The Relations between Parentification, Psychological Health, Stress, and Academic Performance among African American Young Adults

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Introduction

Background

Parentification is a form of neglect. This terminology was first developed in 1967 by family systems theorists (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 2014; Minuchin et al.,1967). Age-appropriate responsibilities are not harmful until the tasks become overwhelming, and the child neglects one's own basic needs to cater to those of their parents (Hooper et al., 2020). A child may also have to serve as a confidante, the main outlet for providing emotional support to parents, which can have a detrimental impact on adulthood (Khafi et al., 2014). African American families have a stronger sense of obligation and expectations of caregiver's roles and household responsibilities (Schmitz, & Tyler, 2016). Parentification and its impact differ across ethnic groups.

Aims of the Research

The aims of this research were to explore the relationships between parentification and psychological health, stress, and academic performance among African American young adults. This research aims to contribute to culturally sensitive understanding of the well-being of African American young adults and to inform culturally sensitive prevention and intervention strategies.

Hypotheses

1) There would be a positive correlation between parentification and psychological health.
2) There would be a positive correlation between parentification and perceived stress.
3) There would be a negative correlation between parentification and academic motivation.

Key References

Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. & Spark, G.M. (2014). *Invisible Loyalties*. Taylor & Francis.

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Method

Research Design

A cross-sectional study design was used to infer the relationship between past childhood parentification experience and current psychological health, perceived stress, and academic motivation. Convenience sampling was used, and participants were recruited from a Historical Black University located in the South Atlantic Region. The online survey was created using the Qualtrics software. The consent form was presented online before the survey began. No IP addresses and identifying information were collected except for student IDs to track extra credit.

Participants

- 157 survey responses from African Americans
- **Age:** Range 18-30 (M=20.31; SD=2.82)
- **Gender:** 79.6% (125) females, 19.1% (30) males, 1.9% (3) cisgender, .6% (1) transgender/gender variant, and 1.3% (2) non-binary
- **Classification:** freshmen 40.8% (64), sophomore 7.0% (11), junior 14.6% (23), senior 35.7% (56), graduate gtudent 1.3% (2), and other 0.6% (1).
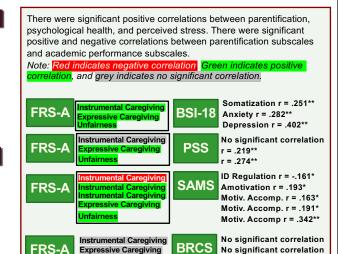
Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using the following instruments. Proper psychometrics were obtained.

Filial Responsibility Scale—Adult (FRS-A)	Brief Symptom Inventory-18 (BSI-18)	Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	Short Academic Motivation Scale (SAMS)	Brief Resilient Coping Scale (BRCS)
range between α=.73 and α=.89 (Instrumental Caregiving, Expressive Caregiving, Unfairness subscales)	range between α=.84 and α=.93 (Somatization, Anxiety, Depression subscales and the Global Severity Index (GSI)	α=.67	ranged between α=.62 and α=.89 (Intrinsic motivation to know and learn, intrinsic motivation towards achievement and accomplishment, intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation and engagement, extrinsic motivation through rewards and constraints, introjected regulation, internalization of extrinsic motives, and amotivation subscales)	α=.72

Analyses were done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-27). Pearson product movement correlations were used to examine the relationship between parentification, psychological health, stress, and academic performance.

Results

There were significant positive correlations between parentification, psychological health, and perceived stress. There were significant positive and negative correlations between parentification subscales and academic performance subscales.

Note: Red indicates negative correlation. Green indicates positive correlation, and grey indicates no significant correlation.

| FRS-A | Instrumental Caregiving / Expressive Caregiving / Unfairness | BSI-18 | Somatization r = .251** Anxiety r = .282** Depression r = .402** |

| FRS-A | Instrumental Caregiving / Expressive Caregiving / Unfairness | PSS | No significant correlation r = .219** r = .274** |

| FRS-A | Instrumental Caregiving / Instrumental Caregiving / Instrumental Caregiving / Expressive Caregiving / Unfairness | SAMS | ID Regulation r = -.161* Amotivation r = .193* Motiv. Accomp. r = .163* Motiv. Accomp. r = .191* Motiv. Accomp r = .342** |

| FRS-A | Instrumental Caregiving / Expressive Caregiving / Unfairness | BRCS | No significant correlation No significant correlation r = -.184* |

Discussion

Emotional caregiving and inappropriate age responsibilities can lead to excessive distress in youths (Boumans & Dorant, 2018).
- Our findings also point to the positive correlation between parentification and psychological health and stress. Therefore, our first and second hypotheses were supported. This indicates that individuals who report higher levels of parentification tend to experience more psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, somatic symptoms and have more perceived daily stress.
- However, parentification was largely positively correlated with academic motivation, except individual regulation. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. Education in African American families symbolizes honor and respect and is a way to make African American families feel accomplished in life (Gilford & Reynolds, 2011).

One limitation of the study is that majority of participants have a higher education and are female. Future studies can examine these relationships among African Americans from different education levels with balanced gender. Community services can capitalize on the strengths of African American youth and provide culturally sensitive support.

PURPOSE
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