Parenting Stress as a Mediator in the Relationship between Postpartum Maternal Depressive Symptoms and Early Childhood Internalizing Behaviour

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CONCLUSIONS

Parenting stress at 6 months mediates the relationship between maternal mood at 3 months and child internalizing behaviour at 3 years

The mediation is observed for both the Total Stress score and the Parent-Child Dysfunction Interaction Subscale of the Parenting Stress Index

Early interventions targeting parenting stress could reduce the impact of maternal mood disturbance on early childhood internalizing behaviour

BACKGROUND

- Postpartum depressive mood symptoms are associated with increased internalizing behaviours in early childhood[1], which increase risk for mood, anxiety and substance use disorders in later life
- Maternal psychopathology has previously been shown to influence parenting stress[2] and higher parenting stress predicts higher childhood internalizing behaviour[3]
- Parenting stress is the perceived discrepancy between the demands of parenting and an individual’s coping resources. It is influenced by parent factors, child factors and the parent-child interaction. Higher parenting stress affects how individuals’ parent[4]

OBJECTIVES

- Does parenting stress at 6 months mediate the relationship between maternal mood symptoms at 3 months and child internalizing behaviour at 3 years?
- What impact do the different aspects of parenting stress (measured using PSI-SF subscales) have on this relationship?

MEASURES

- EPDS: Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale
- PSI-SF: Parenting Stress Index – Short Form
  - PD: Parental Distress Subscale
  - PCDI: Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction
  - DC: Difficult Child Subscale
- CBCL: Child Behavior Checklist (Internalizing T-score)

METHODS

Data from a longitudinal birth cohort (n= 191) assessed the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 month Maternal Mood EPDS</th>
<th>6 month Parenting Stress PSI-SF</th>
<th>3 year Child Internalizing CBCL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51 Missing Data</td>
<td>101 dyads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Defensive Responding (PSI-SF)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 ASD Diagnosis</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS I

Bivariate correlations demonstrated that mediation analyses could proceed with PSI-SF Total, PD and PCDI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPDS</th>
<th>PSI-SF Total</th>
<th>PD</th>
<th>PCDI</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>CBCL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPDS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI-SF Total</td>
<td>.423**</td>
<td>.451**</td>
<td>.329**</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.231*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>.775**</td>
<td>.773**</td>
<td>.421**</td>
<td>.407**</td>
<td>.407**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDI</td>
<td>.292**</td>
<td>.278**</td>
<td>.444**</td>
<td>.292**</td>
<td>.290**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>.357**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01

RESULTS II

Mothers of girls reported more mood symptoms than mothers of boys (t(105.14) = -2.383*), and maternal years of education was associated with maternal mood (r = -.260**) and total parenting stress (r = -.229**). As such, child sex and maternal years of education were included as covariates in all mediation analyses.

Early interventions targeting parenting stress could reduce the impact of maternal mood disturbance on early childhood internalizing behaviour.


Acknowledgements: This research was funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research to T.F. Oberlander (PI), #MOP 54490; MOP 86296; MOP 57837

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