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Regulatory disorders and parent-child-relationship.

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Topic: Research

The pilot study assessed parents (n=24) and their infants (age of 0-18 months), who suffered under regulatory disorders (excessive crying and/or sleeping problems) and participated in an ambulant parent-child-therapy in the Social Pediatric Center (SPZ) Traunstein (Germany) as well as 19 healthy parent-child-dyads.

The goal was to analyze the associations between the infants' regulatory disorders and the level of parental stress and parent-child-relationship, and to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention.

The main point of interest of the study discusses the association between existing regulatory disorders and the level of maternal sensitivity as well as the dyadic quality of interaction based on valid DMM assessments. We predicted, that an individualized approach, combined with establishing a secure base in the therapeutic relationship, improves the intervention.

As expected, mothers in the clinical group showed increased levels of stress, depression and aggression before treatment. Also the interaction quality between parents and children in the clinical group was seriously impaired at the beginning of the treatment; mothers showed a significantly decreased level of sensitivity and infants showed a significantly lower degree in cooperation.

The dyadic behavioral aspects, such as sensitivity and cooperation, were associated to the degree of parental-stress and severity of maternal depression.

The individualized intervention proved to positively influence the child's regulatory disorder, the parental level of stress, as well as the level of maternal sensitivity and the quality of the dyadic relationship in the clinical group. In the control group no differences were noticed between the two time points of assessments.

How it used the DMM

The analysis included an evaluation of standardized and video-taped play-interactions between mother and child, based on the CARE-Index (Crittenden, 1997, 2007). So it used a valid DMM assessment as a diagnostic and therapeutic instrument to understand and improve the mother-child-relation. The patterns of the CARE-Index and the DMM were used to support parents in understanding their child's perspective as well as to reflect on their own relational behaviour and history.

What it can contribute to the DMM

The present study shows that the DMM is a valuable model to understand distressed parent-child-relations and should guide intervention in early development, especially with regulatory disorders or increased parental stress and crucially also improves mother-infant-relation. So the study demonstrates that the CARE-Index as the earliest DMM assessment is a useful and valid instrument for planing diagnosis and treatment in early development.