DOCTORATE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Major Research Project

The Association Between Maternal Responsiveness and Child Social and Emotional Development

Trainee Name: Lara Best

Supervisors: Laura Miller, Research Associate, University of Bristol.

Dr. Rebecca Pearson, Post-doctoral Research Assistant, University of Bristol.

Target Journal: Journal of Family Psychology

Word Count: Research Paper: 7884 (excluding tables, figures and references)

Appendices: 5663

Declaration:

“I certify that the all the material in this manuscript 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”.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology University of Exeter.
Abstract

Introduction. A mother’s verbal and non-verbal behaviour towards her infant is known as maternal responsiveness (MR). Positive MR is associated with better child social and emotional development (SED). A mother’s ability to accurately recognise emotions is thought to enhance MR.

Method. Data from 1,122 mother-infant interactions from a longitudinal birth cohort study, was used firstly to examine whether positive MR at 12 months was associated with better child and adolescent SED, and secondly to explore whether better maternal facial and vocal expression recognition at 151 months was associated with positive MR and child SED. MR was measured using the Thorpe Interaction Measure (TIM) from observed mother-infant interactions and SED from questionnaire data adjusting for potential confounding variables. A test of facial expression recognition was used with vocal expression recognition additionally used in mothers.

Results. Logistic regression revealed that positive MR was associated with positive SED outcomes in childhood but there was little effect in adolescence. Positive MR was associated with mothers having better facial and vocal expression recognition at 151 months and these recognition skills were associated with children showing less emotional problems at 158 months independent of MR. Adjustments for confounding variables had no effect on these results.

Conclusion: These findings support the benefit of positive MR on a child’s SED in middle childhood. Further, the findings suggest that a mother’s facial and vocal expression recognition skills are important to both MR and a child’s SED. Limitations include subjective reporting of SED.

Keywords: Maternal Sensitivity, Maternal Responsiveness, Social and Emotional Development, Social Competence, Emotional Recognition
# Table of Contents

Cover Sheet 1  
Research Paper 3  
  Abstract 3  
  Introduction 4  
  Method 10  
  Results 17  
  Discussion 32  
  Conclusion 41  
  Acknowledgments 42  
References 43

Appendices 57  
Appendix A: Ethical approval email from University of Exeter 58  
Appendix B 59  
B1. Instructions to Authors (Literature Review) 59  
B2. Instructions to Authors (Research Manuscript) 63  
Appendix C 66  
C1: Social and Communication Disorders Checklist (SCDC) 66  
C2: The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) 67  
C3: The Diagnostic Analysis for nonverbal Accuracy 2 (DANVA2) 68  
C4: Carey Temperament Scales 70  
C5: Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EDPS) 75  
Appendix D: Test of confounder and outcome associations 76  
Appendix E: Regression analyses results for MR and additional SDQ subscales 77  
Appendix F: Regression analyses results for maternal emotional recognition and additional SDQ subscales 78  
Appendix G: Dissemination Strategy 79