

I knew I loved you before I met you: Unlocking the potential of prenatal attachment

When do you think the bond between a mother and her child begins?

As you ponder this question, you may be thinking it's when a baby is first born, as a mother cradles her newborn in her arms.

Or, could it be when baby says its first words, such as "Ma Ma"?

In actual fact, despite traditional belief, the relationship between a mother and her child begins well before they have even met. And that is, before birth.

During pregnancy, a mother begins to connect with her unborn child, by talking to her child and imagining what her baby will be like. As a pregnant woman begins to adopt the role of a mother, she grows in her desire to protect, provide, love, and know her foetus. This relationship is called: prenatal attachment.

While we tend to overlook this relationship, did you know that this bond has an impact on her child after birth? New research shows that prenatal attachment has a flow-on effect to different aspects of a baby's personality, its development, and daily activities. However, while prenatal attachment may be associated with a range of infant developmental outcomes, no reviews that have systematically collated and appraised the evidence.

Such research is important as it may help to inform interventions that aim to promote more favourable prenatal attachment, to subsequently foster positive infant development in the future. By supporting women in this critical time of life, we can unleash the potential of the next generation. Just imagine the possibilities for both our children and our future, by helping kids get on the right track, right from the beginning. My research addresses this need in a systematic review of the literature.

To conduct this study, we searched five electronic databases to find 995 papers that may be possibly relevant to our research question. Of these papers, 8 papers fitted the eligibility criteria, and were assessed based on the quality of the research.

So what did we find out? These papers highlighted that poorer maternal-foetal attachment was linked to suboptimal infant development. In particular:

Five papers revealed that mothers who didn't have a strong bond with their unborn child during pregnancy were more likely to have children with an irritable and difficult temperament.

Two papers suggested that mothers with more negative thoughts and feelings towards their unborn child were more likely to have children who cried uncontrollably, and had atypical sleep patterns.

One paper found that lower prenatal attachment was associated with global developmental delay, that is, did not meet particular developmental milestones that were typical for children their age.

Conversely, the papers demonstrated that mothers who have a stronger bond with their unborn babies were more likely to have babies that are able to easily adapt to new situations, are regularly settled, and proficient in a range of skills.

Who would have thought? The way that we mother our children in the womb, can alter our babies' development.

This research is revolutionary because it means we can give kids a head start in life, even before they are born.

So how do we nurture the babies of tomorrow? By mothering them in the womb.

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Publication

[Associations Between Maternal-Foetal Attachment and Infant Developmental Outcomes: A Systematic Review.](#)

Branjerdporn G, Meredith P, Strong J, Garcia J
Matern Child Health J. 2017 Mar