The relationship between education levels, drug use, mental health and child abuse potential during pregnancy

Ana Tindall B.S., Alissa C. Huth-Bocks Ph.D., and Kyle Kruse B.A.
Eastern Michigan University

INTRODUCTION

Current research suggests that depressed mothers had relatively fewer positive interaction with their infants then non-depressed mothers (Brennan, Hammen, Andersen, Bor, Najman & Williams, 2001).

Heightened maternal anxiety levels but the fetus at risk of being delivered prematurely (Glynn, Schetter, Hobel, & Sandman, 2008).

Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), were found to be predictive of perpetrating child abuse (Pears & Capaldi, 2001).

Also, another research study found that parents who were abusing alcohol or drugs were more likely to be neglectful than parents who did not (Cash & Wilke, 2003; Heni & Miele, 2003).

Finally, this current study is going to look at how these different elements along with the maternal education levels as predictors potential child abuse.

Research Aims:

➢ To identify prenatal maternal factors associated with potential childhood abuse.
➢ To examine whether alcohol and nicotine are reflective of depression and anxiety.

METHOD

Participants

• 100 women were recruited from the community.
• Mothers’ age range: 18-40, M = 26 (SD = 5.8).
• 50% African–American, 35% Caucasian, 15% belonging to other ethnic groups.
• 62% single/never married, 30% first time mothers.
• 23% with high school diploma, GED or less education, 41% some college or trade school, and 35% college degree or graduate school.
• Median monthly household income = $1650
• single parent households
• on public assistance
• reported DV during pregnancy

Procedures

Women were recruited through community service agencies and by posting flyers in public places. The interview took place during the third trimester of pregnancy and was about 2.5 hours and received $25.00 compensation. During this interview, which often took place in the women’s homes, participants completed a semi-structured interview about their feelings about pregnancy and motherhood and numerous questionnaires about their history, current and past relationships, psychosocial experiences, and general health.

Measures

Demographics Questionnaire. A brief demographic questionnaire assess’ for background characteristics such as age, ethnicity, education & income, marital status, and use of child care.

The Brief Child Abuse Potential Inventory (BCAP; Ondersma, Chaffin, Mullins, & Lebreton, 2005) is a 34-item questionnaire that assesses dimensions believed to be related to risk for child abuse such as parental rigidity, loneliness, and general distress; there is also a scale to detect false reporting.

The Edinburgh Postpartum Depression Scale (EPDS; Cox, Holden & Sagovsky, 1987; Wisner, Perry & Piontek, 2002) is a widely-used, 10-item questionnaire assessing for prenatal and postpartum depressive symptoms.

The Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse questionnaire (AOD; Winters & Zenilman, 1994) is a 16-item screening instrument used to determine problems with alcohol and drug abuse.

Maternal Anxiety. The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Derogatis & Malsisaro, 1983) is a self-report: 6 items from the anxiety subscale were used (alpha = .78).

RESULTS

Correlations Matrix for all Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Possible Range</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCAP</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0 – 21</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOD</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPDS</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0-22</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSI-A</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0-22</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive Data for Study Variables

Correlations revealed significant associations between mothers’ with child abuse potential with education level, depression and anxiety, and with drug use. There were also significant correlations between drug use and anxiety and depression. As well as between anxiety and depression levels.

DISCUSSION

Mental health of the mother (i.e. depression and anxiety) is directly related to use of alcohol and/or nicotine. In our sample, 23% of the women drank alcohol and 34% smoked during their pregnancy.

Overall, these results suggest that the mothers’ education, mental health and drug use have important implications for child abuse potential.

Experiences during pregnancy may be particularly important on the impact on the developing fetus.