequency	.233	.290*	-.053	.544**	.368**		
7. PDH-Parenting Tasks Intensity	.195	.358**	-.172	.450**	.702**	.613**	
Mean	4.68	4.26	5.29	3.03	2.52	2.59	2.01
Standard Deviation	0.48	0.44	0.46	0.55	0.76	0.58	0.59

Note. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

## Results

- Five negative affectivity temperament dimensions (average of sadness, discomfort, fear, anger, and soothability) predicted:
  - **Frequency of stress related to challenging behavior** ( $F_{5,63} = 4.185, p=.002, R^2=.161$ )
  - **Intensity of stress related to challenging behavior** ( $F_{5,63} = 6.786, p<.001, R^2=.350$ )
  - **Intensity of stress related to parenting tasks** ( $F_{5,63} = 3.501, p=.007, R^2=.217$ ).
- Five effortful control temperament dimensions (average of smiling/laughter, attentional focusing, inhibitory control, perceptual sensitivity, and low intensity pleasure), positively predicted:
  - **Frequency of stress related to challenging behavior** ( $F_{5,65} = 4.315, p = .003, R^2 = .249$ )
  - **Intensity of stress related to challenging behavior** ( $F_{5,63} = 3.441, p = .008, R^2 = .215$ )

## Discussion

• Children who were lower in effortful control had parents who reported more intense and frequent stress related to challenging behaviors. Parents may have more difficulty managing challenging behaviors related to children's difficulties with inhibitory impulses which leads to increased parental stress in dealing with children's challenging behaviors.

• Parents of children higher in negative affect reported more frequent and intense stress related to challenging behaviors and more intense stress related to parenting tasks. Prior research has shown that frustration and anger—dimensions of negative affect, when exhibited in children is negatively associated with supportive parenting (Paulussen-Hoogbeem et al., 2007).

• Effortful control and surgency/extraversion temperament dimensions did not predict intensity or frequency of stress associated with parenting tasks. Parents may view these parenting tasks as less stressful in general, and temperament dimensions outside of negative affect do not greatly effect parental stress levels related to parenting tasks.

• These results point to the importance of considering child temperament when investigating the development and implementation of interventions aimed at reducing parent stress.

• These findings highlight the bidirectional nature of the parent-child relationship.

## Limitations

- Parenting stress and child temperament data are provided by parent report. A independent observer is needed to provide additional evidence for parental stress and child temperament.

## Future Directions

- Explore how perceived parental stressors and temperamental influence may change over time
  - Do parents experiences of minor stressors related to challenging behavior and parenting tasks change as children age?
  - Does child temperament continue to influence parents experiences of minor daily stressors across time?

## References

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