Although externalizing behavior problems are the most common problems in childhood, most remain untreated. Identifying factors related to treatment use can help close the gap between need and utilization. This study examined how the severity of a child’s behavioral symptoms moderates the relationship between parents’ perceptions of treatment effectiveness and the likelihood of using offered treatments. Participants were 182 parents of three to eight year old children attending primary care pediatric visits in five Midwestern community-based practices. Parents completed questionnaires rating the perceived effectiveness of the treatment, likelihood of utilizing the treatment, and the Pediatric Symptom Checklist. Separate linear regressions were conducted for four treatment types. Child behavior moderated the relationship between parental perceived effectiveness and likelihood to use prescription medication, \( p < .05 \). Parents of children with more severe behavior problems were more likely to use prescription medication than parents of children without severe behavior problems, and likelihood to use prescription medication had a weaker relationship with believing it will work than for other parents. For parents of children with less severe behavior problems, belief in the effectiveness of prescription medication was positively associated with likelihood to use. All other regressions were not significant. The impact of perceived effectiveness of prescription medication on likelihood to use it varies depending on the severity of a child’s behavioral symptoms. Parents of children without a clinically-significant behavior problem need to
believe in prescription medication’s effectiveness in order to increase their likelihood to use it.
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