

Abstract

Child maltreatment has been associated with difficulties in parenting (Bailey, DeOliveira, Wolfe, Evans, & Hartwick, 2012) and children of abused mothers have been found to be at risk of emotional and behavioral mental health outcomes compared to children of mothers with no abuse history (Collishaw, Dunn, O'Connor, & Golding, 2007; Delker, Noll, Kim, & Fisher, 2014). However, research is limited in terms of studies that investigate mediators in the relationship between parental abuse and child psychopathology. In addition, the majority of past research has focused only on self-reported, maternal histories of abuse and on limited offspring outcomes (i.e. internalizing and externalizing symptoms). The current study examines the mediational role of parental psychopathology on offspring psychopathology in a sample of parents (mothers and fathers) with documented histories of childhood abuse and neglect. Using a prospective cohort design, parents with documented histories of childhood abuse and neglect during 1967–1971 were matched with non-maltreated parents. Potential mediators (parent Major Depressive Disorder [MDD], parent Dysthymia, parent Generalized Anxiety Disorder [GAD], parent Posttraumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD], parent Alcohol Abuse/Dependence, and parent Drug Abuse/Dependence) were assessed in young adulthood, approximately 22 years after incidents of abuse and neglect. In 2009 and 2010, the parents' offspring (Mage = 22.3) were assessed for Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, Alcohol Abuse/Dependence, and Drug Abuse/Dependence with standardized assessment techniques. Logistic regression was used to test bivariate relationships and the Sobel test was used to test the significance of mediation effects. The results of the current study indicated that there was a differential impact of parent childhood abuse and neglect and parent psychopathology on child versus adult offspring psychopathology. In child offspring, parent childhood abuse and neglect overall, parent childhood sexual abuse, and parent childhood neglect all predicted multiple forms of child offspring psychopathology. However, there were no statistically significant findings for adult offspring psychopathology. In parents of adult offspring, there was a pervasive impact of parent childhood abuse and neglect on parent psychopathology. However, in parents of child offspring, parent childhood abuse and neglect only predicted increased parent MDD. In addition, there was evidence of differential effects of a parent's gender. Female parents with histories of childhood abuse and neglect and female with psychopathology had a more widespread effect on offspring

psychopathology than male parents. Lastly, the results of mediation analyses indicated that parent childhood neglect, specifically, increased child offspring depression clinically significant symptoms through its effect on increased parent Major Depressive Disorder. This type of prospective longitudinal data can help increase understanding of the long-term and intergenerational effects of childhood abuse and neglect. This examination of one potential mediator may help in the identification of important intervention and treatment targets that may help decrease negative outcomes in parents with histories of abuse and neglect and their offspring.