
MATERNAL REPRESENTATIONS AND MOTHER-CHILD INTERACTION IN THE PERINATAL PERIOD: EFFECTS OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY COMORBIDITY

L. Vismara¹, R. Tambelli², F. Odorisio², P. Marconi²

¹Department of Educational Sciences Psychology Philosophy, Faculty of Humanistic Studies, Cagliari, Italy ; ²Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Roma, Italy

Introduction: Post-partum depression is the most common complication of pregnancy in developed countries, affecting 10–15% of new mothers (McDonald et al., 2012). PPD can negatively impact a woman's wellbeing, maternal–infant interactions and child developmental outcomes from infancy through school age (Avan et al., 2010). Such conditions may be exacerbated by co-occurring anxiety symptomatology and perinatal stress (Brand, Brennan, 2009; Tambelli, Odorisio, 2013).

Objectives: Nevertheless, empirical data show incongruent effects of perinatal maternal mental health upon mother-child relationship and the child's health. We believe that maternal representations may contribute to understand such differences.

Aims: On such basis, the purpose of our research was to evaluate the influence of maternal representations on emotional availability during a free play interaction in the context of perinatal depression and anxiety comorbidity.

Methods: We administered to 120 first time mothers (mean age= 33.57; s.d.=4.82) and their babies (mean age=6.55; s.d.=.63), the following measures: the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (Cox, et al., 1987); the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger,1983); the Parent Stress Index – Short Form (Abidin, 1993) and the Maternal Representation Interview at Child's Birth (Tambelli et al., 2006). Finally, all mothers were video recorded during a free-play interaction with their child, assessed according to Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, 2000).

Results: Results showed significant different quality of maternal representations and mother-child interaction according to presence/absence of depression and/or anxiety.

Conclusions: The study shows the need to acknowledge the woman's emotion-regulation style that needs to be supported in the context of psychological malaise during the perinatal period.