Shared pleasure in early mother-infant interaction and subsequent child outcome

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Objectives

The aim of the study was to test the hypothesis that shared pleasure in early mother-infant interaction predicts subsequent better social competence as well as lower levels of emotional and behavioural problems in school-aged children.

Material and Methods

The sample was population based and consisted of mother-infant dyads participating in a larger longitudinal study on postnatal depression, breast-feeding and child well-being. The mothers were enrolled during their first pregnancy from the maternity health clinics in the city of Tampere, Finland (Tamminen, 1990). The depressive symptoms of the mothers were screened with the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale questionnaires (EPDS; Cox et al., 1987) during pregnancy (T1) as well as during the first week (T2) and at two months (T3) post partum. Two hundred and ten mothers participated in the study at time points T1 and T2 (Figure 1).

Feeding situations of 38 mother-infant dyads were videoed during home visits when the infants were 2-3 months old. The videoed sample comprised 20 mothers scoring high and 18 mothers scoring low in combined depressive symptomatology. However, the occurrence of SP sequences was not associated with the depressive status of the mothers. However, the occurrence of SP sequences was statistically significantly associated with younger maternal age: median age 25.5 years (SP+) vs 28.3 years (SP-), p = 0.023.

The occurrence and the duration of the SP sequences were statistically significantly associated with higher Social Competence scores in fathers’ reports and lower Total Problem scores in fathers’ reports, lower Externalizing Problems in both parents’ reports, lower Internalizing Problems in mothers’ reports and lower Total Problems in fathers’ reports, and lower Externalizing Problems in both parents’ reports and lower Total Problems in fathers’ reports (Figure 2).

The mean duration of the SP sequences was moderately correlated with Social Competence scores in fathers’ reports (Spearman’s rho = 0.50) and inversely correlated with Total Problem scores in mothers’ reports (Spearman’s rho = -0.35).

Results

SP sequences occurred in 16/38 (42%) of the segments in the total videoed sample and in 13/29 (45%) of the segments in the longitudinal sample. The occurrence and the duration of the SP sequences were not associated with the depressive status of the mothers. However, the occurrence of SP sequences was statistically significantly associated with younger maternal age: median age 25.5 years (SP+) vs 28.3 years (SP-), p = 0.023.

The occurrence of the SP sequences was statistically significantly associated with higher Social Competence scores in fathers’ reports and lower Total Problem scores in mothers’ reports. Indicative associations were detected also with lower Internalizing Problems in mothers’ reports, lower Externalizing Problems in both parents’ reports, lower Total Problems in mothers’ reports, lower Total Problems in fathers’ reports, lower Externalizing Problems in both parents’ reports and lower Total Problems in fathers’ reports (Figure 2).

The mean duration of the SP sequences was moderately correlated with Social Competence scores in fathers’ reports (Spearman’s rho = 0.50) and inversely correlated with Total Problem scores in mothers’ reports (Spearman’s rho = -0.35).

Conclusions

The observed associations between shared pleasure in the early mother-infant interaction and subsequent better competence and lower problem scores of the children provide preliminary support for the hypothesis. The findings need to be confirmed in a larger sample.

References


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