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Temperament and Teacher-Child Relationship Quality in Preschool: The Moderating Roles of Classroom Environmental Support and Family Income

Amanda Prokasky  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln, aprokasky@unl.edu*

Kathleen Moritz Rudasill  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln, kmrudasill@vcu.edu*

Victoria J. Molfese  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln, vmolfese2@unl.edu*

Xiaoqing Tu  
*University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

Kate Sirota  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln, ksirota@unl.edu*

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BACKGROUND

- High quality teacher-child relationships in preschool are critical to later academic and social adjustment (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).
- Children’s temperament (e.g., attention) predicts teacher-child relationship quality (Rudasil & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010).
- Environmental factors, such as higher classroom support (Hamre & Pianta, 2001) and lower poverty (Gershoff et al., 2007) are also protective factors for children’s outcomes, and may ameliorate links between temperament and teacher-child relationship quality.

PRESENT STUDY

- The present study is designed to examine the association between child temperament and teacher-child relationship quality, focusing on the moderating role of income and classroom emotional support in preschool.

METHODS

Participants:
- 103 children (55 females) in 23 classrooms, located in 9 child care centers in a Midwestern city

Measures:
- **Child temperament:** teachers rated 7 dimensions (activity, anger, approach, fear, shyness, attentional focusing, inhibitory control) of children’s temperament using the Children’s Behavior Questionnaire (Rothbart et al., 2001)
- **Teacher-Child Relationship Quality:** teachers reported conflict, closeness, and dependency in relationships with children using the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta et al., 2001)
- **Income:** Parents reported annual income
- **Classroom Quality:** trained observers assessed classroom emotional support, instructional support, and organization using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, LaParo & Hamre, 2008)

ANALYSIS

- Predictors were grand mean centered, and Hierarchical Linear Modeling was used to account for children nested in classrooms.

RESULTS

Main Effects
- Higher inhibitory control and higher attentional focusing predicted lower teacher-child conflict, and higher teacher-child closeness.
- Higher anger and higher activity predicted higher teacher-child conflict.

Interactions
- Family income moderated the association between child activity and teacher-child closeness, and between child shyness and teacher-child closeness (see Figures 1 & 2).
- Family income moderated the association between child inhibitory control and teacher-child conflict (see Figure 3).
- Classroom emotional support moderated the association between child attentional focusing and teacher-child conflict (see Figure 4).

DISCUSSION

- Findings are consistent with other research linking children’s temperament and teacher-child relationships, and highlight the importance of considering the role of children’s temperament in the development of relationships with teachers in early childhood.
- Teacher training and professional development programs could be strengthened by emphasizing individual differences in temperament, and the way that these individual differences impact a child’s development.
- Results also point to the contributions of environmental influences, namely classrooms emotional support and family income, to the development of children’s relationships with their teachers.