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Mother-infant and father-infant play-interaction 10 weeks after birth: differences in sensitivity, unresponsiveness and control.

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Topic: Research

Fathers can be attachment figures to their children. For example, the longitudinal project by Grossmann and colleagues (2002) found that fathers' sensitive and challenging play is an essential variable for the attachment representation later in children. Still, most of the literature focuses on the mother-child relation. In our study, we examined similarities and differences in infant-mother and infant-father interactions, when the infant was 3 month old.

Methods: This study included 40 families with a healthy preterm (31^{0/7} – 34^{6/7} weeks gestation) and 30 families with a term infant (38^{0/7} – 41^{6/7} weeks gestation). The Salmon's Item List German Language Version was administered to evaluate the maternal and paternal subjective birth experience. Depressive symptoms were assessed with the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. Sensitivity in play interactions were explored in videotaped play sessions coded with the CARE-Index.

Results: Mothers were more depressed and disappointed with the birth experience and more sensitive in the play interaction than fathers. Furthermore, mothers were more controlling but also less non-responsive than fathers. An Anova showed that neither the mothers' nor the fathers' depressiveness had a negative impact on the sensitivity.

Discussion: We discuss the noticeable control of the mothers and the non-responsiveness of the fathers in regard to current research.