Different amounts of protest in 4-month-old infants of depressed vs. non-depressed mothers

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Different amounts of protest in 4-month-old infants of depressed vs. non-depressed mothers

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Abstract

Amount of vocal protest was measured in 4-month-old infants of depressed vs. non-depressed mothers during 10 minute face-to-face interaction. The sample consisted of two groups of mothers with their infants: depressed (n=17) and non-depressed (n=49), in total N=66. Vocal protest was measured using PRAAT phonetic software and manual reliable coding. Results showed that infants of depressed mothers expressed a lower amount of vocal protest compared to infants of non-depressed mothers as measured in mean percentage of time (p <.001).

Background

A significantly heightened amount of protest has previously been reported for infants of depressed mothers during face-to-face interaction (Field, Healy, Goldberg, & Guthertz, 1990). The other studies have also reported a heightened amount of protest in infants of depressed mothers on a tendency level (Murray, Furr-Crowley, Hooper, & Cooper, 1996; Friedman, Bebee, Jaffe, Ross, & Triggs, 1999).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of N=66 primiparous mothers and their infants from the urban Copenhagen area with PPD group (n=17) and non-depressed group (n=49). Inclusion criteria were: Primiparous mother, healthy infant, mother at least 18 years of age, living in the Copenhagen area, normal hearing and vision abilities. Exclusion criteria were: Psychosis and/or presence of co morbidity disorder and abuse or any substances.

Measures

Depression status was measured using the short-report measure Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Status (EPDS) and the standardised psychiatric interview Present State Examination (PSE). Wing, Cooper, & Sauter, 1988, which is administered by a clinical psychologist as enrollment in both groups.

Procedures

Interaction took place according to a standardized design of Procedure Sartorius, 1974), which was administered by a clinical psychologist.

Depression status was measured

Contrary to previous findings, the results of the present study showed a lowered amount of protest in infants of depressed mothers, which would result in different amount of protest when different modalities are measured.

Sample characteristics might have affected the results. The depressed women in the present sample can be considered low-risk (Table 1), while Field has often used particularly high-risk samples. Interactions of high-risk infant-mother dyads are quantitatively and qualitatively different (Murray & Cooper, 1997; Field, 1967). Furthermore, it has been argued that there are different types of depressed mothers characterized by different behavior patterns in mother and infant (Cohn, Malats, Tronick, Cornell, & Lyons-Ruth, 1986; Tronick & Weinberg, 1997; Field, Hernandez-Rafel, & Dego, 2005). Infants of under stimulating depressed mothers have been found to receive less positive feedback from their mother (Cohn et al., 1986; Field et al., 1990). The infants of the disengaged mothers might turn passive and turn to self-regulation in time (Tronick & Weinberg, 1997).

Conclusions

Protest is a lowered amount of protest in infants of depressed mothers, while previous studies have detected higher amounts. The relatively small sample size of the depressed group should be taken into account.

The differences in age are relatively small, however an infant might experience many interactions on a daily basis, making the experience on which they base their behavior accumulate quickly. Finally, the infants of depressed mothers might as a group show both a heightened and a lowered amount of protest. Adopting Bebee’s mid-range model for interpretation would indicate that the different depressed samples are facing different types of regulatory differences. A heightened amount of protest would indicate that the infant is preoccupied with the interactive regulative while a lowered amount would indicate that the infant has turned to self-regulation (Beebe, Runtz, Sutor, & Kniblaeu 2005).