

Publication

Anxiety disorders before birth and self-perceived distress during pregnancy : associations with maternal depression and obstetric, neonatal and early childhood outcomes

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Background: Maternal perinatal mental health has been shown to be associated with adverse consequences for the mother and the child. However, studies considering the effect of DSM-IV anxiety disorders beyond maternal self-perceived distress during pregnancy and its timing are lacking.

Aims: To examine the role of maternal anxiety disorders with an onset before birth and self-perceived distress during pregnancy for unfavourable maternal, obstetric, neonatal and childhood outcomes.

Study design: DSM-IV mental disorders and self-perceived distress of 992 mothers as well as obstetric, neonatal and childhood outcomes of their offspring were assessed in a cohort sampled from the community using the Munich-Composite International Diagnostic Interview. Logistic regression analyses revealed associations (odds ratios) between maternal anxiety disorders and self-perceived distress during pregnancy with maternal depression after birth and a range of obstetric, neonatal and childhood psychopathological outcomes.

Results: Lifetime maternal anxiety disorders were related to offspring anxiety disorders, but not to offspring externalizing disorders. Analyses focussing on maternal DSM-IV anxiety disorders before birth yielded associations with incident depression after birth. In addition, self-perceived distress during pregnancy was associated with maternal depression after birth, preterm delivery, caesarean section, separation anxiety disorder, ADHD, and conduct disorder in offspring.

Conclusion: Findings confirm the transmission of anxiety disorders from mother to offspring. Apart from maternal anxiety, self-perceived distress during pregnancy also emerged as a putative risk factor for adverse outcomes. The finding that maternal anxiety disorders before birth yielded less consistent associations, suggests that self-perceived distress during pregnancy might be seen as a putative moderator/mediator in the familial transmission of anxiety.

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