Children with different disabilities may have different characteristics in mastery motivation, however, the characteristics of children with expressive language delay (ELD) during early childhood are largely unexplored. The study investigated whether children with expressive language delay have differences on mastery motivation comparing with typically developing children (TD), as well as the predicting effects of mastery motivation on parenting stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

Forty children with expressive language delay, thirty-six children with typically developing children (age from 1.5 to 4 years old), and their caregivers, living in northern Taiwan, were recruited. The Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development-Third Edition (Bayley, 2006) were used to assess children’s cognitive and expressive language abilities. Children’s instrumental aspects including object-cognitive, gross motor, social interaction, expressive aspects of mastery motivation, and parenting stress, psychological symptoms were rated by their caregivers.

Univariate analysis of covariance showed that children with ELD had lower social motivation with adults and children than TD ($F$s = 5.46, 5.48, $ps < .05$), whereas, there were no significant differences on other aspects of motivation. Multiple regression analyses indicated that children’s mastery motivation of ELD had significantly association with their parenting stress ($F$s = 2.37~ 3.93, $ps < .055$), particularly the social motivation negatively predicted parenting distress indices of parental distress and parent-child interaction dysfunction ($\beta$s = -.51, -.48; $ts$ = -2.36, -2.96, $ps < .05$) after controlling children’s ability. However, children’s motivation had no direct predicting effect on parental anxiety and depressive symptoms.
Children with expressive language delay have higher risk on low social motivation and their social motivation associated with parenting stress. It could have important implication for improving children’s social motivation to decrease parenting stress.