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Early Childhood Stressors and Negative Personality Behaviors

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Early Childhood Stressors and Negative Personality Behaviors

Research is moving away from static to contextual models of understanding personality development, making it imperative to consider daily occurrences, not just biology or significant traumatic events, in personality formation. Temperament has long been considered the innate source of behaviors that later solidify into personality, but behaviors themselves and the conditions that produce and reinforce them are shaped by the daily environment. This behavior-environment interaction is especially important for children experiencing childhood stressors like poverty, food insecurity, and parental aggravation. Non-clinical personality related behaviors may arise from these stressors, which can lead to negative life consequences (e.g. relationship problems, lower job performance) and diagnosed disorders. Negative personality behaviors include low agreeableness, high neuroticism, and high internalizing/externalizing behaviors. While not all children born into stressful environments will exhibit negative behaviors, innate traits like ego resiliency and environmental factors like parental involvement are expected to buffer negative effects.

This study seeks to explore the impact of chronicity and multiple childhood stressors on agreeable and neurotic behaviors in adolescence and the role of parental involvement during childhood. It is therefore hypothesized that more childhood stressors and longer occurrences at ages 3 and 5 will predict higher internalizing/externalizing and neurotic behaviors and lower agreeableness at age 15. Secondly, parental involvement at age 3 and 5 will predict lower internalizing/externalizing and neurotic behaviors and higher agreeableness at age 15. Hypotheses will be analyzed using three waves of longitudinal data from Princeton University's Fragile Families and Child Well-being study.

Keywords: Personality, Childhood, Stress, Behavior, Temperament, Environment, Parental Aggravation, Parental Involvement