THE ROLE OF CAREGIVING HELPLESSNESS, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND MATERNAL HOSTILITY IN MATERNAL SENSITIVITY DURING TODDLERHOOD


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Maternal sensitivity, defined as mother’s ability to respond their infants’ cues in a timely and appropriate manner (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1971), was shown to be a significant factor for healthy child development and secure mother-child relationship (Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). Previous research has shown that maternal sensitivity was negatively associated with caregiving helplessness (Solomon & George, 1996) and maternal hostility (Lovejoy, 1991), and positively associated with social support (Neuhauser, 2016). In line with these findings, the current study aims to explore the role of caregiving helplessness, maternal hostility, and social support in maternal sensitivity in a low SES group. In a 2-hour home visit, mothers (N=127) of toddlers (Age Range =18-36 months) filled a pack of questionnaires including the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis, 1992), Caregiving Helplessness Questionnaire (Solomon & George, 2011) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988). The recorded home observations of mother-toddler dyads were coded by two independent coders for Maternal Behavior Q-Set (Pederson & Moran, 1995). The inter-rater reliability (Inter-class correlation coefficient) varied from .80 to .94. The preliminary results showed that there is a negative association between maternal sensitivity, and maternal helplessness and mother-child frightened subscale of caregiving helplessness questionnaire (r=-.19, p<.05) and hostility subscale of brief symptom inventory questionnaire (r=-.19, p<.05). Additionally, maternal sensitivity was positively associated with social support (r=.20, p<.05). Maternal hostility was also positively associated with and maternal helplessness and mother-child frightened subscale of caregiving helplessness (r=.46, p<.01). In order to examine the pattern of relationships, a series of regression analyses will be conducted. Understanding how perceived helplessness about child-care, maternal hostility and social support contribute to maternal sensitivity in early years of development, especially in a high risk group of low SES mothers, can be critical to design intervention and prevention programs in Turkey.