

POSTER

PROTECTING CHILDREN: IS THE BEHAVIORAL IMMUNE SYSTEM (BIS) RELATED TO OVERPROTECTIVE PARENTING?

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ABSTRACT

The Behavioral Immune System (BIS) comprises psychological mechanisms that act as a first line of defense against pathogens. It detects the presence of potential health threats in immediate surroundings, facilitating the avoidance of objects and people. Behavioral immune responses are evident across a wide spectrum of human behavior. For instance, research indicates a positive correlation between BIS strength and social conservatism, as well as xenophobic attitudes. Individual differences in BIS reactivity are associated with preventive health behaviors, such as wearing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic or hand washing. Furthermore, it has been found that individuals perceiving themselves as more vulnerable to infections tend to prioritize the trait of obedience in children, which suggests an association between BIS and offspring-protective behaviors.

We investigate this assumption in a correlational study ($N = 1417$). Specifically, we examine whether behavioral immune system indices, namely germ aversion and perceived infectability, are positively related to overprotective behaviors in the context of parenting. Additionally, we aim to determine whether this relationship is stronger among women compared to men, given that women generally invest more in their offspring. Our results are discussed in the context of the evolutionary basis of parenting behaviors and BIS flexibility.