



Manifestation of Trauma: The Effect of Early Traumatic Experiences and Adult Attachment on Parental Reflective Functioning

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There are many risk factors that make the transition to parenthood difficult, even in the best of circumstances. One such risk factor is the experience of parental childhood trauma, which has the potential to affect the parent/child relationship, both in terms of attachment style parental reflective functioning. This study aims to expand on the line of research concerned with the effects that trauma has once that child transitions into adulthood and into parenthood by looking at the role that the experience of trauma and adult attachment has in relation to parental reflective functioning. This study assessed mothers ($N = 125$) by using the CTQ (childhood experience of trauma), ECR (adult attachment), and the PRFQ (parental RF). Our study found that in the presence of physical neglect, insecure attachment had a particularly deleterious effect on maternal reflective functioning. This relationship was not as strong in the absence of physical neglect.

Keywords: childhood trauma, adult attachment, parental reflective functioning, prementalization

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EARLY EXPERIENCES OF TRAUMA AND THE ATTACHMENT SYSTEM

The experience of trauma during childhood has been the subject of many empirical studies and its effects well documented, affecting different domains of mental health, and general wellbeing (Lieberman and Van Horn, 2008; Spratt et al., 2012). Consequently, clinical and empirical interest continues to drive research on the effects of trauma on subsequent generations, as it has proven to be more complex than previously thought. As a result, there has been specific focus on the parent/child relationship and how trauma specifically affects parenting in adult survivors of child abuse and neglect (Bottos and Nilsen, 2014). Research in this area has important implications in terms of how different service providers approach survivors of traumatic experiences in terms of parenting, attachment styles, and early childhood interventions, as childhood maltreatment is more likely to occur during essential moments of childhood development and its long-term effects can be especially adverse in these particular areas (Ford and Courtois, 2009).

Attachment theorists have posited that early relational experiences in childhood directly affects the organization of the attachment system, providing the working models on which later relationships will eventually be developed (Fonagy et al., 2002; Slade et al., 2005). In this context, exposure to childhood trauma, specifically trauma perpetrated by primary caretakers or under their care, can be detrimental to children's attachment (Carlson et al., 1989). Insensitive caregiving and maltreating behaviors have been implicated in the development of attachment