



# Research Week 2022

## The effects of postpartum depression on parenting sense of competence and infant emotional development

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### Abstract

Prior research indicates that postpartum depression is a risk factor for child socioemotional difficulties (Vásquez-Echeverría et al., 2022). Birthing parent depressive symptoms have also been negatively associated with feelings of competence in their role as a parent, which includes decreased feelings of satisfaction and self-efficacy (Curci et al., 2021 & Heerman et al., 2017). However, little research has investigated whether decreased parenting sense of competence is one of the mechanisms through which depression influences children's emotional development. We hypothesized that birthing parents with higher postpartum depression scores would report feeling less competent in their role as a parent, and that decreased feelings of competence would negatively impact their child's emotional development.

When their child was 6 months old (N=243), birthing caregivers completed questionnaires including the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (Cox & Holden, 2003), Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (Karp, Luttenbacher, & Wallston, 2015), and Infant Behavior Questionnaire (Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003). Hypotheses were tested using linear regression.

Consistent with expectation, greater depressive symptoms were associated with lower parenting sense of competence scores ( $\beta=-.38$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Depressive symptoms ( $\beta=.17$ ,  $p=.01$ ) and parenting sense of competence ( $\beta=-.18$ ,  $p=.01$ ) exerted independent effects on infant sadness. Further, parenting sense of competence significantly mediated the association between depressive symptoms and infant sadness (Sobel test=-2.03  $p=.04$ ), confirming our hypothesis that decreased parenting self-efficacy and satisfaction is one mechanism through which caregiver depression influences infant emotional development.

These results demonstrate the importance of parental mental health and perception of their competence in their role as a parent for children's early emotional development. These findings suggest that children may internalize their parents' feelings of depression,

self-efficacy, and satisfaction in their role as a parent. Better understanding these relationships can help mental health professionals in implementing preventative interventions that promote the health and self-esteem of both parent and child.