Anxiety and depressive symptoms during pregnancy, perceived control and posttraumatic stress symptoms after childbirth: A longitudinal mediation analysis

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Abstract

This longitudinal study evaluated the mediating role of sense of control during labour in the association between anxiety and depression levels during pregnancy and postpartum posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. Participants were 57 women. Anxiety and depression were assessed during pregnancy; sense of control and childbirth-related posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms were collected 6–8 weeks after childbirth. Higher levels of anxiety and depression were associated with more postpartum posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms through lack of perceived control. For depression, this happened only for primiparous. Interventions targeting mechanisms enhancing perceptions/feelings of control should be offered to these women to prevent/minimize childbirth-related posttraumatic stress disorder.

Keywords

anxiety, childbirth-related posttraumatic stress, depression, labour perceived control, longitudinal study, perceived control, pregnancy, trauma

Introduction

The experience of giving birth is an important time in any woman's life. However, it is a highly individual experience and can lead to positive or negative psychological effects, depending on a series of factors (e.g. Smarandache et al., 2016; Waldenström et al., 2004). Exploring negative psychological effects resulting from childbirth is paramount since they can impact not only the well-being of the mother but also the well-being of the child and the development of a healthy mother–infant relationship (Ayers et al., 2016; Parfitt et al., 2014; Rauch et al., 2013; Waldenström et al., 2004).

In the late 20th century, the delivery event was recognized as a potential stress agent that may trigger posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Alder et al., 2006; Cohen

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