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**Hostile Attribution, Harsh Discipline, and Child Well-Being: The Role of the Parent’s Own Trauma**

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It is well-established that harsh discipline is a contributor to both aggressive behavior in childhood and to child welfare system involvement. More recent complex modeling of child well-being indicates that this relationship is further exacerbated by parents’ beliefs that their children misbehave intentionally, frequently attributing hostile or oppositional intent to their children’s behavior. This hostile attribution bias (HAB) frequently consists of inappropriate developmental expectations for their children or a failure to recognize the child as a person in need of empathy. In turn, both of these types of misattribution have been implicated in child welfare system involvement.

One possible explanation for HAB is that the parents’ inability to take the perspective of their children and anticipate their needs and concerns has been fundamentally altered by their own experiences of child maltreatment. This experience in turn may result in the assumption of malintent by others, including one’s own children. However, little research has examined the link between a parent’s history of experienced child maltreatment, their empathy toward and developmental expectations of their children, their discipline practices, and their child’s aggressive behavior. Looking at a sample of approximately 1000 four-year-olds and their parents, this study, using the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect, analyzes this relationship utilizing structural equation modeling to test this relationship between the caregiver’s own maltreatment, problematic attribution, harsh parenting, and child well-being. Implications for practice in both child welfare and early childhood education practice will be discussed.