

# Factors Associated with Poor Father-to-infant Attachment at 6 Months Postpartum: A Community Study in Victoria, Australia

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## Objective/Background

Father-to-infant attachment, the emotional tie between a father and his infant, is essential for healthy emotional development of children. Currently, there is little consistent evidence on potentially modifiable risk factors for poor quality father-to-infant attachment. The objective of this study was to identify factors associated with father-to-infant attachment at 6 months postpartum.

## Methods

English-speaking men were recruited in diverse community settings in Victoria, Australia. Participants (n=270) completed computer-assisted telephone interviews at approximately 4 weeks and 6 months after the birth of the couple's first infant. Standardised measures were used to assess men's mental health, quality of intimate partner relationship, infant crying and fussing, and father-to-infant attachment. Structural equation modelling was used to identify factors associated with poor quality father-to-infant attachment.

## Results

Adjusting for other relevant factors, poorer quality father-to-infant attachment was significantly associated with personality traits including oversensitivity ( $p=0.03$ ), more symptoms of depression and anxiety ( $p=0.02$ ), poorer quality partner relationship ( $p=0.01$ ) and more frequent partner criticism of infant care ( $p=0.01$ ) (Wynter et al., 2016).

## Conclusion/Discussion

Specific personality traits which may reflect fathers' attachment style and which were significantly associated with poor father-to-infant attachment in this study, are not easily modifiable. However, partner criticism is potentially modifiable, and is not only associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety in fathers (Wynter et al., 2013), but also with poor father-to-infant attachment. Routine primary care should include both parents; promoting affirmative partner relationships may be a promising means for improving father-to-infant attachment.

## References

Wynter K, Rowe H, Fisher J. (2014) Interactions between perceptions of relationship quality and postnatal depressive symptoms in Australian, primiparous women and their partners. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*. 20(2):174-81.

Wynter K, Rowe H, Tran T, Fisher J. (2016) Factors associated with father-to-infant attachment at 6 months postpartum: a community-based study in Victoria, Australia. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/02646838.2015.1136051.

## Key Words

Fathers, Attachment, Quality of Intimate Partner Relationship