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Title: Maternal trauma and parenting sensitivity: Implications for attachment-based interventions

Abstract: Childhood trauma can have a major deleterious impact on individuals, and data is accumulating that suggests this likely creates risk for future offspring. Specifically, parents with higher exposure to childhood trauma have been found to have increased likelihood of frightened, frightening, and dissociated behavior in interactions with their children, as well greater child protection involvement. Increased sensitivity to infant emotional cues, in contrast, may decrease the likelihood of transmitting intergenerational risk. In this pilot study, three expectant/new mothers were given a series of questionnaires, two being specific to trauma: the PTSD Checklist and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as well as completed the Adult-Attachment Interview (George et al., unpublished). The AAI is a roughly one-hour assessment of early relationships and experiences with caregivers, as well as their perceived impact on adult functioning and was expanded from the original version with respect to types of exposure and responses to danger (Crittenden and Landini, 2011). These mothers had followed through on a referral by their nurse midwife for early intervention services. The mothers’ sensitivity to her baby was evaluated using the CARE-Index (Crittenden, 1981), a three-minute play task between the parent and baby. Babies ranged between 6 weeks and 4 months. The hypothesis is that mothers reporting greater childhood trauma and traumatic symptoms on the questionnaires, and unresolved trauma/loss in the AAI will have lower sensitivity to their infant’s emotional cues. These associations will be explored via qualitative analyses. This work was supported by MSU Undergraduate Research Fellowships and an MSU AHRC grant.