

Beyond the Effect on Children: Investigation on the Longitudinal Effect of Parental Perfectionism on Child Maltreatment

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Abstract : Background: Perfectionistic strivings (PS) and perfectionistic concerns (PC) are associated with an increase in parental burnout (PB), and PB causally increases violence towards the offspring. Objective: To our best knowledge, no study has ever investigated whether perfectionism (PS and PC) predicts violence towards the offspring and whether PB could explain this link. We hypothesized that an increase in PS and PC would lead to an increase in violence via an increase in PB. Method: 228 participants responded to an online survey, with three measurement occasions spaced two months apart. Results: Contrary to expectations, cross-lagged path models revealed that violence towards the offspring prospectively predicts an increase in PS and PC. Mediation models showed that PB is not a significant mediator. The results of all models did not change when controlling for social desirability. Conclusion: The present study shows that violence towards the offspring increases the risk of PS and PC in parents, which highlights the importance of understanding the effect of child maltreatment on the whole family system and not just on children. Results are discussed in light of the feeling of guilt experienced by parents. Considering the insignificant mediation effect, PB research should slowly shift towards more (quasi) causal designs, allowing to identify which significant correlations translate into causal effects. Implications: Clinicians should focus on preventing child maltreatment as well as treating parental perfectionism. Researchers should unravel the effects of child maltreatment on the family system.

Keywords : maltreatment, parental burnout, perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns, perfectionism, violence

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