

STRESS BEYOND THE NICU DISCHARGE: IMPLICATIONS TO OUTCOME

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DISCLOSURE

Learning Objectives:

1. Discuss the relationship of family experiences of stress and infant/toddler behaviors;
2. Present pilot study findings examining the relationship of family emotionality.

Conflict of interest statement:

I have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this presentation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- NICU admissions are major stress events.
- According to the literature, NICU stress can:
 - Interfere with bonding & attachment
 - Play a role in postpartum depression
 - Invoke long-term anxiety and panic responses
 - Decrease maternal breast milk production
- Unresolved stress can:
 - Induce behavioral and biochemical changes for the parents, siblings, and perhaps the infant.

Walking on eggshells

This is the reality for many families...



**And stress is manifested
in babies as...**



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To examine the relationship between unresolved family stress and high-risk family experiences

METHODS

- Design: Cross-sectional correlation
- Setting: University Early Learning Center
- Tools: Family Emotion Expressiveness (FEE)
 - Completed by mothers at home
 - Measures emotional climates of family and information on corresponding infant behavior

Demographic instrument

SAMPLE

- 54 mothers of infants 6-months of age or older
 - 35.2% African American (19 or 54)
 - 70.4% with some college education (38 of 54)
 - 51.85% first child (28 or 54)
 - 77.7% employed 20 hours a week or more (42 of 54)
 - 92.5% married (50 of 54)

PROCEDURE

- Parents are consented to participate in research upon admission to the Learning Center
 - Mother's complete 14 inventories at home prior to admission
 - 3-month study period for data collection and observation of morning drop off period
 - Pilot study
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ANALYSIS OF DATA

- Pearson correlation coefficients was used to determine relationship between variables.
 - Looking for correlations related to stress
 - NICU admissions and family stress ($r = .88$)
 - High risk primiparous births without NICU admissions and family stress ($r = .72$)

NOW LET'S GO BACK TO THE SAMPLE

High Risk Primiparous Births



- Of the 54 reporting mothers, 44 were primiparous births (81.5%)
- Of these 44 mothers, 31 said they were high risk
 - Gestational diabetes, history, chronic illness, etc.

NOW LET'S GO BACK TO THE SAMPLE

NICU Admissions

- Of the 54 reporting mothers, 13 or 24.1% were admitted to the NICU
- Of the 13 admissions, only 3 were NICU stays of 7-days or longer



SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

- Findings illustrate a lasting unresolved family stress
 - It appears that the NICU admission is much more stressful than the high risk pregnancy
 - These NICU admissions were not for extremely premature infants
 - Stress seems to have become the “normal” for these families at more than 6-months out from the birth
 - Small pilot study, yet findings that make us rethink discharge teaching...

Recommendations

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1. Identify at risk families early
2. Interventions to decrease stress should be offered
3. Follow-up care of at-risk families



Thank you!

QUESTIONS?