

ABSTRACT

Background: Animal and human studies have found that maternal stress during pregnancy can influence the developing fetus. These effects may be mediated by the hypothalamic- pituitary – adrenal (HPA) axis.

Objective: To determine the influence of psychosocial stress during pregnancy on psychological behaviour of the infant.

Methods: A self reported questionnaire was used to identify two groups with and without antenatal stress in otherwise healthy mothers in late pregnancy. The infant's behaviour was assessed by using the Neonatal Behavioural Assessment Scale at the age of one month.

Results: Complete data were available on 73 term-born infants. Antenatal maternal psychosocial stress was associated with significant differences on infants behaviour in terms of motor, regulation of state and reflexes ($p<0.05$) whereas in terms of orientation and autonomic stability, the differences were highly significant ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion: Maternal antenatal psychosocial stress may have adverse effects on the psychological behaviour of the offspring.