Does maternal depression really lower child well-being?

A comparison of parents’ and children’s (self-) assessment

6th pairfam International User Conference, Cologne, 16th & 17th May 2019
Session: Parents’ characteristics & child well-being
Parental Depression in the Media

• Parental Depression Associated With Increased Healthcare Utilization in Children and Adolescents Psychiatry Advisor

• Smoking, Depression in Parents Linked with ADHD in Children MD Magazine

1. How strong is the effect of maternal depression on their children’s well-being?
2. Do mothers evaluate the effects of maternal depression on their children’s well-being differently than the children themselves?
Effects of maternal depression on CWB

• Emotional and behavioral problems in children of depressed mothers: a school-based study in Southern Brazil  Reyes et al. 2019

• Maternal depression: Associations between behavioral problems in school-aged children, organization patterns, adversities, and family environment resources  Cilino et al. 2018

• Maternal Depression, Social Vulnerability and Gender: Prediction of Emotional Problems Among Schoolchildren  Pieta, Loureiro, Pasian 2018

• Characteristics of mothers’ depressive illness as predictors for emotional and behavioural problems in children in a Sri Lankan setting  Rohanachandra, Prathapan, Wijetunge 2018
Effects of maternal depression on parenting behaviour

- Negative effect on co-parenting (less supportive, inter parental conflict) and development of family-level relations Tissot et al. 2017

- More negative parenting: negative affect, intrusion and criticism Ulmer-Yanic et al. 2018

- Less sensitive parenting behaviour and more negative emotions Muzik et al. 2017

- Maternal depression associated with hostility Bosquet, Egeland 2001
Parenting as mediating factor

Mother’s parenting behaviour

Maternal depression → CWB

Stephanie Heß & Matthias Pollmann-Schult
Validity of parent’s information

• Children as passive research objects, mostly objective descriptions of children’s lives Ben-Arieh 2007

• Vast differences between parent reports and child reports Upton, Lawford, Eiser 2008

• Parents do not always report their children’s emotions / well-being correctly Sweeting 2001

• Adolescents report more emotional and conduct problems than their parents Koskelainen et al. 2000
Sample selection

The German Family Panel (pairfam) waves 2 to 9
- children, anchor, partner

- observations included if
  - at least 2 observations in waves 2 to 9
  - transition into depression (transition out of depression excluded)
Sample

1,233 children (3,931 observations)

» age: 8 to 16 years
» sex: 51.7% boys; 48.3% girls
» composition of household:
  13.7% only children
  51.1% two-child households
  35.2% 3 to 6 children
  88.5% married parents
Depression and harsh parenting

State-Trait Depression Scales (STDS)

Measure to capture depressive experiences in non-clinical samples healthy respondents

Depression:

1. My mood is melancholy.
2. I am happy.
3. I am depressed.
4. I am sad.
5. I am in desperation.
6. My mood is gloomy.
7. I feel good.
8. I feel secure.
9. I am calm and composed.
10. I enjoy life.

Harsh parenting*:
How often do the following things happen between you and your child?

1. I criticize my child.
2. I yell at my child because he/she did something wrong.
3. I scold my child because I was angry at him/her.

* Items vary slightly for children’s questionnaire
Child well-being

**Emotional problems***:

1. I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence.
2. I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness.
3. I have many fears, I am easily scared.
4. I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful.
5. I worry a lot.

**Conduct problems***:

1. I get very angry and often lose my temper.
2. I am often accused of lying or cheating.
3. I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want.
4. I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere.
5. I usually do as I am told.

* Items vary slightly for parents’ questionnaire

**Strength & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**

Screening of child behaviour
Answered by parents and children in pairfam
## Descriptive statistics

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<th></th>
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<th>Ø</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<td>Depression (STDS)</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
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</table>

N = 1,233 (3,931 observations)
Differences: Maternal and child assessment

Emotional problems

Conduct problems

$r = 0.39$

$r = 0.38$
Covariates

Mother:

• employment status mother
• educational level mother
• married cohabitation vs. not married cohabitation

Child:

• age
• number of children in household
Model

Maternal depression (STDS)

Harsh parenting / Child well-being

vs.

Harsh parenting / Child well-being

Fixed Effects, waves 2 to 9
Effects of depression on harsh parenting

Significant effect of maternal depression on harsh parenting when mother information is used – no significant effects when child reports are used

Effects differ

<table>
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<th>Harsh parenting (mother)</th>
<th>Harsh parenting (child)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
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<td>Depression (mother)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.22***</td>
<td>2.07***</td>
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</table>

Covariates:
- Number of children in HH
- Age of children
- Employment status mother
- Educational level mother
- married vs. Not married

N = 1,109 (2,837 observations)

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Effects of depression on CWB – mother report

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<td>Model 3</td>
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N = 1,233 (3,931 observations)

Covariates:
- Number of children in HH
- Age of children
- Employment status mother
- Educational level mother
- married vs. Not married

Significant effect of maternal depression on emotional problems and conduct problems reported by mother

Higher levels of material depression ➔ higher levels of behavioural/emotional problems
Effects of depression on CWB – child report

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<th>Conduct problems</th>
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N = 1,233 (3,931 observations)

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

No significant effect of maternal depression (reported by mother) on children’s self-reported CWB

Mothers evaluation of emotional and conduct problems and children’s self-reports differ

Covariates:
- Number of children in HH
- Age of children
- Employment status mother
- Educational level mother
- married vs. Not married
Conclusion

• Differences between maternal evaluation and children’s self-report

• Mothers: Increase of depression ➔ increase in child emotional and conduct problems as reported by mother

• Children’s self-perception does not show increasing emotional and conduct problems when mothers experience more depressive symptoms

Findings vary depending on respondent
Conclusion

- Effect of maternal depression on child well-being is not as strong as former studies indicate

- Incorporate children as ‘experts of their own lives’ to conduct more reliable research ➔ take their perceptions into account

- Validity of parents’ reports need to be discussed critically

- Use child measures complementing not substituting
Thank you for your attention!