Background

- Mothers who hold attitudes and beliefs about themselves, others, and child rearing that match those shared by substantiated child abusers are at both elevated risk for child physical abuse and compromised parenting.
- These attitudes and beliefs include rigidity, distress, low ratings of self-worth, and inappropriate expectations for children’s development.
- Assessments of attitudes and beliefs that indicate risk for child physical abuse can also illuminate levels of social desirability, or mothers who want to be viewed in a positive light.
- Social desirability may also indicate underlying psychopathology that can compromise the provision of supportive parenting.
- In the current study, we consider if high levels of social desirability, captured as “faking good” on an assessment of attitudes and beliefs about one’s self, others, and child rearing, can uniquely be associated with compromised parenting.

Method

Sample. N = 92, M income = $11,237

Drawn from a longitudinal multisite evaluation of Early Head Start (EHS).

Measures

- High endorsement of attitudes and beliefs that align with those shared by substantiated child abusers indicates risk for abuse and compromised parenting.
- Faking good: A “distortion” index of the CAPI that indicates exaggeration of positive attributes.
- Abuse scale: clinical threshold of risk for abuse is a score of 166+.

Three-Bag Task: maternal sensitivity, stimulation of cognitive development, positive regard, detachment, intrusiveness, negative regard were observed during a parent-child free play task at child age 14-months. Scores ranged from 1-7.

Results

### Subgroups

- **1. “Faking good” (n = 40)**
  - Any score on Abuse scale, elevated “Faking Good”
- **2. Valid, low risk (n = 33)**
  - Scores below clinical cutoff on Abuse scale, not elevated “Faking good”
- **3. Valid, high risk (n = 19)**
  - Scores above clinical cutoff on Abuse scale, not elevated on “Faking Good”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Parenting Differences</th>
<th>Faking good (n = 40)</th>
<th>Valid, low risk (n = 33)</th>
<th>Valid, high risk (n = 19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-month parenting</td>
<td>M(SE)</td>
<td>M(SE)</td>
<td>M(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>4.68 (.22)</td>
<td>5.63 (.16)</td>
<td>5.19 (.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stim. Of Cog. Development</td>
<td>3.71 (.16)</td>
<td>4.91 (.19)</td>
<td>4.50 (.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Regard</td>
<td>3.63 (.20)</td>
<td>4.69 (.22)</td>
<td>4.06 (.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>1.82 (.20)</td>
<td>1.19 (.08)</td>
<td>1.56 (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusiveness</td>
<td>2.26 (.20)</td>
<td>1.75 (.15)</td>
<td>2.06 (.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Regard</td>
<td>1.40 (.11)</td>
<td>1.13 (.07)</td>
<td>1.50 (.32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Matching subscripts denote differences significant at p < .01

### Descriptive Information

- **Faking good** were more likely teen moms compared to Valid, low risk group.
- **Valid, high risk** had lower income and were more likely ever homeless than **faking good**.
- **Valid, high risk** had highest levels of **depressive symptoms**.
- **Faking good** reported the lowest levels of **family conflict**.
- **Faking good** had the least **safe home environments** (HOME assessment).

Discussion

Results contribute to current paucity of evidence on the parenting behaviors of mothers who endorse high levels of attitudes and beliefs that indicate risk for child physical abuse, and extend this area to consider how exaggeration of positive attributes contributes to parenting behaviors.

Conclusions

1. Mothers who exaggerate positive attributes and beliefs are at **elevated risk** for exhibiting unsupportive parenting behaviors.
2. The **behavioral profile of mother found to be “faking good”** is similar to, and in some domains, less positive than, mothers who endorse high levels attitudes and beliefs shared by child abusers.
3. CAPI assessments deemed “unsalable” due to high levels on this distortion index should **reconsider the interpretation of this index as a risk** this to parenting and children’s development.
4. Future research should probe these exaggerations of positive attributes, including the sequelae, correlates, and consequences such exaggeration as it relates to child maltreatment and development.

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