Infant sensory patterns and developmental outcomes: Associations with maternal-fetal attachment, postnatal maternal sensory patterns and previous perinatal loss

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INTRODUCTION
The development of cognitive, motor, language, socio-emotional, and daily living (i.e., adaptive behavior) skills in infancy is the precursor of future childhood development. Identification of prenatal characteristics that predict later infant development may afford opportunities for early intervention, potentially optimizing childhood development outcomes.

AIMS/PURPOSE OF WORK
The aim of the present study was to examine the effects of selected prenatal factors (maternal-fetal attachment, maternal adult attachment, maternal well-being, and previous perinatal loss) on later infant development, as assessed by the mother and an external observer.

DESCRIPTION/METHODS
Pregnant women were recruited from two antenatal clinics at one tertiary hospital and asked to complete self-report questionnaires. The Bayley’s Scales of Infant and Toddler Development were then completed one to two years after their baby’s birth. Independent samples t-tests, correlational analyses and multivariate linear regression models were conducted.

RESULTS
Results revealed that four prenatal factors (i.e., more favorable maternal-fetal attachment, more secure/less anxious maternal attachment, and higher maternal well-being) predicted maternal reports of infant adaptive behavior regardless of previous perinatal loss. No significant associations were identified between prenatal factors and other infant developmental domains (social-emotional development, cognition, motor skills, and language). Infants of women without perinatal loss scored higher in therapist-measured cognitive development compared to infants of women with previous perinatal loss.

CONCLUSIONS
While further research is required, findings indicate that a mother’s well-being and her relationship with her baby during pregnancy contributes to positive perceptions of her infant’s daily living skills. More research exploring interventions to support the parenting of
women with perinatal loss is required to, in turn, promote optimal cognitive development in infants.