Abstract

Introduction: Although the quality of parent-child relationships is known to be associated with the offspring’s mental health, little is known about the prevalence of problematic relationships in this scenario. This cross-sectional study aims to investigate the prevalence and risk factors of different types of early parent-infant relationships in a Brazilian population group. Methods: During 1 year, all families (n = 230) from an urban community of Porto Alegre, southern Brazil, with 4-month-old infants born in public hospitals were identified, and 148 were fully investigated by two family therapists. This study describes data on the 116 infants with two-parent families. Demographic, obstetric, and relational variables were collected through questionnaires and scales (Parent-Infant Relationship Global Assessment Scale, Global Assessment of Relational Functioning, and Self-Report Questionnaire). Prevalence ratios were calculated, and Poisson regression with robust variance was performed to adjust for covariates. Results: Almost 10% of mothers and 12% of fathers showed an at least significantly perturbed relationship with their 4-month-old infants. Inadequate mother-infant bonding coincided with evidence of paternal mental disorder, poor maternal social network, and no breastfeeding at 4 months. A problematic father-infant relationship was associated with a dysfunctional couple relationship and with low infant birth weight. Conclusions: There is a high prevalence of early parent-child relationship problems, suggesting a need for health system interventions. Parent-infant relational problems are prevalent very early in life and more associated with other relational problems than with socioeconomic burden.

Keywords

Parent-infant problematic prelationship, parenting, family relationship, child development, revalence, relational problems.