Co-occurring Trajectories of Depression and Social Anxiety in Childhood and Adolescence: Interactive Effects of Positive Emotionality and Domains of Chronic Interpersonal Stress

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Deficits in positive emotionality (PE) have been implicated in the etiology of both social anxiety and depression; however, factors that contribute to divergent social anxiety and depression outcomes among youth low in PE remain unknown. Extant research suggests that parent-child stress and peer stress demonstrate differential patterns of associations with social anxiety and depression. Thus, the present study examined prospective interactive effects of PE and chronic parent-child and peer stress on simultaneously developing trajectories of social anxiety and depression symptoms among 543 boys and girls (age 8-16 at baseline, M[SD] = 11.94[2.32] 55.6% female). Parents reported on youth PE at baseline. Domains of chronic interpersonal (parent-child and peer) stress occurring between baseline and 18-months were assessed via child-report by trained interviews using the Youth Life Stress Interview (Rudolph and Flynn Development and Psychopathology, 19(2), 497-521, 2007). Youth completed self-report measures of depression and social anxiety every three months from 18- to 36- months (7 assessments). Conditional bivariate latent growth curve models indicated that main effects of parent-child stress, but not peer stress, predicted trajectories of depression in boys and girls. In girls, high levels of chronic interpersonal stress in both domains predicted stable, elevated trajectories of social anxiety symptoms regardless of PE. In boys, PE contributed to a pattern of differential susceptibility whereby boys high in PE were particularly susceptible to the effects of chronic interpersonal stress, for better or worse.

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