

Publication

The Origins of Mental Toughness – Prosocial Behavior and Low Internalizing and Externalizing Problems at Age 5 Predict Higher Mental Toughness Scores at Age 14

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BACKGROUND: The concept of mental toughness (MT) has gained increasing importance among groups other than elite athletes by virtue of its psychological importance and explanatory power for a broad range of health-related behaviors. However, no study has focused so far on the psychological origins of MT. Therefore, the aims of the present study were: to explore, to what extent the psychological profiles of preschoolers aged five were associated with both (1) MT scores and (2) sleep disturbances at age 14, and 3) to explore possible gender differences. **METHOD:** Nine years after their first assessment at age five (preschoolers), a total of 77 adolescents (mean age: 14.35 years; SD = 1.22; 42% females) took part in this follow-up study. At baseline, both parents and teachers completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), covering internalizing and externalizing problems, hyperactivity, negative peer relationships, and prosocial behavior. At follow-up, participants completed a booklet of questionnaires covering socio-demographic data, MT, and sleep disturbances. **RESULTS:** Higher prosocial behavior, lower negative peer relationships, and lower internalizing and externalizing problems at age five, as rated by parents and teachers, were associated with self-reported higher MT and lower sleep disturbances at age 14. At age 14, and relative to males, females had lower MT scores and reported more sleep disturbances. **CONCLUSION:** The pattern of results suggests that MT traits during adolescence may have their origins in the pre-school years.

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