Examining the Relationship Between Maternal Childhood Maltreatment and Parenting Among First-Time Mothers

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Background and Purpose: Child welfare research emphasizes the impact childhood maltreatment experiences can have on future parenting beliefs and behaviors as an area of focus for prevention and intervention within the field. This study furthered the current understanding of the mechanisms through which intergenerational transmission of maltreatment occurs by examining the mediational role played by parenting self-efficacy among first-time mothers. Rooted in Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory, this study positioned parenting self-efficacy as a mediator (M) between maternal childhood maltreatment experiences (X) and parenting stress and behaviors (Y). Beyond testing indirect effects through parenting self-efficacy, this study also examined the direct effects of different types of childhood maltreatment on parenting stress and behaviors.

Methods: Performing secondary data analysis on the Predicting and Preventing Neglect in Teen Mothers Study (2001-2007), the present longitudinal study utilized data collected from 522 first-time mothers across four geographic regions of the United States during the prenatal period as well as at the following infant age intervals: 6, 24, and 30-months old. Both indirect and direct effects of maternal childhood maltreatment on parenting outcomes were tested through a series of multiple linear regression analyses. Sobel testing was utilized to test the significance of mediation.

Results: Partial mediation was established between emotional neglect and parenting stress while full mediation was established for pathways regarding physical neglect and parenting stress, and physical abuse and parenting stress. Experiences of emotional neglect and physical neglect each individually predicted lower levels of parenting self-efficacy. Opposite of the expected direction, physical abuse predicted higher levels of parenting self-efficacy. Higher parenting self-efficacy predicted lower levels of parenting stress. Regarding direct effects, emotional neglect during childhood significantly predicted higher levels of parenting stress. Physical abuse during childhood significantly predicted lower levels of demonstrating/physical teaching, one of the four specific parenting behaviors measured during mother-infant interactions.