

Do Older Parents have More Self-Regulated Children?

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Abstract

- Strong self-regulation in early childhood is a key predictor of academic and social success from elementary school through college (McClelland et al., 2012).
- This study analyzed the influence of the age of the child's parent on the child's self-regulation as measured by the HTKS (Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders) measure.
- Relations between children's self-regulation scores and their parent's age were initially examined and then were tested again after controlling for family income and child age.
- Higher child self-regulation was significantly related to having older parents. However, this correlation lost significance after family income (Head Start status) and child age were controlled.
- These results suggest that although parent age and child self-regulation are significantly related, family income and child age are stronger predictors of children's self-regulation.

Introduction

- Strong self-regulation in early childhood is a key predictor of academic and social success from elementary school through college (McClelland et al., 2012).
- Although little research has specifically examined parent age and children's self-regulation, the parenting styles of younger parents versus older parents could contribute to differences in children's self-regulation.
- Research supports the idea that older parents may encourage stronger self-regulation through better parenting strategies.

- One study found that language development was lower in children born to teenage mothers and the biggest difference was parenting behavior (Keown, 2001).
- Another study found that parents who encouraged autonomy in children had children with stronger self-regulation (Bernier et al., 2010).
- Parents who can support their children's independence and autonomy have children with stronger self-regulation. Moreover, older parents may provide more stimulating and autonomy-supporting parenting behaviors to children, which could result in stronger self-regulation.

Study Design/Methods Used

- This study was conducted as a part of Dr. Megan McClelland's Touch Your Toes! Kindergarten Readiness Study in Fall and Winter 2011.
- The sample included 178 pre-kindergarteners (ages 4-5; M = 4.64 yrs), 49.5% girls, and 51% Head Start status (low-income). Average parent age was 33.59 yrs, range from 21 to 66 years old.
- Data about parent's age and Head Start status were collected to assess children's background.
- The majority of parents in the sample were mothers (76%).
- Children's self-regulation was measured using the Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders (HTKS) task.
- The present study examined the following research questions:
 1. Is there a significant correlation between children's self-regulation scores and the age of their parent?
 2. Is the relation present after controlling for family income (Head Start status) and child age?

Results

- For the first research question, self-regulation on the HTKS was positively correlated with parent age. Specifically there was a significant positive correlation: ($r = 0.19$, $p = 0.009$), where stronger child self-regulation was related to having older parents.
- For the second research question: Children who were low-income (Head Start) had significantly lower self-regulation ($\beta = -0.356$, $p = 0.000$) and older children had significantly higher self-regulation ($\beta = 0.163$, $p = 0.019$).
- Parent age, however, was not significantly related to children's self-regulation after controlling for family income and child age ($\beta = 0.036$, $p = 0.635$; see Table 1).

Summary/Conclusion

- This study found that parent's age is positively correlated with stronger self-regulation in children before controlling for any other factors.
- However, family income (being in Head Start) and child age were stronger predictors of children's self-regulation on the HTKS. After controlling for family income and age of the child, there was no significant correlation between parent age and children's self-regulation.
- These results can be useful in determining what factors have the biggest impact on children's self-regulation, which is a predictor of future school success. This information can help guide academic professionals and parents by providing a focus on how to improve children's self-regulation.

Table 1: Parent Age Predicting Child Self-Regulation in Preschool (N = 178)

Variables	HTKS	
	Coefficient	t-ratio
Head Start Status	-0.356	-4.66**
Child Age	0.164	2.36*
Parent Age	0.036	0.48

Note: HTKS is the Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders Task
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$

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