



Society for Research in Child Development  
Office for Policy and Communications  
1313 L Street, NW • Washington, DC 20005  
OFFICE: (202) 289-7905 • FAX: (202) 289-4203

**PRESS RELEASE**

Child Development (January/February issue)

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON February 7, 2007 (12:01 AM)**

Contact Information:

Andrea Browning  
Society for Research in Child Development  
Office for Policy and Communications  
(202) 289-7905  
abrowning@srcd.org

**Parents' Genes, Not Parents' Arguing, May Cause Children's Conduct Problems**

Children's conduct problems--skipping school, sneaking out of the house, lying to parents, shoplifting, or bullying other children--are a major source of concern for parents and teachers. As a potential cause of these problems, parents' marital conflict has received a lot of research attention. Now a new study finds that parents' fighting may not be to blame but rather that parents who argue a lot may pass on genes for disruptive behavior to their children.

The findings are published in the January/February 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

A group of researchers from the University of Virginia and several other universities looked at this question, studying 1,045 twins and their 2,051 children. Some of the parents were identical twins and shared all of their genes and some were fraternal and shared only half of their genes.

The study found that parents' fighting is not likely a cause of children's conduct problems. On the other hand, parents' genes influenced how often they argued with their spouses and these same genes, when passed to their children, caused more conduct problems.

"This study suggests that marital conflict is not a major culprit, but genes are," said K. Paige Harden, the lead researcher and graduate student at the University of Virginia. "Our findings have potential implications for treating conduct problems: Focusing on a child's parents, as is common in family therapy, may not be as effective as focusing on the child."

The study was supported, in part, by grants from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression.

#

Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 1, *Marital Conflict and Conduct Problems in Children-of-Twins*, by Harden, KP, Turkheimer, E, and Emery, RE (University of Virginia), D'Onofrio, BM (Indiana University), Slutske, WS (University of Missouri), Heath, AC (Washington University, St. Louis), and Martin, NG (Queensland Institute of Medical Research). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.