

Maternal Stress and Distress Tolerance as Predictors of Infant Sleep Quality

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Stress is a part of life that is experienced by everyone that can impact many aspects of one's day-to-day experience. This is especially true for new mothers, as raising an infant can be a particularly daunting task. This study examines whether high levels of maternal stress negatively impacts infant sleep quality, and whether this relationship is moderated by the mother's ability to deal with stressful situations (distress tolerance). Using secondary data from the Brain and Early Experience Study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I examined maternal stress levels, maternal distress tolerance levels, and infant sleep quality of 40 mother-infant dyads recruited from areas nearby the university. Maternal stress and distress tolerance were measured using four self-report questionnaires—one questionnaire from the prenatal time point and one questionnaire from the 6-month time point for each variable. Infant sleep was measured using actigraphy biofeedback technology, collected over a continuous 6-day, 7-night span during the 6-month time point. Despite my hypotheses, this study did not reveal any significant findings. This indicates that maternal stress and distress tolerance did not have a notable impact on infant sleep quality within this sample population. One marginally significant finding revealed that the covariate of infant gestational age at time of birth is negatively correlated with sleep efficiency under some conditions—the implications of which are considered and discussed within the paper. Study limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.