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The expected child versus the actual child: implications for the mother–baby bond

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine whether women's perceptions of their infant remain stable between late pregnancy and the early postnatal period, and to examine the effect of women's expectations and evaluations of their infant on the mother–baby bond. Participants completed questionnaires at 39 weeks gestation and 3 weeks after birth. Questionnaires measured demographic details, expected/actual infant characteristics, symptoms of anxiety and depression and the mother–baby bond (postpartum only). It was found that there was a significant difference between expectations and evaluations, with infants being perceived as less fussy, more adaptable and dull than they were expected to be. Both expectations of the baby and evaluation of the baby had a significant effect on the mother–baby bond. Women who expected their infant to have a more difficult temperament and then evaluated them,

similarly reported a poorer mother–baby bond postpartum. Symptoms of anxiety and depression in pregnancy were unrelated to expectations of the baby, or to the postnatal mother–baby bond. The effects of parity and postnatal anxiety and depression were also examined. The results are discussed, suggesting that a subgroup of women who have negative perceptions of their infant before and after birth may be at risk of mother–infant attachment problems and long-term mother–infant difficulties.

Notes

ns = nonsignificant.

Possible range: Fussy 9–63; Unadaptable 5–35; Dull 4–28; Unpredictable 5–35; Total 23–161.

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Source: Psychological Medicine
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Social Support, Infant Temperament, and Parenting Self-Efficacy: A Mediational Model of Postpartum Depression
Source: Child Development
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