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PERCEPTIONS OF AGGRESSIVE PARENTAL BEHAVIORS AND THE IMPACT ON ADULT SELF-CONCEPT: THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED PARENTAL SUPPORT

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Every year in the United States two million children are subjected to maltreatment, and over 90% of parents use physical discipline on their children. Decades of research have shown that facets of self-concept in childhood are negatively impacted by maltreatment and physical discipline in childhood. Research on adults has shown similar negative impacts on self-concept due to the same childhood experiences. Researchers have also found that the quality of the parent-child relationship lessens the effects of childhood trauma. However, previous research has employed objective, or frequency-based definitions of maltreatment. Perhaps investigating individuals' perceptions of their parents' actions as "abusive" vs. "disciplinary" may better predict self-concept, than just the frequency of parental actions. The present study investigated how adults' perceptions of experiences with aggressive parental actions that occurred during childhood related to self-concept in adulthood, and to the perceived quality of the parent-child relationship. In addition, the role of perceived parent-child relationship quality as a mediator of the negative effects of child maltreatment was also re-evaluated by taking individuals' perceptions of parents' actions into account. Participants (N=120) completed three questionnaires, which measured the frequency and perceptions as "abusive" and "disciplinary" of parental actions, current self-concept, and the perceptions of the quality of the parent-child relationship during childhood. Results indicated that, overall, individuals' subjective perception of their parents' actions was a more important predictor of adult self-concept, than the frequency of the actions. The findings highlight the need to consider how individuals' perceptions of past experiences may be related to the extent those experiences affect functioning and adaptation.