

## **Intergenerational transference of attachment style in children of depressed mothers.**

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### **Background**

There is an intergeneration effect of maternal depression on child mental health outcomes. For example, rates of major depression in children of depressed parents are elevated (Chilcoat & Breslau, 1997; Kinnard, 1995). In addition there is evidence to support an association between insecure attachment styles and depressive vulnerability.

Insecure style is associated with low self esteem (McCarthy, 1999) and negative attitudes to self (Griffin and Bartholomew, 1994). Childhood experiences such as abuse (Alexander, 1993) and parenting style (McCarthy, 1999) are shown to be associated with insecure attachment style. Therefore, children of depressed mothers who also have an insecure attachment style have an increased risk for adverse outcomes.

This paper examines the question of whether or not children of depressed mothers 'inherit' the attachment style of their mothers thereby maintaining the intergenerational transference of risk to their own children.

**Method:** Data for this paper comes from the Mater and University Study of Pregnancy and Outcomes. During the child's first five years, depressed mothers were identified by self-reported symptoms. When the child was 15 years, Bartholomew and Horowitz Attachment prototype questionnaire (1991) was administered to mothers and their teenage children.

**Analysis:** Using mother-child dyadic data, analysis focuses on the comparison of attachment style prototype and congruence in maternal-child attachment. This will be compared with a control group of mothers who were not depressed in the child's first five years.

**Significance:** If secure attachment is intergenerational, intervention can be directed towards not only symptom treatment of depression, but also parenting interventions and child interventions promoting more secure attachment styles in children at risk. This has the potential to have very long term benefits extending over generations.