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TITLE: Screening for Unhealthy Parenting Behaviors in Pediatric Primary Care: Going Beyond the Presenting Parent

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Background: Some unhealthy discipline practices (e.g. spanking, threatening, humiliation) are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and precursors to child abuse. Health care providers should evaluate the parenting behaviors of both the presenting parent (PP) and other caregivers (OC), but this is an unmet goal likely due to a lack of screening instruments that are scalable to an office setting. An instrument with promising psychometric properties is the Quick Parenting Assessment (QPA); the QPA is internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha=0.79) and children with elevated QPA scores have a 9-fold increased risk for behavioral problems (manuscript under review).

Objective: To determine rates of unhealthy parenting behaviors for both the PP and OC using the QPA.

Design/Methods: In a clinic serving low-income, racially-diverse families, parents of children ($n=866$, 79.5% being the mother), ages six months to 10 years (median=2.6 years), completed the QPA. The QPA has 12 Yes/No questions and takes approximately one minute to complete. Seven questions assess the discipline practices of the PP and five questions assess the discipline practices of OC (from the perspective of the PP). The QPA screens for five unhealthy parenting behaviors in the PP and OC: excessive use of punitive discipline such as time-out, speaking angrily, threatening with physical punishment, physical punishment, and humiliating language such as calling the child naughty.

Results: PPs reported using unhealthy parenting practices (range 16.5% to 70.0%) more often than they reported for the OC (range 14.0% to 59.1%) for each of the five unhealthy parenting practices (Table); all of the differences were statistically significant (humiliating language $p=0.019$; all others $p<0.001$). Parenting concordance (PP "Yes"/OC "Yes" or PP "No"/OC "No") was present for over 75% of children. Parenting discordance (PP "Yes"/OC "No" or PP "No"/OC "Yes") ranged from 8.3% for humiliating language to 22.0% for threatening with spanking. For 1.7% to 4.0% of children, the PP was not using one of the five unhealthy parenting strategies, but the OC was (PP "No"/OC "Yes").

Conclusion(s): A brief parenting assessment instrument demonstrates promise to screen for unhealthy parenting behaviors for both the parent presenting in clinic and other caregivers. The screening tool could help health care providers efficiently determine which caregivers need parenting education and support. These findings have implications for ACEs screening and child abuse prevention in pediatric primary care.

Table: Rates of using five unhealthy discipline practices for the presenting parent and other caregivers.

Unhealthy parenting behaviors in the last 1-2 months	N	Presenting Parent (PP) "Yes"	Other Caregivers (OC) "Yes"	Both "No"	Both "Yes"	PP "Yes" OC "No"	PP "No" OC "Yes"
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Overuse of punitive discipline	886	620 (70.0)	524 (59.1)	234 (26.4)	492 (55.5)	128 (14.4)	32 (3.6)
Spoke angrily	881	284 (32.2)	178 (20.2)	562 (63.8)	143 (16.2)	141 (16.0)	35 (4.0)
Threatened spanking	882	323 (36.6)	169 (19.2)	539 (61.1)	149 (16.9)	174 (19.7)	20 (2.3)
Spanked	881	265 (30.1)	123 (14.0)	601 (68.2)	108 (12.3)	157 (17.8)	15 (1.7)
Humiliating language	881	145 (16.5)	124 (14.1)	710 (80.6)	98 (11.1)	47 (5.3)	26 (3.0)