

DOCTORATE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Research Paper

Title: Maternal Responses to Infant Stimuli in Pregnancy in Women with and without
Depression

Target journal:

Journal of Affective Disorders

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Statement of academic probity and professional practice:

“I certify that all material in this assignment / assessment which is not my own work has been identified and properly attributed. I have conducted the work in line with the BPS DCP Professional Practice Guidelines. This research contributes to the Overall DClInPsy degree.

Abstract

Background: Research suggests that prenatal depression is associated with disrupted maternal responses to infant stimuli, with depressed women not showing the bias towards distressed infants observed in non depressed women (Pearson, 2010). The current study examined depression related differences in women's self reported responses to infant stimuli, early in pregnancy, investigating if maternal responses in pregnancy are more associated with a reduced comforting response, or a heightened avoidant response.

Method: Women in this study were referred by community midwives as part of a cohort study. Pregnant women with clinical depression (n=38), and comparison non-depressed women (n=67), were exposed to images of distressed, neutral and happy infant faces. The women were asked to rate how they responded to the images, along three scales: wanting to comfort, wanting to turn away, and feelings of anxiety.

Results: Women with depression showed significantly different response patterns to women without depression. Women with depression were substantially more likely to be in the highest quartile for ratings of wanting to turn away from distressed infant faces (odds ratio 4.15, $p < .01$, 95% confidence intervals (CI) = 1.63-10.5). They were also substantially less likely to be in the highest quartile for wanting to comfort a distressed infant face (odds ratio .22, $p < .01$, 95% confidence intervals (CI) = .09-.54).

Conclusions: The findings from this study are consistent with both a heightened avoidant and a reduced comforting response towards distressed infants in depressed

pregnant women. This study provides further evidence that depression disrupts maternal preparations at a conscious level.

Keyword: Depression; Maternal Responsiveness; Self Report; Pregnancy; Prenatal; Perinatal.

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