

Expecting Parents' Relational Patterns and Early Parental Adjustment

Aim

Attachment styles (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), **relational entitlement**, i.e. one's feeling of privilege in intimate relations (Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011), and **pathological concern for others**, i.e. a compulsive concern for others' welfare while denying own needs (Shavit & Tolmacz, 2014), are suggested as personality characteristics that shape interpersonal adjustment. However, their contribution to expecting parents' transition to parenthood have not been investigated so far. Study's objectives were: (1) Assess links between expecting parents' relational patterns, spousal satisfaction and **antenatal attachment**; (2) Test the contribution of these prenatal characteristics to **parents' early postpartum adjustment**.

Method

Subjects: 95 first-time expecting parents (69 mothers, 26 fathers).

Measures: Time 1 (pregnancy): Experience in Close Relations (ECR), Sense of Relational Entitlement (SRE), Pathological Concern Questionnaire (PCQ), Adult Caregiving Questionnaire (ACQ), Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) and Parental Antenatal Attachment Scale (PAAS).

Time 2 (6 months postpartum): DAS, Parent Stress Inventory (PSI) and Parent Sense of Competence (PSOC).

Table 1: Associations between parent' prenatal characteristics and postnatal adaptation

	PAAS		PSI		PSOC Satisfaction		PSOC Efficacy	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
ECR Avoidance	-.43**	-.04	.13	.42*	.15	.06	-.14	-.36†
ECR Anxiety	-.15	-.11	.28*	.02	-.31*	.22	-.13	-.02
SRE Excessive	.27*	-.16	-.22†	.42*	.05	.17	.05	.12
SRE Restricted	-.25*	-.07	.36**	.42*	.24*	.02	-.22†	-.16
SRE Assertive	.14	.09	-.24*	.05	.22†	-.05	.21	.34
PCQ	-.40**	.04	.39**	.20	.02	.19	.02	-.03
Prenatal DAS	.17	.36†	-.18	-.22	.04	-.22	.28*	.63**
Postnatal DAS	.14	.08	-.18	-.47*	.33**	.19	.22†	.51**

† $p = .07$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Results

- Mothers' prenatal higher **assertive entitlement**, lower **restricted entitlement** and higher postpartum spousal satisfaction predicted higher postpartum **parenting satisfaction**.
- Mothers' prenatal **restricted entitlement** predicted lower **parenting efficacy**.
- Fathers' higher prenatal spousal satisfaction predicted higher **parenting efficacy**.
- Fathers' prenatal **avoidance style** and **excessive entitlement** predicted higher postpartum **parental stress**.

Discussion

- Postpartum parenting adjustment**, conceptualized as subjective experience of stress, satisfaction and efficacy, is linked with **expecting parents' prenatal relational attitudes**. Specifically, balanced entitlement, secure attachment and spousal satisfaction are linked with parenting satisfaction and efficacy, whereas unbalanced entitlement and insecure attachment are linked with parental stress.
- Clinically, assisting expecting couples to negotiate spousal tensions related to relational sensitivities can prepare parents to better deal with the adaptation to parenthood.
- Study's limitations:** small sample size, attrition, self-report measures.