

Research Reviews

Maternal Depression – Effects on Infants & Early Interventions

Fields, T. (1998). Maternal Depression: Effects on Infants and Early Interventions. Preventative Medicine, 27, 2, 200-3.

In a report on a number of studies conducted by Dr. Fields and associates, their research suggests that:

- Maternal depression negatively affects infants as early as birth, suggesting the influence of prenatal maternal depression
- As early as birth the infants demonstrate "dysregulation" in their behavior, physiology, and biochemistry which is an effect of prenatal exposure to maternal biochemical imbalance
- Infant dysregulation is compounded by the disorganizing influence of the mother's interaction behavior
- Depressed mothers were found to have two predominant interaction styles, withdrawn or intrusive, which both have negative effects related to inadequate stimulation and arousal
- Non-depressed caregivers (such as fathers) are thought to buffer these effects because they provide more optimal stimulation and arousal modulation than depressed mothers.

Interventions that are mood altering for the mothers and arousal reducing for the infants (e.g., music and massage therapy) assisted the mothers and infants to be more responsive, and more available to parent child interaction coaching. Thus their subsequent interactions improved.