Mother’s Attributions Regarding Children’s Behavior and Maltreatment

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This study aimed to compare maltreating mothers and non-maltreating mothers on attributions and affects related to child behaviors. It also assessed how attributions predict affective and behavioral reactions to child behaviors. The study population comprised of a community-based sample of mothers with children aged 2 to 4 years (n = 238). Mothers’ attributions and affect were assessed using vignettes of child behavior. They also answered questions about their maltreating parenting behaviors and demographic factors such as childcare environments. Results highlighted that, as compared with non-maltreating mothers, maltreating mothers made more intentional and stable attributions to negative child behavior, and to report more anger and aversion. They also had a tendency to report less happiness toward positive child behavior. Additionally, path analyses documented a pattern of thinking-feeling-action linkages. It was revealed that attributions regarding children’s behavior influenced negative affect and that negative affect in turn predicted maltreatment. Finally, the usefulness of a cognitive approach to maltreating mothers, and the implications of the findings as a model for intervention are discussed.

Keywords: maltreatment, attributions, affects, mother, preventive intervention.

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