An Observation of Maternal Depression and Early Childhood Development

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Abstract
Many are aware of the commonality of post-partum depression, as well as the potential effects it may have on a child’s development. This study aims to look closer at the effects maternal depression may have on an infant’s development, as well as the potential effect of common interventions. For one year, a participant of an intensive home-visiting primary preventive program, Healthy Families, was observed. This participant, who has a diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder, completed bi-monthly developmental screenings (Ages and Stages Questionnaire/Social-Emotional) with her child. Parent-child interaction was observed, as well as the meeting of the child’s developmental milestones. The mother also self-reported progress in individual therapy, along with her daily moods. Higher depressive symptoms at the time of the developmental screening predicted lower total developmental milestones, as well as decreased parent-child interaction. The meeting of developmental milestones and the scores on the developmental screenings, along with parent-child interaction, increased as the mother sought more involvement in therapy. The findings suggest that post-partum depression does have additive effects on both a child’s social-emotional and overall development.

Background
- Approximately 1 in 7 women experience postpartum depression up to a year after giving birth (Cummings & Davies, 1994).
- Symptoms include: dysphoric mood, fatigue, anorexia, sleep disturbances, excessive guilt, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
- With proper interventions, such as individual therapy, symptoms are expected to reduce (Cummings & Davies, 1994).
- The Ages and Stages Questionnaire/Social-Emotional (ASQ/ASQ SE) are developmental screens conducted to track an infant’s development (Yue et al., 2018).

Purpose
- This study aims to look closer at the effects maternal depression may have on an infant’s development, as well as the potential effect of common interventions.

Information
- MOB and Target Child (TC) are participants in a primary-preventive home-visiting program, Healthy Families, where the researcher is an employee.
- Mother of Baby (MOB) is a 40-year-old woman and a mother of five. MOB and Target Child (TC) entered the program a month after TC’s birth.
- MOB was previously diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder; however, she was not receiving treatment at the time of intake.

Methods
- The researcher, MOB, and TC met weekly for a year where a journal was kept to record observations.
- At MOB’s request, the researcher referred MOB and family to functional family therapy when TC was two months old.
- When TC was three months old, MOB was referred to individual therapy.
- The researcher checked in on MOB’s progress weekly, along with her daily moods.
- Parent-child interaction and MOB’s perception of TC’s development were also documented weekly.
- MOB, TC, and the researcher completed bi-monthly developmental screens (ASQ) and three social-emotional developmental screens (ASQ-SE).

Discussion and Conclusion
- Entering TC’s third month, MOB began to report increased mood and sought increased involvement in therapy.
- This reflected in TC’s ASQ/ASQSE scores, as they began to increase at around the same time.
- During the six month ASQSE MOB even reported that she felt more at ease with TC and she was less fussy.
- When parent-child interaction was primarily positive, MOB was able to recognize TC’s ability to meet developmental milestones better.
- The findings suggest that post-partum depression does have additive effects on both a child’s social-emotional and overall development.

References