



How Does Maternal Depression Influence Adolescent Aggression? The Role of Parenting Practices, Family Functioning, and Informant Discrepancy

Kelly L. Pugh and Albert D. Farrell
Virginia Commonwealth University

Introduction

Researchers examining antecedents to adolescent aggression have devoted increasing attention to the role of maternal depression. Recent studies have found that maternal depression impacts adolescent functioning and is predictive of later aggression (e.g. Pilowsky et al., 2006). Three mechanisms have been proposed to account for this relation. First, it has been argued that maternal depression impacts parenting practices (e.g. parent monitoring), which in turn leads to aggression among youth. Second, maternal depression has been proposed to impact family functioning (e.g. family cohesiveness), which then impacts adolescent aggression. Lastly, it has been proposed that higher rates of aggressive behaviors among adolescents of depressed mothers are the result of an informant discrepancy between a mother's and an adolescent's reports of aggression.

The current study will add to the literature on the relation between maternal depression and adolescent aggression by (a) examining the influence of three competing mechanisms, parenting practices, family functioning, or informant discrepancy, (b) using a large sample ($N = 927$), and (c) using a diverse population that includes minority populations from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Methods

Setting:

- Data collected as part of the Multisite Violence Prevention Project (MVPP)
- 37 schools from four geographical areas of the U.S.
- Schools served a high percentage of low-income, minority families

Participants:

- 927 Mother-Adolescent Dyads
- Adolescents
 - Sixth Grade Students (High levels of aggression/High Level of influence on peers for perpetuation of aggression)
 - 65% Male
 - 66% African American, 15% Hispanic, 10% White
- Mothers
 - Mean Age = 36 years old
 - 39% Met Criteria for Depression
 - 51% Single Parents
 - 22% Income below \$9,999; 26% Income \$10,000-19,999
 - 24% Some High School; 38% High School Grad or GED

Procedures:

- Data collected in Fall of 2001 for Cohort 1 and Fall of 2002 for Cohort 2
- A battery of outcome measures was administered to students and their families

Measures:

- Maternal Depression
 - Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (Radloff, 1977)
- Parenting Practices
 - Parenting Practices – Parent/Student Version (Gorman-Smith et al., 1996)
- Family Functioning
 - Family Relationship Scale – Parent/Student Version (Gorman-Smith et al., 1996)
- Adolescent Aggression
 - The Problem Behavior Frequency Scales (PBFS) (Farrell et al., 2000)
 - Behavior Assessment System for Children- Parent Rating Scales for Adolescents (BASC-PRS-A) and Teacher Rating Scales for Adolescents (BASC-TRS-A)
- Moderators
 - Family Demographics – Parent Report

Chart 1: Informant Discrepancy

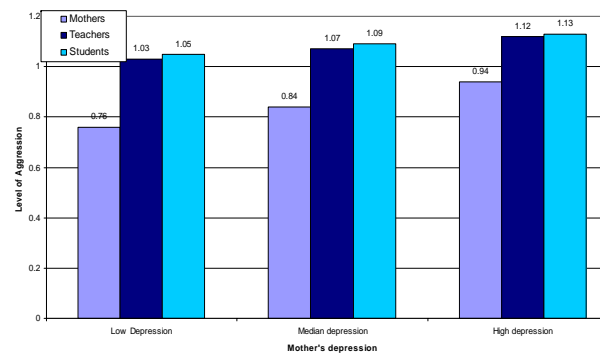
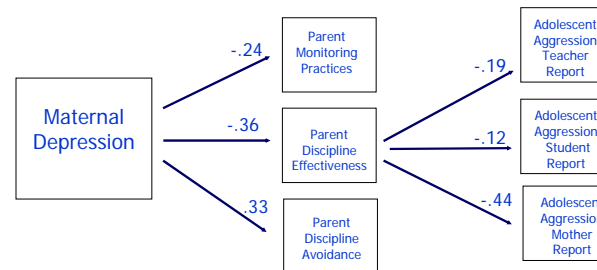


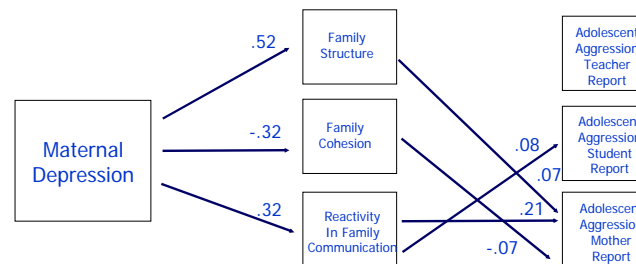
Diagram 1: Parent Practices



Note Path Coefficients represent the paths from the Maternal Depression to Adolescent Aggression, as mediated by Parent Monitoring Practices, Parent Discipline Avoidance, and Parent Discipline Effectiveness

Note Only significant paths at $p \leq .05$ are illustrated in diagram

Diagram 2: Family Functioning



Note Path Coefficients represent the paths from the Maternal Depression to Adolescent Aggression, as mediated by Family Structure, Family Cohesion, and Reactivity in Family Communication

Note Only significant paths at $p \leq .05$ are illustrated in diagram

Table 1: Indirect and Direct Effects

	Teacher Ratings of Aggression	Student Ratings of Aggression	Mother Ratings of Aggression
PARENTING PRACTICES MODEL			
Indirect Effect Via Parenting Practices	.04*	.04*	.18*
Direct Effect of Maternal Depression	.05	.04	.08*
Total Effect of Maternal Depression	.09*	.08*	.26*
% Indirect Effect	44%	50%	69%
FAMILY FUNCTIONING MODEL			
Indirect Effect Via Family Functioning	-.03	.03	.13*
Direct Effect of Maternal Depression	.10*	.05	.13*
Total Effect of Maternal Depression	.13*	.08*	.26*
% Indirect Effect	23%	38%	50%

Note Asterisk indicates a significance at $p \leq .05$

Results

Analyses

- A Within Subjects Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the association between maternal depression and informant discrepancy.
- Structural Equation Modeling was used to compare competing models that represent the relation between maternal depression and adolescents' aggression as a function of parenting practices and family functioning.

Findings

Informant Discrepancy

- Ratings of adolescent aggression significantly differed by source, ($F(2, 1658) = 31.07, p < .001$), such that maternal ratings were significantly lower than both student and teacher ratings (See Chart 1).
- Maternal depression was significantly related to adolescents' level of aggression, ($F(2, 1658) = 4.40, p < .05$).
- The degree of difference across sources varied as a function of maternal depression ($F(2, 1658) = 53.97, p < .05$), such that the discrepancy was greater for mothers with low levels of depression (See Chart 1).

Parenting Practices

- The indirect effect through parenting practices accounted for 69% of the total effect of maternal depression on Mother Report of adolescent aggression, 50% on Student Report of adolescent aggression, and 44% on Teacher Report of adolescent aggression (see Diagram 1 and Table 1).

Family Functioning

- The indirect effect through family functioning accounted for 50% of the total effect of maternal depression on Mother Report of adolescent aggression, 38% on Student Report of adolescent aggression, and 23% on Teacher Report of adolescent aggression (see Diagram 2 and Table 1).

Conclusions and Future Implications

- Ratings of adolescents' aggression differed by source and the discrepancy across sources varied by level of maternal depression. This indicates that mothers with higher levels of depression, as compared to mothers with lower and median levels of depression, report more accurate ratings of their adolescent's aggressive behaviors.
- Implications for considering the role of levels of maternal depression on informant discrepancy when using maternal report as the primary source of information about adolescent behavior
- The indirect effect through parenting practices and family functioning both accounted for a proportion of the total effects of maternal depression on adolescent aggression, but parenting practices accounted for a higher percentage of the indirect effects.
- Implications for including parents and families in future interventions
- Implications for future violence prevention and intervention programs focusing on the most influential mechanisms (e.g. parent discipline effectiveness) that lead to aggressive outcomes in adolescents