EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL SENSITIVITY AND INFANT MOTOR PERFORMANCE.

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Background/Significance: Early intervention approaches for infants with delays in development are most often development-centric. When the parent provides the developmental stimulation, however, a relationship-centric approach may be optimal. Early parent-child relationships are the foundation of a child’s development. Attachment theory and parent-child interaction frameworks support that attunement of the parent to the child allows for accurate reading and response to the child’s cues. This creates a warm, trusting and predictable environment for the child to learn and explore in.

Purpose: To (1) test the feasibility of applying a measure of parental sensitivity to an existing video-based data set of parent-child interaction during a motor activity, and (2) examine the correlation between parental sensitivity and infant motor performance.

Sample Description/Population: Existing video data will be coded for this secondary analysis. Participants are twelve parent-infant dyads. Infants were typically-developing 12 month olds who took part in a larger longitudinal study examining early infant stepping.

Method/Design & Procedure: For this secondary analysis, parental sensitivity will be coded using the Parent-Child Early Relational Assessment (PCERA, Clark, 1985). This is an observational tool designed to capture the frequency, intensity and duration of the relational experience between parent and child. Each parent-infant data set consists of three, 30-second treadmill trials, where the parent simultaneously holds the child on the treadmill and interacts with the child during the treadmill stepping. Analyses will include descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations.

Results/Outcomes: Pilot coding with the PCERA has supported the feasibility of assessing parental sensitivity during this parent-supported early intervention activity. Preliminary results suggest that infants who stepped with greater frequency had parents who were more sensitively involved with them during the treadmill stepping. Further analyses are pending.

Conclusions/Implications: This study is part of an ongoing line of research to recognize the centrality of the parent-child relationship as the primary mechanism for stimulating the global health and development of a child.