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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 expectations, perceived quality of the mother-baby bond, and perceived adaptability of the baby). Results showed that women's expectations of their infant's characteristics were stable between late pregnancy and the early postnatal period. Women who had higher expectations of their infant's characteristics also reported higher levels of anxiety and depression during the postnatal period. The effects of parity and postnatal anxiety and depression were

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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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