Patterns of Associations between Child Maltreatment, Maternal Childhood Adversity, and Maternal Mental Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study in Tirana, Albania

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Abstract : Objectives: There have recently been increasing calls to better understand the intergenerational transmission of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). In particular, little is known about the links between maternal (ACEs), maternal stress, maternal depression, and child abuse against toddlers in countries in South-East Europe. This paper, therefore, aims to present new descriptive data on the epidemiology of maternal mental well-being and maternal ACEs in the capital of Albania, Tirana. It also aims to advance our understanding of the overlap between maternal stress, maternal depression, maternal exposure to ACEs, and child abuse toward two-to-three-year-old. Methods: This is a cross-sectional study conducted with a representative sample of 328 mothers of two-to-three-year-olds, recruited through public nurseries located in 8 diverse socio-economic and geographical areas in Tirana, Albania. Maternal stress was measured through the perceived stress scale ($\alpha = 0.78$); maternal depression was measured via the patient health questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.77$); maternal exposure to ACEs was captured via the ACEs international questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.77$); and child maltreatment was captured via ISPCAN ICAST-P ($\alpha = 0.66$). The main outcome examined here will be child maltreatment. The paper will first present estimates of maternal stress, depression, and child maltreatment by demographic groups. It will then use multiple regression to examine associations between child maltreatment and risk factors in the domains of maternal stress, maternal depression, and maternal ACEs. Results: Mothers' mean age was 32.3 (SD = 4.24), 87.5% were married, 51% had one child, and 83.5% had completed higher education. Analyses show high levels of stress and exposure to childhood adversity among mothers in Tirana. 97.5% of mothers perceived stress during the last month, and 89% had experienced at least one childhood adversity as measured by the ACE questionnaire, with 20.2% having experienced 4+ ACEs. Analyses show significant positive associations between maternal ACEs and maternal stress $r(325) = 0.25$, $p = 0.00$. Mothers with a high number of ACEs were more likely to abuse their children $r(327) = .43$, $p = 0.00$. 32% of mothers have used physical discipline with their 2–3-year-old, 84% have used psychological discipline, and 35% have neglected their toddler at least once or twice. The mothers' depression levels were also positively and significantly associated with child maltreatment $r(327) = .34$, $p = 0.00$. Conclusions: This study provides cross-sectional data on the link between maternal exposure to early adversity, maternal mental well-being, and child maltreatment within the context of Tirana, Albania. The results highlight the importance of establishing policies that encourage maternal support, positive parenting, and family well-being in order to help break the cycle of transgenerational violence.

Keywords : child maltreatment, maternal mental well-being, intergenerational abuse, Tirana, Albania

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