Maternal Executive Functioning and Scaffolding in Families of Children with and without Parent-Reported ADHD.


doi: 10.1007/s10802-017-0289-2. [Epub ahead of print]

Abstract

Parental scaffolding robustly predicts child developmental outcomes, including improved self-regulation and peer relationships and fewer externalizing behaviors. However, few studies have examined parental characteristics associated with a parent's ability to scaffold. Executive functioning (EF) may be an important individual difference factor associated with maternal scaffolding that has yet to be examined empirically. Scaffolding may be particularly important for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and disruptive behavior disorder (DBD) symptoms due to their core difficulties with inattention, disorganization, EF, and self-regulation, their need for greater parental structure, and higher-than-average rates of parental EF deficits. Yet, little research has examined child ADHD in relation to parental scaffolding. This cross-sectional study examined: (1) the association between maternal EF (as measured by the Hotel Test, Barkley's Deficits in Executive Functioning Scale and Digit Span) and observed scaffolding, (2) the association between parent-reported child ADHD/DBD symptoms and scaffolding, and (3) the interaction between child ADHD/DBD symptoms and maternal EF in predicting scaffolding. In a sample of 84 mothers and their 5-10 year-old biological children (62% male) with and without parent-reported ADHD, we found that maternal EF, as measured by Digit Span and the Hotel Test, predicted observed maternal scaffolding. However, child ADHD/DBD symptoms did not significantly predict maternal scaffolding controlling for child age, maternal education, and maternal EF, nor did the interaction of maternal EF and parent-reported child ADHD/DBD symptoms. Working memory and task shifting may be key components of parental EF that could be targeted in interventions to improve parental scaffolding.