Paternal Sensitivity and Father-Child Attachment Security: The Moderating Role of Fathers’ Depressive Symptoms

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Method

• N = 80 residential, biological father-child dyads.
• Children were approximately 3 years of age.
• Father-Child Attachment Security assessed following a 90-minute observation using the Attachment Q-Set (Waters, 1987)
• Paternal Sensitivity assessed observationally during a 15-minute semi-structured puzzle task.
• Fathers’ Depressive Symptoms assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1978).

Summary

• Paternal sensitivity and attachment security were significantly positively associated.
• This relationship was moderated by fathers’ depressive symptoms, such that the relation between sensitivity and attachment was stronger among fathers who reported more depressive symptoms.
• Fathers with more depressive symptoms and low sensitivity had children who were the least securely attached to them, whereas fathers with high depressive symptoms and high sensitivity had children who were the most securely attached.
• Future work should explore the meaning of subclinical depressive symptoms in fathers, and potential family, child, or socio-contextual moderators of the relation between fathers’ parenting behavior and father-child relationship quality.

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