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Reactions of Mothers and Fathers after Prenatal or Postnatal Diagnosis of Congenital Heart Disease

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Introduction

A diagnosis of congenital heart disease (CHD) in a fetus or in a newborn triggers increased levels of distress in parents. There is some evidence that mothers' reactions may differ from fathers but this has not been extensively evaluated. The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate reactions of mothers and fathers after a prenatal or postnatal diagnosis of CHD.

Method

Participants were recruited from one university hospital in western Sweden and divided into two groups; Prenatal diagnosis of CHD (Prenatal group) or postnatal diagnosis of CHD (postnatal group). Data was collected at 2-6 months after delivery. The questionnaires used were: The Hospital Anxiety and depressions scale (HAD), Sense of Coherence (SOC-13) and Life satisfaction (LiSat11).

Results

In total 15 parents (7 mothers and 8 fathers) were included in the prenatal group and 30 (15 mothers and 15 fathers) in the postnatal group. The groups were matched regarding age, sex, parity and complexity of CHD. Mothers in the prenatal group scored lower on life satisfaction (Mean 44.4±10.3) compared to mothers in the postnatal group (Mean 56.5±5.2; $p=0.013$). Fathers in the prenatal group scored higher on depression (Mean 6.25±3.65) compared to fathers in the postnatal group (Mean 3.4±2.69; $p=0.04$). Furthermore, fathers in the prenatal group scored lower on life satisfaction (Mean 45.4±10.1) and SOC (Mean 56.5±5.1) than fathers in the postnatal group (Mean 56.6±5.1; Mean 75.4±7.0; $p=0.0049$). No difference was found between mothers and fathers except for a lower SOC in mothers in the postnatal group ($p=0.007$).

Conclusion

In the prenatal group, both mother and fathers respectively displayed lower life satisfaction compared to mothers and fathers in the postnatal group. Furthermore, fathers in the prenatal group had higher level of depression and lower SOC than fathers in the postnatal group. Few differences were detected within the couple.