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Development and properties of a brief scale to assess intimate partner relationship in the postnatal period

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Abstract

Background:

Poor quality intimate partner relationship is associated with postnatal depression and anxiety among women. Existing scales assessing the quality of this relationship are long and measure stable aspects of the relationship rather than specific behaviours which may respond to targeted interventions. The aim was to develop and investigate the properties of a brief, life stage-specific scale to assess potentially modifiable partner behaviours in the postpartum period.

Methods:

Participants were primiparous women from diverse geographical and socio-economic backgrounds in Victoria, Australia. Seven study-specific items were developed to assess potentially modifiable aspects of the intimate partner relationship at 6 months postpartum. Women’s mental health was assessed using the Composite International Diagnostic Interview and the Patient Health Questionnaire depression and generalised anxiety modules. Factor analysis was conducted on the 7 items, and associations calculated between factor scores. Factor scores were compared for women with and without mental health problems. Mean inter-item correlations were computed to assess internal consistency.

Results:

Factor analysis on data from 355 women revealed two factors with good internal consistency: Caring Partner Behaviours and Emotionally Abusive Partner Behaviours. Higher overall relationship satisfaction was associated with higher Caring Partner Behaviours and lower Emotionally Abusive Partner Behaviours scores. Having mental health problems was associated with lower Caring Partner Behaviours and higher Emotionally Abusive Partner Behaviours scores.

Limitations:

Interaction between partners was not observed; thus external criterion validity was not assessed.

Conclusion:

This brief scale is a promising means of assessing potentially modifiable aspects of the intimate partner relationship in the postnatal period.
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