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Perinatal emotional well-being, parental bonding and dyadic sensitivity in early mother-infant interactions

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Abstract

The quality of the early parent-child relationship is essential for the development of the child, and parental sensitivity plays a key role in early interactions. Several factors may affect the mother's ability to interact sensitively with the infant, including the mother's early relationship experiences with her caregivers and the presence of emotional distress in the perinatal period. The aim of the study was to evaluate the influence of parental bonding and different aspects of maternal perinatal psychological well-being on dyadic sensitivity at three months postpartum. At the third trimester of pregnancy (T1) and at three months postpartum (T2), 43 primiparous women filled in a series of questionnaires assessing symptoms of depression, anxiety and quality of the parental bond. At T2 mothers also completed a child temperament questionnaire and participated in the CARE-Index procedure. Results showed that maternal trait anxiety in pregnancy was predictive of lower dyadic sensitivity while maternal experience of a nurturing father in infancy was associated with less compulsiveness of the child. Conversely, childhood experience of an overprotective/controlling father predicted a reduced maternal responsiveness. These results underline the influence of the quality of the internalized early maternal relationships on her sensitivity in the current relationship with her child. The data also highlight the influence of maternal perinatal psychological well-being on the quality of the dyadic relationship. Overall the study results confirm the influence of intergenerational aspects on the quality of the mother-child relationship and underline the importance of early detection of maternal emotional distress in the perinatal period.