



Compliance and Internalization in Preschool Foster Children



Brenda Jones Harden^{a,*}, Aimée Drouin Duncan^b, Colleen I. Morrison^b,
Carlomagno Panlilio^b, Robert B. Clyman^c

^a Department of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, United States

^b University of Maryland, College Park, United States

^c University of Colorado, Denver, CO, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 January 2015

Received in revised form 27 April 2015

Accepted 28 April 2015

Available online 5 May 2015

Keywords:

Foster care

Parenting

Compliance

Internalization

Preschool

Social development

ABSTRACT

Child compliance and internalization are socio-cognitive developmental processes which are critical for children's social outcomes in multiple arenas. These developmental processes are found to be compromised in maltreated children. The current study was designed to add to the extremely limited literature on compliance and internalization in maltreated children in foster care. Compliance and internalization tasks were administered to preschool foster children, videotaped and later coded. Through parent-report questionnaires completed by the foster parents and observations of the foster home, the relation of compliance/internalization to child behavior problems, foster care experiences, and the foster home environment was examined. Findings revealed that most children showed committed compliance, but over 50% of children exhibited "deviation" behaviors in the internalization task. HOME acceptance scores (via observation of parent and child in home setting) significantly contributed to children's compliance levels but did not significantly contribute to their internalization. Internalization was related to children's externalizing behavior problems. These findings are considered in the context of future research and practice with respect to young children in foster care.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The first years of life are marked by unparalleled physiological, neurological, and psychological development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Maltreatment that occurs in these early years can derail young children's development and may be detrimental to their long-term developmental outcomes. Further, foster care placement rates for maltreated children are highest during infancy and early childhood (Jones Harden & Klein, 2011), which may lead to even more challenges to young maltreated children's development. The research is unequivocal in that children in the U.S. foster care system are at increased risk for poor developmental outcomes (NSCAW, 2001), which may be related to their early functioning and/or the compromised environments in which they were reared prior to their foster care placement. Specifically, compared to children who do not experience maltreatment and subsequent placement in foster care, children in foster care demonstrate poorer social skills and higher rates of externalizing behavioral problems (Cheung, Goodman, Leckie, & Jenkins, 2011; Vanschoonlandt, Vanderfaellie, Van Holen, De Maeyer, & Robberechts, 2013).

However, there is a dearth of studies on other social-emotional processes in this population of children. Specifically, despite theory and research that highlight the salience of compliance and internalization as socialization goals for preschool children, there is extremely

limited research in this area with respect to maltreated children. Compliance can be defined as children's adherence to parental standards in general, whereas internalization can be considered children's compliance with parental standards in the absence of the caregiver (Feldman & Klein, 2003; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). Early compliance and internalization have implications for children's moral development, behavioral functioning, and mental health (Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). In fact, child noncompliance has been documented to be the primary reason parents pursue mental health treatment for their children (Chamberlain & Smith, 2003). Given that foster children show social-emotional deficits in other areas, it seems important to understand compliance and internalization in this population. The current study explores compliance and internalization among preschool aged foster children, the relation of these processes to children's behavior problems, as well as the influence of the foster home environment on compliance and internalization.

Attachment theory suggests that insensitive, unresponsive, or rejecting parenting during the first years of life, such as what is experienced by maltreated children, results in deficits in cognitive and social-emotional functioning (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Belsky, Rovine, & Taylor, 1984; Egeland & Farber, 1984). Children who experience insecure attachment lack concurrent experiences of positive social interactions with their caregivers (Stayton, Hogan, & Ainsworth, 1971). Thus, maltreated children may be unable to successfully integrate their caregivers' expectations for their behavior and to receive rewards for meeting those expectations, which may prohibit

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: bjharden@umd.edu (B.J. Harden).

their development of compliance and subsequent internalization (Emde, Biringen, Clyman, & Oppenheim, 1991; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Maccoby, 1992). Albeit very limited, there is evidence that maltreatment results in maladaptive responses to these compromised child–caregiver interactions that affect children's compliance and internalization (Koenig, Cicchetti, & Rogosch, 2000; Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986).

Although to our knowledge there is no study which examines compliance with and internalization of parental standards for maltreated children in foster care, from a theoretical standpoint, these constructs may be even more complex among this group of children. It is likely that children's emotional connection to their foster parents may be attenuated by factors such as duration of the current placement, the number of prior foster homes, and whether the child is related to the foster caregiver (e.g., has had a long-standing relationship with the foster caregiver). There is emerging evidence that these factors do have an impact on the foster home environment and associated child outcomes (Casanueva et al., 2013; Dozier, Stoval, Albus, & Bates, 2001; Farmer, 2009).

Compliance behaviors emerge during the preschool years for typically developing children, as their self-regulation and memory capacities mature. For early compliance to be established, children must accurately interpret cues regarding caregiver standards, as well as contextual and environmental cues. First to appear is situational compliance, which occurs when children accept caregivers' standards cooperatively under their caregivers' supervision. Children exhibiting situational compliance are likely to need continuous supervision and coaching from caregivers to stay on task. Later, children exhibit committed compliance, as they begin to adopt caregivers' standards as their own, and do not need continuous monitoring or coaching by their caregivers to remain on task (Kochanska, 2002a). Committed compliance is the most advanced form of compliance, and is critical for the development of internalization. Internalization is exhibited when children consistently comply with their caregivers' standards independent of caregivers' presence or influence, which is taken as evidence that children have internalized caregiver standards as their own (Feldman & Klein, 2003; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995).

Children who do not accept their caregivers' standards may be noncompliant, which has implications for their short- and long-term social developmental trajectories and mental health (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990). Noncompliant behaviors may emerge from negative parent affect (Hoffman, 1982; Patterson, 1982), insecure attachment (Londerville & Main, 1981; Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978), and caregiver power assertion (Crockenberg, 1987; Kuczynski, Kochanska, Radke-Yarrow, & Ginius-Brown, 1987). Some research suggests that maternal responsivity can promote child compliance (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995) and may be particularly beneficial for the development of compliance in vulnerable children, such as those with difficult temperaments (Kochanska & Kim, 2013). Additionally, noncompliance can be a transitional state to compliance when caregivers follow children's episodes of noncompliant behaviors with successful negotiations around caregiver standards (Crockenberg & Litman, 1990). Noncompliance without caregiver negotiations may result in sustained noncompliance, which can render children vulnerable to a range of psychological difficulties throughout childhood and adolescence (Kochanska, 2002a,b; Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990).

Some studies have documented gender differences in children's level of compliance and internalization (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995; Kochanska, Aksan, & Koenig, 1995; Kochanska & Kim, 2013). This literature generally suggests that girls demonstrate more committed compliance, less situational compliance, and less passive non-compliance than boys. Research on maltreated children, however, has not consistently shown gender effects for these developmental processes (Koenig et al., 2000; Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986).

There is an abundance of literature linking negative parenting to adverse child outcomes (Karass & Walden, 2005), as well as studies

demonstrating the positive impact of caregiver behaviors, such as maternal positive attention and verbal strategies on children's compliance, internalization, and noncompliance (e.g., Feldman & Klein, 2003; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). However, in a study of Head Start children, all of whom were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1998) did not find a relation between parental positive behavior and child compliance, though they did find a relation between positive parenting and social competence constructs such as prosocial behaviors and emotion regulation. Such findings suggest that children from higher risk environments may display different patterns of compliance and internalization than their lower risk counterparts.

Very few studies have examined parenting processes and compliance and internalization in samples in which there is maltreatment. Crittenden and DiLalla (1988) revealed that maltreated children, particularly those subject to physical abuse, as young as 2-years-old exhibited a different form of compliance behavior, which they termed compulsive compliance. Compulsive compliance is demonstrated when children immediately comply with all caregiver requests, in order to minimize caregiver hostility and to maximize positive interactions (Crittenden & DiLalla, 1988; Hoffman, 1970); this form of compliance does not typically progress to internalization (Ryan et al., 1995). Other comparative studies revealed that maltreated children demonstrated higher levels of noncompliance with caregiver standards than non-maltreated children (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983; Koenig et al., 2000; Oldershaw, Walters, & Hall, 1986; Schindler & Arkowitz, 1986). Another study suggested that abused children were more defiant of parental standards than non-abused children (Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986). Further, Koenig et al. (2000) observed differences in compliance and internalization processes by maltreatment type: whereas physically abused children displayed more compromised internalization, the internalization exhibited by neglected children was similar to their non-maltreated counterparts. Together, these studies suggest that compliance in maltreated children may develop and operate in a pattern which is inconsistent with the compliance and internalization patterns exhibited by children reared in non-maltreating environments.

Attachment theory and research also underscore the contribution of compromised parent–child relationships to the development of problem behaviors in early childhood and beyond (Fearon & Belsky, 2011). There has been substantial research on problem behaviors, particularly those in the externalizing arena, during the preschool period, highlighting extreme variations in children's development of self-regulation, social competence, and emotional expression (Campbell, 2006). Extant evidence also suggests that children who manifest early onset behavior problems, particularly in the antisocial domain, are likely to exhibit problems that increase in rate and severity over time (e.g., Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002). Further, early externalizing behaviors are associated with concurrent and future difficulties including persistent delinquent behaviors (Bor & Sanders, 2004) and poor academic functioning (Campbell, 2002).

There is a high prevalence of externalizing behavior problems in preschool children from low-income backgrounds (Jones Harden et al., 2000). Because children in foster care generally fall into the low-income category and may have deleterious experiences in foster care, they have been found to have higher rates of behavior problems, particularly when the studies address older maltreated children (e.g., Administration for Children and Families, 2009). The limited evidence on young maltreated children in foster care does suggest higher rates of behavioral problems for this group considered in the context of community samples of non-maltreated children who are not in foster care (Lawrence, Carlson, & Egeland, 2006; Rogosch, Cicchetti, & Aber, 1995; Stahmer et al., 2009). In addition to the impact of foster care experiences (e.g., instability, aspects of the home environment (e.g., parents' cognitive stimulation and emotional support) have been found to be related to preschool foster children's

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/345965>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/345965>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)