In infancy, negative emotionality (NE) is characterized by emotions such as fearfulness, sadness, and distress to limitations/frustration. NE has important implications for children’s psychological health and development. Higher NE in infancy may lead to increased internalizing and externalizing problems. Greater fearfulness in infancy may contribute to greater anxiety in toddlerhood. Children’s NE also has implications for social skills and related outcomes. Preschool-aged and older children who have higher NE tend to have more difficulties with social skills competence. However, little work has examined the effects of NE during infancy on children’s very early socialization skills.

The current study investigates the contribution of infant NE at 4 months postpartum to emerging socialization skills at 14 months of age. Nearly half of the infants were male (41.5%). The Effect of Negative Emotionality Four Months Postpartum on Socialization-Related Skills at Fourteen Months

Introduction

Method – Participants

- A subset of 39 mothers and their infants from a larger longitudinal study (n = 84) who had completed lab visits at 4 and 14 month postpartum were included in this investigation.
- Nearly half of the infants were male (41.5%). Most mothers (Mpq = 30.18) self-identified as Caucasian (73.2%), Hispanic (12.2%), or African American (4.9%).
- All participants were compensated with $50 and were provided feedback on their child’s social development.

Method – Measures

- Infant Behavior Questionnaire – Revised (IBQ-R): Negative Emotionality dimension
- Sadness: flattened mood and decreased activity
- Falling Reactivity: speed of recovery from distress
- Fear: distress associated with novelty
- Distress to Limits: negative reaction to confinement
- Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales – Interview Format (2nd Edition), Socialization domain
- Interpersonal Relationships:imitative actions and responses to caregivers and peers
- Play/Leisure Time: engagement with others during play activities
- Coping: ease of transitions and reactions to people

Method – Procedure

- Mothers completed the IBQ-R and a demographics measure at 4 months postpartum.
- The Socialization domain of the Vineland was administered to mothers by a trained graduate student via telephone.

Results

Table 1: Correlations between Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Index</td>
<td>Cum. Risk</td>
<td>-0.234</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
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<td>Play and Leisure</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.020*</td>
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</table>

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Socialization Skills at 14 Months Of Age From Infant NE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>NE</th>
<th>Infant Sex</th>
<th>Infant NE</th>
<th>Infant Sex NE</th>
<th>Infant NE Infant Sex NE</th>
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<td>Social Index</td>
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<td>0.005</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

- Infant NE predicted toddler socialization broadly
- Specifically, infant NE significantly predicted toddler coping skills and play and leisure activities.
- These findings indicate that higher NE as early as 4 months of age may influence later socialization difficulties.
- Young children with high NE may benefit from proactive interventions targeting NE to help prevent later development of problematic social skills.
- Future work can improve upon the current study by obtaining a larger sample and obtaining other sources of temperament data, such as objective observation.
- Future studies could also examine additional risk factors for socialization outcomes, such as attachment, and whether parenting moderates the effects of high NE on later socialization-related outcomes.

References


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