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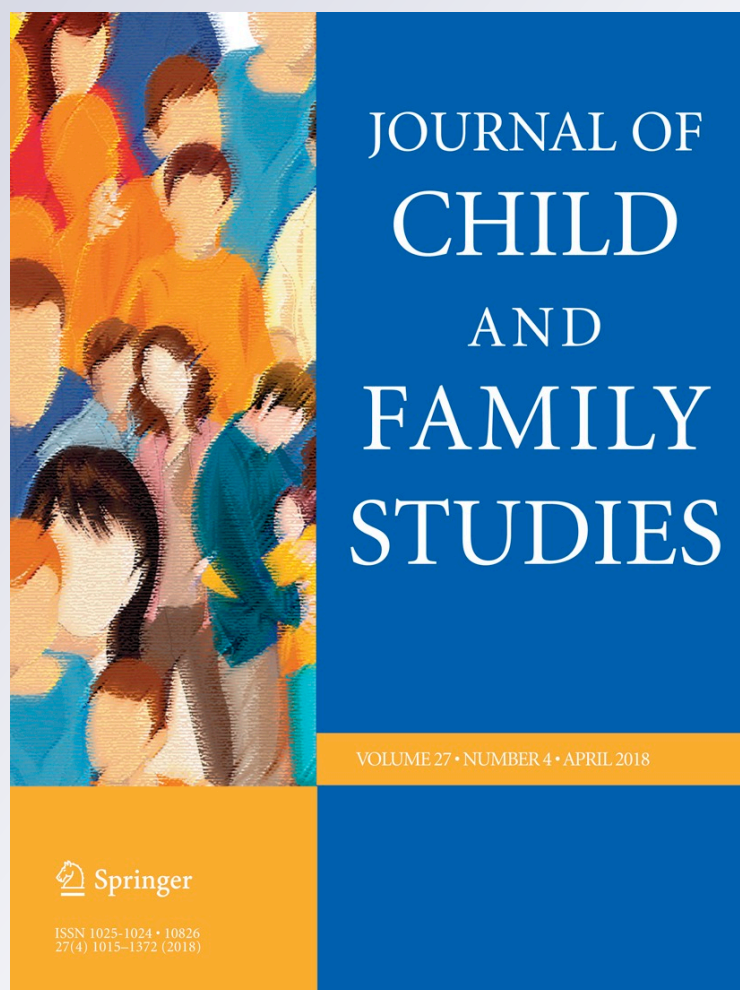
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Perceived Parental Acceptance-Rejection and Children's Psychological Adjustment: The Moderating Effects of Sex and Age

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Abstract Although numerous studies have confirmed the relation between parental rejection and the psychological adjustment of children, few have explored the potential moderating effects of children's age and sex on this relation, nor considered maternal and paternal rejection separately. In order to further examine this relation, psychological adjustment and perceived parental rejection were examined among 983 school children aged 9–18 years (54% girls). The Personality Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) were used. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted and post hoc analyses were performed to examine any significant interactions between the investigated variables. The results confirm that perceived rejection by both parents is significantly associated with several dimensions of children's psychological adjustment. Moreover, this relation was moderated by children's sex and age for some adjustment dimensions. Perceived parental rejection tended to have a more robust effect on daughters than on sons and on younger children (boys and girls) than on older children. In addition, maternal rejection contributed to a greater extent to the negative self-esteem and the negative self-adequacy of younger children compared to older children. Besides, paternal rejection contributed to a greater extent to the emotional instability and the negative self-adequacy of girls

compared to boys. Understanding this relation and its moderators at early stages can help design accurate prevention and intervention programs within a family setting. This knowledge will help professionals focus on specific and suitable adjustment dimensions according to a child's sex and at an appropriate stage of the developmental process, and help children avoid the development of future negative psychological outcomes.

Keywords Psychological adjustment · Children · Adolescent · Parental acceptance · Parental rejection

Introduction

Affection, caring, involvement and parental acceptance are elements of a positive relationship between parents and children promoting child adaptation and functioning as an extension of attachment (Fairbanks et al. 2013). Conversely, rejection, hostility, neglect, isolation, inconsistency, and indifference can facilitate the presence of psychological disorders, both internalized and externalized, such as depression or anxiety (Carrasco et al. 2014; Giauguzi and Giovazolias 2015), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Gau and Chang 2013) or aggressive behavior (Carrasco et al. 2009; Klahr et al. 2014). Moreover, meta-analyses of transcultural studies have consistently shown the negative effects of rejection on psychological adjustment (Khaleque 2015).

In the context of the interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory; Rohner 2004), formerly known as PARTheory, the acceptance-rejection construct (warmth dimension of parenting) has been proposed as the unifier of

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