

Association between Maternal Personality and Postnatal Mother-to-Infant Bonding

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Abstract : Introduction: Most women develop a healthy bond with their children, however, adequate mother-to-infant bonding cannot be taken for granted. Mother-to-infant bonding refers to the feelings and emotions experienced by the mother towards her child. It is an ongoing process that starts during pregnancy and develops during the first year postpartum and likely throughout early childhood. The prevalence of inadequate bonding ranges from 7 to 11% in the first weeks postpartum. An impaired mother-to-infant bond can cause long-term complications for both mother and child. Very little research has been conducted on the direct relationship between the personality of the mother and mother-to-infant bonding. This study explores the associations between maternal personality and postnatal mother-to-infant bonding. The main hypothesis is that there is a relationship between neuroticism and mother-to-infant bonding. Methods: Data for this study were used from the Pregnancy Anxiety and Depression Study (2010-2014), which examined symptoms of and risk factors for anxiety or depression during pregnancy and the first year postpartum of 6220 pregnant women who received primary, secondary or tertiary care in the Netherlands. The study was expanded in 2015 to investigate postnatal mother-to-infant bonding. For the current research 3836 participants were included. During the first trimester of gestation, baseline characteristics, as well as personality, were measured through online questionnaires. Personality was measured by the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), which covers the big five of personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, altruism and conscientiousness). Mother-to-infant bonding was measured postpartum by the Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire (PBQ). Univariate linear regression analysis was performed to estimate the associations. Results: 5% of the PBQ-respondents reported impaired bonding. A statistically significant association was found between neuroticism and mother-to-infant bonding ($p < .001$): mothers scoring higher on neuroticism, reported a lower score on mother-to-infant bonding. In addition, a positive correlation was found between the personality traits extraversion ($b: -.081$), openness ($b: -.014$), altruism ($b: -.067$), conscientiousness ($b: -.060$) and mother-to-infant bonding. Discussion: This study is one of the first to demonstrate a direct association between the personality of the mother and mother-to-infant bonding. A statistically significant relationship has been found between neuroticism and mother-to-infant bonding, however, the percentage of variance predictable by a personality dimension is very small. This study has examined one part of the multi-factorial topic of mother-to-infant bonding and offers more insight into the rarely investigated and complex matter of mother-to-infant bonding. For midwives, it is important recognize the risks for impaired bonding and subsequently improve policy for women at risk.

Keywords : mother-to-infant bonding, personality, postpartum, pregnancy

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