

The Effect of Maternal Physical Illness on Reporting Child Problem Behavior

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Research has shown that when mothers have physical illnesses, their children have impaired psychosocial functioning (Hammen et al., 1987). These mothers reported higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in their children, as well as lower social competence (Siegel et al., 2002). Of the aspects of physical illness that may contribute to lower psychosocial functioning, only illness-related activity restrictions have been found to relate significantly to child behavior problems (Bauman, et al., 2002). Many physical illnesses that cause activity restrictions often present comorbidly with depression (Cassano & Fava, 2002). As with activity restrictions, maternal depression has been shown to have a negative impact on child psychosocial functioning, including increased behavior problems (Luomo et al., 2001). It is possible that effects of mothers' physical restrictions on children's behavior problems result from their increased likelihood of depression rather than the restrictive effects of their health problems, *per se*.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of physical restrictions and the comorbidity of physical restrictions with depressive symptoms on biological mother's reporting of their child's behavior problems using the ECBI and the CBCL scales during treatment intake. The sample consisted of 129 mother-child dyads referred to the UC Davis CAARE Diagnostic and Treatment Center for Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). Children were referred to the PCIT program for treatment of their externalizing behavior problems; most had a maltreatment history. Results of analyses revealed that the presence of health problems and depressive symptoms both significantly predicted higher levels of behavior problems in their children. However, analyses also showed that the effect of their health problems on mothers' tolerance of their children's behavior problems was largely a result of differences in their depressive symptoms.

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