What is this research about?

Previous studies have shown that children’s perceptions of their school environment are related to their academic outcomes and well-being. Less research has been focused on the importance of parents’ perceptions of school environment on child adjustment. Parental perception of school environment may be important for immigrants because schools are a central aspect of family adaptation. This study looks at the relationship between immigrant parents’ perceptions of school environment and the emotional and behavioural problems of their children.

What did the researchers do?

Interviews were conducted with over 500 immigrant parents whose children are between the ages of 4 and 13. The child was also interviewed if they were aged 11 to 13. The sample comes from the Greater Toronto Area and is ethnically Hong Kong Chinese, Mainland Chinese, and Filipino.

The researchers measured child emotional distress, child physical aggression, parental perception of school environment, family dysfunction, and parental depression. A number of other variables were also measured, including English fluency, relative living conditions, sex and age of child, and parental education.

What did the researchers find?

• More positive parental perception of school was associated with less emotional distress in children. However, this relationship disappeared after controlling for ethnicity, years in Canada, English fluency, and relative living conditions.
• If parents had more symptoms of depression the children were more likely to have emotional distress.
• More positive parental perception of school was associated with less physical aggression in the children.

What you need to know:

Parental perception of school environment is important to the well-being of the children of immigrant parents. Specifically, having more positive parental perception of school was associated with less emotional distress and less physical aggression in the children. Emotional distress was higher in children whose parents had more symptoms of depression.
aggression in the children.

- Parental perception of school varies across ethnic groups.
- Greater physical aggression in the children was associated with being male, 4-6 years of age, and living with a parent with more symptoms of depression.

How can you use this research?

This research can help inform efforts to improve immigrant adaptation and address immigrant children’s mental health. This information is especially relevant for educators and school officials working to improve the relationship between immigrant parents and their children’s school.

About the researchers

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Evidence Exchange Network (EENet; formerly OMHAKEN) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots in the field of mental health and addictions in Ontario. EENet actively promotes the use of research evidence in decision-making by supporting engagement and connections between researchers and mental health and addictions stakeholders across Ontario. EENet works to develop targeted KT products and tools and supports interactive exchanges. It is supported by the Ontario Government and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. This summary was written by Karl Smyth.

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