

Couple relationship moderates anxiety and depression trajectories over the transition to parenthood

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Background

The importance of the couple relationship on the mother's and the father's psychological adjustment to the transition to parenthood has been pointed out in the recent literature. However, the direction of effects between these variables over the transition to parenthood has not been extensively explored. The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of the couple relationship on mother's and father's anxiety and depression symptoms trajectories over the transition to parenthood.

Methods

A sample of 129 couples (N=258) completed self-report measures of anxiety and depression symptoms and couple relationship at each trimester of pregnancy, at childbirth, and

at 3- and 30-months postpartum. Dyadic growth curve models were performed using multilevel modeling.

Results

Whereas anxiety and depression symptoms showed no moderation effect on couple relationship trajectories over the transition to parenthood, couple relationship moderated anxiety and depression symptoms trajectories over the postpartum postpartum period. In the presence of a less positive partner relationship fathers (only) had a steeper increase in anxiety symptoms from 3- to 30-months postpartum. In the presence of a more negative partner relationship both mothers and fathers had a steeper increase in depression symptoms from 3- to 30-months postpartum.

Conclusions

While mothers' and fathers' psychological adjustment seemed to have no moderating impact on their couple relationship changes over the transition to parenthood, mothers' and fathers' couple relationship had a moderating impact on their psychological adjustment changes over the postpartum period, and may be a key factor to improve prevention programs during the transition to parenthood.

Key messages:

- Couple relationship moderated anxiety and depression symptoms trajectories over the postpartum postpartum period.
- Anxiety and depression symptoms showed no moderation effect on couple relationship trajectories over the transition to parenthood.