

Abstract

This diploma thesis focuses on the effects of prenatal stress on the psychological development of a child in preschool age. The theoretical part describes the types of stress in pregnancy, their prevalence, and the possibilities of screening and preventions or the way of reduction. It also concentrates on the effects of prenatal stress on child development, including factors that moderate and mediate this effect. The empirical part focuses on the effects of prenatal stress on cognitive, psychomotor, and socio-emotional development in children at the age of five, and whether the effect of prenatal stress on child development is mediated by maternal stress in the period after birth. The sample includes 218 mothers whose children were examined using the Intelligence and Development Scale (IDS) at the age of five. Pre- and postnatal stress was measured using The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) in the third trimester, and then at 9 months and 3, 4 and 5 years after delivery. The results of path analyses did not show a significant effect of pre- and postnatal stress on children's development in the mentioned areas. Prenatal stress was a significant predictor of postnatal stress. The included covariates showed a positive effect of the mother's education on verbal cognitive and socioemotional development. Boys had lower motor development scores compared to girls. Lower social support in pregnancy increased prenatal and postnatal stress. Higher stress during pregnancy was found in multiparous women compared to primiparous women. These results show that the effects of prenatal (and postnatal) stress on child development may be less severe than suggested by previous studies, which were generally based on parental assessment and not on the objective assessment of child development.

Key words: prenatal stress and distress; child development; psychomotor development; cognitive development; socioemotional development