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Do maternal multiple insecure attachment models impair quality of mother-infant relationship via depression?

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INTRODUCTION

Previous results suggest that insecurity with the romantic partner impairs quality of the mother-infant relationship via depression (Vanwalleghem et al., 2022): the poorer the quality of attachment with the partner, the higher the risk of maternal perinatal depression and, in turn, of bonding problems between the infant and his/her mother. It is unclear however whether mothers' attachment with each parent also plays a role, and how their attachment networks including the partner explain depression and bonding with the infant.

OBJECTIVE : Examine whether mothers' attachment towards mother and father predicts attachment with the partner, which itself contributes to explain mother- infant bonding, via maternal postpartum depression.

METHOD

POPULATION

n = 90 mothers of infants under 6 months, 32 of whom exhibited postpartum depression

Participants were aged 23 to 42 years (M = 31.8; SD = 4.22)

49 participants were multiparous and 41 primiparous

ASSESSMENT

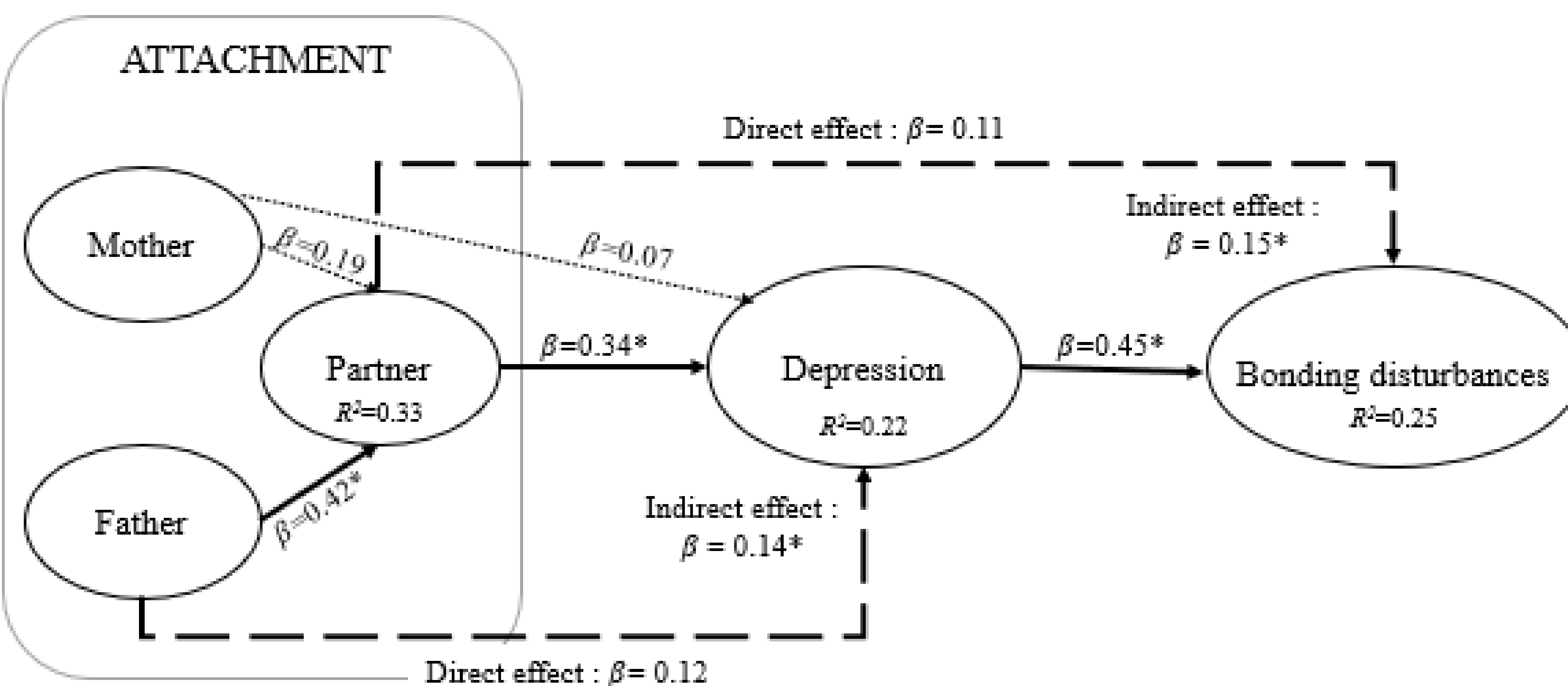
1. Attachment Multiple Model Interview (AMMI; Miljkovitch, 2009; Miljkovitch et al., 2015) : measure of attachment along four dimensions: security, deactivation, hyperactivation, and disorganization for each relationship (mother, father, romantic partner)

2. Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire : measure of the quality of the mother-infant relationship (Brockington et al., 2001; Brockington et al., 2006)

3. Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EDPS; Cox et al., 1987; Jardri, 2004) : measure of depression severity (from 0 to 30 ; Cut-off score for depression = 13)

RESULTS

Figure 1.
Links between attachment to the partner, the mother, and the father, depression, and mother-infant bonding



Note. * $p < .05$

INTERPRETATION

Partial Least Squares-Path Modeling analysis (PLS-PM) show that

(1) Attachment to the partner mediates the link between attachment to the father and depression severity, but not between attachment to the mother and depression severity

(2) Maternal depression mediates the link between attachment to the partner and mother-infant bonding

DISCUSSION

Results of this study are in line with those of previous studies showing that maternal depression mediates the link between attachment and bonding (Nonnenmacher et al., 2016 ; Handelzalts et al., 2021). They also bring new insight as attachment models are not involved in the same way in the context of perinatal depression: attachment with the father and with the romantic partner better explain depression and associated bonding disturbances.

These findings suggest that therapeutic work should focus on the relationship between the mother and her romantic partner and that a possible replication of the attachment model with the father in the relationship with the romantic partner could be explored during psychotherapy.

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