THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHER-INFANT RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING EXPERIENCES ON JAPANESE MOTHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS LIFE AND DEATH

Tanaka M.

Mukogawa Women’s University, School of Letters, Hyogo, Japan

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Background and aims: Mothers build relationships with their infants through various experiences during pregnancy and puerperium. These experiences cause changes in pregnant women’s attitudes toward death, generativity, and the importance of life (Taguchi, 2012). A previous study suggested that attitudes toward life and death in adulthood are influenced by the construction of such intimate relationships (Kondo, 2016). However, little remains known about relationship-building experience that influence attitudes toward life and death among Japanese mothers.

Methods: Participants were 103 mothers who had given birth to their first child (M = 30.30 years, SD = 4.53). Each participant completed a questionnaire that consisted of scales on attitudes towards life and death (fear of death, purpose of life, belief in an afterlife, relationship between life and death, and concern for others) and yes/no questions about the experiences the mothers felt had affected relationship-building with their infant (awareness of pregnancy, morning sickness, ultrasound examination, uterine growth, fetal movement, contractions, labor, the baby’s first cries, holding the baby for the first time, and feeding).

Results: Multiple regression analysis revealed that “awareness of pregnancy” had positive relationships with “fear of death” (β = .28, p < .01, R² = .08), “purpose of life” (β = .31, p < .01, R² = .09)”, and “concern for others after death” (β = .31, p < .01, R² = .10).

Conclusions: These findings demonstrate that awareness of pregnancy, at which point mothers first experience relationship-building with their infant, influences Japanese mothers’ attitudes towards life and death. This suggests that mothers think that the first trimester is an important period for relationship-building. Further research should examine the attitudes towards life and death of Japanese fathers and pregnant women.