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Abstract

The objective was to examine pathways from child sexual abuse (CSA) and maternal mentalizing to child internalizing and externalizing difficulties and to test models of MRF as moderator of the relationships between CSA and child difficulties. The sample was comprised of 154 mothers and children aged 2–12 where 64 children had experienced CSA. To assess parental mentalizing the Parental Development Interview was rated with the Parental Reflective Functioning Scale. Child internalizing and externalizing difficulties were assessed with the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). Results indicate that there were significant inverse relationships between maternal mentalizing and child internalizing and externalizing difficulties. When maternal mentalizing was considered together with CSA, only maternal mentalizing was a significant predictor of child difficulties. Furthermore, maternal mentalizing moderated the relationship between CSA and child internalizing difficulties. These findings provide evidence of the importance of the parents' mentalizing stance for psychiatric symptoms of children aged 2–12, as well as children's recovery from CSA. The clinical implications of the findings are discussed.

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