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Title: The Impact of Parenting on First-Time Mothers Mental Health and Sense of Competence: A Mixed-Method Study

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Abstract

Early adverse childhood experiences impact the psychosocial functioning of individuals when they become parents themselves including links to postnatal mental health problems. Previous research primarily focused broadly on attachments styles or the impact of abuse on parenting. This mixed-method study will look at both negative and positive day-to-day parenting interactions that mothers experienced with their own parents. A community sample of 212 first time mothers of infants under 12-months old completed questionnaires relating to perceptions of being parented, parenting stress, parenting sense of competence, postnatal depression and postnatal anxiety. 25 of these mothers were then interviewed 1:1 to explore at a deeper level the transition to motherhood and aspects of their own parenting that they draw upon. Quantitative data was analysed using PROCESS for moderating and mediating relationships and qualitative data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Results showed that both positive and negative experiences of being parented affect mothers' sense of competence and that this relationship is mediated by mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. Stress moderated some of these relationships. Reflexive thematic analysis generated themes explaining how mothers' made sense of and responded to their own experiences of being parented in order to manage their own mental health and develop their own parenting styles. These findings have implications for postnatal mental health services and parenting programs.

Keywords: parenting, postnatal, competence, mental health