



Antecedents and consequences of separation anxiety in first-time mothers: infant, mother, and social-contextual characteristics

Hui-Chin Hsu

Department of Child and Family Development, McPhaul Center, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-3622, USA

Received 15 March 2003; received in revised form 15 August 2003; accepted 2 September 2003

Abstract

Maternal separation anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state of worry, guilt, and sadness experienced by mothers during a short-term separation from their infant (Hock, McBride, & Gnezda, 1989). Guided by Belsky's [Child Dev. 55 (1984) 83] multidimensional model of parenting, influences of the three major determinants of parenting, namely maternal characteristics, social-contextual resources, and infant characteristics, on individual differences in maternal separation anxiety were examined. The linkage between mothers' separation anxiety and their responses to infant social signals during dyadic interactions was also investigated. Fifty-three first-time mothers participated in the present study during the transition to parenthood from their third trimester of pregnancy to 6 months postpartum. Results showed that low maternal trait anxiety, high marital quality, high satisfaction with social network emotional support, and low infant temperamental negativity (indexed by both maternal ratings and behavioral measures) were associated with heightened child- and employment-related separation concerns. Furthermore, general separation anxiety was linked to mothers' over sensitivity to infant negative signals, but under sensitivity to infant positive signals during social interactions. Factors shaping individual and developmental differences in parents' separation anxiety are discussed.

© 2004 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Maternal separation anxiety; Determinants of parenting; Maternal response; Infant temperament

1. Introduction

Taking an ethological perspective, Bowlby (1982, 1988) conceptualized that social bonds between caregivers and infants are composed of an attachment system and a caregiving system. Whereas an attachment behavioral system is organized for infant to maintain proximity to and seek protection from caregiver, the goal of a caregiving behavioral system is for caregiver to provide safety and security to infant (Cassidy, 1999, 2000). Therefore, even though the attachment and caregiving systems are independent

E-mail address: hchin@fcs.uga.edu (H.-C. Hsu).

from each other, they are behaviorally complementary and developmentally linked (George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Solomon & George, 1996). Furthermore, just like infant attachment is expressed through intense emotions (e.g., during separation from and reunion with attachment figures), caregiving behaviors are also grounded in emotions.

Driven and motivated by emotions, parents provide nurturant care to meet the needs of their children (Bell & Richard, 2000). Due to competing demands, however, parents must balance between their desires for caregiving and needs to pursue other goals (e.g., employment). Unpleasant feelings such as guilt, lost, worry, and sadness often arise when parents are unable to maintain proximity to and provide protection for their children. Apprehension and anxious feelings uniquely associated with short-term separations from child experienced by parents of infants and young children are termed parental separation anxiety (Hock, McBride, & Gnezda, 1989). Separation distress is a distinct and stable dimension of mothers' representations of their relationships with their young children (Aber, Belsky, Slade, & Crnic, 1999). While feeling anxious about separation from child may be normal and desirable for parents of young children, excessive separation anxiety may be maladaptive and detrimental to parents' mental health (Hock & Schirtzinger, 1992), which, in turn, may exert negative impacts on their parenting behaviors and child development (McBride, 1990; McBride & Belsky, 1988). The current study, therefore, was an attempt to systematically examine the antecedents and consequences of separation anxiety experienced by first-time mothers.

Bowlby (1982, 1988) contended that a caregiving system develops over time, resulting from interactions between biological and environmental factors. Furthermore, Belsky (1984) proposed that parenting behaviors are multiply determined by three sources of influence: parental characteristics (e.g., psychological traits), child temperamental dispositions, and social-contextual conditions (e.g., marital quality and social network support). Guided by Belsky's (1984) multidimensional model of parenting, the current study was designed to explore the role of these three major factors in shaping individual differences in first-time mothers' separation anxiety during the transition to parenthood.

1.1. Maternal characteristics

Prior research has demonstrated that individual differences in mothers' separation anxiety are associated with a number of maternal demographic and psychological characteristics. Higher levels of separation anxiety are more likely to be reported by younger, less educated, and first-time mothers (Blunk & Williams, 1999). Greater maternal separation anxiety is also linked to higher trait anxiety (Hock, McBride, & Gnezda, 1989; Stifter, Coulehan, & Fish, 1993), depression (Hock & Schirtzinger, 1992), dependency, self-criticism (Hock & Lutz, 1998), and low self-esteem (McBride & Belsky, 1988). Moreover, mothers experiencing higher levels of separation anxiety are also more likely to endorse traditional child-rearing and sex-role values (Hock & Lutz, 1998; Hock & Schirtzinger, 1992; McBride & Belsky, 1988). Taken together, it has been suggested that separation anxiety may be a trait-like deposition in parents.

Previous research has primarily focused on concurrent associations between mothers' separation anxiety and their demographic and psychological characteristics during the postnatal period. Little is known about whether and to what extent maternal characteristics measured prenatally are linked to separation anxiety experienced by mothers postnatally. It has been documented that there are developmental precursors to maternal parenting competency. For example, prenatal maternal characteristics of coping and adaptation competence are predictive of maternal behavioral sensitivity and responsiveness to infant during social interaction (Heinicke, 1984, 2000; Heinicke, Diskin, Ramsey-Kleen, & Given, 1983). Maternal

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات