

The "Faking Good" Index of the Child Abuse Potential Inventory: Associations with Parenting Behaviors

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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.
- These attitudes and beliefs manifest themselves during parent-child interactions as **control, harshness**, and **low positivity**.
- 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 that match those shared by known child abusers, are uniquely associated with compromised parenting.**

Method

Sample. $N = 92$, M income = \$11,237
Drawn from a longitudinal multisite evaluation of Early Head Start (EHS).

Measures

Child abuse potential Inventory: self-report assessment of distress, rigidity, unhappiness, problems with child and self, problems with family and others (Milner, 1986).

- 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

- "Faking good" ($n = 40$)
 - Any score on Abuse scale, elevated "Faking Good"
- Valid, low risk ($n = 33$)
 - Scores below clinical cutoff on Abuse scale, not elevated "Faking good"
- Valid, high risk ($n = 19$)
 - Scores above clinical cutoff on Abuse scale, not elevated on "Faking Good"

Mean Parenting Differences

| | Faking good ($n = 40$) | Valid, low risk ($n = 33$) | Valid, high risk ($n = 19$) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 14-month parenting | M (SE) | M (SE) | M (SE) |
| Sensitivity | 4.68 (.22) _a | 5.63 (.16) _a | 5.19 (.28) |
| Stim. Of Cog. Development | 3.71 (.16) _{cd} | 4.91 (.19) _c | 4.50 (.26) _d |
| Positive Regard | 3.63 (.20) _{ef} | 4.69 (.22) _{eg} | 4.06 (.21) _{fg} |
| Detachment | 1.82 (.20) _h | 1.19 (.08) _h | 1.56 (.27) |
| Intrusiveness | 2.26 (.20) _i | 1.75 (.15) _i | 2.06 (.31) |
| Negative Regard | 1.40 (.11) _j | 1.13 (.07) _j | 1.50 (.32) |

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).

Summary of Results

- Mothers who "fake good" are not clearly differentiated from other moms based upon profile of demographic characteristics.
- Mothers who "fake good" are just as sensitive, detached, intrusive, and negative as *valid, high risk* mothers.
- Mothers who "fake good" are differentiated from *valid, low risk* mothers on every behavior.
- Mothers who "fake good" are distinguished from the *valid high risk* mothers in terms of lower positive regard and stimulation of cognitive development.

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

- Mothers who exaggerate positive attitudes and beliefs are at **elevated risk** for exhibiting unsupportive parenting behaviors.
- 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.
- CAPI assessments deemed "unusable" 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.
- 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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