# The Influence of Pandemic-Related Worries During Pregnancy on Child Development at 12 Months

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been linked to increased risk for perinatal anxiety and depression among parents, as well as negative consequences for child development. Less is known about how worries arising from the pandemic during pregnancy are related to later child development, nor if resilience factors buffer negative consequences. The current study addresses this question in a prospective longitudinal design. Data was collected from a sub-study (n = 184) of a longitudinal study of pregnant individuals (total n = 1173). During pregnancy (April 17-July 8, 2020) and the early postpartum period (August 11, 2020-March 2, 2021), participants completed online surveys. At 12 months postpartum (June 17, 2021-March 23, 2022), participants completed online surveys and a virtual laboratory visit, which included parent-child interaction tasks. We found more pregnancy-specific pandemic worries were prospectively related to lower levels of child socioemotional development based on parent report (B = - 1.13, SE = .43, p = .007) and observer ratings (B = - 0.13, SE = .07, p = .045), but not to parent-reported general developmental milestones. Parental emotion regulation in the early postpartum period moderated the association between pregnancy-specific pandemic worries and child socioemotional development such that pregnancy-specific pandemic worries did not relate to worse child socioemotional development among parents with high (B = - .02, SE = .10, t = - .14, p = .89) levels of emotion regulation. Findings suggest the negative consequences of parental worry and distress during pregnancy on the early socioemotional development of children in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results highlight that parental emotion regulation may represent a target for intervention to promote parental resilience and support optimized child development.

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