



DOCTORATE IN CLINICAL AND COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Paternal Depression, Expressed Emotion and Child Emotional and Behavioural Problems

Author name & affiliation: Lucy Butler

Department of Clinical Psychology

College of Life and Environmental Sciences

Washington Singer Laboratories

University of Exeter

Exeter, EX4 4PQ

Supervisor 1: Dr Lamprini Psychogiou

Supervisor 2: Dr Heather O'Mahen

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Contents

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| | | |
|--------------|-------|----|
| Abstract | | 3 |
| Introduction | | 4 |
| Hypotheses | | 9 |
| Methods | | 9 |
| Results | | 15 |
| Discussion | | 17 |
| Conclusion | | 24 |
| References | | 26 |

Extended Appendices

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|----|
| A. Extended method | | 32 |
| B. Extended results | | 41 |
| C. Extended discussion | | 47 |
| D. Extended references | | 49 |
| E. Instructions for authors | | 50 |
| F. Dissemination plan | | 60 |

Abstract

Few studies currently exist which examine expressed emotion in depressed fathers, despite considerable evidence linking expressed emotion and depression in mothers. These findings are important as they indicate that mothers' depressed mood is associated with an increase in child-directed critical comments and a decrease in positive comments, which have been linked to poorer child emotional and behavioural outcomes. There are limited findings exploring how depressed mood may impact fathers' expressed emotion, and how this in turn may impact upon the child. This paper reports findings from part of a longitudinal study examining fathers with depression in the postnatal period. The aim of this study was to determine whether child emotional and behavioural problems at age 2 years were associated with increased critical comments and decreased positive comments made by fathers (N = 143). It was predicted that fathers who were depressed when their child was 3 months or 12 months old would make more critical comments and fewer positive comments about their children at age 24 months, and that fathers' critical comments would predict child emotional and behavioural problems at 24 months. Fathers' depression at 12 months was found to be significantly related to child emotional and behavioural problems at 24 months. The children of fathers who made more positive comments had fewer reported emotional and behavioural difficulties at 24 months. Fathers' positive comments were found to remain stable from 12 months to 24 months. There were no significant relationships found between fathers' depression and the frequency of positive or critical comments. This study has implications for increasing fathers' child-directed positive comments in order to prevent the development of child emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Keywords: Paternal depression; Expressed emotion; Child emotional and behavioural problems.

