

Exploring Mothers' Knowledge and Experiences of Attachment in the First 1000 Days of Their Child's Life

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Abstract : The rapid growth and development of an infant in the first 1000 days of life means that this time period provides the greatest opportunity for a positive developmental impact on a child's life socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically. Current research is being focused on children in the first 1000 days, but there is a lack of research and understanding of mothers and their experiences during this crucial time period. Thus, it is imperative that more research is done to help better understand the experiences of mothers during the first 1000 days of their child's life, as well as gain more insight into mothers' knowledge regarding this time period. The first 1000 days of life, from conception to two years, is a critical period, and the child's attachment to his or her mother or primary caregiver during this period is crucial for a multitude of future outcomes. The aim of this study was to explore mothers' understanding and experience of the first 1000 days of their child's life, specifically looking at attachment in the context of Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory. Using a qualitative methodological framework, data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with 12 first-time mothers from low-income communities in Cape Town. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that mothers articulated the importance of attachment within the first 1000 days of life and shared experiences of how they bond and form attachment with their babies. Furthermore, these mothers expressed their belief in the long-term effects of early attachment of responsive positive parenting as well as the lasting effects of poor attachment and non-responsive parenting. This study has implications for new mothers and healthcare staff working with mothers of new-born babies, as well as for future contextual research. By gaining insight into the mothers' experiences, policies and intervention efforts can be formulated in order to assist mothers during this time, which ultimately promote the healthy development of the nation's children and future adult generation. If researchers are also able to understand the extent of mothers' general knowledge regarding the first 1000 days and attachment, then there will be a better understanding of where there may be gaps in knowledge and thus, recommendations for effective and relevant intervention efforts may be provided. These interventions may increase knowledge and awareness of new mothers and health care workers at clinics and other service providers, creating a high impact on positive outcome. Thus, improving the developmental trajectory for many young babies allows them the opportunity to pursue optimal development by reaching their full potential.

Keywords : attachment, experience, first 1000 days, knowledge, mothers

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