Abstract

Background: Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is very frequent in preschoolers. The severity and the long-term negative outcomes make the understanding of this disorder a priority. The goal in this study was to assess the mediating role of parenting practices in the relationship between parents' psychopathology and ODD in preschoolers.

Method: A community sample of 622 children was assessed longitudinally at age 3 and age 5. Parents reported on children's psychopathology through a diagnostic interview, and on their own psychological state and parenting style through questionnaires. Results: At ages 3 and 5, corporal punishment mediated the relationships between mothers' anxiety-depression and ODD (in girls), between mothers' aggressive behavior and ODD (in boys), and between parents' rule-breaking and ODD both in boys and girls. For both sexes, there was a direct association between mothers' aggressive behavior score and ODD. The association between fathers' psychopathology and ODD was not mediated by the fathers' parenting practices. Fathers’ anxiety-depression and aggressive behavior scores were directly associated with ODD. Conclusions: Parents’ psychopathology must be explored and, in families where such psychopathology is a relevant variable, parenting practices must be addressed with a view to the prevention and treatment of children's ODD in the preschool years.

Keywords

Oppositional defiant disorder, parental psychopathology, parenting, preschoolers.