Parenting Efficacy as a Moderator between Child Callous-Unemotional Traits and Parenting Behavior

Alexis C. Fuller, Rebecca A. Lindsey, Robyn S. Herbert, & Tammy D. Barry

Washington State University, Department of Psychology

INTRODUCTION

- Callous-unemotional (CU) traits can be categorized by a lack of guilt and empathy or deficits in emotional responding in children/adolescents with conduct problems (Tolan & Leventhal, 2013). The presence of CU traits can be highly predictive of antisocial outcomes later in life (McMahen, Witkiewitz, & Kotler, 2010).
- Research has shown a bidirectional relation between child CU traits and parenting behaviors; with more positive parenting behaviors predicting a decrease in CU traits over time; while negative parenting behaviors predict higher levels of CU traits over time (Hawes, Dadds, Frost, & Hasking, 2011). For example, the use of corporal punishment as an act of discipline for children with higher levels of CU traits has been shown to be widely ineffective, with this form of punishment only exacerbating the severity of the CU traits (Waller, Gardner, & Hyde, 2013).
- As there is substantial evidence linking CU traits with ineffective parenting behaviors, research has shifted to exploring factors that may influence parenting behaviors for this population. The purpose of this study was to investigate if parenting efficacy moderated the relations between child CU traits and parenting behaviors.

METHODS

Participants
- Participants were 59 caregivers (56 females) and their 59 children (25 females). Caregivers were ages 24 to 68 (M = 38.11; SD = 8.32).
- Children were ages 8 to 13 years (M = 10.53; SD = 1.22). The majority of children were identified as African-American (67.8%) and European American (30.5%).

Procedure
- This project was approved and conducted in compliance with the Institutional Review Board. Participants were a larger study investigating attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptomatology and aggression.
- Caregivers read the informed consent letter prior to testing or completion of any measures. Data were collected from caregivers, who completed measures about themselves and their children.
- Caregivers received $20 for their participation in the study.

Measures
- Demographic Form. This questionnaire assessed demographic and background information about the child and family.
- Antisocial Process Screening Device (APSD). Frick & Hare, 2001. This 20-item parent-report measure assesses callous and unemotional traits, poor impulse control, and antisocial behavior in children. The Callous and Unemotional Traits Factor was the variable of interest.
- Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC). Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978; Johnston & Marsh, 1989). This 12-item adaptation of the original measure consists of two subscales: (1) perceived parenting efficacy and (2) parenting satisfaction.
- Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ). Shelton et al. 1996. The APQ is a 42-item measure which assesses the frequency of the following parenting practices: Involvement, Positive Parenting, Poor Monitoring/Supervision, Inconsistent Discipline, and Corporal Punishment. Items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).
- The Positive Parenting and Involvement domains were combined to create a positive parenting variable. The Poor Monitoring/Supervision, Inconsistent Discipline, and Corporal Punishment domains were combined to create a negative parenting variable.

RESULTS

- Correlations were run among variables of interest (Table 1).
- Parenting efficacy was tested as a moderator between the relation of child CU traits and positive parenting. There was a main effect for CU traits b = -.60, SE = .29, p = .04, and for parenting efficacy, b = .36, SE = .11, p = .002 (Table 2).
- There was a significant interaction between CU traits and parenting efficacy, ΔR² = .16, b = 1.23, SE = .31, p = .0002, when predicting positive parenting (Table 2).
- Parenting efficacy was tested as a moderator between the relation of child CU traits and negative parenting. There was not a main effect for CU traits b = .44, SE = .27, p = .10, and the main effect for parenting efficacy was trending toward significance, b = -.18, SE = .10, p = .09 (Table 2).
- The interaction between CU traits and parenting efficacy was trending toward significance, ΔR² = .05, b = -.52, SE = .28, p = .08, when predicting negative parenting (Table 2).
- Post hoc, both interactions were examined at different levels of parenting behaviors (Figures 1 & 2). A 1-point constant was added to each plot point to facilitate the interpretation.
- Positive parenting was relatively higher when parenting efficacy was higher regardless of the level of child CU traits, b = .47, SE = .43, p = .28. However, when parenting efficacy was lower, positive parenting was higher when CU traits were lower and lower when CU traits were higher b = -1.67, SE = .35, p = .001.
- Negative parenting was relatively low when parenting efficacy was higher, regardless of the level of child CU traits, b = -.004, SE = .40, p = .99. When parenting efficacy was lower, negative parenting was lower when CU traits were lower and higher when CU traits were higher b = .89, SE = .32, p = .008. Note, however, the original interaction was only a trend.

DISCUSSION

- CU traits were negatively related to positive parenting and positively related to negative parenting, whereas parenting efficacy was positively related to positive parenting and negatively related to negative parenting.
- Parenting efficacy was a significant moderator in the relation between CU traits and positive parenting. Parenting efficacy trended as a moderator between CU traits and negative parenting.
- Findings from this study emphasize the importance of parenting efficacy, especially when child CU traits are elevated. Specifically, these results indicate that higher levels of parenting efficacy are related to higher levels of positive parenting and lower levels of negative parenting regardless of the level of CU traits. Thus, parenting efficacy attenuates the relation between CU traits and undesirable parenting practices.
- The current study has several limitations to consider. First, male caregivers were underrepresented, with only 5% of the sample identifying as male, a trend commonly seen in research regarding child psychopathology (e.g., Braunstein, Peniston, Perelman, & Cassano, 2013). Future studies should make greater efforts to recruit male caregivers.
- The current study’s cross-sectional design was also a limitation, as no causal relations could be tested. Longitudinal studies are necessary to determine the causal relations among factors and investigate changes in factors across time.
- Future research should also evaluate other factors that may decrease negative parenting and increase positive parenting, even when children have high levels of CU traits.

Table 1. Correlations Among Parenting Behaviors, Parenting Efficacy, and Child CU Traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Positive Parenting</th>
<th>Negative Parenting</th>
<th>CU Traits</th>
<th>Parenting Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Parenting</td>
<td>-.321*</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CU Traits</td>
<td>-.441***</td>
<td>.347**</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Efficacy</td>
<td>.465***</td>
<td>-.322*</td>
<td>-.350**</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Moderated Multiple Regression Examining Parenting Efficacy as a Moderator of the Relation between CU Traits and Parenting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Positive Parenting</th>
<th>Negative Parenting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model R²</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Model R²Δ</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.05†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CU Traits</td>
<td>-.60 (.29)</td>
<td>.44 (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Efficacy</td>
<td>.36 (.11)**</td>
<td>-.18 (.10)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CU Traits X Parenting Efficacy</td>
<td>1.23 (.31)***</td>
<td>-.52 (.28)†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Figure 1. Interaction between child CU traits and parenting efficacy predicting positive parenting.

Figure 2. Interaction between child CU traits and parenting efficacy predicting negative parenting.