

INTRODUCTION

- Feeding is the process made up of the child's desire for food, access to food, ability to consume food, and digestion of food.³
- Feeding relationship disturbance is the interference of a healthy feeding relationship at a mealtime by those involved in the environment.¹
- These disrupted interactions lead to poor outcomes. It is important to study other variables that may be related to higher levels of mealtime disturbance.
- Child behavior is the way the child acts towards the parent, food, or mealtime. Behaviors include internalizing, externalizing, and attention problems.³
- Studies have suggested that preschool children with feeding relationship disturbance and are more likely to experience behavior dysregulation.^{2, 5}
- Limited studies have been evaluated the relationship between feeding relationship disturbance and problematic child behaviors among school age children.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the relationship between feeding relationship disturbance and child problem behavior.

- We hypothesized that an increase disruption to the parent-child feeding relationship will be correlated with an increase in child problem behavior

METHODOLOGY

Participant Data

- Community parents (n=199) were primarily female (76.4%), White (72.9%), married (70.4%), and Catholic (22.6%). Parents were ages 22-72, the average age of parents was 36.71 years (SD=8.197).
- Children were 55.3% female. Children were ages 6-12, the average age was 8.8 years (SD=2.074).

Procedure

- A community sample of parents, recruited by students in an advanced psychology course, completed online surveys containing the About Your Child's Eating (AYCE)¹ and Pediatric System Checklist (PSC-17)³ as a part of a larger online study.

Measures

- Feeding relationship disturbance. AYCE is a 31-item questionnaire following a Likert scale that measures three aspects of the mealtime environment as reported by the parent.
 - AYCE measures constructs such as child resistance to eating, positive mealtime environment, and parent aversion to mealtime. The feeding relationship disturbance was calculated by adding the child resistance to eating and parent aversion to mealtime subscales and subtracting the positive mealtime environment subscale.
- Child Behavior. The Pediatric System Checklist is a 17-item questionnaire following a Likert scale that measures three aspects of child behavior as reported by the parent.
 - The PSC-17 measures constructs such as internalizing, externalizing, and attention problems.

METHODOLOGY Cont.

Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographics of the participants. Analyses were formed by correlating the relationship between feeding relationship disturbance as measured by AYCE and child behavior as measured by the PSC-17 with a Pearson correlation.

RESULTS

- All correlations were found to be significant. (see Table 1)
- There was a significant positive correlation between child attention problems and child resistance to eating, $r(161) = .246, p=.002$.
- There was a significant negative correlation between child internalizing symptoms and positive mealtime environment, $r(160) = -.304, p < .001$.
- There was a significant positive correlation between child externalizing symptoms and parent aversion to mealtime, $r(159) = .372, p < .001$.
- There was a significant positive correlation between child attention problems and parent aversion to mealtime, $r(161) = .395, p < .001$.
- There was a significant positive correlation between total PSC-17 scores and total AYCE scores, $r(154) = .354, p < .001$.
- 53.7% (n=87) of children were reported above the internalizing symptoms cutoff, 16% (n=27) of children were reported above the externalizing symptoms cutoff, and 12.2% (n=20) of children were reported above the attention problems cutoff.

		PSC-17 INT	PSC-17 EXT	PSC-17 ATT	PSC-17 Total
AYCE CRE	Pearson Correlation	.205	.224	.246	.214
	Significance	.009	.005	.002	.008
AYCE PME	Pearson Correlation	-.304	-.287	-.276	-.295
	Significance	.001	.001	.001	.001
AYCE PAM	Pearson Correlation	.364	.372	.395	.377
	Significance	.001	.001	.001	.001
AYCE Total	Pearson Correlation	.347	.351	.369	.354
	Significance	.001	.001	.001	.001

DISCUSSION

- All subscales that measured mealtime interactions were significantly associated with child behavior problems.
- Much of the focus of past research into the parent child feeding relationship is centered around how the child causes problems. This data shows that both on the child behavior and the actions of the parents are important in the relationship.

DISCUSSION Cont.

- Many children in sample were reported by their parents to be above the cutoff scores for the PSC-17 constructs. This means that many of the children in the sample have clinically significant behavior problems.
- Children with higher internalizing symptoms would not want to deal with the stress of the mealtime environment, resulting in higher scores of child resistance to eating. Parent aversion to mealtime scores higher as the parent would not want to put their child in an environment that causes stress.
- Children who have higher externalizing symptoms have trouble following rules, which leads to them having higher scores of child resistance to eating. Higher parent aversion to mealtime results from the parent not wanting to fight the child on the environment.
- Children with higher attention problems have higher child resistance to eating as they would resist a focused and structured mealtime. Parent aversion of mealtime also would be higher as they would not want to deal with the child's struggle to focus.
- Child problem behavior was reported the least when children were also reported to have positive mealtime environments. Teaching parents how to create these environments may result in a decrease in these behaviors.
- Psychologists should utilize this information to teach parents of children with feeding problems how handle problem child behavior, and how to interact at mealtimes to reduce feeding problems.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Most respondents were female, White, from 2-parent households, and of high socioeconomic background. Thus, there could be difficulty applying findings to diverse groups, including families from different cultural backgrounds, lower socioeconomic status, or single parent households.
- As information on child behavior and feeding relationship disturbance were self-reported by parents, there is also the possibility that parents may under or over report disturbance and child behavior.
- Future studies are recommended to investigate the marital status of parents in the reporting households to determine if this impacts the relationship between child behavior and parent feeding practices.
- It is also recommended to conduct this study with a more diverse sample to increase generalizability.

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