EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHER-INFANT INTERACTION AND BREASTFEEDING IN THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE IN GREECE

Tsampanaki A., Kokkinaki T., Triliva S., Karademas E.C.

Department of Psychology, University of Crete, Greece

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**Background and Aims:** A causative relationship between breastfeeding and the quality of mother-infant interaction has often been reported in the literature. Authors suggest that this positive correlation is enhanced through endocrine and sensory factors involved in breastfeeding. Nevertheless, this conclusion is usually based on retrospective studies. Moreover, many empirical studies have failed to confirm this correlation. This longitudinal and naturalistic study aims to describe the development of mother-infant interaction in the course of the first year of life and to correlate this unfolding relatedness with “successful breastfeeding” (breastfeeding lasting six months or more).

**Methods:** This study is a part of a doctoral dissertation exploring the personal experience of breastfeeding mothers and other factors, such as mother’s personality and her relationship with Significant Others, that may be related to breastfeeding duration. Ten mother-infant dyads from Greece participated in this study. The sample was homogenous concerning mother’s age, marital status, educational level, socioeconomic level and working status. Mother-infant spontaneous interactions for 7 minutes periods were video-recorded at infants’ home when the infant was 2, 4, 6, 9 and 12 months old. The recordings were micro-analyzed and variables coded were among others: maternal infant-directed speech, responsiveness and touching, eye contact and both partners’ emotional expressions.

**Results:** All mothers succeeded in maintaining breastfeeding for nine to twelve months. Preliminary evidence on the development of mother-infant interaction patterns, however, showed that quality of interactions wasn’t always high. Instead, some mothers had difficulties in maintaining a positive relationship with their infant.

**Conclusions:** While recognizing the limitations of this study, our preliminary findings suggest that the general assumption that breastfeeding has a positive effect on mother-infant relationship is not supported for every mother-infant dyad. Therefore, such an assumption should be avoided by clinicians in order not to cause unnecessary feelings of guilt in mothers with breastfeeding difficulties.