Identifying Preschool Age Protective Factors in the Development of Borderline Personality Disorder: A Prospective Investigation

Objective
Despite a growing literature detailing early childhood risk factors for borderline personality disorder (BPD), few studies have examined protective factors that might mitigate the effects of those risk factors. The current study examined whether three preschool-age characteristics - impulsivity, emotional lability, and initiative-taking - moderated the relationship between preschool-age risk factors and adolescent BPD symptoms.

Method
We analyzed data in a sample (n=151) from the Preschool Depression Study, a longitudinal study with assessments from preschool (ages 3-6) through adolescence (ages 13-21). Preschool characteristics were assessed via parent report with the MacArthur Health and Behavior Questionnaire (Essex et al., 2002) and coding of observed Preschool Laboratory Temperament Assessment Battery tasks (Goldsmith et al., 1993). Several preschool risk factors were examined: adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), internalizing symptoms, and externalizing symptoms measured from clinical interviews. BPD symptoms (and presumptive diagnosis) in adolescence were measured using the Borderline Personality Features Scale for Children (Crick et al., 2005).

Results
Observed emotional lability moderated the relationship between preschool internalizing symptoms and adolescent BPD symptoms (Beta=1.72, p=.03), with lower lability exerting a protective effect against BPD risk for children with more internalizing symptoms. Parent-reported impulsivity moderated the relationship between preschool ACEs and presumptive BPD diagnosis (Beta=-0.85, p=.04), with lower impulsivity exerting a protective effect against BPD risk for children with fewer ACEs. Parent-reported emotional lability emerged as a significant predictor of adolescent BPD symptoms (Beta=1.38, p=.05).

Conclusion
This is one of the first studies to identify potential protective factors in BPD development using longitudinal data and observational assessments. Greater emotion and behavior regulation as early as the preschool period could help reduce risk for developing BPD. These findings necessitate future research on such protective factors, and on early childhood interventions that could foster these factors to mitigate the effects of less malleable risk factors. " Kiran Boone

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1. The reader will identify gaps in the current literature on BPD development.
2. The reader will analyze the results of the current study and evaluate their implications for BPD prevention.
3. The reader will generate potential future directions in research concerning protective factors and early childhood intervention in BPD development.

