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IMPLICATIONS OF MATERNAL EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY ON OBSERVED PARENTING BEHAVIORS: THE CONTEXT OF PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

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Abstract

Introduction: Substance Use Disorder (SUD) represents a risk factor for parenting, for adult-child relationships, and for child development. Empirical studies report high rates of psychopathology and deficits in Executive Functions (EF) in individuals with SUD, which could further compromise parenting behaviors. Despite this, previous studies did not examine the associations between these two areas of parental functioning and observed parenting behaviors. The present study aimed to investigate the associations between parental EF, psychopathology, and observed parenting behaviors in the context of SUD.

Methods: Twenty-nine mothers with SUD participated to the study. The mothers were assessed with respect to EF (ENB-2), psychopathology (SCL-90-R) and quality of parenting behaviors (EA-Scales) during free-play interactions with their children.

Results: The results highlighted high rates of EF impairments and psychopathology in the participants, as well as poor quality parenting behaviors. Regression analyses highlighted that EF was significantly associated with observed maternal sensitivity, whereas the role of psychopathology was only marginally significant.

Conclusions: Impairments in EF play a significant role in determining the quality of parenting behaviors in the context of maternal SUD. Clinical implications of the findings in terms of prevention and treatment are discussed.